

Propositional Music and Transformation in the New Millennium—A Chord is a Verb, Not a Noun.

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The only thing absolutely universal about music, I believe, is that all cultures seem to have something to which they refer with an utterance in their language that we translate into our word, *music*. Beyond this, music is one of the most wonderfully open and, consequently, abstract forms of activity known to human beings. The past 300 years or so has been a time of profound change in ideas about nature and reality. Music has reflected practically every such change. Because the pace of this recasting accelerated so much during the last century, it is to be expected that 21st Century composers will be routinely involved with new musical propositions.

I am interested in musical thinking that includes a view of composition as the proposition of musical realities—complete cognitive models of music. *Propositional music* assumes that prior to engaging in a compositional act, the composer asks and then answers the question, "What is music?" By *composer*, I simply mean, *creative music maker*, including creative performers, composers, analysts, historians, philosophers, writers, thinkers, producers, technicians, programmers, designers and listeners—and the listeners are perhaps the most important. To the extent that music is a shared experience, audiences must understand that this experience can not take place in a meaningful way without their active participation. This requires a view of *listening as composition*. Listeners are part of the compositional process. They must take an active role in creating musical experiences.

To participate in the evolving universe, a state of mind must be maintained in which the *intelligent order* contained in observations and experiences must be sought without the benefit of prior knowledge regarding the nature of that intelligence. To understand this in musical terms, the components of formal analysis must be regarded as action items, entities that can stimulate the formation of sometimes-unpredictable relationships and provide tools for exploring musical environments. For example, a *chord* should be thought of as a *musical verb*, not a noun. It is a channel of action, a temporary marker for movement, a signpost with arrows on a road leading to somewhere on the continuously stretching rubber sheet of musical space-time.

We are now capable of imagining new paradigms and even testing them through technological or other simulations, especially in the arts. In this way, we can anticipate observations we might make from within potentially new paradigms. The synthesis of new paradigms can itself be considered an artistic process in which transformation is a given.

During the current era, which now includes the global phenomenon of *cyberspace*, defined as the realm of collective, electronic memory, art seems to be moving towards an intimate confrontation with the beautiful, holarchical forms of the natural universe. This is happening on many levels of society. The common theme is *interactivity*. This includes heterogeneous, socio-cultural interaction and global, technological networking. So, who is the audience of our contemporary *infosphere*? Increasingly, it will be comprised of participants in networked exchanges.

During recent centuries, scientific themata have evolved with such power that, when combined with empirical investigation and phenomenic verification, they have succeeded in denuding traditionally powerful myths of their power to guide society. New

myths may arise from a critical level of interconnectedness. Such mass phenomena are sure to evince emergent properties. Hopefully they will be accompanied by images of sufficient power to garner forces of healing within our culture once again. Cultural crossings, with imaginal dialogs circulating in communication networks, may become the art objects of focus.

Natural selection will insure that a planetary society that is incapable of structuring itself along the lines of cooperative transformation will not survive. Perhaps, the power and freedom of music enabling us to explore new models of interaction may help us develop the means of necessary restructuring. Perhaps, we will be able to conceive of an idea of musical interactivity unbounded by our limited views of time and space and expand our appreciation of the universality of music even more.

David Rosenboom, composer and performer, has been a pioneer in American experimental music for over 30 years. His work explores the spontaneous evolution of musical forms, languages for improvisation, new techniques for ensembles, performance art, computer music and interactive multimedia, compositional algorithms, and extended musical interface with the human nervous system. He has held the Darius Milhaud Chair at Mills College, the G. A. Miller Professorship at the University of Illinois, and a professorship in music and interdisciplinary studies at York University, Toronto. Presently, he is Dean of the School of Music at the California Institute of the Arts.
