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Ensemble ilinx: The Philosophy

EXPOSÉ

Ensemble Ilinx, from its conception in 2015, is a contemporary music ensemble dedicated to performing repertoire from the 20 and 21st century and newly composed works. It is open for all students pursuing a musical degree at the Berlin University of the Arts who are interested in contemporary music. I plan to organize one or two concerts per semester with selected repertoire from the 20th and 21st centuries, collaborative projects with well-established living composers once a year, and 2 to 3 world premieres by UdK composition students per concert. Aside from artistic curation, as the director, I would also take on the responsibility of musical aspects of conducting and coaching. Cooperation projects with conducting students at the UdK and occasionally guest conductors is also planned as a changing musical direction would strengthen the instrumentalists from different cultural backgrounds and promotes their professional flexibility. Since there is also the possibility of performing inter- or transmedial works, the Ensemble ilinx would not remain limited to only performing acoustic concerts, but also works that transcend the boundaries of concert music with genres such as dance, song, video, electronics, theater and poetry. Staged concerts would also be possible when the program is right. A permanent cooperation with the festivals Crescendo and Mehrlicht!Musik which has been in place for years would be maintained adding the possibility of applying within Germany for ensemble competitions. Ongoing collaborations with Klangzeitort, Harry Curtis' conducting department and the KBB/Orchestral Office with the future goals of creating a larger ensemble projects where most instrumentalists have the desire and are encouraged by their department to participate in at least one project during their course of study.

Repertoire from the 20th and 21st Century and New Works

Ensemble ilinx has had a very special structure in that it has performed since its inception in 2015 repertoire and new works from student composers. Amidst the student ensembles in Germany, not many can claim this as most ensembles are dedicated either to repertoire *or* new student compositions. Repertoire from the 20th and 21st century is extremely important to learn as it builds a basis for understanding how music has advanced in the last century.

Musicians after having met a living composer tend to have a different relationship to the repertoire they learn, including classical repertoire. Meeting and working with a living composer creates a completely different relationship to the musical experience, that is why it is so essential that such experiences are very well curated and in a mediated environment where they can remain positive. Playing with Ensemble ilinx can create a different understanding of how music is composed, thereby informing the musician of how other types of music, such as classical or romantic, can be interpreted.

Curating for the Future

Choosing concert programs that reflect diversity and are international give students an advantage if they find themselves working in many different locations in the world. This would mean integrating little known repertoire from composers of diverse backgrounds outside of the white, male heteronorm world of new music.

Communication

The basis for creating a positive and transformative musical environment for aspiring composers, instrumentalists and artists is to program challenging, interesting and stimulating projects where everyone feels respected no matter what their level of understanding of new music might be.

For example, I had a very nice experience with a violinist who knew nothing about advanced playing techniques who signed up for ilinx projects every semester. She was struggling with a Lachenmann technique on her violin and said to me during the rehearsal "I can't do it at all." Then I suggested playing slowly and putting a little more pressure on the bow, and suddenly the extended technique emerged. She was totally surprised that her instrument could produce such a sound and laughed. That was a moment of surprise - and she will never forget it. This is an example of the one-on-one communication and respect in musical coaching, breaking up difficult tasks in difficult music into small elements that can be understood that remain my personal strength.

She wanted to play in all subsequent Ensemble ilinx projects until she graduated. Those are exactly the moments I mean - that just one positive experience makes you want to play new music again and again.

Creative Flexibility

The musical world we live in is rapidly changing, something made more evident during the COVID crisis. There are fewer positions for musicians within the orchestral environment than there are graduates with degree in music, and if an instrumentalist would like to remain a professional musician by staying freelance, the first thing that becomes evident is that they must be very flexible in what they can do. Therefore, the projects available at the UdK, which can also be multidisciplinary, can give the freelance musician an upperhand as opposed to a strictly conservatory trained musician.

Ensemble ilinx is not limited to pure acoustic performances, but the possibility to combine them with genres such as dance, video, electronics, theater and poetry as it has in the past. Staged concerts, inter- or transmedial works remain a goal depending on concert location.

Preparing Student Musicians for the Real World

The point of the ensemble is not to make every instrumentalist a new music specialist, it is to give them tools to perform well and not be caught off guard within any professional musical environment. Especially in Germany, this involves knowing something about new music.

As a composer I have experienced first-hand orchestral musicians who were confused and frustrated by some of the most rudimentary of musical techniques, such as *flutter tongue* or *col legno battuto*. But the curation for most orchestras and opera houses in Germany requires musicians to be able to perform at least one piece of new music per year. This is a real-world fact: every classically trained professional musician will have to perform *at least* one piece of new music during their career. Therefore having at least one semester with Ensemble ilinx gives them the tools they need to succeed in their chosen profession.

