# Expanding contexts for computer music: one composer's experience

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**Using his own experience of forty-three professional engagements over a period of a year, most of which involved performances on a laptop computer, the author examines the nature of the 'musical scenes' into which involvement with computer music has led him. The author contends that the social nature of 'computer music' is changing not only because of changes in the technology, but also because of a number of social factors, some of which are examined in this article.**

The first thoughts that led to this essay were problematic. I had noticed that most of the gigs I was playing were with my laptop computer, and that I was playing my music in a wider variety of venues than I had in the past. Therefore, taking myself as an example, I felt that what I was calling 'the sociology of computer music', i.e. the nature of the social environment computer music was occurring in, had, over the past few years, changed, and changed decisively. The introduction of cheaper and more powerful technology had led to many more people making music with computers than before, and these people were performing the music in a wider variety of venues and 'scenes' than had earlier been the case.

This idea had several problems. First of all, I had to define what the nature of a social environment or 'musical scene' was. For me, this was the complex of implicit or explicit rules, venues and behaviours in which certain musics existed. For example, we could define one 'classic' computer music 'scene' as semi-experimental music made by academics, and mostly performed in university contexts, with occasional performances of the music on radio, in installations and at conferences. At most of these events, the accepted behaviour of the audience is to sit quietly and listen to the music intently. Socialising occurs before and after the music. During the performance of the music, people generally do not smoke or drink. Events usually start at or shortly after the advertised time. Social advancement in this scene is a result of a complex of rules – getting papers published, participating in conferences, and indulging in collegial behaviours such as writing unpaid reviews and articles for journals (like this one), being on committees for conferences, etc. And the academic computer music scene seems to be one where money is not supposed to be an issue – i.e. most of its members have university or other jobs, and being paid for the music is usually only a secondary consideration of theirs.

My definition of a 'musical scene', then, was social and not stylistic. It's true that much of the semi-experimental music described above had certain stylistic similarities. For example, it didn't usually have a driving pop-oriented beat (though there are, of course, exceptions), yet I found thinking about music in social terms rather than stylistic ones to be more useful. Moreover, so many composers (since the 1920s, at least!) had been making so many 'stylistic crossover' pieces, that to associate a particular musical 'style' with a particular 'scene' seemed to me to be problematic. Oftentimes, the exceptions to the rule would outnumber pieces made according to whatever rule you were trying to demonstrate! What did seem obvious to me was that people divided themselves into social 'scenes' very easily, and the differing behaviour of these scenes was what I was encountering more and more in my wanderings from one performing venue to another. For example, I would go from a rehearsal in the organic food- and Alexander Technique-influenced, female-dominated world of post-modern dance directly into an extremely smoky, hard-drinking opening of a group of mostly male visual artists. The music I would be making in both these scenes would be quite similar, but the behaviours in both worlds were extremely different, and these social differences seemed to be more meaningful to me than any changes in my musical style that might result. (We still seem to have the need to form into tribes and divide ourselves into groups of insiders and outsiders. Why? Sometimes our need to cling to this form of what I regard as atavistic behaviour fills me with despair. Is our sense of identity really that fragile? Whatever happened to those generous visions of a universal, sharing humanity?)

I also felt that if we limited the consideration of 'computer music' to music which exhibited the usual stylistic traits of the music played in the academic scene described above (let's call it, as Joel Chadabe did in a conversation we had, music made by people who read *Computer Music Journal* and *Organised Sound*), we'd have a difficult time dealing with the driving beat-oriented and sample-dominated music made by many people in dance clubs in which the main instrument of production, composition, and sometimes performance was the computer. And this music, and this scene, has

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as least one substantial magazine almost totally devoted to it, which is called *Computer Music* (Bath, UK: Future Music Ltd). The music made in this scene doesn't sound like 'academic computer music', but it's certainly music made on a computer, and its makers sometimes describe themselves as 'computer musicians' and what they do as 'computer music', so it would seem that limiting a definition by musical stylistic terms was not going to work.

Another problem was that if I was going to deal with the social nature of computer music, I had to ask just who these computer musicians were. I had to admit, in thinking back on my career, that I'd actually probably never been part of the 'academic computer music' scene, anyway. For example, since 1981, I'd never had a full-time academic gig. From 1982–2000, I'd spent less than a total of fourteen months in the employ of academic institutions, and all of that was at part-time rates. Furthermore, although since about 1997 I'd been very active in ACMA, the Australasian Computer Music Association, I'd never been to one ICMC (International Computer Music Conference) and had never sent a paper or a piece to any of them. (Although I had been dragooned onto a works selection panel for one.)

So, if participation in the 'academic computer music scene' was what was required to be considered a 'computer musician', then there was a strong possibility that I didn't qualify – despite the fact that since 1992 my main performing instrument had been a laptop computer. (A Chicony 286 laptop with a Roland Sound Canvas card, 1992–6; a Toshiba Pentium laptop with a Roland PCM-CIA interface, 1997–9; a Gateway Pentium II laptop with a Roland UA30 interface, 1999–present.)

