

## **Barry Truax**

### **Electroacoustic Music of Extended Duration: A Question of Format**

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#### **Introduction**

Although popular music has a well-established connection to specific recording formats, most obviously in terms of duration, number of channels, available frequency and dynamic range, and currently, levels of data compression, electroacoustic music (and here we are only considering fixed media works) has generally tended to ignore these format restrictions at the level of composition and performance, and made appropriate compromises in the context of distribution on commercial formats. Some historical exceptions with instrumental classical music may be noted where pieces were composed for the commercial recording format of the day, but the Nonesuch label's commissions for Morton Subotnick in the late 1960s are regarded as the first electroacoustic pieces composed specifically for the LP format, a tradition that the author continued for his 1985 release of the *Sequence of Earlier Heaven* LP, and the later release of eight solo CD's after 1987. The crucial distinction is whether the CD format during recent decades has been regarded as a purely distribution medium for an arbitrary grouping of works.0 the

performance in the opera house and concert hall, from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the publishing of scores, begins to fix the work for repetition, as well as providing a showcase for the virtuosic interpretation by the soloist. We can therefore also identify the architectural acoustics that facilitated this development as a technology for the musical communication of increasingly fixed concepts of works.

How has the electro-mechanical, and then electronic and now digital technology that developed since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century further changed these practices? Most obviously, new art forms have emerged, such as film, audio recording, video, television and digitally based new media, along with the enormous economic implications that have characterized these developments in terms of commodification and distribution. Here I will only deal with the range of approaches to the use of such fixed media, which I will place along a continuum.

Documented Performance ! -----



## **The Recording Format as a Vehicle for Works of Extended Duration**

As mentioned earlier, Morton Subotnick's works commissioned by Nonesuch for their LP label, namely *Silver Apples of the Moon* (1967) and *The Wild Bull* (1968), are regarded as the first pieces of electroacoustic music (or electronic music as it was then known) composed specifically for a commercial recording, the stereo LP. In 1977, I was fortunate to publish my first solo LP *Sonic Landscapes* on the Canadian Melbourne label, but it was clearly a collection of four unrelated pieces, as was the following double LP, *Androgyne*, published in 1980 with six works. However, in 1985, on the occasion of the International Computer Music Conference being held in Vancouver, I was able to launch my own record label, Cambridge Street Records (CSR), with its first disc, *Sequence of Earlier Heaven*. I had quite consciously composed the four works it contained with the view to their integration on this disc. Side One consisted of two pieces, *East Wind* and *Nightwatch*, for a solo instrument (recorders and marimba respectively) combined with soundtracks derived from those instruments, and Side Two consisted of two computer-synthesized works, *Wave Edge* and *Solar Ellipse*. The guiding macro-compositional plan reflected the traditional *I Ching* pattern of trigrams paired as opposites in a cycle, as visually presented on the cover of the LP, along with the associated

range in terms of duration. As a teacher of electroacoustic studio production (including both musical and 'sound' pieces), I know that projects of increasing duration are useful for student composers to develop their compositional skills. The 3-minute exercise, for instance, nicely leads to a 6-8 minute substantial project, and then to a challenging 10-12 minute work to occupy an entire semester, for instance.

However, what are the implications

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