
Book Review

Leigh Landy, *Experiencing Organised Sounds: The Listening Experience across Diverse Sound-Based Works*. New York: Routledge, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-032533-278.
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In this book, composer and researcher Leigh Landy builds on his long-lasting efforts for increasing appreciation, understanding and access to sound-based music. During his many years as editor of this journal, Landy has consistently explained and argued that the current situation in sound-based music is characterised by a multiplicity of expression types and different composition methods, musical goals and listening practices. This type of inclusive attention is necessary for increasing the availability of these musics for broad audiences, remembering that they are related through a common readiness to focus and listen intently to non-notated and often ‘non-musical’ sounds that are not produced by conventional acoustic instruments.

The research this book is based upon can be found in several of Landy’s publications written over a period of more than 30 years beginning with *What’s the Matter with Today’s Experimental Music?* (1991), continuing with ‘The “Something to Hold on to Factor” in Timbral Composition’ (1994), ‘The Intention/Reception Project’ (2005), *Understanding the Art of Sound Organisation* (2007), *Making Music with Sounds* (2012) and finally the music analysis book *Expanding the Horizons of Electroacoustic Music Analysis*, edited together with Simon Emmerson in 2016.

This basis and particularly the book *Expanding the Horizon of Electroacoustic Music* have resulted in a template for step-by-step analyses of sound-based works, to use a term coined by Landy in 2007. The template presented in this new book adds situatedness into the analysis, thus representing a further development of analysis traditionally focused on the musical object itself and its spectral and/or structural characteristics. The template is a framework for structuring and describing different types of sound-based works, and this systematic approach is helpful for seeing the type of kinship between work types regarding choice, ordering and use of materials, and for their requirements and flexibilities in terms of venue and presentation. As such, it represents a fresh look at the new musical landscape of technology-based music, and a significant contribution which should be a

welcome addition to the analytical toolbox and for more everyday listening. The parts of Landy’s model are: 1) Materials, 2) Listening behaviour, 3) Behaviour of materials, 4) Representation, 5) Ordering, 6) Space, 7) Performative elements, 8) Intention/reception, social, emotional and meaning-related aspects, 9) Situatedness and 10) Elements specific to genre or piece.

Approaching sound-based music in this manner entails broaching the difference between mediated and live music, thus adding sociocultural dimensions to the analysis. The (inherently reductive) conventional analysis of sound based on its emergent characteristics is supplemented by site awareness and circumstance, and Landy discusses site-specificity both for performance and for listening. The analyses presented in this book recognise how some work types require specific settings from both a composer and an audience point of view, and also how concert settings provide a richer listening experience than individualised use of headphones or home stereos, however necessary they might be for broad dissemination of music.

The analysis template is used throughout the book in all work descriptions, and the music presented is a highly heterogeneous selection of categories (or dialects, depending on the importance placed on kinship). This puts the model to the test; however, it is only in discussions about the two last sound art works that the model feels somewhat insufficient, something that is also recognised by Landy (192). Of these two works, one is completely dependent on interactivity and the other on workshops for creating both instruments and performance.

One of Landy’s aims with the book is for it to be useful for both specialised and non-specialised readers. Thus, the prose makes little use of specialised terminology which might be unknown for broad audiences. On a few occasions, genre-specific terminology is introduced; however, it is consistently explained in a glossary located at the end of the book. The writing style is also important – the book is kept in a conversational tone, rather than appearing as an authoritative text.

The book is organised in five chapters, which includes introduction and closing words. This means that the bulk of the book is concentrated in chapters two, three and four. Chapter two contains analyses of seven works for fixed medium, chapter three analyses of six works performed with live electronics, and chapter four discusses three works from the ambiguous genre sound art. In all, 16 works.

1. MUSIC FOR FIXED MEDIA

In chapter two, Landy discusses several types of fixed media works; works that are composed and played back to the audience via different loudspeaker arrangements or home stereo. Many music styles fit within this category, and the author discusses the acousmatic works *C'est Wiizzz!!!* (Florian Sulpice, 2013) and *Three Spaces in Mid Air* (John Young, 2017), soundscape composition *A soundwalk* (Katerina Tzedaki, 2017), lowercase music *interiorities viii* (Simon Atkinson, 2014), electronic/formalised compositions *Gravitational Landscape (with tinnitus)* (Kevin Dahan 2016), visual music *Three Breaths in Empty Space* (Bret Battey 2009), and as the last piece in this chapter, his own composition *On the Éire* (2017) as an example of text/sound + sample-based music. (Sulpice was a very young teenager when this piece was written, so the acousmatic category contains two works just to show how young people with little formal musical education can also make this kind of music.)

