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ART-O-MATION?

I am tempted to review a recent magazine article. But if I do, many of you wouldn't go and read it . . . and in this case, the article is as accessible as anything could ever be: it was in the January 18, 1964 issue of the Saturday Evening Post.

It's on page 66 of that issue, and the title is:

MUSIC FOR MACHINES.

by Lewis Lapham. There is a large picture of a composer at the controls of a $250,000 electronic automatic music-assembler, and in keeping with the enormous price-tag, the machine's keyboard resembles that of a cash-register.more than it does that of a piano.

This article avoids technical mumbo-jumbo and thus is an excellent introduction to the automatic side of electronic music. It is quite an event for such an article to appear in a magazine for the general reader, and to avoid the pitfalls of Sunday-supplement oversimplification. So that is why I'm not going to rehash it for you.

All I will hint is that it discusses tape-recorder manipulation of pre-recorded sounds (usually known by the French term *musique concrète*), the use of computers in composing and to produce the sounds, and that the piano is a complicated machine, so the contemporary development of new musical machines cannot make music sound any more mechanical than it already does through the piano and the pipe-organ (another ponderous, complex machine).

Perhaps it would be a good idea if you would misquote the title to your friends when telling them to read the article, and call it Machines for Music. (This is the first time I ever *asked* anybody to misquote something, and I never thought the day would come, but here it is!) The reason for this suggestion is that the title implies that machines will listen to the music. One might be inclined to laugh off this implication, except that on page 3 of the January 18, 1964 Post is a statement that Mr. Lapham is a pianist who likes music composed for people.

Actually, music through machines is the real subject here. As a composer, I may have different intentions and styles and objectives from one piece to another. Now I may give the performer free rein to change and add and modify, as in a violin solo or a song; now I may pepper the pages with expression-marks and directions; now I may construct a tight, formal, precise network, as in a fugue; and sometimes I may decide to go all the way and specify EVERYTHING down to the last quiver of a vibrato and subtle nuance of intonation and phrasing--in which last case the automatic electronic instrument, or the mosaicking method of composing *without* instruments, is the only real answer. It all depends on the character of the music, and the degree of responsibility the composer is willing to assume at a given time.

If you insist on examples from traditional musical literature, then I can cite almost any well-known Italian operatic aria as an

example of the type of music where the composer supplies only a broad pattern, and the performer is encouraged to fill in some of the finer details, and each performance will be different. The Fugue in C# Minor, book I of Bach's W.T.C., may serve as an example of the formal, logical, precise type of composition which would benefit by performance on an automatic instrument, or rendition through the tape-mosaic or computer methods.

There is a catch here--one that you might not ever have suspected. Musical notation is an unphonetic "orthography"; musical spelling is not much more faithful to the actual sounds-as-heard than is French spelling. If someone protests that we have no way of knowing whether the automatic instrument was carrying out Bach's intentions, I would have to admit that the printed score of a Bach work leaves out a great deal of important information that someone composing directly upon an automatic instrument would have to put in; and besides that, the printed notation is positively misleading in many respects: a technician without musical training, carefully and slavishly following the score, would produce sounds and create effects the composer did *not* intend. With our other example, the Italian operatic aria meant to leave many details of performance to the singer's imagination and creativity, the shortcomings of musical notation just don't matter --and the traditional way of notating such music will remain as good as any.

The why and wherefore of automatic electronic instruments and methods of composing without instruments, is intimately bound up with this unphonetic nature of musical notation, and with the artificial constraints the notation imposes upon a composer's inspiration. At the present time, as mentioned in my Exposé #31, I am engaged in transcribing into musical notation a series of tape recordings of my improvising on manually-played electronic instruments of my own invention. I am simply appalled at how much I must leave out--how much is unwritable (and any of these "reformed" musical notations, including mathematical-style graphs, are no better in this respect). And the transcriptions of passages quite easy to play are extremely awkward-looking in notes, so they are seldom written under ordinary circumstances. Let us take a hint from the general semanticists: Printed notes are *not* music; music is only what you *hear!*

I repeat: it is a waste of time to invent new musical notations, for you are merely replacing one set of problems with *new* problems! The real answer is to invent new instruments, both manual and automatic, and to bypass the notation problem: one way is by improvising and recording this improvisation; the other is by composing directly on an automatic electronic instrument.

A recent survey disclosed that phonographs and hi-fi systems are already in a very large number of homes throughout the country. Then it is only common sense for me, and for any composer, to take advantage of this situation and write for the average living-room rather than the concert hall it won't be played in. Since the music will be reproduced electronically, why not compose it on an electronic instrument?

Some will do this composing at an electronic music studio on elaborate equipment, as the Post article implies. Others will prefer to continue composing at home as they used to do on a piano. I am anxious to develop a smaller composer's automatic instrument for the home studio, as well as to co-operate in the larger-scale endeavors.