So maybe what I was dealing with here wasn't 'computer music' but 'electronic music'. At this point, the distinctions between the areas began to seem ridiculous to me. In my career, I had started out playing with analogue synthesizers, and although I had, before 1979, done some musical work with computers, I preferred to use devices, either commercially produced or self-built, that allowed me to perform live, and that I could afford to own personally. Whether in the studio or in front of an audience, I valued the ability to change sound in real time more than I valued minute and precise control over each musical parameter. Some of my self-built devices used digital logic circuitry. In fact, because computers at the time were too expensive, some of the devices, such as Aardvarks IV (1972–5) were realisations in hardware of a particular software design I wanted to work with. In 1979, in various friends' studios, I began working with a New England Digital Synclavier and the following year, also in friends' studios, began playing with the Fairlight Computer Music Instrument, both early performance-oriented computer music systems. In 1981, I bought my first computer, a Rockwell AIM65 single-board microprocessor that was programmed in FORTH. The use of this computer is significant. I had bought it on the recommendation of George Lewis, whose trials at IRCAM in 1984 are well documented in Georgina Born's *Rationalising Culture* (Born 1995). Already at IRCAM there was a division between the 'experimental' use of computers, which was oriented towards small, live, realtime systems, and the use of big computers that could do 'everything' but not in real time. I had to admit that nearly all of my work fell on the 'experimental' (and perhaps romantically self-described as less legitimate?) side of this divide. In fact, some of my work with 'circuit-bent' (self-modified) transistor radios and cassette recorders was entirely out of the purview of respectability of even some analogue synthesizer-using musicians! In the late 1980s, when I bought a desktop system, poverty forced me to use the 'lowly and despised' IBM platform, not the 'stylish' Mac or the 'tenurable' Unix platform. And because I felt a little burned out by several years of FORTH and Assembler programming on the AIM, I preferred to mostly use interactive software written by others, although occasionally I would still 'roll my own'. I then found out that there was a hierarchy made by some people regarding 'do-it-yourself' versus 'pre-packaged' software. I have encountered many ridiculous hierarchies and status-preserving mechanisms in the new-music field, but 'platform hierarchy' (and its many incarnations) strikes me as one of the more ludicrous of these.

Others have observed some of these hierarchy-preserving mechanisms in far more caustic terms than I have. For example, Bob Ostertag's by now classic article, 'Why computer music sucks' (Ostertag 1997) is an excellent expression of one non-academic computer musician's frustrations in being on a panel at the formerly academic computer music-dominated Ars Electronica festival. (I must admit I shared his feelings after my stint on an ICMC panel!) And the howls of rage and protest that followed from the academic community when the music panel at the Ars Electronica music jury adopted a more pro-popular culture stance showed me, at least, that the 'polite' and 'universalising' academic computer music community was just as capable of narrow-minded dismissals and emotionally ugly turf-wars as was any other self-defined group of human beings.

For many years, I had been making music in a range of venues and scenes. I'd been doing as much music for postmodern dance and installation work as I'd been doing works for live-electronic performance in the concert hall. So I was already working in a diverse range of scenes. Yet from about 1996 or 1997, I noticed that I was performing in a far wider range of places than I'd been previously. I began asking myself where, in terms of 'scene' or 'style', I fit in. And wherever I happened to fall (or was perceived by others to exist) among the many different scenes or styles of music made using technology, I saw three things happening:

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(1) In Australia, academia itself was decaying. This wasn't simply an embittered observation of an outsider to the scene, but a physical fact. A number of university music departments, which had provided a home for the development, performance and criticism of academic computer (or electronic) music had been closed, and in a number of other departments, the electronic music studio was either shut down or downgraded to a status where the technicians were instructed to teach students techniques on a 'need to know' basis – without any overall programme for music technology in place. An institution that had previously provided an infrastructure for music was cutting back on that support, and a number of musicians that formerly considered this environment their natural home were suddenly forced to look elsewhere for support and places to practise their art. This decay of academia in Australia was not limited just to music. Recently, in 1999, even the Vice-Chancellors (the authors of much of the downsizing) were themselves protesting to the government that the budget cutting had gone on for far too long. And in January 2001, a group of Australian music technology academics, led by Peter McIlwain of Monash University, began having private discussions about how to reverse this downsizing trend, at least as far as their area of interest was concerned. (This music technology downsizing seems not to have been the case in New Zealand or in the USA. I haven't done enough research to see if this problem is unique to Australia or if, perhaps, Australia is simply in the vanguard yet again, and this phenomenon will become more widespread internationally in the near future.)

