

DISCUSSION ABOUT CONDUCTED IMPROVISATION AT EUROPEAN INTUITIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE 2021 IN BASEL, 2.OCTOBER.

Participants: Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen (DK), Ingeborg Poffet (CH), Max Stehle (D), Stephan Grossenbacher (CH), Angelika Sheridan (D), Iouri Grankin (UKR/DE), Etienne Rolin (F), Thomas Zimmermann (D), Hans Tonino (NL), Diego Kohn (AR/CH), Brigitte Küpper (D), Esther Knappe (CH), Susanne Escher (CH).

This discussion was preceded by two separate, simultaneous workshops of 40 minutes, led by Etienne Rolin and Diego Kohn respectively. Etienne had his starting-point in Walter Thomson's Soundpainting, Diego in that of Butch Morris, however, both has modified them. - After this practising, the two groups met and played for 16 minutes - in an overlapping manner.¹

MUSICIANS' IMPRESSIONS

Carl: what came out of this juxtaposition and meeting of two different systems and their conductors, focusing on the participants?

(from file ending with 56)

Ingeborg: I think I was changed a lot because I was adapting to the others - the system (Etienne's) was not very precise and then the listening became more important and reacting to the others, and then it's really interesting.

Max: I heard for sure that different ways to conduct realise their people's energies - Diego's much more controlled, Etienne's more [crinkled?], more of an outburst. Also I found there was a lot of connection to the personality of the two conductors.

Angelika: it was like in improvised music in a duo and the other plays really loud and energetic and needs lot of space, you can choose to do the same same or something else. Diego choose to do something else, to be quiet, as an answer to what Etienne did. And what I loved a lot is the pause - not to go into action.

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(Several others agree)

Iouri: for me it was like an attempt to combine minimalism and not minimalism. I understand that Etienne tried to develop the material that was in our orchestra.

Angelika: I felt a bit that in both systems, we play something which you conduct - it's not about me, because I would choose to play something else, choose when I wanna go, you did not have a sign for exactly that.

Etienne: I only decide partly - I invited to improvise.

Angelika: that's one sign, yes, but there are a lot of other signs, and they reacted promptly...

¹ A video recording of almost the whole improvisation starting after one and a quarter minute can be found here: <https://youtu.be/Yd4jbCaJBMg>

Etienne: it's presented - and then it's imprecision - it's going back and forth...

Thomas: for me it's difficult to compare these two systems. I can only say that in my group (Diego's), we had the most possible freedom of everyone, and that was very impressive for me.

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Max: it felt like a battle...

Etienne: yes I can tell you!

Stephan: I wished Etienne would have moved into the other room too.

SYSTEM AND AESTHETICS

Hans: I think both systems allow for freedom, expressiveness. I would like to ask the two conductors, what is the difference between the two systems, what they can do or not?

Diego: basically I would like to clarify whether you are talking about the different sign systems or the different aesthetics - sign system on one side and performance on the other side - Etienne can also make very similar playing to what we did, and the same from our side. - I choose some signs, and indicated only start and stop - the sound came from the group itself.

Brigitte: mentioning the question of what do you feel from the group - I also think there is something both ways - as a conductor, you feel something about what the group could do.

Diego: we have many, many possibilities to do everything we want. We could also go to the park and play music with just one sign, whatever (laughter). So I choose only one direction out of many...

Stephan (?): so this is about aesthetics?

Diego: yes, I think it is not decisive whether you use Butch Morris signs or something you invent

[unidentified - Stephan?]: and also I think that the group invents some aesthetics - we are all individuals - and the composition of the group, which kind of instruments - you had a lot of singers for instance

Angelika: ... there are a lot of signs...

Diego: yeah, that's what they think...

Etienne: that being said, anybody could do these basic signs: points, line and minimalism, just 3! even if there are 4000 Soundpainting signs. Now, what I choose when exercising with my group was what *they* have interpreted as this and as that.

