**TELEMATIC MUSIC MAKING: Live Performance in the time of COVID-19.**

Hello everyone, thank you so much to the Audio Engineering Society UK Section for inviting me to talk. Previously I have spoken for the AES with my colleage Ronan Breslin about Ambisonics in an Art School Context; recently I shared a conversation with Audio Lead at Studio GOBO Alexander Horowitz, called Inside the Black Box of Game Audio; and now its time to share about a practice which has been integral to my identity, performing cello and theremin with the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra. In this talk you will discover how we have expanded our performance practices during a time of physical distancing, restricted movement, closure of our physical performance venues and first and foremost a period of intense anxiety and mourning on a global scale.

Using telematic music making, a group of musicians maintained (and widened) their community, individual performers kept a sense of identity, and built an impossibly huge archive of recordings as both audio visual artefact, raw material for reworks, and importantly, as oral history.

But you might be wondering what do I mean by “telematic music making”? Lets hear the definition from the iconic American composer, performer and scholar of improvisation George Lewis.

**1**

**What does Telematic mean?**

[**https://youtu.be/AromNdC-GdE?t=4201**](https://youtu.be/AromNdC-GdE?t=4201) **1:10:01 (2 mins 26 seconds long).**

*“I think Raymond the thing that interested in being you first started calling for these extended improvisations twice a week was that I don't think maybe you didn't realise how long we were going to go on. You know, maybe like a maybe like a few sessions and then, but what happened was* ***there was this need for extended community.*** *I think people are starting to realise…. I just gave a talk last week on the topic of telematic Afrofuturism. It's a very odd thing. And, and we're starting to realise that there's something about* ***telematics****, you know, this combination of telecommunication and, and informatique, which is sort of coined in the 70s by these two French researchers. But it* ***both thrives on distance and tries to eliminate it as a factor*** *which is very interesting thing to think about quantum entanglement.*

*So that what we've got here is a sense in which we will I don't know when I see 30 or 40 people on screen, in a GIO extended GIO improvisation or virtual GIO Improvisation, which doesn't feel virtual it feels like just improvisation. In the media of the technology.* ***I don't know who's coming from where and I don't really care.*** *But at the same time, it's always interesting to hear that John Russell was wherever he is, and Steve Beresford is wherever he is. You're wherever you are, everybody's where they are, and the sense that* ***people are making these distances not matter anymore****, or that they also do matter, and that theres this two different desires that are sort of existing in the same space, but they're not competing and they're not clashing, they are complementing. And that becomes very exciting for me in terms of how, that's what we'll probably need to do.*

*Because, you know, I see the pandemic right now. It looks like it's coming to a new stage. Maybe for some people, it's made us more aware of a kind of common humanity like anybody can get the thing…”*

2

***How do the performers feel about it?***

On Monday 23rd March 2020, our Prime Minister instructed us to stay at home to minimise the spread of COVID-19. On Tuesday 24th March 2022, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra were due to play together in the Glasgow Center for Contemporary Arts. We usually practice in a concert hall in the CCA, bringing our instruments e.g. a cello or a synthesizer keyboard. Sometimes guest artists bring noise makers for us, ask us to use our voice, design our own instruments, or ask us to respond to a film, a graphic score or use conduction.

So on Tuesday 24th March 2022, Day 2 of the first national lockdown, Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra decided to play their instruments on ZOOM instead, believing it is worth a try. I had recently discovered that it was near impossible to maintain synchronisation with my other Glam Rock band, The Tenementals over ZOOM, so I did not have high hopes! Watch us try and fail to string together a basic well-known tune:

VT: “HAPPY BIRTHDAY CLIP” 1min 30

However the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra weekly sessions surpassed our expectations, as the progressive textures and conversational gestures of improvised music are not so plagued by latency issues as pop/rock music genres are. We were pleasantly surprised that we could have a genuine sense of flow, as performers were open and curious about each other’s gestures – trying to identify the source of each sound, actively searching for cues to respond to.

From the outset were also in wonder about the political and psychological implications of this seemingly magic solution to our profound fears of indeterminate isolation. We gradually became aware of changing social dynamics, such as increased accessibility as we were able to instantaneously drop in to the session at the click of a weblink. Thus we could fitting creativity around or even during our domestic responsibilities. At times it felt like we were erasing the enforced physical distance between us.

