

Stefan Östersjö: Trembling Aeroplanes

Trembling Aeroplanes is a group for new music with digital and electric instruments launched in autumn 2010. The ensemble explores a field of improvised and composed experimental music and consists of members of the Swedish Ensemble Ars Nova.

The project wishes to address a series of topics like the development of new performance practices for digital and electric instruments. This is approached by exploring modes of interaction between composers and performers. The point of departure is to develop the artistic usage of existing interfaces like MIDI-guitar, electric MIDI-cello etc with specific interest in how musicians interact with the virtual instruments created in the software synthesizers used in the new compositions.

The Research Questions that guide the project are:

- How can the resistance of an acoustic instrument be mapped onto the performance on a virtual instrument through a user interface like a midi-guitar?
- Can these virtual instruments obtain a similar level of complexity and resistance as an acoustic instrument?
- Can the emergence of new performance practices be identified in this work, and (if so) how can they best be discussed and documented?
- What is the function, and what are the limitations, of musical notation in these emerging practices?

The Canadian composer John Oliver's *No Ambition* (2011) was premiered by the group in February this year. The working process, as well as the composition itself, indicates some initial steps towards a performance practice in the negotiations between composer and performers. It also points to how the compositional- and rehearsal processes can be understood as an ongoing experimentation with the virtual instruments. However, what most of all has caught our interest in the early analysis of this material is the problems related to notation, and then most specifically how to notate the electronic sounds and how the performance on the instruments controls them. In the score, highly complex events may be represented by a single note, while the actual musical activity is driven by change of lip- or wind pressure on the synthesizer saxophone or by turning the modulation wheel on the synthesizer.

If we look at the score to events 9 and 10 in the piece, we see how sparse the notation often is, despite the fact that most of the resulting music is pretty dense. But what emerges in the first rehearsal is also a striking confusion as to how the more detailed material in Event 10 should be understood. We will now look at a video clip from the very first rehearsal on this section. The discussion of what the notation signifies, and the striking redundancy in some of the composer's attempts to 'clarify' the intention of the notation, might give an idea of the problems raised by the lack of an established practice for notation and performance of this music.

By commissioning music that specifically explores the development of new software instruments in creative collaboration between composers and the performers of the group, our aim is to create new knowledge in this field. The interaction between artistic experimentation

and qualitative research carried out as an integrated part of the artistic processes is another essential element of the research.