Angelika: we got a lot of experience in conducting improvising orchestras - the main thing is what the conductor has in mind. If the conductor has in mind silence, there will be a silence. - There is a great story about Butch coming to London and worked with improvisors like Steve Beresford and Derek Bailey. And he said like "Hey Derek, you look at me" and then Derek said "No, you look at me", meaning something like "I don't need you to tell me to do this and this" (laughter), and he got

his guitar and walked out. After that, they founded London Improvisors Orchestra with a huge change: everybody could conduct - I brought an article with an interview with Butch who stated that his goal was to do good music, and you have to do what I tell you to². If you are a mean conductor and force people, they will show you they don't like it...

Etienne: I totally agree...

Angelika: And, I also do conducting and when I stand before the orchestra, I also try to send: that is happening right now. If you are open to that, you can make a music possible which is just there at the moment, but it has nothing with your idea to do. You feel it right away, when you press your idea upon the orchestra, it will function like a classical orchestra, or they can't ... I worked under both Walter Thompson, Butch and Sabine Vogel, and Butch acted as the boss - I didn't feel like a musician there...

Etienne: yes, I have heard similar stories ... Walter Thomson is unique, but he said, there is no error. If I said "play long tones" and people laugh, I go with it.

Esther: I was so much trying to come to understand all these signs...

Carl: I thought it was so funny that the two conductors began to improvise, such funny music came out of that!

HOW CAN A LARGE GROUP PLAY TOGETHER

Jopo: of course we are all improvisors and like to have our freedom. But my experience is, the more we are the more difficult it is for everybody to play in this freedom. For me it was interesting what the conductor was feeling, because as a group we cannot find it - to make the piece with all members included. The softest tend to get lost. The feeling of being together is the main point, not the individual... the trust between conductor and player, soft or loud, should be the same.

Max: We need to slow down.. We need to listen to the body and through the body we can feel the energy of the room...I'm speaking from experience - even with big groups, if everybody is able to sense that event you can work with that. Another thing is, how can I intervene into a playing situation to give it a different direction if I think it needs that...it comes from space and from the body, and if one feels that, everybody can conduct... we started the Schwarm 13 seven years ago, not with conducting but having certain structures that helped us a lot, but I am really happy that nowadays we don't need it any more...

Carl: Conduction and conduction signs are like compositions. So many open compositions, frameworks, starting-points composed since the fifties really had direction, but also were created in community with the musicians who played them. So - could not one imagine all degrees between having 4000 signs and just some few - and maybe not conducting or maybe musicians themselves making hand-signals. - I saw once the Prague Improvisors Orchestra - the conductor stepped away from the scene at some point, and I have tried that too. As long as you stand there, people look at you, knowing you might give a sign. - I think there are many, many creative forms to emerge in future between the big conduction systems and making a fixed piece. And seen from the musicians' point of view, we know that rehearsing a work requires serious work, trying to find out about the idea of the composer - afterwards, we are free to seek out new challenges. And there's got to be some economy to this work.

2 Peter Kowald: "Gespräch mit Butch Morris, dem Ort Ensemble und Peter Kowald", in: Almanach der "365 Tage am Ort". Luisenstrasse Wuppertal.Köln (König) 1998, S.150-155.

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Hans: I see conducting as a kind of game. You can engage in this game for fun, or for discovering someone's aesthetic. I learnt something from Diego's aesthetic - and you can use this aesthetic later in your own freedom when you improvise freely. The system you use is not so important because you might have different aesthetics. You can like it or dislike it, but it's a good idea to get someone's idea - freedom is also to listen to other ideas.

Susanne: to Diego - I had a very nice experience with the low sounds - it gave me a big concentration, to do that together - a possibility to feel more and more finely, you were really waiting for that. And Etienne, you were very fast to integrate things.

This text has been submitted to participants before publishing. However, some errors concerning names in the transcription may have occurred. Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen