

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust

Report by Eileen Mack, 2002 / 2 Churchill Fellow

The Peter Mitchell Churchill Fellowship

New Music in Chicago, New York, Boston and Australia

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Between the Cracks: New Music in Chicago, New York, Boston and Australia

Final Report by 2002 / 2 Churchill Fellow Eileen Mack

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Introduction

Mention “contemporary music” to most people, and they will think of the music on television show *Rage*, or any commercial radio station. Mention “new music”, and they’ll think of what you can hear live at the pub, that is if it hasn’t been taken over by poker machines. Mention these two terms to lovers of classical music and chances are they’ll think of music that is difficult to play and unpleasant or at very least boring to listen to. But aficionados of the music that we call contemporary music, or new music, or even (affectedly) art music, know that it is none of those things (although we have to admit, in a post-modern way, that it can sometimes be all of these things). By “contemporary” or “new” music, we generally mean music that is written (or sometimes improvised) by composers who are alive today, or at least by composers in the last century whose aim was to innovate with their compositions, rather than replicate. It is mostly performed by classically-trained musicians, although it might include influences from jazz, pop and world music. Whatever the reasons, new music is not currently a part of public consciousness.

New music (apart from music written for film), generally belongs to the ‘arty’ end of the entertainment spectrum along with new contemporary dance, theatre, or visual art. It isn’t mass-market oriented or commercial like film, television or pop-music, and usually doesn’t have the sophisticated aura of the Symphony or Opera. Unsurprisingly, new music organisations are small, hand-on organisations. They tend to work with small, but often very dedicated audiences, and don’t tend to attract huge corporate sponsorships like football or even the Australian Chamber Orchestra. As a result they rely largely on the ingenuity, energy, and generosity of devoted musicians, who profit very little financially from their work.

My own first experience with new music was a concert by Brisbane’s own [Australian Voices](#) Youth Choir. I had already been enjoying the more modern works my high school clarinet teacher put my way, but here, suddenly, was music that spoke to me. At University I sang with the AVYC, and avidly attended concerts by [Perihelion](#), then the resident ensemble at the University of Queensland. Instead of sitting around listening to pop CDs my friends and I listened to Philip Glass, Steve Reich, George Crumb or Gorecki. We ended up presenting our own concerts and founding our own ensemble, the six new music ensemble, which we ran as a professional (if not profitable) concern. We gave concerts, applied for and received grants from Arts Queensland and the Australia Council, toured interstate, and made a CD. But then a couple of years after graduation, the exigencies of making careers as musicians intruded. Members of the ensemble are now spread over the East Coast of Australia, and are studying Law and I.T. as well as music.

As I was then beginning a Masters degree, I started researching the situation of new music ensembles in Australia in recent history. I soon found that the rise and fall of student ensembles was not the isolated incident I felt it to be. Even in Brisbane at that time, there were other organisations who had succumbed to the same difficulties we had, as well as new groups just starting out. At the same time, ensembles like [Topology](#) and [Elision](#) had gotten around this corner some time before. I wanted to look into the reasons why some ensemble went on to success and others didn’t, and see if that kind of knowledge could remain available and connected to what people are doing now.

My role-model in new music at the time was Bang on a Can, a long-running, innovative group in the US, as well as looking at Australian organisations I looked at other organisations in America. What intrigued me was the fact that the US has these groups who have been going for over 15 who were still doing new things, and getting really excited about what they are doing, whereas in Australia many of our brightest groups are burnt out well before that. In 2002 I went to Bang on a Can’s inaugural Summer Institute, where I made contact with other young new music enthusiasts, and got a better feel for the scene in the US. I returned even more intrigued and excited, and was thrilled to receive a Churchill Fellowship to continue my

research. I generally chose to visit organisations who had been running for a long time, and or who had found ways around the challenges my ensemble faced, or whose premise I found particularly interesting.

I started out asking questions about ways in which organisations were founded, but the answers were all very similar. Groups met as students, or soon after finishing study, and came together sharing a love of new music and a desire to do something about it. My hypothesis I suppose was that it was these economic and change of life difficulties that killed off most ensembles. I had taken for granted organisational models I was familiar with, in which most administrative work was done by one or two dedicated and thinly-stretched musicians. What I found instead was a wealth of different models and possibilities, with different strategies for getting around challenges, and it was this diversity that became the focus of my study.

Executive Summary

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Fellowship objective

To investigate the operations of new music organisations in the United States.

Fellowship Highlights

Chicago

- Interviewed Patricia Morehead, one of the artistic directors of the CUBE Contemporary Music Ensemble, and Claire Chase, the young charismatic Executive Director of ICE (International Contemporary Ensemble).
- Attended a concert presented by the CUBE Ensemble, including Ms Chase performing as a guest artists.
- Observed a meeting and rehearsal of the ensemble eighth blackbird, and spoke with violinist Matthew Arnold.

New York

- Assisted in the Bang on a Can office, and observed day-to-day operations and meetings.
- Interviewed Patricia Spencer, director of the Da Capo Chamber Players, Adam Silverman of the Minimum Security Composers' Collective, and Alan Pierson, conductor of Alarm Will Sound.
- Attended a concert of works by Gyorgy Kurtag presented by the ensemble Sequitur.

Boston

- Interviewed Catherine Stephan, the managing director of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project; and Nathan Davis of Non Sequitur.

Findings

There are certainly areas in which Australian new music presenters can learn from their colleagues in the US. These include an openness to more diverse organisational structures, efficient teamwork and a certain persistence and entrepreneurialism.

In addition, new music presenters in the US tend to have more awareness of and contact with other Arts, as a source of audiences, collaborations, and marketing ideas. They have an overt sensitivity to issues of image and identity, and put much thought into devising cohesive programs for concerts, often revolving around a central idea or theme. In terms of funding, American arts organisations rely more on private Foundations and individual donors than on government sources.

There were suggestions and "wish-lists" that seemed to apply across the board in both countries, reflecting common challenges and perhaps the cultural Zeitgeist. These included a desire for more "multi-media" in music performances and better education and venues. Significantly, there were things that we do well in Australia that could be taken on board by American groups. For example, a certain sense of community encouraged by organisations such as the Australian Music Centre and the New Music Network; an attention to regional touring as a method of outreach, and clearly structured government funding arrangements. Lastly there ways in which new music organisations in Australia and America can work together to strengthen the situation of new music in both countries.