Some of the changing musical performance dynamics were as follows:

* In the CCA theatre space we could hear a blend of instruments’ sound waves swirling around the acoustic space; over zoom, we might have two or three instruments nearly solo-d due to fast internet or high quality microphones.
* In the CCA Theatre space we could focus on our own instrument, but see in our peripheral vision another performer raising their instrument to play; over zoom we see a head and shoulders image, and the musical instrument might actually be out of shot.
* In the CCA theatre space, we needed to plan technical support in advance to set up a projector for live visuals or print out a graphic score for our colleagues; over zoom, a performer could spontaneously layer in graphic filters, that blend with their performer image.
* In the CCA theatre space there might be a performer in centre stage, and the percussionist at the rear of the stage, or performers arranged in a curve, where each performer hear the players either side of you the clearest; over zoom, we ***flattened the curve***, as all performers are an equal size and the same distance, 2-3 feet away on a computer screen. The sound is direct to your headphones.

When playing again in person for the first time in two years, in a small rehearsal I was profoundly moved to be able to hug my mentors Raymond, Gerry, Maria and Paul, as we geeked over our new instruments as if we were children returning back to school after a long summer holiday. I was nearly brought to tears when we began to play and the sounds from Raymond’s saxophone, Maria’s mediated voice emerging from multiple speakers, Paul’s trombone and Gerry’s collection of symths and percussive toys ***literally vibrated through my body***. No longer just in headphones. It felt visceral and intimate, and I realised what was lost (over zoom).

However, the ZOOM sessions allowed me to live and breathe improvisation, performing much more frequently than pre-COVID, becoming a part of seminal performers lives (including Maggie Nichols, Steve Beresford and John Russell), sipping wine with them in their living room, or sharing stories around the cooking stove. We became each others social and creative lifelines – especially for those who were shielding due to physical vulnerability.

In the CCA theatre space, behind the scenes chatter would emerge organically in small groups in between pieces; on zoom the entire group became captivated as a whole to hear Maggie, Steve and John’s tales from their decades’ long careers.

We shared joy at new arrivals

* Emma and Paul’s Charlie
* Ken’s granddaughter, Nadia
* Allan’s son, Pippin

Shared grief of our heartbreaking loss. Together we celebrated the life of prolific experimental guitarist John Russell, who many of us never met in person, but he mentored us all every week on ZOOM for nearly a year, before he sadly passed away in the winter of 2020.

Maria Sappho, called these “in between” or behind the scenes chatter “Oral Histories” and I agree. Everyone was putting forward things they wanted to be kept, preserved – sometimes stories, sometime objects, or precious moments like presenting new babies to the screen, like Mufasa holding Simba over Pride Rock in The Lion King. Maria is fascinated in how communities self mytholigize – and the weekly GIOSessions seemed to intensify this process of self-mythologising. It intensified, accelerated and proliferated – as you can imagine this ever expanding archive is profoundly unwieldly – as we record a full 2 hours a week for two years this becomes 104 hours. However the first three months had 2 sessions a week, so that’s another 24 hours, which brings the total to 128 hours. Bear in mind there were often 5 recording perspectives, and that becomes 640 hours of footage. And each week it grows.

What is particularly profound is this sense of fast-forwarded closeness, with people I have never met from the other side of the world – although we might not all have time to tell a story each week, even those who have not spoken aloud are NO less present – in fact they are sometimes the most visibly engaged with the conversation, smiling, laughing and reacting.

3

***How do we do it (rehearsal)?***

Now I’ve recapped some of how it feels to do telematic music making, during a global pandemic, I shall reveal some of the practical methods.

* Technology
* Hosting – welcoming, stories, checking in.
* Facilitating

**Technology – SOUND**

It was really important to us from the beginning that we made the sessions as easy to join as possible. So a performer could join within seconds, by clicking on a regular mailout zoom link sent a minute before the session. Technical setups range from low fi to hi-fi / casual to recording studio set up:

* A LO-FI / Casual approach might be :
  + dialling in to transmit video from a smartphone on a train
  + or from an iPad propped up next to a cooking stove
* a HI-FI/ Studio set up:
  + a cello
  + headphones
  + a Rode NT1A condenser microphone
  + pop shield
  + microphone stand
  + Audio Technica ATH M50x over-ear headphones for real-time monitoring through Adobe Audition (with visible wave form writing to a track for enhanced visual feedback of gestures)
    - to blend the performer’s room sound with the collective ZOOM sound.

Although I distinguish these approaches as low fi and hi fi, in reality there is no perceived hierarchy of one sound being ***better*** than the other – in fact the mobile device dial-ins were often remarkable contributions, and brought about a hybrid way of being, a “performing-and” mode, in a similar manner to the “listen-and-walk” mode of The Walkman Effect (Hosokawa 1984), when mobile playback technologies became commonplace. This multitasking meant that performers would incorporate immovable commitments into the session – at times the novel experience would be spotlighted as a graphic score, for example:

* Thomas Rohrer’s stunning rush through vistas of snow-capped mountains in the Swiss alps
* or Raymond MacDonald’s still, contemplative broadcast of a sunset in Tuscany.