(2) Outside of academia, more and more musicians were using computers in their work. To name just two scenes: first, there was the 'techno music' or 'dance music' scene, and the innumerable sub-genres which seemed to be arising and splitting from it on an almost weekly basis. (This proliferation recalls Benjamin Boretz' quip: 'and if you don't make it all the way to Pope you can always start one of your own'.) This scene, though international, seemed particularly active and intense in Melbourne, which is a city in which interest in 'fashion' and 'style' seems to me to be particularly pointed and keen. Second, there was the greater use of technology in the 'free improvisation' scene. This was accompanied by a greater interaction worldwide between musicians from the 'free improv' and 'new music' scenes. This interaction seems as intense and widespread in Melbourne and Sydney as it does in a number of other large urban scenes I am aware of, such as London, New York and San Francisco. A recent conversation with New York composer Sorrell Hayes, in which she talked about playing with musicians from both the 'new music improv' and 'club improv' scenes, acknowledged that although the difference between the two scenes was narrowing (acoustically, it has all but disappeared for me), there was still, as she saw it, a social difference. A relevant point to mention here is that in Australia there had always been, from the early 1970s (at least in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide) alternative new music scenes outside the academies. In Melbourne, for example, one of the major centres for electronic music and multimedia experimentation and performance, was the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (1976–82), a non-academic self-funded composers' and performers' venue. In this venue, academic electronic musicians and free improvisers were already collaborating regularly as early as 1977.

(3) Most obviously, there was the change in technology. Computers got faster and cheaper, and software developers made more resources available (often free, or for very low cost). In the commercial sphere, the multichannel hard disk recorder became a major resource, and many film music and other commercial music composers began using techniques (such as convolution and granular synthesis) that formerly were the exclusive province of academic music researchers. (I've got three convolution programs and four granulation programs on my laptop now – all of them were downloaded from the web and none cost more than $60US.) This meant that for a young musician starting out in 1998–2000, it was often cheaper to get a computer music system for performance than a good guitar!

My original point that the social nature of computer music had changed because of advances in technology in tandem with a number of other causes still seemed valid, if not obvious, though still somewhat fraught with definitional difficulties. I decided that perhaps the best way of illustrating my point was simply to list the concerts, performances and installations I'd given in a one-year period, and then to analyse this list to see what I could learn by examining what venues I'd played in, what scenes the venues existed in, and what the rules of behaviour were in those scenes. What I found was that in my performances from October 1999 to October 2000, I was performing in as wide a variety of venues as I'd ever performed in, with the addition of a couple of new kinds of scenes. Further, the music I was making was varied in both its nature and its functions. For example, I found that my work with improvisation groups was different (much more sample and quotation oriented) than my work on solo performances for laptop computer, and this was different again from my work in music and movement theatre. In my solo laptop pieces, the patches are focused on one particular compositional process, and there are a specific set of timbres and a method of performance for the particular piece. Compositional identity in these pieces is defined by a patch, a set of sounds, and a kind of performing, each of which can vary from piece to piece. In my improvisations with other people, my approach is quite different. I'll have a whole range of sound resources that I can draw on quickly in response to the needs of the situation, and I'll be much

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more free to mix and match sound and types of processes based on what the other performers are doing.

To examine all these issues, I prepared a list of forty-three performances or music-making activities I was involved in between 12 October 1999 and 6 October 2000. The limiting of performances to a one-year period is arbitrary, but it should serve to show the diversity of venues in which computer music, or music made with computers, if you will, exists today. I also list several gigs where I was not performing computer music but where the activities were very closely related to my work in that field. For example, although I performed a score for accordion and tuning forks (home-made percussion instruments tuned in just intonation) for Kate Kaos' dance piece, *Five. Three. Two. In Memoriam Kenneth Gaburo*, all the other music on the same programme was, in fact, live electronic music of some sort. And in a couple of cases, I'm listing studio sessions, or non-live-venue composing activities, because their nature is also illustrative of some change in the sociology of computer music. (An example of this is composing *Two Japanese Pictures* mostly on planes and trains using my laptop.)

In making this list, I'm taking into account several factors: the venue, the nature of the audience (who are they?), the behaviour of the audience (what do they do?), the attitude of the scene to starting on time, and who pays for the gig (subsidised or commercial, among other possibilities). Not listed here but also worth considering is the amount of improvisation in the gig (this can vary from piece to piece during an individual event), the rules of advancement within each scene (how does one keep being asked back to perform in a scene, or how does one make one's own scene and keep it going?), and the relative status of the scenes among each other. This last is highly subjective: perhaps the most honest way of dealing with this is to say, with tongue firmly in cheek, that the scene that *I* am involved in right now (whoever the *I* making the statement is) is the central and ultimate scene, while all others are peripheral or of less interest and significance. (I have had a number of techno musicians say to me that my work and that of my more academic colleagues has been simply an interesting, if minor, precursor to the development of their scene. And from their point of view, they're right.)

As a footnote, another interesting aspect to consider is the position of names in a scene. For example, in the academic new music scene, one almost always performs under one's own name. In the rock world, corporate identities (band names) mingle with personal names, as is the case in the free improv scene that has evolved from jazz. However, in these scenes, a solo performer almost always performs under his/her own name. In the 'club electronics' scene in Melbourne, though, almost no one performs under their own name. Each person has a corporate identity, or a stage name, and the linkage of this with the performer's real name is not generally declared publicly. For example, I knew composer/performer Mark Harwood for about two years before seeing him at a gig, performing as Quoggenzocker. In no publicity that I had seen was Mark's name linked with Quoggenzocker, and he had never said to me that he performed under that name. There may be many reasons for this phenomenon from simple shyness and lack of self-confidence to an actual rejection of performing behaviours the members of the scene regard as too egotistical, but it is striking that nearly all the members of this scene refuse to perform under their birth names or even to reveal the connection between their stage names and their birth names. It seems that you only find out who the performers are by being part of the scene, and that if you don't know who they are, then, by definition, you aren't part of that scene.