Programme

Chicago 13 - 23 February

- interview with Pat Morehead from CUBE
- lessons with Russel Dagon and John Bruce Yeh
- Chicago Symphony Orchestra concert

New York 24 February - 21 March

- interned with Bang on a Can
- interview with Pat Spencer of Da Capo
- interview with Adam Silverman from the Minimum Security Collective
- Sequitur concert
- spoke to Sequitur director Harold Meltzer and assistant Matt Tierney
- Talujon percussion concert
- Tonic jazz concert
- performed with new ensemble, Pamplémousse
- lessons with Charles Neidich, Mark Nuccio, David Krakauer, Michael Lowenstern
- interview with Alan Pierson of Alarm Will Sound

Chicago 22 - 28 March

- interview with Claire Chase of ICE
- CUBE concert
- attended rehearsal and meeting of the ensemble eighth blackbird

Boston 29 March - 7 April

- Radius concert
- Collage concert
- Boston Symphony Orchestra concert
- lesson with Evan Ziporyn
- interview with Catherine Stephan, from the Boston Modern Orchestra Project
- interview with Nathan Davis of Non Sequitur

Chicago

Chicago (population 2.8 million) was the first large city on my tour and seemingly the most similar to Sydney, in terms of geographical spread and population, as well as the situation facing presenters of new music. Like Sydney, Chicago has a central performing arts precinct, with a prosperous symphony orchestra and opera company in prestigious venues. In the 1990's the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Lyric Opera successfully campaigned for \$100 million from the business community to refurbish their homes.¹ Unfortunately the focus on central companies such as these can overshadow smaller arts ventures. In addition, Chicago faces a dearth of small venues appropriate for new music performance, a challenge also facing presenters in Sydney.²

Chicago has three major university music schools: Depaul University, the University of Chicago, and North western University (in Evanston), as well as a few smaller colleges. As often happens in American towns, much of the new music activity is based around these institutions, whether presented by university ensembles, involving staff, or just taking advantage of the fact that they provide small, affordable venues. The University of Chicago is home to one of the seminal groups in American new music: the Contemporary Chamber Players, who were founded in 1965 by composer and conductor, the late Ralph Shapey. For a long time an influential and fertile place for composers, the CCP it is now run in the form of two resident ensembles, The Pacifica string quartet and eighth blackbird.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra is not unsympathetic to new music, unsurprisingly, since it has as its principal guest conductor is new music great Pierre Boulez. It has a history, especially over the last 30 years, of commissioning and premiering new music, and of creating and fostering programs that help composers or further new music, including an excellent Composer-in-Residence program. In addition the CSO has its own chamber music series featuring players from the orchestra. Associate-principal clarinetist John Bruce Yeh's ensemble, Chicago Pro Musica, is an avid champion of new works and younger composers.

Chicago's music critics also seem unusually well-disposed towards new music performances. In particular Ted Shen, who writes for both the Chicago Tribune and the smaller, artier Chicago Reader seems to promote and review a large number of new music events. Despite all this, according to local new music presenter Claire Chase, there is at the moment something of a void in the scene in Chicago. But similarly to Sydney, there's a sense that new ensembles are coming up to fill take advantage of the opportunities available in the absence of a crowded scene like that in New York. Of course, In contrast to its underdeveloped new music scene, Chicago's jazz and live theatre scenes are famously well-developed. And while these genres may compete with new music for audiences, they may also provide fertile ground for new ideas for new music presenters.

CUBE Contemporary Chamber Ensemble (1987)

Hailed as Chicago's "premiere new music ensemble and presenter of concerts",³ and veteran now of an impressive 15 seasons, CUBE is directed by Patricia Morehead and Janice Misurell-Mitchell. Along with Da Capo in New York, CUBE represent the archetypal performer-based new music ensemble, where the group is basically run by one or two people who also play in the ensemble. The two artistic directors (who play oboe and flute respectively), were named among the "Chicagoans of the Year in the Arts" this year by the Chicago Tribune.⁴ All administration is done gratis, so that no matter how enthusiastic, ingenious or hardworking the

¹ Ryan Ver Berkmoes, *Chicago* (Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications, 2001), 35.

² Ken Smith, "Speak For Yourself! A Hyper-History of American Composer-Led New Music Ensembles," *NewMusicBox* 1/1 (1999) <http://www.newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=01tp06>

³ Frank Abbinanti, "Music from the European Union," *Chicago Tribune* April 5 2002.

⁴ Ted Shen, "Critic's Choice: Cube," *Chicago Reader* March 7 2003.

directors are, the organisation is still limited by the energy, time and ideas of a small group of people, all of whom have day jobs.

Not that this seems much of a limit, as CUBE are amazingly active. The ensemble presents about six different concerts a year, which is a lot for a part-time ensemble. They stitch their funding together through small grants from Foundations of one or two thousand dollars, another factor that makes their work very labour intensive. Mrs Morehead commented that, in retrospect, five years ago they should have engaged a part-time executive director, as groups like Bang on a Can have done. Now they are in something of a Catch 22, where their busy existing schedule leaves them little time to explore entirely new avenues.

As well as oboe and flute the CUBE line-up comprises clarinettist Christie Vohs, percussionist Dane Richeson, additional flutist Caroline Pitman and Patricia's husband, pianist and conductor Philip Morehead. Their programs are "cheerfully eclectic [and] refuse to subscribe to academic modernist dogma or fashion", although they usually follow some kind of theme.⁵ For example, in 2003 concerts have included 'Viennese CUBE', 'Klezmer CUBE', and 'The Uncommon Woman'. Although the ensemble does dabble with jazz and collaborations with experimental instruments, they are firmly rooted in the genre of classical music. The atmosphere at their concerts is casual and somewhat low-key. The players are relaxed and comfortable. I saw a concert at the Columbia College Concert Hall, at which the ensemble were at their best in an evocative piece by friend and fellow Chicagoan Betsy Start. This piece, a poetic memorial to September 11, had the members of the ensemble moving about and playing African percussion, and featured narration by Misurell-Mitchell.