For a zoom room of musicians who had been locked in one location for months on end, we joked that we were being taken on holiday! But beyond the jokes, there was something very new and unique about this spontaneous musical response to another’s sensory experiences of much-longed for travel.

Technical tips for music on zoom, include turning Original sound “on”, and ensuring a level check for new participants.

**Technology - VIDEO**

Also crucial beyond the live zoom sessions and performances, is the work behind the scenes – our team of videoographers, led by video artist Ross Birrell. The team work meticulously to capture multi-cam perspectives of the session, full screening the performers who appear to be the focal point, or the visual catalyst of each piece. These archiving zoom participants are hidden from view, as is their frantic barrage of direct messages (an analogue to the broadcasting gallery in a live news TV channel). This concentrated work continues in fascinating post-production remixes, as the zoom recordings become material to be reworked along the lines of scratch video.

Fascinatingly, some performers “remix” their visuals in realtime, along the lines of Scratch Video pioneers, George Barber, Dara Birnbaum and Nick Hope. Canadian audio-visual alchemists Laura Kavanaugh and Ian Birse of “Instant Places”, Raymond MacDonald and Maria Sappho in the UK, and Usui Yashuhiro and Yasuko Kaneko are heralded by the group for their hypnotic, otherworldly transformations using live filter software such as Cam Twist, Snap Cam, or bespoke interactive platforms built with computer code.

Maria morphs in and out of her films like a balletic cuttlefish;

Raymond animates paintings using exaggerated facial expressions or seated choreography of his limbs;

Yasuhiro builds kaleidoscopes of colour around a fisheye wormhole of flurescent flowers;

Neko seeks out acoustically fascinating sites such as a reverberant tunnel, or a historic building facing demolition and layers up her studio self with that explorer self;

Laura and Iain’s domestic environment seems to have 3D projection mapped images wrapped around the walls.

In GIO Zoom telematic performance, Maria is like a chameleon – or a cuttlefish. Subverting the live – sampling herself.

* “Some of the cephalopods have a marvelous organ called the Chromatophore, that is essentially a display built into their skin. They can create luminous, quickly changing, colorful images all over their bodies. It is absolutely enthralling to watch them flash each other, seemingly communicating in a visual language….
* …People have to use their hands to craft images, so there is an imbalance between our ability to see and our ability to visually create. Not so for some of the squid, octopi, and most especially the charming cuttlefish. These creatures are also stunningly smart. They should serve to excite fantasies of truly alien intelligence on Earth…”
  + *Jaron Lanier, VR Pioneer “The Purpose of Virtual Reality is to turn humans into cephalopods”* [*http://www.jaronlanier.com/squid.html*](http://www.jaronlanier.com/squid.html)

**Hosting**

Once several of the core Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra performers felt confident in the creative potential of the Zoom sessions, GIO founder Raymond MacDonald invited International performers who had joined us in Glasgow or whom he had toured with in Japan, Australia, Canada, Texas – and some he had never met in person!

As you would hope for a regular meet up during one of the most tumultuous epochs in recent memory, it was really vital for us to welcome guests and connect through conversation, to catch up socially and share our community news (on the micro scale) and respond to global events (on the macro scale). Everyone of us needed comfort, solace, cheering up (through our verbal conversations, and making new friends), and at times we used the performances as cathartic outpouring of expression, or a soothing focus of anticipation of others’ gestures.

* We would delight in seeing pioneer guitarist John Russell appear in a bright orange suit, or a gold sparkly tux which we discovered he wore to cheer up the doctors on his hospital visits.
* We would giggle over how much flotist Emma Roche and trombonist Paul Stone’s new baby Charlie was becoming his father’s doppelganger day by day, and encourage the baby to join in, thumping at the piano keys.
* We would take time to ask how we were coping with the continuation of lockdown, the fear of new COVID-19 variants, escalating global conflicts, and monumental protests.
* For those that were shielding we let them relive vibrant memories of their favourite live performances by recounting anecdotes
* We would fulfil commissions for festivals
  + such as Yasuko Kaneko’s Horike’s Heartbeat” , a site specific performance in Horike, Soja City, Okayama Japan. <https://youtu.be/fZc-WXeXPoM>
  + Rachel Joy Weiss’ “Gloves” for the Edge Zones strand of Miami Performance International Festival <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5nDWj0lkbQ&feature=youtu.be>
  + A hybrid in-person and zoom performance in Geneva’s Analix Gallery, Switzerland, curated by the Noisebringers <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuzMT0xjDNg>

We found it vital to leave pauses for reflection between musical performances, to evaluate how each piece transformed our practice or why it elicited certain gestures.

**Facilitating**

As many educators discovered during COVID-19, ZOOM can be a tense environment with latency, connection dropouts, cameras-off contributing to awkward, stilted and effortful interactions, easily fraught with miscommunication. To avoid ZOOM tumbleweeds, anxiety or frustration, we instigated a flexible but reliable structure which is still consistent 2 years later.