In fact, the Melbourne 'club electronics' (my term) scene probably deserves an article all of its own. Here is a group of young composer/performers, who are making (mostly) non-beat oriented electronic music with any means available to them in a large number of venues. Very few use computers proper, and most scavenge whatever cheap resources they can find to make their noise-based music. They are nearly all under thirty, of both genders (though males predominate), and almost none of them are connected in any way with university music departments or any of the classical music scenes. Some have some tertiary visual arts training or are currently studying in art schools. Most came up through the world of pop, rock or techno, but found they were 'too weird' for those scenes, and they seem to have found each other and have coalesced into a scene of their own. Mark Harwood's record store, Synaesthesia, seems to be one of the epicentres of this world. Another very active member of this group is Eamon Sprodd, whose 'Hard Listening' series of concerts juxtaposed both older local and international experimentalists (such as Phill Niblock) with members of this younger group. Hopefully, someone more connected with this very fascinating and talented group of individuals will document their work in a more knowledgeable way than I can.

The KINDS OF VENUES I performed in were:[1]

- JZC – jazz club / art bar environments
- BKS – a bookstore
- RAD – radio
- AGM – art galleries / museums / public libraries
- CMW – public concert halls (classical music world)
- UNI – university campuses
- DTS – art-world dance / theatrical space
- ODE – outdoor environments
- ATA – alternative theatres / art spaces
- CFH – coffee houses
- FLM – film theatres

[1]Letters before venue, audience, etc. types are abbreviations used in the upcoming listing of gigs.

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- HSE – private homes
- CD – recorded media (CD release)

Some of the KINDS OF AUDIENCES I encountered were:

- JAB – jazz club / art bar habitués (intellectual, somewhat alternative, interested)
- RND – whoever happened to be there (bookstore, public spaces, radio)
- GP – general public (radio, outdoor environments)
- OCM – older classical music goers (classical music gigs)
- YNM – younger new music fans (coffee houses, some museums, alternative theatres)
- DJS – a collection of techno music DJs (techno club)
- CMJ – a collection of academic computer music researchers (ACMA conference)
- UMS – university music or art students (gigs at universities)
- DWS – highly educated, mostly female, mostly unemployed dance enthusiasts (dance venues – this is based on audience surveys done by the Melbourne publicly funded venue, Dancehouse)
- VIS – visual arts, and general arts audience
- FMK – a collection of experimental film makers and their friends (film theatres)
- NBR – a collection of invited neighbours, most of whom had some interest in the arts (soirees in private homes)
- NOA – no audience (private event)

I encountered a range of KINDS OF AUDIENCE BEHAVIOUR in these scenes:

- SUB – music purely as a subservient accompaniment to another activity (some dance music)
- BKG – music as background to a social scene (talking is foreground, music is background)
- TOK – talking is O.K. but music is the foreground (as in jazz clubs)
- MFC – music is the focus but a comment or two is O.K. (coffee house environment, soirees)
- SLF – shut up and listen (friendly) (alternative theatres, dance spaces)
- SLH – shut up and listen (hostile) (classical music venues)
- UNP – unpredictable, as in radio, where you don't know what the audience is doing
- AMB – Ambient audience, as in an audience for an installation or a gallery

Also, the PRESENCE OF STIMULANTS should be considered:

- D – illegal drugs used on premises? (To the best of my knowledge, this was the case in none of the venues I was in, including the one techno club I played in, Exp at Centriphugal. In fact, just the week before, they'd been involved in a major media campaign stressing the drug-free nature of their activities.)
- A – alcohol consumed on premises during performances?
- T– tobacco?
- F – food?
- C – coffee/tea?

e.g. NATF = no alcohol, tobacco or food

- UNP – not knowable, as in a radio audience

Different scenes had different IDEAS ABOUT STARTING ON TIME. The range was:

- OT – within 10 minutes of advertised starting time (on time)
- 20L – 10–20 minutes late
- 30L – 20–30 minutes late
- 40L – more than 30 minutes late
- 60L – averaging around 1 hour late
- N/A – not relevant (as in installation work where the audience comes and goes at will)

The gigs were of many FINANCIAL types:

- DD – door deal (where the performer gets a share of the admission charges)
- PGC – a paying gig with a fixed fee from commercial sources
- PGG – a paying gig with a fixed fee from grant sources
- PGI – a paying gig with a fixed fee from an institutional budget
- ENT – entrepreneurial (where one hires a hall, collects admission, etc.)
- NPC – a non-paying gig subsidised by other commercial money-making activities
- NPG – A non-paying gig subsidised by a general-purpose grant