The audience, in this case on a bitterly cold and rainy night, was quite small, but friendly and appreciative. According to Morehead they usually play to audiences of about 100 to 125 people. The problem, in her opinion, with presenting new music, is always that there are just not many people interested in this kind of music. Morehead's work is carried out 'mostly through a sense of mission' she says, "I would say that it's the small chamber group that has kept the American composer alive and creative."⁶

They don't have a regular venue, which is also a problem as far as building an audience goes. According to Morehead none of the available venues in Chicago are ideal, each having advantages and drawbacks. For example, the Columbia College Hall is available free of charge to Morehead as faculty, but she has to give 25 to 30 free tickets to students, a large dent in takings. And the nicest venues for chamber music are the ballroom of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which is only available to the CSO players, and another hall at CSO which cost \$5000 to rent.

I talked to Patricia about the funding challenges facing CUBE and other new music ensembles in the United States. While there is a strong tradition of personal philanthropy in the United States, she said that most of this money goes to large prestigious organisations such as the Chicago Symphony. The bulk of CUBE's funding is through private foundations, however new music groups often have too small a turnover to be considered 'small organisations' by foundations, and so don't even appear on the funding 'radar'. Unfortunately the value of foundations is linked to the stock-market, so that with the falling economy foundations may cut the amount of grants by 25 to 50 percent in the near future. CUBE's annual funding from the Federal National Endowment for the Arts (the equivalent of our Australia Council) is \$5000, seemingly a small amount for such an established ensemble.

Another financial problem for new music is that unlike theatre, or jazz, where multiple performances of the same program are standard, new music concerts usually happen only

⁵ John von Rheim, "Cube's longevity still going strong," *Chicago Tribune* March 19 2003.

⁶ Bryan Miller, "The Care and Funding of Chamber Music," *Chicago Reader* January 17 1992.

once, because of the small audience. This makes each concert a big investment in time and resources. Some groups get around this by touring a program, but Morehead said that in the Midwest the closest city is about 2 hours drive away, and that this made it difficult to tour economically. Perhaps the mainly academic day-jobs of the 'CUBEsters' also makes it more difficult for them to tour, as opposed to their fellow Chicagoans eighth blackbird and New York freelancers, the Bang on a Can All-stars.

CUBE and its directors have a strong sense of community, with one of their colleagues naming Patricia and Philip Morehead the "mom and pop" of new music in Chicago. In addition to its own performances, CUBE also publishes the CUBE Calendar, a newsletter and concert diary of new music in the Chicago area, similar to the Australian Music Centre's monthly listings. This calendar includes articles on new music as well as the list of offerings by the Chicago Symphony and University ensembles, soloists and other chamber groups. With its tireless presentation of new music and the promotion of other ensembles, CUBE is the backbone of the Chicago new music community.

eighth blackbird (1996)

eighth blackbird's image, as shown in their enigmatic lowercase moniker, is hip, slick and sophisticated. Like Bang on a Can before them, they have been compared to the Kronos Quartet. What sets them apart from other ensembles is that they're exploring ways of expanding the concert experience, and achieving great success in doing this. Just one of the striking things about them is that the members have moved cities en masse, twice, since forming as an undergraduate ensemble at the Oberlin Conservatory in Ohio. Like all students, they had their own dreams and ambitions of other career paths, but they laid those aside to commit to the ensemble, a choice which has now been vindicated. They first moved to Cincinnati, to pursue an Artist Diploma in chamber music, and are now resident at the University of Chicago. Despite the pull of New York, the ensemble chose the Windy City for the higher quality and lower cost of living, and for its central geographic position. eighth blackbird's instrumentation is the "Pierrot Lunaire" instrumentation premiered by Schoenberg: flute (Molly Barth), clarinet (Michael Maccaferri), cello (Nicholas Photinos), violin/viola (Matthew Albert), piano (Lisa Kaplan), plus percussion (Matthew Duvall).

Another striking thing is that they are able to earn a living playing new music, perhaps the only ensemble in the country to do so. That's where Chicago's location comes in - eighth blackbird tour a large amount of the time, spending much of their time literally on the road, driving as far as the West Coast and back in their van. Despite the assertions, even of other new music enthusiasts that it can't be done, according to violinist Matthew Albert they don't need to have day jobs, although some of them teach.

The group has a place on the chamber music "circuit" of venues around the country normally reserved for string quartets and trios. One of their colleagues explained the origins of their success: 'I think eighth blackbird ... had an interesting premise to begin with, this idea of staging the music and memorising... and they're young and very good-looking, and they won some competitions which put them on this circuit... It's a big feat for a contemporary music ensemble, it's just a big feat being an ensemble with a clarinet and a flute in it'.⁷ In 1998 they were the first new music ensemble to win the prestigious Concert Artists Guild Competition, with a prize of two years management, and since then the sextet has won the several other chamber music awards and awards for adventurous programming.⁸ Albert surmises that they get booked as often as they do because they're willing to tour: series organisers have an empty slot marked 'young and interesting' to counteract the classical and conservative nature of the rest of their programs, and blackbird are willing and able to fit the bill.

⁷ Adam Silverman, interviewed by Eileen Mackin New York, February 15 2003.

⁸ Smith, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/page.nmbx?id=01tp12>.

Perhaps the most distinctive and important thing about blackbird is their programming and performance style. Because they tour instead of presenting concerts in one place, the ensemble only has to learn one or two programs a year, a method of working which gives them maximum return for their rehearsal time. It also means they get to know the repertoire over a long period, so they get a feel for where and when to program them, and are also able to memorise works, an unusual spectacle in chamber music performance. Their order of program is not based on chronology or set order of movements, but more on stylistic flow, or instrumentation, so that the concert is a continuous stream of music. They will have 'transitions' between pieces or movements, perhaps programming pieces between bigger pieces, to avoid the uncomfortable gap between pieces so common in classical concerts. Most unusually, playing pieces from memory, allows them to move about the stage in a kind of choreography, forming transient duos, trios and such as the music seems to require.⁹

Administrative work in the group is shared democratically. eighth blackbird impressed me, as did the other American groups I saw in administrative action, with their ability to make decisions and problem solve as a team, efficiently and with a minimum of conflict. They now have management and a PR firm, although they did a lot more of their own marketing earlier on. The ensemble maintains its own office and space near Evanston in the north of Chicago, where it is able to meet, rehearse, and store documents, music, instruments, and merchandise (CD's, shirts and even hats.) Their funding is generally a mix of these smaller donations, fees from presenters, and commissioning grants, from foundations and organisations such as Chamber Music America and Meet the Composer.