**Free**

We begin with a free improvisation piece first after which unfolds for 20 minutes, allowing us to calibrate to the gestures, instruments and voices in the room that evening.

**Themes**

We ask around for ideas or themes, often a single word or a phrase would be the prompt, like a compressed form of the Fluxus text scores from Yoko Ono (such as Lighting Piece, where she prompts you to light a match and watch until it goes out). Often these prompts may arise out of observations of organically occurring gestures (such as the Food improvisation inspired by Maggie’s performing-and-cooking multi-tasking; or the Colour improvisation, designed to encourage playing up to the camera, drawing graphic scores with pen and paper or a graphic score of flamboyant make up on a performers’ face. Sometimes we would play a memorial to engage in collective grief (several sessions were sombre dedications to our beloved John Russell), or responses to world events.

**Conduction**

Partly as an experiment on latency and synchronisation, partly as an uncanny hommage of the disembodied hand character “Thing” from the Addams Family, we sometimes play in response to Raymond MacDonalds hand. Rather than establish an overt code or language we gradually agreed that a closed fist = stop, and an open hand = play, beyond that it was subject to interpretation.

**Small Groups**

As ZOOM is a software designed for corporate video-conferencing, it sometimes acts as a brutal conductor! Dimming performers whose signal is weaker (wifi or audio) and prioritizing the most “voicelike” gestures. Therefore, a fairer sharing of the audio spotlight is enabled when we break up the session into small groups, one after the other. The performers who are “offstage”, so to speak become the audience. This results in a focused audio-visual conversation between 2-4 performers, where nearly all voices can emerge in the mix more equally. Organic chance formations of groups are particularly thrilling, but for optimised documentation from our team of videoographers, plotting the groups in advance is much preferred!

4.

***How do we do it (performance)?***

Here I’ll guide you through our recent online and hybrid festivals.

**Online Festival**

GIO had never in its 18 years held a “virtual” festival, but in 2020 we knew we did not want to just “sit this one out” because we could not gather in the Centre for Contemporary Arts. We recruited a talented team from Tusk, who had just staged a live-stream festival – thank you so much to Lee and Sean for your magic in facilitating GIOFest XIII, “Flattening the Curve.”

We curated a programme of pre-recorded artists films; ranging from straight, minimally mediated performances of acoustic instruments to a computer’s webcam; to site specific explorations of acoustics; to richly layered video tapestries; even a piece for whales.

We wanted to compensate for the lack of spontaneous discussion that audience members usually have with performers in the theatre bar and restaurant, so we ambitiously staged a fascinating panel discussion from two prolific theorists and practitioners from the realms of music and sociology and ciritcal studies in Improvisation; Tia de Nora and George Lewis. This was extended by a small GIO discussion, and then opened out to a live Q+A, taking in questions from the audience text chat window on the livestream. It eventually unfolded into a musical performance, bouncing off of the fascinating discussion on the themes of agency, endings, telematics, and music therapy for those with dementia.

We also hosted our outreach participatory sessions, GIOBabies and GIODynamics, for those who are at the beginning of their journey in improvised music. These were offline, without a livestream audience for a supportive environment.

As we planned the event, we nervously pondered will anyone come, is there even a desire for a three day live stream of improvised music on the computer? We always joked, that we would really enjoy the festival even if it was “just for us”. In the end we were immensely proud we could share our private Theatre of the Home with a global audience – in fact we realised we had doubled the audience that would normally fill the physical capacity of the CCA theatre space, with 811 unique viewers over the festival. We were also delighted at a 29% watch rate of a 3 day festival.

The GIOFest XIII Flattening the Curve livestream was segmented by an acousmatic voice-over compere to bring a sense of presence to the remote at-home audiences. The idea was that a member of the orchestra would guide you throughout the festival, revealing behind-the scenes-anecdotes about each performance/performer. This was hoped to raise sociability, going beyond an austere, silent text title card before each performance (whilst also enhancing accessibility).

**Hybrid Festival**

For GIOFest XIV “Reconnections and New Directions”, we were delighted to be allowed back into our beloved live venue, the Centre for Contemporary Arts. However we did not want to leave all that we learned from our online festival behind – nor our international guests who we had become accustomed to seeing every week for the last year and a half!

Therefore we established a hybrid festival format with:

* A live in-person orchestra, performing concerts to the in-person theatre audience;
* A ZOOM orchestra, with each player performing from their “Theatre of the Home”, broadcast into the CCA Theatre space too;
* And all of the above live-streamed into remote audience’s homes.

Again, the acousmatic voice-over compere was there to guide the remote at-home audience through the festival, to bridge the distance from the theatre to the home.