During the period June 1998 – May 2000, I was lucky enough to be a recipient of an Australia Council Composers' Fellowship, so perhaps ALL my activities could be considered subsidised. However, in making the above distinctions, I'm trying to deal with the financial realities of the gig as I would have experienced them even without the fellowship (except, of course, for those specifically mandated by the conditions of the fellowship). For example, both during and after my fellowship period, I would play improv gigs at the Planet Café in Melbourne's Fitzroy suburb, and for my work there, I would get a share of the door. Everyone else performing there, whether subsidised by a grant, or by their day job, or by unemployment benefits, would share equally in the proceeds. This particular gig, then, is a door deal gig, and sometimes, if the audience is small, almost a non-paying gig subsidised by other activities and whether those other activities involve funding from government sources (grants or unemployment benefits) or private

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sources (other employment) may be somewhat relevant, but not excessively so.

Here is the list, with the gigs described according to the above categories – the listing follows the following format: date, title, medium & venue name. Kind of venue; kind of audience; audience behaviour; stimulants?; punctuality; financial. Comments.

## GIGS 12 OCTOBER 1999 – 12 OCTOBER 2000, MOST INVOLVING COMPUTER: WARREN BURT

(1) 12 Oct 99 – *A Tour Thru Temperament*, live computer and keyboard, Planet Café, Fitzroy, free improv series. JZC; JAB; TOK; ATF; 30L; DD.

(2) 20 Oct 99 – *Charles Ives' 125th Birthday*, computer and speaking voice, Collected Works Bookstore, Melbourne, lunchtime performance. BKS; RND; TOK; NATDF; OT; NPG. Most people browsed books but listened quietly while doing so.

(3) 23 Oct 99 – excerpt from *Charles Ives' 125th Birthday*, broadcast on ABC Radio 'Music Show', live interview as well. RAD; GP; UNP; UNP; OT; NPG. Interview was not paid, but royalties paid through APRA (Australasian Performing Rights Association) for use of the music on radio.

(4) Nov 99 – *Composed in Bed with David Tolley's Sounds*, computer music broadcast on ABC-FM 'New Music Australia', as part of David Tolley's 'de/re composition project'. RAD; GP; UNP; UNP; OT; PGI. This was a commissioned work. I was paid a modest fee to compose the work and then received additional APRA royalties when it was broadcast.

(5) 12 Nov 99 – concert with Alison Thomson, piccolo; Peter Neville, vibes; Miriam Morris, viola da gamba; and W. Burt, solo computer, Percy Grainger Museum. AGM; OCM&YNM; SLF; NATDF; OT; ENT. The performance was outdoors in the museum courtyard on a warm spring evening. The cicadas made a lovely contribution.

(6) 14 Nov 99 – *Sun Reflections*, computer music with Miriam Morris, improvising on viola da gamba, 101 Collins St, Melbourne. CMW; OCM; SLH; NATDF; 20L; PGC. This was the 'new music' number on a Classical Music Smorgasbord concert, performed in a large resonant hall.

(7) 14 Nov 99 – *Dada Cabaret*, a night of jazz, free improv, computer music and performance art, Yelza Bar, Fitzroy. JZC; JAB; TOK; AF; 20L; DD. Large, young, hip audience was predominantly dressed all in black.

(8) 21–8 Nov 99 – *Summerlake*, sound installation at Ripponlea Estate, Elsternwick, one of five for *Recent Ruins*, a series of installations in a public garden. ODE; RND; AMB; DATFC; N/A; PGG. Ripponlea is an elegant nineteenth century National Trust garden, with a $9 entry charge. The gardens are a favourite spot for weddings, so a fair number of wedding parties passed through. (Special note – I saw Australian Labour Relations Minister Peter Reith at one of them. He looked uncomfortable.) Although alcohol, tobacco, food, and probably drugs are consumed in great quantities at Ripponlea (at all those weddings), the sites of the installations were generally in places where this did not occur.

(9) 21–8 Nov 99 – *Calvinesque Connections*, live laptop and speaking voice, daily at Ripponlea Estate, Elsternwick, Victoria, for *Recent Ruins*. ODE; RND; SLF; NATDF; OT; PGG. These daily live performances took place in an ornamental tower in a far corner of the property. On climbing the tower, and discovering the performance, people generally stayed for a while, and listened quietly before moving on.

(10) 1–3 Dec 99 – *Installation for Three Laptops – Remembering Kenneth's Lemons*, at 'First Iteration' Conference, Art School, Monash University, Caulfield, Victoria. UNI; CMJ&UMS; AMB; NATDF; N/A; NPG. A five-minute excerpt from the installation was also included on the conference CD.

(11) 27 Dec 99 – *Music for Dirk De Bruyn's films*, recording session; W. B., computer, and Ben Chadabe, drums; Albany, NY. HSE; NOA; SLH; NATDF; OT; NPC. Non-paying activity subsidised by (i) my grant, and (ii) Ben's day job at Electronic Music Foundation.