Matthew describes eighth blackbird as 'essentially a cover band', so connecting with composers is very important to them. They do this via the internet, composer submissions which they listen to twice a year, and new music festivals where they can submerge themselves in new works with the composers in attendance.¹⁰ Their most recent touring program was a collaboration with New York organisation the Minimum Security Composers Collective.

Perhaps one of the reasons for their success (apart from their obvious commitment), is that while they're doing some exciting things, they remain within the classical tradition, making them attractive to presenters.

Eighth Blackbird... deliberately set out to explore the boundaries of a conventional recital... These players aren't rebels in the downtown spirit of Bang on a Can. Rather than breaking down the barriers between classical and pop, they seemed to be folding in pop influences to help expand the definition and scope of classical music - on classical music's terms.¹¹

They are occasionally criticised for putting the performance before the music, or appearing overly choreographed or a little self-conscious or mannered, but mostly their reviews are glowing, and their schedule stays full.¹² Promoters and detractors of new music alike are fond of recommending that something must be done to expand the concert experience, and at least eighth blackbird are out there trying new things, and achieving success as they do.

ICE (2000)

Like eighth blackbird, fellow Oberlin graduate Claire Chase is forging her own models for the presentation and performance of new music. Her group, ICE (International Contemporary

⁹ Ted Shen, "Concert Review, Eighth Blackbird at Mandel Hall," *Chicago Tribune* February 17 2003.

¹⁰ Matthew Albert, "Hymn & Fuguing Tune," *NewMusicBox* 22: 2/10 (2001)

¹¹ Anne Midgette, "Music Review: Expanding Boundaries, Physical and Artistic," *New York Times* February 3 2003.

¹² Mark Swed, "Music Review: Eighth Blackbird Flies," *LA Times* April 14 2003.

Ensemble), is a “think-tank for creative musicians in classical music” made up of young musicians living in several different cities.

Chase’s dedication to new music began while she was still an undergraduate student. In the last year of her degree she embarked on an extremely ambitious project to enlarge the body of contemporary work for her instrument, flute. She applied for and won a \$5000 Presser Foundation grant and commissioned five works, from well-known composers such as Pauline Oliveros and Harvey Sollberger as well as classmate Huang Ruo. On top of this, she aimed to fill the 700 seat Oberlin hall for her performance, to prove to people that what she was doing was important, relevant, and accessible. To this end she promoted the concert to retirement communities, schoolchildren and fellow students, and on the night, the hall was packed, a situation she puts down to the energy generated by the musicians and people behind the scenes, and grassroots PR, like signs on lampposts, billboards, and word-of-mouth epidemics.

After the success of this project, she tried to think of ways to retain this energy, and to keep together the players and other people involved with the project, who were now scattered across the US. She felt that instead of being a deterrent, their various geographical locations should only increase their resources, breadth of knowledge, and ability to find support. She and Huang Ruo conceived the idea of a gigantic think-tank for young, creative minds. And ICE is just that, a collective of emerging artists who believe that classical music, and the music of today, is vital and important to the advancement of our culture, and who see eye-to-eye on issues of programming, innovation, multi-media performance and audience-building.

The result is a rotating non-hierarchical roster called the Artist Roundtable, featuring over 30 young musicians, in New York, Chicago, Boston and elsewhere. Chase is listed as Executive Director, Huang Ruo as Artistic Director, and there are four other ‘directors’, of areas such as development, communications, and outreach. However, the idea is that there is total democracy among the core members; there’s no “principal” flute or “second clarinet” or official conductor. Members of the roundtable mostly communicate via email, and form rotating committees to organise different aspects of ICE projects. Essentially, Icicles will come up with an idea or piece, and then Chase will look for venues and funding. It can be an involved process: a huge amount of discussion and, often, debate, can occur before decisions are made. But, according to Chase, this is worth it, because everyone feels like they are involved in the decision-making process. Chase admits that they’re still ironing out some problems, and evolving rules and methods as needed. Also important to the ICE concept is its board of directors, which includes musicians from the nation’s most respected orchestras (spanning genres of classical, jazz and new music) and established composers and professors.

ICE, Chase asserts, refuses to fit into a stylistic “niche” of any kind. They are committed to taking risks, redefining what is thought of as “contemporary,” “classical,” and “world music”. Their quest is to find a relevant place for chamber music of all kinds, styles, genres, in the new century. In 2001 ICE gave performances of music by Huang Ruo in New York, and in January 2002 had their Chicago debut with a concert of Bach, Cage, Reich, and three premieres of works by ICE members. In June 2002 Chicago was the location for the first ICE Fest, featuring three free concerts, eight Chicago premieres and two world premieres. The concerts, at the Art Institute of Chicago, among other venues were standing room only. The success of these ventures has only reinforced Chase’s conviction that new-music presenters who complain of the difficulty of finding audiences are working with a faulty model.¹³ At the time of my visit they were about to embark on ICE Fest 2003, six concerts in one week, with the aim of “plastering the city with new music”.

¹³ Ted Shen, “Group Efforts: Art Music for the Masses,” *Chicago Reader* May 30, 2003.

Currently, ICE concerts are mostly in Chicago, despite the geographical spread of the collective's members. Chase said she wants to stay 'rooted' in Chicago, to establish an identity and audience. She believes there are opportunities in Chicago that aren't there in the more crowded New York scene, for example. Although their repertoire and programming are eclectic, each ICE concert has an encompassing theme, for example, a concert of Mexican music, or an evening of Berio sequenzas. Chase believes that each concert should be an 'event', with all the associated excitement and anticipation. She is excited at the prospect of exploring multi-media performances, and in performing new music in theatrical venues, which have their own audiences who are interested in new things. ICE's Berio concert featured dancers and lighting and was presented at the Theatre Building Chicago.

