

GODFRIED-WILLEM RAES

Godfried-Willem Raes, born 1952, studied musicology and philosophy at the Belgian State University at Ghent. Organizes new music concerts in Brussels (Palais des Beaux-Arts) and Ghent (Logos Foundation) and practices new improvisation methods with his own Logos group. Composer and author of texts on new music and mixed media.

*Question 1. Main tendencies in music 1970-1980*

A. Free improvisation

- a. sonorous properties: acoustical and self-made electro-acoustical extremely diversified non-standard sounds. Often with use of dynamical extremes, though amplification is generally only used for sound microscopy and not as a way of taking power.
- b. the structures are dialectical and a result of interaction
- c. absence of pitch-melodies and thematic work;
- d. the notion of the musical-personality becomes basic.
- d. creating interesting and enriching interaction patterns, often by causing musical "conflict"-situations.
- e. in principle non-elitist and accessible to everyone. Participation is in principle possible and organised (workshops).
- f. Improvisation as intended here entails the end of a tradition of musical thinking in terms of musical material. Music becomes at first place a musical expressive and sometimes even creative behavior. Its interest is in the process rather than in the final product, if any. Therefore the above questions are ideological in themselves.

Within improvisation as a main tendency, many different currents can be distinguished:

- post-serial & post-cage music rooted free improvisation
(Trans Museq, Bergstrom Nielsen, Cusack, Davies, Logos, Wachsmann, ... (a)
- free-jazz rooted free improvisation
(Evan Parker, Han Bennink, Derek Bailey... (b)
- third generation free improvisation
(originally non- or amateur musicians that learned directly improvisation from either a. or b.-type musicians
(William Embling, Barry Leigh, Ian Menter, Gert Gläser, Rui Calapez-Gomes...)
- psychological free improvisation
(music becomes relatively unimportant in comparison with psychological processes within the group, or between group and audience. Such improvisation can be either intended as a therapeutical tool, or it can become a sort of non-conflictual mystical ritual.
(Prima Materia, Alvin Curran, Richard Teitelbaum... etc...)

B. Contemporary Kitsch: neo-tonality, minimal...

Whereas minimal almost completely disappeared in the U.S during the indicated period, it cannot be overlooked in Europe. For an analysis of this phenomenon, I refer to my article published in "Bulletin 24H communication" (in French, 1980) or in "Mixed-media X yearbook" (in Dutch, 1980).

As to neo-tonality, I consider it a not too important phenomenon of return to kitsch, mainly by composers who have done earlier work in a post-serial style, and who have seen the bankruptcy of this kind of work. I don't think many younger composers are involved in this.

(Nyman, Bryars, Kupkovic, Rzewski, Pousseur, Cardew... Andriessen)

C. Mixed-media composition and projects

- a. no general sonorous properties
- b. composed, but mostly with regard to the mixed-media set-up. Generally, the musical concept is either left more or less free, or it uses a kind of relational notation.
- c. no general stylistic principles
- d. the use of media in a polyphonic but functional way.
- e. all of these productions can be regarded as political in a broad sense; Mixed-media composition is often done by composers considering it the only alternative beside improvisational work.
- f. almost all of this work is purpose- and performer-specific.
(Kievman, Wishart, Fahres, Uitti, Mosconi, Cusack, Greenham, Gilbert, Walker...)

D. Live-electronic music

- a. boring pseudo-complexity
- b. linear with very little thematic work
- c. determined by available equipment
- d. creation of a distant "meta-physical" non-expressive musical atmosphere
- e. escapism and an attempt to social recognition by means of socially high praised mystified technology.

Question 2

2.a Once more the question seems to exclude certain answers beforehand. I'm involved very much in improvisation, but by definition this involvement I've not so much as a composer. Improvisation is not a way of getting ideas for composition. As a composer – though the word became anachronistic and I prefer the more general term music-maker – I am involved mostly in mixed-media work. (Liesolee, Berichten en Berechten, Attitudes, Bellenorgel...) Other work in this field has been done collectively: Deus ex machina, Integration, Konstruktie, Contactu...

2.b. All, and more, of the tendencies I mentioned before. cfr. publications such as "Mixed-media X yearbook", regular articles in "Bulletin 24h communication" and contributions to magazines such as "Musics", "Coloquio", "Volksopvoeding" (containing a larger essay in dutch on creative music-making, and which I still consider very basic) "Yang", "Hartslag",....

2.1: Insofar as Belgium is concerned, I would consider myself as a founder for the realms of improvisation and mixed-media. In a more international perspective, this can be discussed, but there are some aspects within these currents in which I try to do fundamental and founding work: alternative instrument building, development of relational notation systems, ideological work.

The organising work I'm committed in, is a medium I use for distribution of ideas, besides our (logos) own performances and lectures.

2.2.: cfr. Mixed-media X yearbook, and for biodata, some earlier Mixed-media yearbooks.

Question 3

for longer answers I refer to my publications on these topics.

3.1.: improvisation: a creative emancipational force. Making and participating becomes more important than listening and consuming.

kitsch: will either be incapsulated, or disappear as a sort of fashion.

mixed-media: positive interdisciplinary work becomes possible, new possibilities for "functional" music

live-electronics: will, insofar as "serious" music is concerned, have to overcome some fundamental crisis about its technology of sound generation, a large part of it will be integrated into pop-music. The struggle with technology may incorporate some positive experiences for the people producing it.

3.2.: improvisation: development of new adapted instruments allowing for a maximal quantity of sound choice possibilities with a minimum of technical skill necessary to reach them in a flexible way.

kitsch: none

mixed-media: new ways of composing may be developed and relational thinking introduced into composition. This may cause a new tendency in abstract music composition; and some interesting perspectives.

Question 4

Yes. As to improvisation, all over the world musicians collectives have been created, in which musicians organise their own concerts, organise workshops – an alternative music education – have magazines and arrange facilities. The workshops as a medium of musical communication offer a real alternative for concerts as they are really the first experience in which "public" participation is taken serious and has proved to be successful. Also, these collectives publish records of their own members and of associated musicians, which are distributed only by the musicians-members and at the occasion of workshops or concerts.

As contemporary music is not at all a whole, but shows up the same diversity and disintegration as culture in general, ways of distributing all of it are not only unimaginable, but even unwanted. Nevertheless, I don't consider homogeneous distributing systems (taking only one specific style) as a good solution, because it would be closed to conflict and discussion. For distributing improvisation and mixed-media work, this should be mainly done by its creators, but facilities (small concert studios in all villages and towns) should be made available by the government. Musicians should not be paid, nor composers, only organising work, for them, or by them.

Question 5

There are almost no composers who are really making a living of composing. That's in fact a very good thing. Besides, composers have never lived such a good time – economically – than right now, because they almost all have well-paid jobs at schools, universities or radio stations.

Composing cannot and may not be considered as a profession. It is an expressive individual behaviour, that ideally should be the potential of everybody and not a privilege. If the results of compositional work are significant for culture in some way, then this significance in itself is the best possible remuneration one could ever imagine getting from it.

Younger or non recognised composers (f.i. of mixed-media work) should be offered the financial possibility to work out some of their projects. This for material costs, which can be quite high for some projects.

Also they should be offered experience possibilities – places to do try-outs, equipment, free access to instruments, facilities to do publications and getting them distributed etc...