

Speaker Comment

Start

Jan In your discussions about composition, I had this sense of engagement that I...that I associate with

Barry So, at the ends, music and acousmatic music is largely at the abstract end, and phonography is largely at the mimetic end of things that are, you know, documents of reality. Admittedly, any document requires lots of choices - you know, what you record, how you put it together - but basically it's not abstracted in any way, shape, or form. So soundscape composition is definitely moving in that in between. So we can talk about it either from the point of view of the composing, which I've been sort of sketching with soundscape, but you can also talk about the theory of acoustic communication, acoustic ecology, where it has a much larger, more really almost political dimension to it. So the question then is what do musicians who want to take some kind of environmental responsibility, what - this is the theme of my article by the way, there's gonna be one that's going to be in an online journal, Moebius, that talks about the ethical aspects of that - one way you can say is that well, if young musicians or composers want to be useful and apply their knowledge and special skills to real world issues that they find relevant, you know, what can they bring to it? Well, they may say, "well, but gee, I just learned piano and harmony and rhythm and pitch detection, and that has nothing to do with the real world", well, that's largely true, right. We know in the west we can abstract music entirely from context, and it was the radical musicologist like Susan McClary and John Shepherd in the eighties that got that title because they had the temerity to say that music had a social context, right. 03:01:50;21

Barry So there's a lot of resistance historically, of course younger musicologists, they've gone way past that

Barry So that's where, you know, the thing, like the soundwalk or the soundscape composition shows where the two things come together. The musician's sensitivity, perhaps aesthetics, but the pitfall is are you going to overly aestheticize it, is that your main...right? Cause we get excited by aesthetics, right, the aesthetic beauty and value, and sonic pleasure of these...and are we doing this and ignoring the social role of it? And then do we for instance do like visual designers, "well we'll put a sound sculpture in this to beautify the place" right? That's the pitfall that I'm talking about. Fortunately communication, to me, gets you out of that or gets you beyond that, right, in some ways by standing back and not making aesthetic judgments. I try to not make, to make very few aesthetic judgments about any topic in acoustic communication or personal lifestyles for instance, what you listen to, I don't care what you listen to, say music-wise or media-wise, or things like that. You're trying to get to a larger thing about relationships and that sort of thing. So in a way, I have found personally from a theoretical point of view that that largely gets you out of that. And this of course has been, now we're so far into this work, that social scientists

Barry So soundscape composition gives you a practical opportunity to deal with this in your own way. And I'm not going to prescribe composition even if Schafer prescribes what's a good sonic environment, the hi-fi environment right, which is his buzz phrase for the good environment, lo-fi was bad, right. Like most of his work, it has a rhetorical appeal that immediately communicates and people love it and they get the idea right away. It doesn't bear more theoretical or critical scrutiny. Let's face it. Well it was never intended to, I don't think, you know, it was, you know, rhetorical devices that he used, coining words - soundscape or lo-fi, appropriating ironically hi-fi, lo-fi from audio which he was very skeptical about. But you know, they're difficult things to do, so you want the good part of the musician, but you want people other than musicians, you want other people to have aesthetic sensitivity, the kind of sensitivity to sound, I mean that is what is all in common is good listening, and it's just that musicians supposedly practice it, although frankly, you know, piano players don't generally get taught a whole lot about listening skills, it's more vocalists and instrumentalists where they can control the sound right, or score analysis, right. There's [sic] a lot of things that don't promote listening, but there's a lot of things that do. So you just have to extend it, just like electroacoustic music, acousmatic music, even though it's abstract, it was, you know, "all power to the listener", you know, it's all listening judgments of abstract sounds, sound objects that you listen to as an object for listening out of context. So they did it by having the sound object, listening was your basis for then where to go with that sound as you process it, because it's only sound for its own sake, right, so that's why it's so specialized. But they threw away context at the same time, at least in general, I mean many of the younger composers started, you know, referring back to context because it's so

Barry	<p>So, trying to do all of the above, to have, you know, the aesthetic principles of balance, I often think of a lot of my so-called soundscape pieces, which I don't really categorize them all - some are clearly, easily labeled that, others it depends on the company they keep, you could listen to them as soundscape, but you could listen to them...like you could listen to "Riverrun"- is that a soundscape composition or not, you know? Well you can listen to it as if it were, you know, the river metaphor and all that, even though there's not the slightest bit of water sound in it, it's all granular textures. So it's not just a labeling of it, it is how you listen to it quite clearly. But where I was going with that is that the soundscape itself, the soundscape composition itself, allows you to have a variety of approaches to referencing real world contexts, right, and that's its challenge and its great open-endedness that we're still working through. And hopefully then, on the hope for the future, because it is very popular now and we find that there's quite an appetite for it and people who would never go to an electroacoustic concert and sit in the dark - not that they all are, but they could be - right, people would never go to a specialized thing like that where explosions can happen all the time as sound for its own sake, right, it's a very specialized taste and of course I love that music but I know that it's limited in terms of its specialized consumption, right, it's an acquired taste like string quartets or something, right. But soundscape composition engages people on their own experience, and so that's the fundamental thing about communication that then you have going for you. And the challenge for the composer, the student composer, is well, you have to use your own associations with that, your own knowledge about that context, and let it guide you, because you're not going to do it on pitch relationships that are you know, orchestration, you going to have to have context guide you. And I find that, of course, very powerful, because then it can be the real world, and the imaginary world, and then you lead people through these journeys, and I do the, you know, fixed on tape, but it could be easily done in interactive installations or even the game world or, you know, audiovisual types of things, there's no end of the media representations.</p>	
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Barry