Entry to ICE's concerts is free where possible, because Chase believes it is important for a new ensemble to give free concerts at the beginning, at least for the first two years. Her idea is that in presenting new music you are giving the public something they don't yet know they want (and that includes existing classical music audiences). She is really interested in, and inspired by the example of independent theatre groups in Chicago, who have often started from scratch with the support of a number of small individual donors. ICE also exists on donations, including small corporate sponsorships and a large number of individual donors, who are listed on the ICE website.

In person Claire Chase is charismatic and almost evangelical, and this infectious energy, along with the innovative and idealistic goals of the collective structure is extremely effective in attracting performers, audiences, and sponsors.

I think that when you're convinced of both ethics and the urgency of what you're doing, you forget that you have a "place" in the world - that you're a student, that you're a punk kid, that you have very little experience to support all of your rampant idealism, and so on - and you go hungrily toward finding answers to the questions that keep you up at night... No matter how many people tell you that it's impractical to be passionate, that you shouldn't take risks, that you should play in the sandbox of people with Experience and Money, I say go ahead, be passionate, take risks. I've been so moved at how willing people have been to give to ICE in its rather starry-eyed, seedling beginnings. A relationship between a grant giver and grantee is just like any other relationship - it's based on a meeting of needs.¹⁴

ICE is still in early stages, and while admirable, the Roundtable's democratic model still seems to rely on the energy of its executive director. It will be interesting to see how the group evolves organisationally, and how it will make its next steps in regard to funding. ICE is an organisation to watch, and may provide an exciting new paradigm for the promotion of new music.

¹⁴ Linda Shockley, *The Music Plays On for Ambitious Grantseeker*
http://www.iceorg.org/html/news/grantstation_09_2002.html

New York

With a population of seven million, and self-styled status as “capital of the world”, New York is home to a large number of new music groups, and to some of the most exciting and long-lived presenting organisations in the United States. Bang on a Can, Speculum Musicae, Da Capo, So Percussion, the string quartet Ethel, The New York New Music Ensemble, Ensemble Sospeso, Minimum Security Composers Collective and Alarm Will Sound are just a few of the groups active in New York. According to composer Adam Silverman of Minimum Security, “New York has a big community, a big sort of populace who are interested in different kinds of music, whether it’s contemporary music or whatever.”¹⁵

New Yorkers, and the 35 million visitors who pass through the city each year, are spoilt for choice when it comes to entertainment. On any night of the week a host of performances of all kinds are presented all over the city, including but not limited to Broadway shows, cinema, alternative theatre, classical music and jazz. In Winter at least there seemed to be at least one new music concert a night, and sometimes several. This abundance of choices can occasionally have a downside however, with even diehard new music enthusiasts admitting that in New York “there’s so much happening that it’s really possible to be jaded. You go: ‘Well, there are 10 things happening tonight that I want to go to so I’m not going to do anything, I’m going to watch TV.’”¹⁶

The entire population of Manhattan have the kind of metropolitan, extremely urban lifestyle that only exists in the inner-cities of Australia. As such, New Yorkers seem to be very aware of the live Arts in particular, and there are healthy audiences for film, dance and theatre, as well as visual arts. In New York more than anywhere else new music groups try to tap into this potential audience. Similarly to Sydney, the large population can mean that making contact with potential audience is difficult. New music presenters rely a lot on mail-outs, media and venue oriented promotions for publicity, so mailing lists and media contacts are a kind of currency, and agents or at least PR companies are a must. New York has its own new music calendar similar to the CUBE schedule in Chicago and the AMC and New Music Network in Australia. However, unlike these diaries, the New York New Music Calendar charges \$200 a listing.

As in other cities, it is the smaller venues that are home to new music, although new music can be heard sometimes at New York Philharmonic concerts, or when big names like the Bang on a Can All-stars play at Lincoln Centre. Established venues for new music include Merkin Hall, Miller Theater at Columbia University, the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), the Knitting Factory, the Kitchen and Symphony Space. Each venue generally has its own stylistic specialty, and as a result people often judge the music by the venue. For example, a gig at the Knitting Factory might be expected to be more jazz oriented than one at Merkin Hall. Venues can also be very expensive, at least on a new music budget: the Miller Theater’s basic fee is \$2000, and at Merkin Hall the fee is \$1650.

I heard the ensemble Sequitur play a program of works by Gyorgy Kurtag at the 700 seat Miller Theater. This concert was part of the venue’s own “Composer Portrait” series, curated by director George Steel. Miller, which was originally an academic venue, is now a centre for the performance of new music, and George Steel’s programming is “rooted in the conviction that young people naturally inclined to new films and new pop groups will similarly be drawn to contemporary concert music.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Silverman.

¹⁶ David Lang, Micheal Gordon, Julia Wolfe et. al. “In the 1st Person : Bang On A Can,” *NewMusicBox* 1: 1/1 (1999)

¹⁷ Anthony Tommasini, “Music; Making Good on a Promise of New Listeners,” *New York Times* Nov 10 2002.

A number of smaller and more unusual venues help to make the scene more rich and varied. Fledgling ensembles can often be found performing at the affordable but 'comfortably tiny' Greenwich House Music School, a traditional refuge for new music. Tonic, a club on the Lower East Side, with unfinished cement and brick walls and a small wooden stage, becomes filled on weekends for performances of improvised music and jazz.¹⁸

New York is also home to some of new music's biggest names, such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich and Elliot Carter and unfortunately to the rifts between them. Traditionally in the New York scene, new music gets divided into "downtown" and "uptown" camps. Downtown music has as much in common with rock and jazz as with classical tradition, whereas uptown tends to be more conservative, academic and formal in style. The division is less obvious now, but in the 70's and 80's, according to the director of Bang on a Can "there was a war going on".

Bang on a Can (1987)

I first heard Bang on a Can while watching a documentary on SBS, and found their music and attitude immediately electrifying. A few years later I met Bang on a Can pianist (and expatriate Australian) Lisa Moore at the National Music Camp in Australia, and eventually I travelled to New York to play at Bang on a Can's own summer school. They're still for me one of if not the most exciting new music group today. Perhaps it's that they blur boundaries: between classical music, rock, and pop, between uptown and downtown, or that they' manage to pull off being hip without being pretentious. One of the most impressive things about Bang on a Can is their continual evolution: from their beginnings as a composer-run one-off marathon concert, they now have an annual festival, an in-house ensemble (the Bang on a Can All Stars), a record label, and a summer school.