The key hybrid event was commissioned for the Noisebringers. The Noisebringers are a fascinating art collective, comprised of Maria Sappho, Henry MacPherson and Brice Catherin – working across eclectic mediums, from salon-like art exhibitions in international galleries displaying woven tapestries of human anatomy, intricate maps of the their mythological universe, novel and of course telematic performance.

The Noisebringers’ welcomed the GIOSessions Tuesday rehearsal ZOOM into their residency in Geneva, where the ZOOM performers played back over a video projection and a PA loudspeaker system to a small audience in the gallery space – importantly Raymond MacDonald and the Noisebringers also played their instruments live to the audience in the gallery, and broadcast it out to the zoom room and live streamed it on YouTube for audience members across the world. We were so excited at this Hybrid mode of performance, that GIO asked the Noisebringers to stage a large scale hybrid event using the hi-tech facilities in the Centre for Contemporary Art’s Theatre Space. Maria shared that the event in Geneva invented the practice for them, they knew they could do it – almost a proof of concept.

The key differences were that there were only a few audience members in the gallery space – which in itself is a very different socio-cultural venue, the context of an art exhibition. The livestream was just a drop in in the usual Tuesday night exploratory space. It was if we were just letting a few people into our usual meetup.

However, the Friday night of the Creative Scotland funded GIOFest XIV, advertised as a theatrical event with the expectations of perfection, high quality audio engineering and cinema screen projection, with a MUCH MORE expansive technical specification (and signal flow diagram). Simply put, there were also many more performing bodies in the live space, each with their instrument miked up for the PA or sent through a Direct Input. How on earth did they adapt to this scale! How on earth did they avoid feedback??

(Allegedly it was actually a very simple solution – all ZOOM orchestra performers had to wear headphones. I still cannot quite fathom how this single intervention negated the PA loudspeakers blasting the ZOOM orchestra in close proximity to the ROOM orchestra’s summed multiple microphone master feed to ZOOM. In actuality we imagine that the inexhaustible Keir, Jim and the CCA Tech team were closely monitoring the fluctuating dynamics and had carefully selected highly directional microphones.

Foutraque (eccentric)

Crucial to making this work comprehensible to an audience, was a score where the Noisebringers could thin and thicken out the two orchestras. Inherent to the Noisebringers work is a light touch satire, a scrutiny of politics and issues around accessibility and equality in music and art.

Fatroque was a social score. The score was not populated by musical notes on a stave, in different lines for the cellos, guitars, percussion. Rather the score was a timeline of groups – those who could drive, those who had not been on a plane in the last 2 years, immigrants, mothers – if a player did not belong in that group, they had to wait to play, resting, or remaining silent, listening to the solo-d group.

Mothers in the orchestra are at times drawn away from the performing for care responsibilities, so this was a time to celebrate them by foregrounding their voices. It was an intentional thinning out of the majority voices in the orchestra. By enforcing that for a moment only mothers can play, this resulted in only a couple of women singing in the room and on ZOOM. The gap that was left acts almost as a commemorative, or monumental silence, a giving of space, but also as a prompt to make us think about how we might pro-actively include more mothers in improvisation, music and the art world in general.

(This seemed to have an influence from the prolific work of Feminist Improvising Group, Maggie Nicols and the increased participation from mothers, parents and their children in the GIO ZOOM rehearsals).

Remember the signal flow diagram I mentioned? Whilst this included audio signals and audio visual inputs and outputs, what was really prioritised in this diagram was an “extended reality of needs” – so as well as a signal path, Maria identified NEEDS PATHS. What does a ZOOM orchestra performer need to see? The gestures of the ZOOM virtual orchestra and the physical orchestra. Similarly the physical orchestra (or room orchestra) needs to see the ZOOM performers gestures and video filters, and hear their sounds blasted over the PA. This setup felt quite uncanny, as I could see Hope Young on the ZOOM screen in front of me, that she was in singing in Austin, Texas but I could hear her voice emerge from the speaker behind me. Several times I instinctively turned around almost expecting to see her behind me!

Maria became more than a musical, dance and video performer in this work – by wearing a “Britney Mic” she actually became the mediator between the ROOM orchestra and the ZOOM orchestra. She said she felt “really responsible for everyone in the digital realm”, aware of their vulnerability of not being able to move around or explore the space beyond a few static video feeds and a summed audio master, or see the any of the audiences. The stress of facilitating this work is nearly unimaginable, but thankfully Maria has an entire PhD study, The Improvisers Cookbook, to plot ou and analyse the artistic, political and audio engineering ramifications of this ground-breaking Hybrid Performance practice.

A fundamental rule for this work: the “digital bodies are equally as important as the physical bodies”.