Please read the student letters testifying to this attached.

Collaboration

The biggest challenge for Ensemble ilinx since 2015 has been to encourage instrumentalists to sign up of their own accord. I realized that it only takes one positive experience to give people that push. There must also be incentives for instrumentalists, such as meeting established living composers who, just by their physical presence, can encourage and inspire them to play their intricate scores. But also, through collaborations with different departments within the UdK, the more established the ensemble has become. It has become a place where teachers realize the quality of a learning experience for their students. Thusly interdepartmental collaboration will remain key to the future growth of the ensemble.

Future Goals

Until this point, Ensemble ilinx has been operating without the support of the KBB/Orchestral office where the work of obtaining rooms, find instrumentalists and instruments has been decentralized and has fallen on my shoulders and of the tutor for the Ensemble.

The major goal for the ensemble to move forward and really become anchored in the central structure would be for KBB to help with the musician search and setting up rooms for rehearsals, in this way the ensemble could expand more and do larger projects. When the ensemble is integrated in this way with KBB there won't be any rehearsal scheduling issues with other projects taking place at the university at the same time. A larger ensemble would mean more needs for conducting, and as this would be the case, I would be conducting the ensemble more often.

Example Program No. 1

Architecture and Music

*Rebecca Saunders as guest composer-in-residence with Ensemble ilinx
in collaboration with the percussion and architecture departments of the UdK Berlin*

Architecture and music are an old theme, since the Leonin and Perotin and the birth of polyphony in Notre Dame. Guest composer Rebecca Saunders will provide deep insight to her magnificent multi-dimensional work *Chroma*, an architecturally based work, by working closely together with the students of the UdK and Ensemble ilinx. Rebecca Saunders' *Chroma* is a kind of concert installation that has been performed in various versions since its premiere in 2003. It consists of various instrumental modules as solo, duet and trio, which are distributed spatially and temporally. Edgar Varèse composed his *Poème électronique* for Le Corbusier's Philips Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. Varèse's music is dissonant, non-thematic and rhythmically asymmetrical; he imagined them as sound bodies in space, his *Poème électronique* was spatialized by sound projectors. The sound bodies of Varèse's composition *Ionisation* for 13 percussionists also take up the theme of space.

Program:

Rebecca Saunders: *Chroma* für 12 - 16 performers*

2Cl, 1or 2Tpt, 2Perc, 1 or 2Pf, ElecGtr, 2Vln, Vc, 2Db, Korg or Church Organ, 1 or 2 Record Players

Edgar Varèse: *Ionisation* for 13 percussionists

2 - 3 newly composed works from UdK composition students

Example Program No. 2

The Freedom Principle – Afro-Modernism in New Music

Ensemble ilinx in collaboration with electronic music studio UdK Berlin

The Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) first coined the phrase Great Black Music to describe its unique direction in music. The AACM pays homage to the diverse styles of expression within the body of Black Music in the USA, Africa and throughout the world – from the ancient musics of Africa to the music of the future. This program explores Black culture's impact on modern and new music.

Having studied personally with Bill Dixon and Milford Graves at Bennington College, who were also members of the AACM, I believe I can provide some unique insights into the scores. In this staged concert in collaboration with the dance department, a full program of AACM will be presented with two newly composed work from UdK students taking inspiration from the AACM composers.

Program:

Anthony Braxton: Composition No. 142 (sextet) for open ensemble

George Lewis: *Anthem*

for Flute (doubling Piccolo and Bass Flute), Tenor Saxophone, Drums/Percussion, Piano, Mezzo-Soprano, Violin, Sampler/Electronics

Tania León: *Indígena* for ensemble (

flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, piano, percussionist, 2 violins, viola, cello, double bass

2 - 3 newly composed works from UdK composition students

Example Program No. 3

Ligeti 100th Anniversary 2023

Sidney Corbett as guest composer-in-residence with Ensemble ilinx

György Ligeti was one of the greatest and most influential composers of the late 20th century. This program displays Ligeti and prominent students, Unsuk Chin and Sidney Corbett. His highly individual compositions display a wide range of influences, from Western and non-Western music, to art, literature, science and mathematics. Ligeti once said, "Now there is no taboo; everything is allowed. But one cannot simply go back to tonality, it's not the way. We must find a way of neither going back nor continuing the avant-garde. I am in a prison: one wall is the avant-garde, the other wall is the past, and I want to escape."

Sidney Corbett also seems to brace this wall, an artist who outside of the "new music" mainstream nonetheless maintains his own independent and explicitly contemporary position. His work draws on a broad range of musical as well as extra-musical sources, including literature and visual art. Unsuk Chin also does not regard her music as belonging to any specific culture, the compositional style is more self-referential, employing techniques such as acrostics, anagrams and palindromes. Like Ligeti, she works with extramusical associations and other art genres.