Bang on a Can was started in 1987 by three young composers and friends, Julia Wolfe, David Lang, and Michael Gordon. They had all been at Yale studying with Martin Bresnick, a background they have in common with many movers and shakers in the US new music world.

Basically, Bang On A Can started because we were three young composers. We got out of school. We came to New York. We looked around, and there were 5 million things that just off the top of our heads we thought we could change. Most of them are really obvious things... We would get together every day and we would talk all day about how, you know, the world wasn't set up to do a lot of the things that we wanted to do. Basically, a lot of what we were doing was... we got out of school, we'd sit around, we'd meet every day for breakfast or coffee or whatever, we'd show each other our music and we'd complain about how the world sucked, basically. And then you go, well, it's easy to identify lots of things that need to get changed in order to make sure that, you know, interesting music always gets played, and the right audience knows about it, that music actually can mean something large in society, that young composers get treated well...¹⁹

With these aims in mind they presented the first Bang on a Can Festival, a 12 hour "marathon" concert, in an art gallery in SoHo. The marathon juxtaposed many styles, avoiding the distinction between uptown and downtown, and aiming instead for innovation and an adventurous spirit. There were 23 pieces on the program, including works by diverse composers such as Steve Reich, Milton Babbitt, Xenakis, and Stravinsky. Most of the composers were there (not Stravinsky of course), and instead of having program notes, they were asked to speak directly to the audience. Over 400 people turned up, which was unheard of for this kind of concert in 1987. Since then, this one-day experience has expanded into a

¹⁸ Janice Misurell-Mitchell "New York Report: Unlikely Spaces" *CUBE Calendar* 2001. <http://www.cubeensemble.com/arch/arch2001.html>.

¹⁹ Lang et. al.

yearly festival, growing and changing every year. Its definition is pretty loose, sometimes just comprising a week of concerts, and sometimes just the marathon, which now includes anything from large gamelan orchestras to huge bagpipe ensembles and alternative rock bands.

The Bang on a Can All-Stars, who first played together as an ensemble in 1989, grew semi-organically out of these festivals. The directors were fielding requests to take the marathon to other cities, an unwieldy prospect, and they realised that if they had an ensemble, they could take the Bang on a Can aesthetic on the road. Over ten years of marathons, six players in particular had kept reappearing, and so they invited these players to form the original All Stars : Evan Ziporyn on clarinet and saxophone, Maya Beiser on cello, Robert Black on double bass, Mark Stewart on electric guitar, Steve Schick on percussion and Lisa Moore on keyboards. Their instrumentation is unique, part classical ensemble, part rock band, part jazz ensemble, following the Bang on a Can idea of blurring boundaries, or just existing outside of them.²⁰ By 1992 the All Stars had their first separate series. And even though obviously the marathon is much more diverse than the ensemble, they are the voice of Bang on a Can on the road.”

From the beginning, rather than targeting a classical music audience, Bang on a Can promoted their concerts to an arts audience that didn't identify itself with classical music.²¹ They saw their audience as “people who are hungry for different things”, people who were interested in art, dance, theatre, poetry, and who went to see very out there performances, but didn't know about new music. Consequently, image has always been an important part of the Bang on a Can concept - not just concert presentation but visual image: posters and flyers, photography and record covers.

“I think that what Bang on a Can is speaking to is a kind of art crowd. It has to do with how we present ourselves. It's very informal. It has to do with what the flyer looks like. These things sound superficial but they are visuals that are conveying a philosophy. I mean, we are so picky, we are so tied to our copy and our art design, it's ridiculous...”²²

Their marketing ideas are inspired in part by pop groups like Sonic Youth, whose music is complex and difficult to listen to, but who get audiences because they are hip, well-dressed and connected to an alternative, dangerous art scene. Bang on a Can has been compared to Kronos, which was the first classical music to project an alternative kind of image. However, Bang on a Can's directors are adamant that marketing must remain organic and faithful to the music. Their aim always remains to make concerts they'd want to go to, as David Lang insisted “I don't feel there's anything wrong with doing a concert for a smaller audience. I really only care about making a concert that I want to go to!!”²³

Even with an acclaimed annual festival and ensemble, Bang on a Can has kept looking for new and innovative ways to present “music from between the cracks”. In 1998 they launched the People's Commissioning Fund, a radical partnership between artists and audiences to support new music. The fund pools the contributions of hundreds of people who have joined in as member-commissioners with contributions ranging from \$5 to \$5000, and is able to commission a number of new works every year. In 2001 Bang on a Can started its own record label, Cantaloupe Music. On the Cantaloupe label they have released CDs of performances by the All-stars, music of the Bang on a Can composers, solo discs by All-star members, as well as some CD's by other composers. Discs are available for purchase on Bang on a Can's new website store as well as at national and international record stores.

²⁰ “Bang on a Can All Stars.” <http://www.bangonacan.org/allstars.html>

²¹ Greg Sandow, “View from the East: How to be Real,” *NewMusicBox* 36: 3/12 (2002)

²² David Lang et. al.

²³ Ibid.

In 2002 the resolutely anti-academy Bang on a Can started its own school - the Summer Institute of Music at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. Located in North Adams, a small town in New England, the summer school was dedicated entirely to adventurous contemporary music. It brought together young performers and composers from across the US and the world, who were passionate about new music, and culminated in its own mini marathon concert. Studies included gamelan and improvisation, music business seminars and performances were presented daily in the museum galleries, free and open to the public. The Bang on a Can directors aim in starting the Summer Institute was not to be dogmatic, but to bring together a "new generation with interests as quirky and unrecognized as their own once were", and to "energise students' optimism". Instead of creating a movement, they aimed to show musicians from a classical training background that, "there are other options here, other ways to have a meaningful musical life."²⁴

For seven years the three composers were solely responsible for all administration, but since 1994 they have maintained administrative staff, a move which has made projects like Cantaloupe and the Summer Institute possible. Their office is in downtown heartland East Village, and holds three full-time staff, including manager Kenny Savelson, as well as part time staff and interns. During my visit I worked as a volunteer in the office, which often got pretty cramped, with up to seven people working at one time. The Artistic-Directors still oversee everything, dropping in regularly for meetings, to pick up or drop off work, or just to say hello, although when one of them is busy with another project they are able to take some time off. I was impressed by the efficiency and smoothness of their meetings, and the way in which they calmly negotiated solutions to challenges. According to David Lang:

