Free Improvisation: Researching the Acoustic Space

This presentation discusses how the phenomenon of room acoustics can be relevant for real time creativity in the field of free improvisation. The question posed is how sight specific room acoustic properties can be incorporated into aspects of improvisation, such as formation of musical language, real time decision making, and relationship with performance spaces. The room acoustic properties under consideration are reverberation time, frequency response, and room modes. The purpose for conducting this research is to provide additional possibilities for how improvisers create during real time performances.

One case study will be discussed pertaining to a performance space located in the Estonian Museum of Applied Art and Design in Tallinn, Estonia. The acoustic properties of this performance space were measured using the Transfer Functions method developed by Swen Müller and Paul Massarini. This data was then applied to an experiential methodology known as the Kolb Learning Model, developed by David Kolb. This model represents the pathway an individual takes in transitioning between experiences, observations, theories, and experiments. In this case, data was collected from experiences of improvising in the performance space. These experiences were documented and reviewed alongside the acoustic measurements of the hall. A theory was then formed for how to incorporate the acoustic properties of the space into a strategy for interpreting musical language, real time decisions making, and a relationship with the space. Then the theory was applied to a concert scenario. The concert was reflected upon in search and any advantages or disadvantages experienced while applying the theory.

Results show some possibilities for incorporating this room's acoustic condition into improvisation. Pierre Schaeffer's Sound Objects can be used for interpreting musical language in relationship to reverberation time and frequency response. Feedback systems proposed by Jeffrey Pressings prove to be useful for real time decision making regarding changes in perception of sound due to the room's acoustic. Finally, one approach for relating to a performance space's acoustics could be to view it as an instrument or instrument extension.

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Theodore Parker is an American born musician currently residing in Tallinn, Estonia. He works in the fields of improvisation and experimental music, both as a guitarist and electro acoustic musician. His bachelor and master degrees in Jazz music were attained at Bowling Green State University and The Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, where he currently pursues Phd studies. His artistic ideas explore the use of site specificity in real time music creation, blending the use of site specific arts practices, improvisation, and multi channel diffusion. Furthermore, he has worked in collaborative projects with choreographers, dancers, performance artists, and actors. He has performed in several improvisation concert series including Improtest and F.R.I.M. as well as performed with Taavi Kerikmäe, Raul Keller, Ekke Västrik. Additionally, he the is founding member of groups Punkt Nihu (2014) and Guerilla Impro (2013). Theodore also lectures on a number of topics ranging from free improvisation history, ambisonics, to site specificity in music.