

Avant-Garde and Electronic Music

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Electroacoustic Music

The term “electroacoustic music” encompasses a wide range of compositional and technical styles of music that developed during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In general, it can be defined as music that is composed or performed with the aid of electric or electronic means. This can include computers, synthesizers, and even loudspeakers.

The origins of electroacoustic music are largely within academia. Today, many innovations within the genre are still coming from professors (both composers and researchers) with ties to the university world. Increasingly, however, the world of film music is turning to electroacoustic means to produce the wide range of music and sound effects needed for the motion picture industry.

The list of styles and techniques that is included in this genre is long, and some of the terminology is subject to more than a single definition. Here is a short list of some of the styles that make up the electroacoustic genre, along with a brief definition of each.

Acousmatic music: music that is intended for performance through loudspeakers. The music may or may not exist in a notated version.

Computer music: any music that is composed with the assistance of a computer.

Digital synthesis or digital signal processing: the manipulation of sound digitally (with zeros and ones) as opposed to in an analog environment where sounds exist in a continuously changing series of values.

Sound sculpture: sound that is produced in connection with an object of art.

Soundscape: a musical composition that evokes a sense of a particular environment, such as sounds of nature, the ocean, or everyday noises such as traffic.

The means through which composers created electroacoustic music are as varied as the composers themselves and a comprehensive list is virtually impossible to create. There are a number of organizations and societies in the world devoted to the study and promotion of electroacoustic music. They include: SEAMUS, The Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States; ICMA, The International Computer Music Association; and many small or regional organizations or festivals that promote the field of electroacoustic music.

If you are interested in composing electroacoustic music or learning more about it, consult the website of one of these organizations to learn more. (www.seamusonline.org or www.computermusic.org)