As if this set up was not complex enough, the NoiseBringers and GIO also commissioned Rachel Weiss, based in Miami Florida, to develop an augmented reality software, playing up the notion of beaming in a “virtual conductor.” This was experienced through a moving smartphone screen, which displayed a disembodied 3D modelled hands imposed upon the real CCA space, and floating text graphic prompts. The noisebringers choreographed a conjoined dance to move around this Augmented reality and beam it to the ZOOM orchestra. The ROOM orchestra were mesmerised by the unfurling of these entangled performers.

VT: highlights of Friday Night <https://youtu.be/ic-9hdy5nfk> 5 mins long

**Film festival programme**

We also projected a film festival in the CCA Cinema Room (and livestreamed it too) – one section of which was a suite of films from our current GIO members.

Whilst the brief was totally open for film submissions, there were actually some commonalities between the work

* both myself and Yasuko Neko were trying to simulate the complex mix of claustrophobia and sublime wonder that is found in darkness (seen in the films The Tunnel and Autumn);
* Instant Places and Usui Yasuhiro generated digital extensions of flora and fauna from their homes and surroundings as a stimulus for their music (seen in Dalliance and Vibrant Peak Color)
* And Thomas Rohrer and Negin Zomorodi presented investigations of local performance mythologies both in Northeastern Brazil and Iran

These films are due to be published on our website, along with short but incisive interviews with several of the filmmakers, archived as a crucial oral history. The idea was to bridge the distance between the Canada, Japan, Iran, Brazil and Glasgow, amplifying the voices and concepts of those who could not travel.

The interviewees were asked to tell the GIOFest about themselves, to hear where in the world they were calling from, and hear more about their musical career. Then they were asked to reveal the inspiration/concept for their film. One of the most poignant commonalities discovered was when Instant Places, Yasuko Kaneko and Usui Yasuhiro were asked to “share a fond memory or the funniest moment working with members of GIO?” – and totally unprompted they each shared lovely insights from our dear friend John Russell.

VT: Laura and Ian

*one moment that sticks out for me, because because it's inclusive of the sort of river of life and, you know, things flow and John Russell was, was with us for a long time. And then, and then he passed on, you know, and, but one day, he had, you know, this wonderful card behind him with this, this, this lovely bear on it, you know, bear on it. And I said, What a lovely card. And so he picked it off the shelf, and he proceeded to read it to me. And it was, or us, you know, because there was a few of us were early for the session. And, and the card was from a young friend from up the street, and it was a young person. And they proceeded to say that they're very sorry that he wasn't, you know, feeling well, and everything, and they were really missing him. Because, you know, even though his parents and you know, other people around, you know, they're all very fine. But but but he said, Nobody understands me, and nobody listens to me, like you. And I'm really missing you. And I thought that that was a really wonderful, delightful kind of window into the beauty of, of the practice of art and the practice of life. And that's a moment that sort of sticks out for me.*

***Jessica Argo*** *13:25*

*And a lot of the most meaningful moments, I think, from working with GIO online over the last year and a half have just been so many philosophical insights from John, but also just just beautiful, hilarious moments as well - he brought a lot of love to the session. So yeah. And he had a lot of ... had a lot of friends around him too. I think that's that's really sweet hearing about that card. One of my favourite memories is just wondering what John was going to wear to a session one day, I loved the surprise of is it going to be like, like your hat? Is it going to be bright orange? Is it going to be as gold sparkly suit? He just brought so much light to the sessions. And that was yeah, that's how I met him. I've never I've never met him in person. But he was such a big part of my life for for several months. So yeah, we've done quite a bit of work for well, in remembering John as well. We made we made some pieces specifically for John, I think there's still still an archive of a special mo... Mopomoso session dedicated to him available online. If anyone's interested. He made a lovely film for us last year as well. I think that was one of the the climaxes if one of the evening so the first evening I think so.*

***Laura*** *14:55*

*Well, I think that's the thing is everybody is allowed to show up as their own tremendously unique human beings, and everybody seems to show up their best human being, you know, they show up with their with their best, their best spirit and it's very inspiring.”*

When asked Do you have a message for the audience of GIOFest XIV? This is what Yasuko Kaneko shared.

