

## **APPENDIX 3**

- **Brief history of CME**
- **Epilogue by Murray Schafer**
- **Extended techniques**

A Brief History of my experience with the Creative Music Environment (CME) ensemble:

In April of last year I put a flyer (see following page) into 500 postboxes in the Royal Conservatory of the Hague. As you can read, my idea was to create an environment in which we could experiment with percussion, electronic manipulation of sound and use that to create our own work. I had contacted the composer Hugo Morales after hearing a work of his at the May festival, and he said he would be interested in the project. We then enlisted the help of Ezequiel Menalled, who has much expertise in working with contemporary student works and many student performers.

Well, after a couple of meetings with both of them, it became clear to me that within the culture of the conservatory, student time is very limited. My hope to have 10 or 12 rehearsals, long rehearsals where we made decisions together quickly came down to 6 rehearsals, the first two with free improvisation and experimentation, the last 4 or 5 efficiently led by Ezequiel in order to make the work ready for performance. My discussions with Hugo led to the idea that he write a piece which would show some type of relationship between improvised and through-composed music. In a series of following discussions, in which Hugo more than once referred to talks he had had with his own composition instructor, the piece became more and more complex. In the end there were two different ensembles, one (the readers) who would play an extremely difficult to read through-composed piece and the other (the improvisers, CME) who would react to certain players in the reading group according to different parameters, pitch, rhythm or grouping of notes (something like density, I believe).

The through-composed piece was to create tension (the piece was called *In tensión*) and high concentration in the players, while the idea was that probably the listeners would not actually hear the difference between the two ensembles. To hear the work, listen to the CD *In tensión*.

What I had planned as an open creation with many inputs, with percussion and electronics, became a strictly scheduled production of the work of a composer, a production which I was very pleased with. I liked the work very much and felt that it was effective. However, I wonder if I succumbed too easily to the Conservatory model. High pressure, non-collaborative composition and a piece with a highly analytical structure.

Ready to try something **different**?

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## Creative Musical Environment

Coordinated by Sharon Stewart (masters student Music Education)  
in collaboration with Hugo Morales (student Composition and Sonology)

### **What's the idea?**

We prepare an environment (and a plan for collaboration) in which instrumentalists, percussionists, singers and (possibly) dancers create an original work, trying new sounds, new techniques and making most compositional decisions together.

### **Sounds impossible?**

Well, yes, but we hope that the environment will be so well designed and the coaching and group work so well planned that we will reach a satisfying musical result (including performance!) within 10 weeks and everyone will have learned something.

### **Why not?**

You think it is crazy, but you are still curious, but you have never done anything like this before? You are exactly the kind of musician who can help us learn the most!! So, why not??

**See other side for more info**

### **Why?**

As part of my own learning process, I want to move away from the 'classical' tradition of studying and preparing an existing work and toward the creation of a musical work itself, a process where everyone needs to keep their ears open and use their creativity. I am interested in the process of decision-making that is involved in making music and hope to transfer this knowledge toward making a model for Creative Musical Environments for students of all levels. Hugo will be providing compositional/technical expertise and advice.

### **What's the plan?**

First, you contact me (see bottom) so I have an idea of what kind of instruments and musicians might be involved. The group meets for the first time late in September (week 39) for a meeting where we decide who can do what and early in October (week 40) for a first experimental session. Then we have a free week to experiment alone (week 41)

After that we have one 2-3 hour rehearsal per week from 17 October until 18 November (weeks 42-47).

**What kind of people are we looking for?**

- flexible and open to different forms of music, as the resulting work will not be the 'ownership' of anyone and will be quite different than what one individual would create
- communicative and able to reach agreements
- committed and motivated (i.e. coming to all rehearsals)

**What's the product?**

At the end of November or beginning of December (week 48 or 49), the work will be performed as an important part of my final exam/concert. Each participant will receive a recording of the performance as well as full credit for his/her participation.

**But first:**

Contact me at [sharonbs@planet.nl](mailto:sharonbs@planet.nl) or call 06 2945 3933 to find out more and decide if you are interested.

From the program notes of my concert Sirens, 8 December 2004:

▪ ***In tensión* by Hugo Morales**

Parallel interaction between two energies.

Performance dedicated to Rosario Murguía and Carlos Morales.

**Directed by Ezequiel Menalled**

Carmen Ferreiro Soto, flute

Jorge López, clarinet

Paulo Almeida, bas clarinet

Justin Christensen, trumpet

Eefje Benning, sax

Sharon Stewart, piano

Ronald Boersen, viola

Cesar Queredo, acoustic guitar

Carlos Gutierrez, electric guitar

Luciana Mancini, voice

Alan Razzak, tenor

Helen Thomson, soprano

I first heard Hugo Morales during the May Festival this past spring. His work *Mot* for recorder, flute, violin and violone, with synchronized processed sounds from the same instruments, caught my attention. I contacted him and asked if he would write a work for this concert. After discussing the concept for tonight's concert, we decided that a good idea would be to place improvisation and notation together in a revealing relationship.

Hugo does not want to reveal too much before the piece is performed, however, feel free to ask him questions after the concert.

