Abstract

Vibe Check is an electronic composition. The piece is a study on the balance between frequencies in music and environmental sounds. Some key focuses are the biological makeup of environmental sounds and how they relate to the orchestral instrument of the vibraphone. This piece utilizes electronics in order to mold the two orchestral and environmental worlds. The piece is semi-improvisational, because it uses unconventional written notation and signs to be interpreted by the performers. The composition is designed for two performers, one on computer and another on vibraphone. The vibraphone is being recorded with a microphone which is sent to the computer. A patch in MAX/MSP allows for live sampling of the vibraphone as well as the use of effects, spatialization, volume, and filters. Through this performance there will be a discovery in the connection between the environment and music.

References


4) “Coexistence” Youtube, uploaded by Liam Smith, 24 February 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HassD1IkWDs

VIBE CHECK

Thomas Aquino

Compositional Process

The first step the compositional process was to find environmental sounds. The sounds I chose lead me to walk outside with a field recorder in harsh weather, near streams, and near fires. The next step was to take those sounds and turn them into one solid piece of background audio which the performer would then interpret. I chose 3 sounds, water, wind, and fire, and used a tertiary meter, dividing each section of sound into 3:33 minute sections. The background audio is made entirely of the found sounds and uses digital processing in order to achieve a more synthetic sound. The sounds are very harsh in a musical context, and the electronics help bridge the gap between the environmental and musical nature of the sounds. After the background music was made, I experimented with playing different instruments over the piece. Effects using a patch built in MAX/MSP allow me to manipulate the performance music to better fuse the two (performer/background music) together.

Virtual Performance

Through the effects of the pandemic (COVID-19), there were many issues that surfaced. Instead of performing live in a concert hall I now had to figure out a way of effectively stream this type of music. This piece explores many ways on how to create, perform, and practice music from home. During the pandemic, I had to research ways on working on music from home away from other musicians. One of the methods I used to perform live was to play back the mp3 through a screen share in a ZOOM meeting and use my interface to record the instrument live. Another tool that I used to practice with other musicians was to record a video and have the other musicians perform over that video one at a time, cancelling the issue of latency. Another technique used was to send projects or stems in a folder through email and if the other musicians had a DAW, this method was very viable.

Conclusion

During the process of creating Vibe Check I researched different technologies to create the performance piece. I researched various ways of streaming, processing, recording, and mixing a electro-acoustic live performance composition. Before I started the project, I didn’t think about how to stream, mix, record, and process my audio by myself with my home equipment. When doing some streaming attempts, I had to consider variables such as internet speeds. I learned how to measure my internet speed using online speed test in order optimize the Vibe Check online musical performance. Some technologies I researched were OBS, Soundflower, and how to optimize my sound preferences within zoom so that I can perform music through it. I also discovered some live mixing techniques through logic, Maschine, and MAX/MSP.

Future Work

In the future I would like to record the piece live using higher quality equipment. One effect of the pandemic is that I didn’t have access to professional streaming gear. Upgrading certain pieces of technology would allow me to output more productively. This would also help me in pursuing more recording, mixing, and mastering at home, as well as teaching.