(12) Dec 99–Jan 00 – *Two Japanese Pictures*, computer music made on planes, trains, busses, etc. in Australia, Japan and USA. Public transport environment & CD. NOA; UNP; FC; N/A; NPG. I wore headphones while composing it and didn't communicate what I was doing to my fellow passengers, except for one curious and very cordial Japanese gentleman on the Osaka – New York flight. FC = airline food – urgh!

(13) 3 Feb 00 – *Alternations around Zero – Water*, computer music made for Colin Fallowes *Zero* CD project, UK. CD; JAB&UMS; UNP; UNP; N/A; NPG. Non-paying gig, but contributors received multiple copies of the CD for distribution or sale as they wished.

(14) 8 Feb 00 – five live improvisations on solo laptop, Planet Café, Fitzroy – free improv series. JZC; JAB; TOK; ATF; 30L; DD.

(15) 7 Mar 00 – lunchtime solo computer music concert, Music Dept, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. UNI; UMS; SLF; F; OT; PGI; F = the occasional person munching quietly on a sandwich.

(16) 1–2 Apr 00 – *Five. Three. Two*, dance piece by K. Kaos. Dance accompaniment for accordion and

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tuning forks, Dancehouse, Melbourne. DTS; DWS; SLF; NATDF; 30L; PGI. NATDF, in this case, is that dance world holier-than-thou attitude towards defiling the temple of the body with pollutants. All music at this event except for mine was for live electronics.

(17) 7 Apr 00 – *Improvisation with 5 Pound Synth*, live electronics and movement. Theatre of the Ordinary, Fitzroy. ATA; DWS; SLF; CF; 20L; NPC. Non-paying performances by choreographer Al Wunder's students, who had paid Al tuition for his classes from whatever financial resources they had. The 5 pound synthesizer is a mis-wired transistor radio–calculator device I made in 1979 (premiered in York, UK) on which I still perform. The calculator chip and the radio circuit are wired into a feedback loop, so I guess it qualifies as a very primitive hybrid digital–analogue synthesizer. It's very small, very loud, and makes wonderfully ugly and mostly uncontrollable sounds.

(18) 9 Apr 00 – live electronics duet, W. Burt on laptop accompanying composer/performer tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE, as part of his music and film presentation. Hard Listening Series at the Musicians' Club, St. Kilda. JZC; YNM; TOK; AT; 30L; PGG.

(19) 25 Apr 00 – duet improv with Tom Fryer on MIDI guitar and electronics, W. B. on computer and screaming voice, Planet Café, Fitzroy, free improv series; JZC; JAB; TOK; ATF; 30L; DD.

(20) 30 Apr 00 – live computer and computer graphic projections, shared concert with Phill Niblock. Hard Listening Series at Musicians' Club, St. Kilda; JZC; YNM; TOK; AT; 30L; PGG. A number of film makers were in attendance to see Phill Niblock's films.

(21) 11–14 May 00 – *Five. Three. Two*, dance piece by K. Kaos. Dance accompaniment for accordion and tuning forks, Fitzroy Gallery, Melbourne. AGM; DWS; SLF; NATDF; 30L; NPG. Performance was outdoors in the gallery courtyard, under a full moon. Non-paying gig subsidised by (i) my general-purpose grant and (ii) Kate and the dancers' day jobs. All other music on this programme except mine was live electronics.

(22) 14 May 00 – live computer performance, Café Retro, Fitzroy, Melbourne Composers League, Elbow Room concert. CFH; YNM; SLF; AF; 30L; DD. Door deal organised by a composers' collective for the purpose of presenting the members' works. (Fairly big audience, too – about 80!)

(23) 18 May 00 – *Tantrum*, collaborative multimedia performance with film makers and video artists at Planet Café, Fitzroy. JZC; JAB&FMK; TOK; ATF; 30L; DD&ENT.

(24) 26 May 00 – *Poems of Rewi Alley*, live laptop and voice, 'Exp' at Centriphugal, Mercat Cross Hotel, Melbourne. JZC; DJS; SUB; AT-ND; 60L; DD. Because I performed on the first set instead of the last set as the organiser wanted me to, I performed only to a group of DJs, as the audience hadn't arrived yet. (In this scene, the audience regularly arrives *ca*. 1 hour – 90 minutes after the advertised starting time.) Organisers, under pressure from the media, publicly proclaimed event drug free. Door deal, with the organiser presenting a series of evenings showcasing local DJ / new music / electronica folks using this popular techno club as a venue.

(25) 30 May 00 – duet concert with composer/performer tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE, for duelling samplers and live laptop, Planet Café, Fitzroy, free improv series. JZC; JAB; TOK; ATF; 30L; DD.

(26) 2 Jun 00 – *Return of the Squirrel!*, solo performance for live computer, movement, accordions and toys. Theatre of the Ordinary, Fitzroy. ATA; DWS; SLF; CF; 20L; ENT.

(27) 10 Jun 00 – duet of movement and talking improvisations with John Britton. Theatre of the Ordinary, Fitzroy. ATA; DWS; SLF; CF; 20L; ENT. Not a computer gig but the mechanical, and very, very, special Penguin Metronome was used. (Thanks, Rodney!)