VT: Neko

***“Jessica Argo*** *19:36*

*-And so imagining that you've got the GIOFest XIV audience in front of you just know that you were at the screening that we had in the CCA of the film. So if you got a message for the audience of GIOFest XIV.*

***Yasuko Kaneko*** *19:50*

*Yeah. Last night, last year, I joined the GIOFest at the first time and I was very happy. I enjoyed it very much. And yes, I'm, I'm very thankful to GIO... Because GIO saved... me... GIO saved me in the COVID-19 pandemic, I was so depressed all my concerts were canclled. And I couldn't meet my friends. Yeah, that GIO ZOOM session was... how to say... new method to save people! Yeah. So sorry. So enjoy GIOFest! Thank you very much for inviting me the festival!*

***Jessica Argo*** *21:13*

*Well, thank you we feel we feel very lucky to to have your presence in the festival again, and now the audience this year, actually get a chance to get to know you a bit more as well and hear your voice and hear more about your ideas. So it's lovely!*

*21:31*

***Jessica Argo*** *21:37*

*It was amazing hearing hearing your insights and hearing a bit more about you it's the kind of thing that we don't always have time for in the geo sessions on Tuesdays we we talk through music, and then at 7:30 we all go you know, it's lovely that we can talk through music and through films, but but I feel really lucky to to have done this interview with you. And it's yeah, it's really lovely to hear how much of an impact it's been having on you”*

*5.*

***CONCLUSION***

I’d like to close with a memory from Maria, about a conversation between John Russell and Maggie Nichols, who were addressing the loss and mourning proliferated around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The passed down story is that John shared a notion about it being possible that all the matter in the universe was able to be condensed down to the size of a sugar cube, and that “we would be nothing without the stuff in between”.

I interpret this musing about astronomy and physics to be a metaphor for the importance of the connections between these performers, that have so much distance between them yet find a way to connect, artistically and socially. The way that we have used telematic music making to ***fold in*** space, as if folding a piece of paper in half, contracting the thousands of miles between us. We also cross time, have Japanese performers playing quietly at in the early mornig, UK performers who play hungrily before their dinner, or Canadian performers who drop in their lunch hour. Time is a slippery notion for our archivists, who have hundreds of hours of video to edit.

I will also return back to the idea from George Lewis I shared at the start. With Telematic Music Making, the distance almost doesn’t matter in some ways, but simultaneously, the distance really does matter. Because we can feel amazed at the longevity and determination of this continual connection, appropriating digital and physical spaces that were not designed for musical collaboration – using software that was designed for business teleconferencing, and adapting our domestic spaces to become performance venues.

What I find most exciting is how it has transformed many of our performance practices. Performers are laughing in the face of mediation, consciously manipulating the digital self, and blending live and pre-recorded, and generating a regular space for temporary teleportation.

***END.***

[**https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81311161355?pwd=Umw2OXN4Z1p0bWdEcXErMjF4cHN6dz09**](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81311161355?pwd=Umw2OXN4Z1p0bWdEcXErMjF4cHN6dz09)

**Meeting ID: 813 1116 1355**

**Passcode: 053167**

**Sources:**

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**MARIA**

Maria phonecall

Maria - Signal Path Diagram

**ARCHIVE WISDOM:**

George and Tia’s talk

Interviews:

* Yasuko Kaneko
* Usui Yasuhiro
* Instant Places

**FILM DESCRIPTIONS**

Voiceovers 2021

Voiceovers 2020

**PROGRAMMES**

GIO Fest XIV 2021Reconnections and New Directions <https://www.glasgowimprovisersorchestra.com/giofest/xiv/programme/>

GIOFest XIII 2020 Flattening the Curve

<https://www.glasgowimprovisersorchestra.com/giofest/xiii/>

**PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS**

GIOBabies

GIODynamics

Noisebringers – Zoom orchestra, Room Orchestra, Augmented Reality. <https://www.glasgowimprovisersorchestra.com/giofest/xiv/archive/>

Talk: Jessica Argo

Title: **Telematic Music Making - Live performance in the time of COVID-19**

Speaker: Dr Jessica Argo, Glasgow School of Art

Time: 19:00 - 20:30 (incl Q+A)

Date: 15 March 2022  
Venue: Zoom

Host: Neil Johnson, Chair, AES UK Section

Photo:



Outline:

The Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra have rehearsed and performed in the city’s Centre for Contemporary Arts since the early 2000s, and hosted 14 annual festivals (GIOFest) funded by Creative Scotland. The group have always found it vital to collaborate with prolific musicians from around the world, and encourage accessibility and inclusion in its outreach programmes GIOBabies and GIODynamics, for those who are at the beginning of their journey in improvised music.

When COVID-19 struck, Jessica Argo, Raymond MacDonald and Maria Sappho immediately set up a programme of ZOOM sessions, meticulously documented by a team of filmmakers led by Ross Birrell. The idea was to maintain the creative community despite the newly imposed lockdown restrictions. Our weekly sessions surpassed our expectations, as the progressive textures and conversational gestures of improvised music are not so plagued by latency issues as pop/rock music genres are. Many musicians expanded their practice, going beyond solely musical instrumentation, as they played up to the mediation of ZOOM technology - morphing their bodies with experimental video, conducting other players using physical gestures, appropriating household objects as noise-makers or optical filters, presentation of spontaneous graphic scores and dropping in keyword themes. Fascinating political and theoretical questions arose - what are the ethical implications of forming a “Theatre of the Home” (Macdonald and Donohue 2020) - when the private rehearsal space becomes the stage? One result is that participation can become more accessible for those with chronic illness or care responsibilities, the only requirement being an internet connection, even on a mobile device (expensive external microphones were not mandatory).