▪ **Live Performance : The CME Ensemble**

Playing are: Paulo Almeida, bas clarinet; Eefje Benning, sax; Ronald Boersen, viola; Alan Razzak, tenor; Sharon Stewart, piano; Helen Thomson, soprano

The two ideas of the Creative Music Environment (CME) Ensemble and the work by Hugo Morales are combined. By placing 500 invitations in student pigeonholes, I got about eight positive responses. Six of those who responded have been working together over the past six weeks and now form this ensemble. The first 'free improvisation' rehearsal was an incredible experience for me. The atmosphere in the group was positive, and we were able to remain concentrated, creating three long, energetic, searching improvisations. For me it was the first time I had worked in an ensemble without a certain need to reach a certain predetermined level of 'perfection'. The most important thing was to remain in the moment and to use our full abilities and experience to contribute to that moment. I hope that at least some of us can continue after tonight with our collaboration, searching for new colors, new ideas within different parameters of sound and our instruments. My original idea was to experiment with electronic manipulation and percussion with the group. Although that is not a part of this improvisation or Hugo's work, we hope to explore these ideas in the future.



## Ideas for extended techniques

There is a common mantra among piano players about ‘developing a singing tone’. The voice, with its swelling phrases and breathing, is a common goal of piano players. However, the piano is also a percussion instrument, a producer of amazing echo’s, buzzes, roars if the strings are used in combination with glass objects, plastic spoons, rings, etc. Prepared pianos, work instigated by John Cage is now around sixty years old, and it seems to have hardly infiltrated the daily life of most pianists, much less that of the piano teachers. I am aware that preparing pianos is a tricky task, especially for the un-initiated, however the simple use of objects (i.e. causing them to vibrate by touching them against the strings) can create some beautiful sounds. The exploration of ‘new’ sounds can provide ideas that can grow into musical creations, using only extended techniques, or created in combination with ‘normal’ playing.

I would like to continually turn to a broadening of the sound vocabulary of the piano, a practice which can be introduced to students, with the goal of stimulating creativity through the appreciation of sounds which can be produced apart from the hammer on the string. The following is (an always insufficient) list of sounds which can easily be made on the piano, the majority of which expand its typical repertoire (extended techniques). My advice would be to make your own sounds, and enjoy!

- Crashes: the cacophony that is produced when dropping the forearm, hand or fists on the piano keys is astounding. The resonances that slowly die away (when the keys are held or the pedal is pushed in) are worth listening to time and time again.
- Waves (glissandos with pedal): when the pedal is pushed lightly and the keys are stroked lightly with the back or side of the thumb, swirling waves of sound can be created. A wave of soft clicks can be produced by stroking the fingernails lightly over the surface of the keys.
- Knocks and thumps: the wooden body of the piano can be knocked on in any number of places. Try them all. Try them with and without pedal. The resulting echo of the knock caused by the sympathetic vibration of the strings is haunting.
- Haunting echos: press some keys silently. Play a melody or some random notes higher on the piano. Listen to the resulting vibrations.

When the vertical wooden board above the keys is removed, the strings will be exposed<sup>1</sup>. Accessibility of the strings increases greatly with a grand piano. However, even on a grand piano, some strings in the low/middle range are inaccessible, as they cross under the bass strings.

- Zings and mists: the fingers and fingernails can be stroked softly over the strings to create a variety of sounds. The coils around the low strings means that these can be played along the length of the string (with a piece of material softer than the copper winding around the string).
- Buzzes: a glass or plastic object (a piece of paper or aluminum foil are more difficult – however they can also be placed between the hammers and the strings) can be touched against the string or moved over the string while it is vibrating (the string can be caused to vibrate either by striking it with the hammer or with the glass object).
- Glockenspiel (sort of): the strings can be struck with wooden mallets, padded or unpadded.

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<sup>1</sup> Easy access to the strings can be blocked when the dampers are located on wires in front of the strings. This is an annoyance for

- Ghost piano<sup>2</sup>: the pianist depresses certain keys silently and then strokes her hand over the strings. Only the keys with the dampers raised are left to vibrate more freely.
- Tocks: the strings can be reduced in their freedom to vibrate by placing the fingers more or less firmly against the strings. They then give a dull tapping sound instead of ringing. A combination of free and stopped strings can provide a dizzying effect.
- Glassy overtones: by placing your finger (or a rubber eraser) on the string at a node (this must be found through experimentation) one of the overtones is given a dominant position and sings out above the rest.

More ways are possible. A fun idea is to let one student play on the piano and the other to play with their sound or add new sounds by working on the inside of the piano. Listen to the tracks on the CD 'Experimenting with the strings' to hear what a couple of students discovered with a wooden mallet and a small glass bottle and access to the strings. The way some students listen carefully and work with great focus in producing unusual.

I would like to finish this section with an anecdote about free improvisation (a slightly different topic). Two of my students had just finished a rather long recording of repeated blues improvisation (one playing a twelve bar blues bass line and the other improvising on a blues scale and then switching). When they were just finished, one began what became a wild improvisation, and the other joined. They seemed to deliberately not ask for my approval, so I sat quietly and recorded them (listen to CD track 'An improviso improv'). Much can be heard in this recording. What begins as alternating hand thumps turns into an experiment with thirds played together (a part from a previous piece) that is taken over by the treble. A series of bass lines are tried and abandoned, a rolling hand technique is tried out. Staccato and grace notes abound. A very high, alternating hand repeated pattern takes over, and the bass plays along. There is silence, and the bass picks up again on a very low tone. After a while more fist-rolling or cluster technique appears in the bass. At some point the treble player turned to me and I told them that I had been recording them the whole time. This produced groans. That moment gave me an insight into 'where my students are' and what directions an unguided improvisation can take without interference by the teacher. I could hear that they were clearly listening to each other, but not making music together. They were trying a chain of different attack techniques, but not really interested in creating a musical form. (I was listening critically again). However, at that time I chose not to make a comment on what they had done, to just allow it to be what it was.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Cowell's piece *Aeolian Harp* (1923) is one of his first pieces for what was termed the "string piano". The pianist silently depresses keys and then strokes his hand over the strings, leaving only the held keys to resonate.