This is a wide range of expression types, and the chapter begins with a historical introduction to musical listening and loudspeaker orchestra before diving into the individual works. Each composer is briefly presented to give background for the selection of their work, and the analyses of the works follow the method laid out in the template, often interspersed with general observations and reflections on characteristics typical for each dialect. The explanations are detailed enough to satisfy academic readers, and broad enough for not losing the non-specialist readership. This diversity covers acousmatic works in the Schaefferian tradition (Sulpice, Young), soundscape in the Schaefferian tradition (Tzedaki), lowercase drone music (Atkinson), highly structured electronic music (Dahan), visual music (Battey) and a text/sound piece based on recordings of radio transmissions (Landy). These musical examples are all based on uninterrupted soundfile playback, and the template handles the differences between the works very well. The chapter is rich on information and reflections and is the largest in the book. The template sections on material and order are unsurprisingly the largest.

2. LIVE MUSIC

In chapter three, an even more diverse selection of musical works is discussed, and this is not surprising, given the current interest in experimentation with and development of controllers and interfaces. As in the previous chapter, Landy introduces each style and summarises typical characteristics, and this is helpful for readers unfamiliar with these often-unconventional instruments. The categories and musical works discussed are: mixed music *Solo Flute Quartet* (Simon

Emmerson, 2017/18), improvised music *Third Space* (James Andean, 2004, 2020), live coding *MTI@20 – Leicester, UK* (Anna Xambó, 2020), DIY electronics *Motor Music* (John Richards, 2014), turntablism *untitled performance* (DJ Sniff (Takuro Mizuta Lippit), 2008) and performance art, represented by Neal Spowage with *Noise Loop Bootstrap* (2017). Thus, this category spans the range from performance on conventional instruments (Emmerson) to conceptual investigations of how electrical infrastructure can yield musical information through interference (Spowage). In between, there is a drum performed as an electronically excited solo instrument (Andean), appropriated objects turned into musical instruments (Richards), and two works for manipulation of recorded sounds and music (Xambó and DJ Sniff).

As in chapter two, the styles are discussed briefly, and the composers introduced. The analysis template is used throughout, and as in the previous chapter, the template sections for material and ordering are the largest. Throughout the book data gathered from composers and performers have been discussed and mixed with notes and observations from Landy's own listening experiences. Although the data types are in a sense objective, Landy also points to the importance of personal meaning-making in analysis, finding and uncovering value in the works.

3. SOUND ART

Sound art has historically developed from the visual arts and is often presented as installations. Precise categorisation is difficult as means and tools can also make for concert-like presentations, and electronic media with streaming and interaction affords hybrid forms that constantly develop. Landy has chosen three sound art works. The first is *Speech 2* (Francesc Martí, 2015), a work of video art that involves turning speech into music in the text/sound tradition. The second is a technically accomplished installation *Contraction* (Peter Batchelor, 2019/20), where several columns of loudspeakers allow visitor-controlled selection of playback from huge soundfile banks, and the third is Samantha Topley's *Noisy Pompoms*, a DIY/DIT project she has been working on for several years, through numerous workshops where participants make their own instruments and music. This section is also where the social aspects weigh in the strongest, and where closer studies of audience intentions and reactions could be useful in teasing out what this genre is about, especially regarding works that display technological features more prominently.

I miss more data on audience and visitor reactions to music and installation works, and wish that Landy had circulated questionnaires or gathered data from observations of concert audiences and visitors as that

would have enriched information on the reception aspects of performances and showings. Here, it should be noted that the book was written during the Covid lockdown, making collection of social data difficult. However, had these data been collected in a variety of circumstances, sociocultural patterns would have undoubtedly emerged, further strengthening the efforts for realising the ambition of inclusivity.

4. SUMMARY

In his analyses, Landy has captured essential qualities in work types as diverse as classic acousmatic composition, live performance of noises on improvised instruments and conceptual installation art. His attention to minutiae in material and ordering leaves the reader with a record of how much a detailed and intentional listening to highly diverse music can yield of information and appreciation. Clearly, Landy likes the works he has described, and urges the reader to listen with the same attitude. All works that have been discussed, with the exception of two installation works, are available from a Routledge website, and are best appreciated when listening to and viewing the supporting material.

For the informed reader/listener much of what Landy has pointed out will serve as a reminder of how important it is to approach each work with as little of a presupposition as possible and to remain an *interested* listener. The meticulous descriptions of material and

ordering are very helpful for noticing and making sense of details that can often be overlooked or disregarded, and this makes the book an excellent choice for introductory courses at university level, especially due to the rapid changes in technology-based art and the growth of media-oriented music design courses in higher art education.

Jøran Rudi
University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, UK
Email: j.rudi@hud.ac.uk

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