

Research Forum Presentation: Ephemeral Music: Electroacoustic Music Collections in the United States

ADRIANA P. CUERVO

Abstract: Electroacoustic music, created in a digital environment without using traditional notation on paper, relies on the use of technology for its interpretation and performance. The widespread use of this compositional technique challenges archivists to guarantee the long-term preservation and access to the original sonic experience of these creative works which can be thought of as born-digital records. Composers often rely on a combination of commercial software and home-grown hardware to create electroacoustic compositions, and performance becomes the only avenue of experiencing the work as a whole. This music is slowly disappearing since standards for its long-term access have not been developed and the creators are not taking a proactive approach to move into a sustainable access model.

In this platform presentation I will report on the results of a recently completed study of electronic music collections in libraries and archives across the United States in order to establish the span of such collections and their institution's preservation strategies. I will determine the extent of the material currently held by libraries and archives and I will establish whether the repositories are actively collecting these types of compositions, or if these types of materials are just a byproduct of other collection development policies. Finally, I will determine if they are pursuing any preservation strategies to ensure long-term access to this digital content. This study lays the foundation of future preservation and effective long-term access initiatives for born-digital music as well as similar born-digital artistic works.

About the author:

Adriana P. Cuervo is the assistant archivist for Music and Fine Arts at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received a master's degree in library and information science from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at UIUC, and a bachelor's degree with honors in music history from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, Colombia.

She is interested in the ramifications of collecting and preserving electronic music and its implications for archives in the 21st century. These days she spends time figuring out if other university libraries and archives across the United States are collecting this music, and if they are, she would like to know if they have any preservation/access plans for such collections. She also is interested in the composers' workflow and the practices and attitudes toward preserving their creative output. This analysis will inform the development of appraisal strategies for archivists interested in acquiring collections of electroacoustic music and curating these materials in trustworthy digital repositories.