(28) 13 Jun 00 – *Chords and Currawongs with Dr. Ruth Words*, live performance on laptop and CD player, Melbourne Super 8 Filmmakers Group, Erwin Rado Theatre, Fitzroy. FLM; FMK; SLF; TC; OT; NPG.

(29) 8 Jul 00 – *Brisbane Nocturne*, live solo laptop performance and paper, ACMA Conference, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. UNI; CMJ&UMS; SLF; FC; OT; NPC. OT = conference time (trying to be on time, but always late to some extent). Non-paying gig: attendees pay to attend conference, some with institutional support, some self-funded.

(30) 14–16 Jul 00 – *Lost and Abducted*, talking operas for voices, live computer, instruments, projections and dancers. Libretto by R. Randall. Direction: J. Britton, B. Murley. Voices: H. Newnham, C. Connors, I. Holdaway, J. Britton. Live music: W. B. Cecil St Studio, Fitzroy. ATA; YNM&DWS; SLF; CF; OT; PGG. Capacity audience for all three nights! Grants received for fully funded production with union rates or better paid to all participants.

(31) 30 Jul 00 – improvisation for movement, voices and Harmonic Canon with A. O'Keeffe, and K. Kaos Conundrum, Movement–Theatre Improv Series, Cecil St Studio, Fitzroy. DTS; DWS; SLF; CF; 20L; ENT. Not a computer gig – I used my reconstruction of Harry Partch's Harmonic Canon instead.

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(32) 8 Aug 00 – *Winter Solstice Mix*, Dirk de Bruyn, live films and W. B., live computer, multimedia performance, Sun Theatre, Yarraville, Melbourne. FLM; FMK; SLF; NATDF; 30L; NPC.

(33) 14 Aug 00 – *Five Environmental Displacements*, CDs made for installation at Geelong Regional Gallery's 'Cross Reference' installation, Sep–Oct 2000. AGM; GP; UNP; UNP; N/A; NPC. The CDs come with instructions to use them in a variety of ways, from passive listening to more active use with the listener assembling his/her own environments.

(34) 19 Aug 00 – *Chords and Currawongs with Dr. Ruth Words*, solo laptop and CD improvisation, La Mama Theatre, Carlton. ATA; YNM; SLF; C; OT; DD.

(35) 23 Aug – 3 Sep 00 – music for J. Britton's *The River Project*, La Mama Theatre, Carlton. ATA; GP&VIS; SLF; C; OT; ENT&DD. This was not a computer gig – I played accordion and unamplified music boxes.

(36) 1 Sep 00 – *Back to Back*, Duo Improv with Wendy Suiter, flute, and W. B., laptop, at Salon AH HA, Abbotsford. HSE; NBR; MFC; AF; 20L; DD.

(37) 4–10 Sep 00 – *Shaman – in Memoriam Terrence McKenna*, installation for computer graphics and recorded computer music at Avago Korfeel, Art School, Monash University, Caulfield. UNI; UMS; AMB; NATDF; N/A; NPC.

(38) 5 Sep 00 – showing of video documentation of *Shaman*, Axle Concrete Poetry Group meeting, Fruscolino Café, Richmond. CFH; VIS; TOK; FC; 30L; NPC. Only one of many activities during a meeting over pizzas and coffee.

(39) 8–9 Sep 00 – *Winter Solstice Mix*, Dirk de Bruyn, live films and W. B., live computer, multimedia performance, Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, Victoria. AGM; VIS; MFC; NATDF; OT; PGI. The Gippsland Art Gallery is a State Funded Regional Arts Gallery – a very elegant one, too, with a fabulous curator.

(40) 15 Sep 00 – *Palato-Uvular Improvisation*, voice and minimal movement, Theatre of the Ordinary, Fitzroy. ATA; DWS; SLF; CF; 20L; NPC. This was not a computer gig, but my voice sure sounded like a synthesizer!

(41) 21–2 Sep 00 – *Winter Solstice Mix*, Dirk de Bruyn, live films and W. B., live computer, multimedia performance, Brisbane Powerhouse, Brisbane, Queensland. AGM; GP&YNM; SLF; NATDF; 30L; PGI. The Brisbane Powerhouse is a well-funded and very intelligently programmed public arts space.

(42) 3 Oct 00 – *Antipodean Collection – A Laptop Symphony*, live solo laptop concert at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA. UNI; UMS; SLF; NATDF; OT; PGI.

(43) 6 Oct 00 – duo improv concert with Ben Chadabe, drums and W. B., live laptop, also W. B. on solo laptop, Arts Center, Troy, NY. ATA; YNM&GP; SLF; NATFD; OT; DD.