Program:

György Ligeti: String Quartet No. 2

György Ligeti: Études for piano solo

Unsuk Chin: ParaMetaString für Streichquartett

Sidney Corbett: Piano Quintet

2 - 3 newly composed works from UdK composition students

EXPERIENCE

After having grounded Ensemble ilinx with Prof. Mendoza in 2015, I have been responsible for curation, musical preparation, musical direction as a conductor and have coached instrumentalists how to perform and interpret advanced new musical techniques found in many scores, even when we had guest conductors. My experience as a composer is the greatest resource here in the knowledge of new music techniques and different graphic and traditional notation styles, also of inter- and transmedial works. Before I moved to Germany, I also had founded an ensemble in upstate NY, responsible for curation, musical direction and performance.

This concept for Ensemble ilinx is based on my personal experiences at the Berlin University of the Arts. When I came to the UdK, there was no format for student performances, since there was no ensemble for new music and no collaboration with other departments, only the concerts in the 'Zoom + Focus' series, which were canceled all too often because they hadn't found enough instrumentalists who wanted to participate. In 2015 I founded the Ensemble ilinx with Prof. Elena Mendoza. I have also directed the 'Zoom + Focus' contemporary music concert series at Klangzeitort, the Institute for New Music at the Berlin University of the Arts and the Hanns Eisler School of Music Berlin from 2009 until 2021. Through the cooperation with the conducting course and Harry Curtis, I also been responsible for organizing an orchestra seminar with Prof. Mendoza, Prof. Vlitakis, with whom we now also work together with the Brandenburg State Orchestra every year.

Now every year easily more than twenty newly composed works by students are premiered at 'Zoom + Focus', the Orchestra Seminar and the Ensemble ilinx. These works have also been performed in two to three concerts per semester with repertoire from the 20th and 21st centuries. From my experience of working at the UdK, I know that different departments work together, where student works are performed and concerts with repertoire from the 20th and 21st centuries take place regularly and are well attended. I have realized that the first basis for creating a positive and transformative musical environment for aspiring composers, instrumentalists and artists is to program challenging, interesting, and stimulating projects that are experienced as positive, and the teachers and their colleagues are also reported in this way.

In earlier years, the instrumental students in the very classically oriented courses at the UdK had no chance to do anything experimental. I have also received feedback from many that without the concerts and seminars that I organize and teach, they would have had no experience and no knowledge of new music and new music playing techniques.

I graduated with a PhD in 2008 from the University at Buffalo, where I taught music composition, music appreciation and Electronic Music after having done a masters in music with Chen Yi and Jim Mobberley at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, not only in composition but conducting. In my

first degree at Bennington College, my majors were in mathematics and music composition. I have always been passionate about the sciences, but composing music focused on capturing the virtuosity of musical performance is where my drive is, now trying to capture also with video these virtuosic elements. This research in the field of video has had some very successful premieres at renowned festivals such as Soundtrack Cologne, Matera and the Regensburg Film Festival.

As a composer, my music has been performed by many international venues such as the Deutsche Oper Berlin, Bruckner Orchester Linz with Dennis Russell Davies and David Friedman, a renowned Jazz Vibraphonist, the Münchener Biennale, Wien Modern, MärzMusik, Academy Schloss Solitude, Wiener Konzerthaus, Konzerthaus Berlin, the Aspen Music Festival, June in Buffalo, Ars Electronica, Soundtrack Cologne, Goethe Institute in Mexico City, Taiyuan Symphony Orchestra, as well as many established new music ensembles and soloists.

Music theater productions include *Von Sodom und Gomorra nach Berlin* which premiered in 2012 at the Munich Biennale and winning the “New Scenes” prize at the Deutsche Oper, where I was commissioned to write a 40-minute mini-opera *Wie man findet, was man nicht sucht*.

Some notable projects in the last couple of years that involve multimedia include: *Lost Time*, an installation and performance in the Nikolaikirche, Berlin’s oldest church and now museum, with Venice Biennale artist Chihura Shiota, as well as my ePlayer pieces for solo and their digital duos *Just 34* for extended marimba and vibraphone premiered in Mexico City with Ensemble KNM in 2020 and *Double Treble* at the BKA Berlin 2022 by Nathan Plante.

My most recent project with pianist Eric Huebner, member of the New York Philharmonic, was to capture through a set of etudes and filming session that have been premiered and played in California and New York in April of 2023.

As someone who has many different hats, as composer, curator, video artist, conductor, pianist, teacher, founder of ensembles, specializing in both traditional notation and experimental notation put me in a very unique position in regard to being able to exchange extraordinarily well with the different areas of specialty.