The reason why Bang On A Can is successful is that we are incredibly romantic about it... We are really good friends, and we are all very different people but we have some things that we share in common... every day we meet and every day we talk to each other and we figure out how to get each other excited about different things. And we have very high standards about it and we only do things that are interesting to us and are exciting and charge us up and that make us feel very excited and feel good. And that's, I think, how everything's made honest.²⁵

Da Capo Chamber Players (1970)

The Da Capo Chamber Players' first concert was in 1970, and since then more than seventy works have been written especially for the ensemble. It grew out of a series managed by the pianist and composer Joan Tower at the Greenwich House Music School from 1966-1979, and is now directed by flautist Patricia Spencer. Their instrumentation is the "Pierrot Lunaire" line-up: flute, cello (Andre Emelianoff), violin (Eva Gruesser), piano (Lisa Moore), and clarinet (Meighan Stoops). From its beginning more than 30 years ago Da Capo's aim has been to make new music more familiar and accessible to audiences. In their first concert, which featured pieces by Stefan Wolpe, Wuorinen, Webern and Babbit, they did this by playing some of the pieces twice so the audience could have a second hearing. In the early 1990's they began making a conscious effort to juxtapose new music and old music, so that, in their words, "up-to-the-minute commissioned works have an extra sparkle when heard side-by-side with traditional masterpieces."

More and more, according to Patricia Spencer, they've found that audiences respond well to theme-oriented concerts, such as concerts based on the music of one composer, or of women composers, or even Australian composers. Da Capo is part of the New York Consortium for New Music, along with other New York ensembles Continuum, Da, ModernWorks!, The New York New Music Ensemble, Newband and Speculum Musicae. By pooling resources the consortium is able to present an annual festival, Sonic Boom, which has been running for just

²⁴ Anne Midgette, "Ultimate Downtowners Head for the Hills," *New York Times* July 7, 2002.

²⁵ Ibid.

over 10 years. The first few Sonic Boom festivals featured a gala opening concert in which all of the groups performed, serving as a “sampler” for the rest of the festival. Spencer said that she has found that involving more people at the production end, as in such a sampler concert, is a particularly effective way of increasing audience. Another advantage of the festival format was that it imbued each concert with the sense of being an event, another audience drawcard.

Spencer does most of the admin work herself, so the group relies a lot on her energy and enthusiasm. She admits that one of the things that keeps her going is being able to decide the kind of music she wants to play. Spencer cautions that although delegation is an important skill, one must be cautious: delegating to the wrong person, even though they are enthusiastic, can make more work rather than less. Her work in Da Capo is only possible because her job teaching at a couple of different University Music Departments allows her a degree of flexibility. According to Spencer, it would be impossible for her to earn a living just playing contemporary music.

One of the things that Patricia Spencer particularly lamented was that a musician’s education doesn’t include administrative skills relevant to starting and running an ensemble. she’d really like to have an administrator in to help with audience development, an area she says she would like to know more about. Da Capo has a publicist who, she says their publicist does excellent work, building contacts with the media, and passing information to journalists she knows will be interested. “They understand the person they’re talking to, whereas I always think everyone’s interested in what Da Capo’s doing”.

Da Capo receive regular funding from the New York State Council for the Arts, and less regular funding from the federal National Endowment for the Arts, as well as funding from private Foundations. Apparently federal funding was easier to come by prior to the 80’s, when there were huge cuts to Arts budgets. Spencer explains that US spending on the Arts is embarrassingly small, almost 14 times less than Italy spends. The application for the New York State Council grant that they receive, takes about 25 hours to complete. It is easier to get commissioning funds than operational funding, and it is easier for Da Capo as an established group to get funding than for a group who is just starting out. Despite the difficulties of finding funding, Spencer believes there are advantages to having to operate on a budget.

If you’re already on the edge of survival and the economy goes belly-up then you have less to worry about, I mean it sounds ridiculous, but you’re able to do something by operating at the edge. You’re able to do something that you couldn’t necessarily otherwise, and it is also in a weird way stronger than the other organisations, because it’s already operating on a shoestring. So the shoestring gets thinner, thicker, it’s still a shoestring. It’s like existing in the cracks - it’s like we don’t need the imprimatur of the establishment, we don’t need all of the money people - we can make this happen anyway. It’s the rebelliousness that I like about that too.

Sequitur (1997)

Sequitur was co-founded in 1997 by composer and current artistic director Howard Meltzer. The ensemble consists of a core group of about 20 musicians, including guitar, percussion, horn, winds, strings, piano and vocalists, who come together in flexible groupings to present concerts. The ensemble is conducted by Paul Hostetter when necessary and has a resident theatre director, Ron Bashford. The Sequitur players are freelancers, who work with other organisations in New York, and the ensemble is occasionally augmented for large works.

In the early 1990’s Meltzer, who at age 28 already had a job as a lawyer, was embarking on his second career as a composer. Like many composers he attended a lot of concerts, listening to new things and trying to find his own identity. However he found most new music concerts dull and dutiful, and like fellow New Yorkers Bang on a Can, he observed that his

lawyer colleagues had no concept of new music, but were well versed in theatre, film and dance. Instead of trying to promote new music directly to them, Meltzer thought a better way to attract this audience was to involve other arts in concerts. In addition this would have the advantage of distinguishing an ensemble from others.

Sequitur's initial aim was to find a "new audience, made from adventurous people who went to downtown theatre and modern dance performances - people who loved seeing boundaries crossed among artistic disciplines". Meltzer wanted his musicians to be able to literally speak directly to the audience, and to include many different styles of music from all over the world. The ensemble's first concert, at Merkin Hall, included a semi-staged work for actor and string quartet by David Lang, Luciano Berio's Opus Number Zoo, for speaking wind quintet, a setting of the Declaration of independence by Rzewski. They now present a season of three concerts a year, as well as a cabaret series launched in 1999.