Whilst in lockdown we hosted the first fully online, live-streamed GIOFest XIII. Another bonus was that our regular sessions were no longer limited to those in Glasgow - it became long-form international residency where we play with musicians we may never meet in person!

Therefore, as our world began to open up again, we decided GIOFest XIV would incorporate our expanded digital practices, combining three festivals in one. First and foremost, a  live in-person CCA event with theatre audience and our international players dialling in on ZOOM, played back in the theatre space; secondly, a film festival featuring interviews with our players based in Canada, Japan and Brazil; and thirdly, the event was available online as a live-stream, for an audience at home.

Over this talk, Jessica will share how we do this telematic music making, how the musicians feel about it and she will even share a live demonstration of a small group ZOOM improvisation with members of the orchestra.

Bio:

**Dr Jessica Argo** is the Programme Leader of the BDes Sound for Moving Image Programme at Glasgow School of Art’s School of Simulation & Visualisation. Beyond the GSA, Jessica is passionate about public outreach for art and science, speaking at TEDx, the Glasgow Science Festival and Sonica. Jessica is an immersive installation artist, previously mixing live experimental video in dance clubs and white cube galleries.

EXTRA VOICEOVERS ABOUT GIO FILMS

Yasuko Kaneko:  Tunnel

*“In a playful gesture reminiscent of Pauline Oliveros’ Deep Listening Band, legendary trombonist and experimental filmmaker/site-specific installation artist, Yasuko Kaneko activates the absorbing acoustic space of “the Tunnel. As the sounds linger and bounce off the tiled walls, Neko layers up sounds and images from numerous takes (each appearing as ghostly figures). With ingenious editing she transposes time - between blinding daylight and haunting moonlight – she also transposes space, using a split screen of the claustrophobic tunnel and a wide expanse of Japanese meadow.”*

Usui Yasuhiro

*Vibrant Peak Color pairs expanded electric guitar techniques with mesmeric video footage of blossoms, berries, pansies and spiky foliage – each inspiring improvised timbres. The visuals are saturated with hallucinogenic colours turning green ultramarine, white berries turquoise, as if a magnet on a tv screen! This visual manipullation bridges the contrast between organic and electronic textures. What is truly remarkable is the space between the notes, and the delicate gestures at times playing the guitar as if it was percussion. A truly hypnotic experience*

Instant Places (Ian Birse & Laura-Kavanaugh):  Dalliance

*“In their new work Dalliance, Ian Birse and Laura Kavanaugh, known as “Instant Places” build a tension between organic and synthetic materials as we are hypnotised by a swirling constellation of what appear to be digital rose petals, swirling in a mandala like formation. This stunning visual is soundtracked by a fascinating build of modular synthesised tones and expanded guitar and piano textures. You won’t be able to look away!*

*Jessica Argo, Autumn*

*Autumn is a work from myself, Jessica Argo – it was made immediately after I walked through a park at the heartbreakingly early sunset of 4:26pm – the performance is segmented by a programme of synthetic light sources and includes leaves collected on this walk. The improvised Theremin textures emulate sounds heard, sights experienced and emotions felt on this walk – the popping of fireworks, the bright ochre of the leaves, the panic-induced shallow breaths as the light faded away and I lost sight of my surroundings. Autumn has connotations of cosiness, hibernation and comfort – but the disappearance of daylight is disorientating.*

Thomas Rohrer:   Nelson e Benedita - Tradição Improvisada

*“In this short film from Thomas Rohrer (directed by Luan Cardoso), we discover the source of his distinctive, biting fiddle timbre as we meet Nelson da Rabeca, who is renown for building and playing traditional fiddles. Beyond the fascinating sounds and sublime shooting locations around Marechal Deodoro in the State of Alaagoas, Northeastern Brazil, the connection between Thomas and Nelson is totally heartwarming to watch.”*

Negin Zomorodi

Yasmin Vafaei

In the film Abandoned Dreams, the Iranian Composer and Improviser Negin Zomorodi plays haunting, nostalgic, and heart-breaking piano gestures -animated by the contemporary dancer Yasmin Vafaei. The dance appears to be a site specific performance inside an architectural ruin, so the work is infused with conflict, and gives a sense of a rupture in history. This is reinforced by the occasional snipped of samples of familiar choral music from the past.

You can learn more about Negin’s incredible career spanning mathematics, engineering and music, and find out how integral music was in her life as she grew up around political upheaval and conflict – she played piano in electrical blackouts to find her own peace