As valuable as this list is for me, I also find it problematic. For one thing, I would like to make it clear that I'm making no moralistic statements regarding the use of drugs, alcohol, tobacco or food in relation to the consumption of music. I'm simply listing whether, to the best of my knowledge, these were present at my gigs because I feel that their presence or absence is a defining characteristic of differing musical scenes. I also think that extracting the information contained here into a chart of some kind might give a better idea of the different characteristics of the various 'scenes' I played in. But looking at the list, we can at least see that I performed in a wide variety of venues and scenes. It's also obvious, though, that my work is still existing in a primarily 'art-world' context. I did not, for example, perform at any 'raves'. (This would have been a scene in which drug usage would have been very much in evidence.) This was simply because I didn't know who to ask, and I was already so busy with all the other gigs, I didn't have time to play at one. Nor did I play at any traditional 'rock' venues. My music, for all its stylistic diversity, doesn't usually go near that realm. (It should be obvious that I'm interested in performing my own music in different contexts, and not in writing music that fits the demands of one context or another.) Furthermore, many of the 'commercial' venues here (especially the Planet Café), although they seem to be surviving financially, obviously are not doing so on the proceeds of admissions to my performances. Many of these series, in fact, happen when the venue owner decides to have a 'weird music' series because that's the sort of music that, however unprofitable, they happen to like and want to encourage. So whether you wish to regard me as a 'typical computer music composer' or not, looking at the list shows a much wider range of venues than those in which a 'classical computer music composer' would have had their works performed.

Nor does this list reveal the two biggest changes I have observed in my performing life in comparison with earlier years. The first involves the presence of tobacco. That is, for most of the 1980s and 1990s, nearly all of the venues I'd played in had been smoke free. As someone who's mildly allergic to tobacco smoke, this was a relief. Now I find I'm playing more than half of my gigs in smoky to very smoky environments. Again, without moralising, the upcoming banning of smoking in Victorian restaurants and pubs is a restriction of people's rights I'm warmly looking forward to. I understand that reaching a broader audience also means exposing oneself to a broader variety of art-consuming behaviours, but in protecting my lungs, I'm afraid that my basic anarchism only goes so far. The other large change has

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been financial. That is, most of the venues I previously played in, such as university music departments and community art galleries, were not venues recognised by APRA (The Australasian Performing Rights Association) as licensed or royalty-paying. As a consequence, I had never bothered to fill in my APRA live-performance returns to collect my royalties on live performances of my work. Now, however, with so many of my performances taking place in pubs and clubs, venues which are APRA licensed, I have taken the time to fill in my live-performance returns, and found that I received an additional $500 in royalties because of these gigs (which, for someone on a freelancer's income, is actually a considerable sum). This highlights the financial difference between the academic computer music scene and some other scenes as mentioned earlier.

Several interesting issues came up during this year of performing. One was that, unlike much of the academic computer music world, which seems obsessed with sound quality and the setting up of special institutionally based multichannel listening environments, to a large degree I gave up control over the sound system I would play on. I decided in most cases not to take loudspeakers to the gig. If there was a house sound system, I would use it. Not owning a car, I mostly would take public transport to my gigs. I would accept the equalisation and acoustics of each sound system and venue I worked in. And further, in many of the venues, time was a consideration. This was especially the case at both the Planet Café and the Theatre of the Ordinary, where often there would be less than five minutes available between acts to set up. So in this new setting for computer music – a floating, public transport-based, non-institutional setting – multichannel sound systems became a luxury. And when I did get access to a place that had one, for me, it was simply another 'house PA' that I had to adjust to and not the pinnacle of sound diffusion its owners might have wanted me to view it as. (I'll be on the road to somewhere else the next night. Only they who have the luxury of living and working in one place for a while can regard what they have as a 'pinnacle'.)

In his 1970 essay, *The Beauty of Irrelevant Music*, Kenneth Gaburo states: 'The creative act consists not only in the stipulation and formation of concrete structures, BUT in responsible maintenance of them. Furthermore, such structures demand of us the necessity to create and maintain environmental systems within which they can function properly.' (Gaburo 1976) In my work setting up alternative spaces and venues in the 1970s – 1990s (such as Clifton Hill Community Music Centre and the Linden New Musicales, St. Kilda, 1986–94), this was certainly my philosophy. And in 2000, noticing the decline of Australian musical academia, I organised a series of seminars in my home, in which such composers as Clarence Barlow, Phill Niblock and tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE spoke. (It was easier to do it at home and they got more money from door admissions than they would have gotten out of the impoverished university budgets!) But in this past year, my venue-hopping has placed me into many different contexts in which I do not have control over the environment. Further, I notice that many of the younger event organisers in Melbourne, such as Eamon Sprodd and Andrew Garton, seem to be far more accepting of a range of performing conditions that I might tend to regard as unacceptable. I wonder if the notion of artists exercising control over the means of the production and distribution of their work is one that is temporarily in eclipse, or if, as these organisers get fed up with substandard treatment, they too will begin to try to organise venues to fit their requirements. (In my more despairing moments, in fact, I wonder if the notion that one might be able to have control over ANY aspect of one's environment might just be a nostalgic artefact of an earlier era of individualist thought. . . .)

There is much more that could be said about the changing social nature of computer music as I am experiencing it. But with this article, perhaps I've at least provided some interesting anecdotal evidence to show that for one performer/composer, the range of venues and contexts in which he is making music with his computer has widened considerably.

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