

# EPHEMERAL MUSIC: ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC COLLECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

Adriana P. Cuervo  
Assistant Archivist for Music and Fine Arts - UIUC  
SAA Research Forum 2008  
August 26, 2008  
San Francisco, CA

# Ephemeral Music: A Survey of Electronic Music Collections in the United States

Adriana P. Cuervo, Assistant Archivist for Music and Fine Arts  
Sousa Archives and Center for American Music - University of Illinois

Where's the music? How much do we have?

How about long term access? Will time silence this music for ever?

## Defining Electroacoustic music

Music in which computer-based technology is used to access, create, explore and configure sound materials, without the aid of western musical notation on paper and in which loudspeakers are the principal medium of transmission. Often referred to as computer music, this type of music was developed in the early 1950s in the realm of research laboratories and universities as the evolution of sound recording technology allowed the manipulation of sound in a manner similar as manipulating photographic images on paper. These compositional techniques allowed composers to expand the limited pool of sonic resources available through traditional musical instruments.

## The Survey

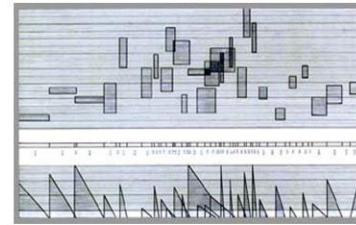
In order to determine the breadth and scope of the material currently held by libraries and archives across the country I am conducting a survey of electronic music archival collections in music and performing arts libraries and archives in the United States. The survey results will yield data that will confirm the existence and extent of this type of collections, whether the repositories are actively collecting these, and if the collectios are just a byproduct of other collection development policies. I will also determine if these institutions are pursuing any preservation strategies to ensure long-term access to this born-digital content.

The survey will be distributed electronically to the members of the Music Library Association and the Society of American Archivists, approximately 4500 recipients, later this Fall and will target repositories that serve research institutions (primarily colleges and universities) given the origins of electroacoustic music as a compositional technique. This will constitute the first step in establishing standards and best practices for the preservation of born-digital art.

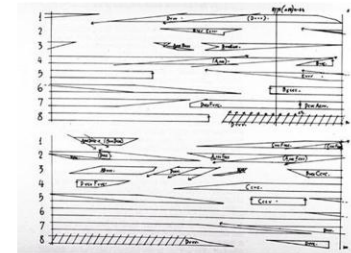
## Looking into the future

Develop adequate standards for description and preservation  
Provide long-term access to the homegrown software and hardware that usually accompanies electroacoustic music.

Stylistic Migration: from academic environments to popular culture,  
this compositional technique permeates fields other than music.



Score of K. Stockhausen's *Studie II* (1953)



Fragment of J. Cage's  
*Williams Mix* (1953)



Lejaren Hiller and Joh Cage  
working at one of the  
first experimental music  
studios in the United States  
in 1952 at UIUC

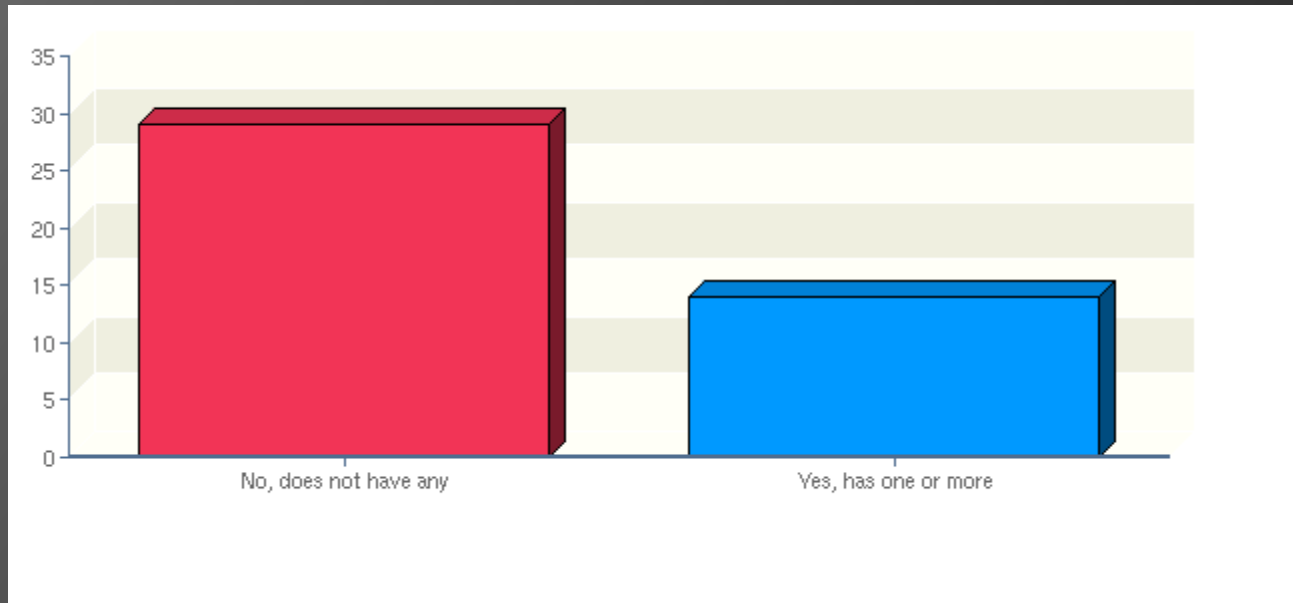
# Goals of Survey

- Determine extent of material
- Establish collecting practices
- Scope of preservation practices among respondents

# The Survey

- Survey delivered to 499 contacts via email with additional 2 reminders
- Music Library Association College and University librarians and SAA's College and University Archives Section
- 43 responses for an 8.62% response rate.
- Survey was available to the respondents between July 18 and August 11 2008.

Does your institution currently have one or more collections or record series that contain electroacoustic music as part of its holdings?



No 29

Yes 14

# Of these 14 respondents...

- 13 institutions include the future acquisition of these type of collection in their collection development policy
- 9 don't have preservation plans
- 2 don't know if their institution has any preservation plans
- 3 plan to reformat for preservation

# Environment

All 14 institutions have a college or department of music

Top three majors offered by these institutions

Composition

Music Education

Performance

# Extent of collections

Measuring units reported include:

53 cubic feet

86 linear feet

120-150

About 1000



# What's next?

Establish common threads among appraisal criteria for these types of collections

Take closer look at composers' documentary output in order to better inform our collecting practices

Target colleges and universities with renown electronic music/composition programs to assess holdings and conduct comprehensive study

# Thank you!

Thoughts, ideas, questions or concerns?

[acuervo@illinois.edu](mailto:acuervo@illinois.edu)