Meltzer admitted that with Sequitur's ever-changing line-up makes it more difficult to establish an identity as a group, but said that he wasn't interested in creating yet another "Pierrot plus percussion" ensemble, and that with their flexible instrumentation the ensemble is able to pursue possibilities of odd combinations. Their programming remains innovative and cohesive but free of stylistic bias, a quality which makes their concerts popular with critics and colleagues alike, but again hinders the establishment of a clear identity for Sequitur.

To combat this, Sequitur emphasizes their goal of integrating theatre into musical performances. The ensemble is very proud of its ground breaking new music cabaret shows, but is not able to do as much theatre work as they would like, due to the cost of doing so. The Sequitur musicians are paid professional rates, and Meltzer likes to budget everything properly, which restricts the amount of available funds. The projects Sequitur would like to do grow as they grow, including fully staged chamber operas and concerts with a large number of players. The Kurtag concert involved a lot of augmenting players, and while their fee from the venue was \$4 500, the concert ended up costing \$35 000. He believes it is important that "mixed-media" projects be produced with the collaboration of professionals from the associated art forms. According to Meltzer these collaborators can often be found simply by cold-calling, for example, a theatre director who you are interested in working with.

Sequitur has a loyal audience of about 150 to 250 people, and they have gotten audiences of up to 400 people. The ensemble has a number of strategies for audience development. They use mailing list from theatre and dance companies, and their work with theatre directors and actors attracts a crossover audience. Each project presents a new opportunity to develop audiences, and to hopefully retain and increase numbers, for example their cabaret concerts draw audiences associated with the venues, and the Kurtag concert attracted interest from the Hungarian community. Half of their funding is through grants, and the other half from individual donors. Sequitur is well served in this by Meltzer's network of contacts and associates in the music and business worlds. The ensemble commissions one or two new works a year, as well as eight or nine short cabaret songs.

Meltzer says the down side of running your own organisation is that, obviously it takes up half your time for which you don't get paid, and it can stifle his own composing. On the upside, if his own works are not programmed by other ensembles, he can always program one in a Sequitur concert. Meltzer believes in working to improve the field of new music, and that in programming concerts, he is able to put across his own vision of what a concert should be like, a concept he finds extremely empowering.

Minimum Security Collective (1998)

Minimum Security is a group of composers who “gang up to get performing groups to commission works from them. It's an inspired strategy, economically feasible and designed to create new repertoires.”²⁶ Like Bang on a Can, they met while in graduate school at Yale, studying with Martin Bresnick. The four members of the collective, Dennis DeSantis, Roshanne Etezady, Adam Silverman and Ken Ueno, whose compositional styles are quite different from each other, now live all over the place, in Rochester, New York, Michigan and Cambridge. The group was founded in 1998 out of a desire to work directly with performers and do concerts in an interesting way, and to “broaden new music's repertoire and audience with music that combines a modern immediacy with classical rigor”.²⁷ Minimum Security now collaborates with established ensembles and soloists to present concerts throughout the United States. Their concerts exclusively feature the works of living composers, including but generally not restricted to works by the Collective members. as well as guests, with a total of seventy-two works so far presented.²⁸

Usually Minimum Security put together between two and four different programs a year, and present multiple performances of each program. In contrast, most other composers' collectives present only one or two individual concerts a year. Minimum Security's method of collaborating with established ensembles means that they have access to a pool of resources and experienced performers, making their task somewhat easier. Their most recent project was “di/verge”, a sixteen movement piece developed in collaboration with the ensemble eighth blackbird. Minimum Security's long term goal is to do more of this kind of high profile project, involving professional management and publicity agents and a large number of concerts, so that they can charge proper commissioning fees.

The composers all have other jobs, for instance, Adam Silverman works for an arts foundation, and introduces children to music in preparation for concerts by the New York Philharmonic. Minimum Security concerts have been funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, Meet the Composer, Aaron Copland Fund, Yvar Mikhashoff Trust for New Music, North River Music, and Yale School of Music. The Collective also maintains a body of individual donors, including friends and family of the composers.²⁹

In terms of programming, Silverman questions the value of concerts whose only theme is that the works on the program have been written recently, and argues for cohesiveness and thoughtfulness in program choices. Minimum Security try to make their programs interesting in variety and concept, for example by interspersing movements of different pieces, or by including musical references. Silverman was much taken with the idea basing a concert around an awesome piece of music like George Crumb's Black Angels, or an interesting concept, like virtuoso Robert Dick's concerts of works for every possible kind of flute. He also liked the idea of sensitively juxtaposing old and new music, for example by commissioning contemporary responses or companion works to classical masterpieces. According to Silverman, Minimum Security has an advantage, because they can tailor pieces to a particular concert, rather than having to find pre-existing works. The five year old Collective seems to have hit on a sustainable and flexible concept, and it will be interesting to see which organisations they collaborate with in future. They have already worked in Italy, so perhaps an Australian collaboration could be next.

²⁶ Kyle Gann, “The Uptowners Among Us,” *The Village Voice* October 10 - 16, 2001.

²⁷ <http://www.minimumsecurity.org/>

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Alarm Will Sound (2001)

Members of Alarm Will Sound began playing together in 2001 while studying at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester near New York. The ensemble consists of about 19 players (including wind, brass, strings and percussion), conductor, and vocalist, and commonly works with amplification, like the Bang on a Can All Stars. The players have diverse experience in composition, improvisation, jazz and popular styles, early music, and world music, and bring this experience along with a sense of adventure to all their performances. The group has a reputation for performing demanding music with energy and flair, and has performed and recorded works by Steve Reich, David Lang, Ligeti, Cage, and Birtwhistle, as well as acoustic versions of tracks by Aphex Twin.

Although the group is run by conductor Alan Pierson and Gavin Chuck, Pierson said that in terms of identity, Alarm Will Sound's aim is to let audiences get to know the individual players instead of identifying with conductor. Their concerts are structured to allow band members to project their personalities, to do things that they're good at. Recently this involved percussionist (and Minimum Security member) Dennis DeSantis performing live remixes of pieces from the concert program. Pierson agreed that the expectation in our "multi-media" age is for "concert plus". He would like to incorporate more theatrical elements into their shows, but said that this is hard, especially for a young group.

Their constant line-up, according to Pierson, differentiates Alarm Will Sound from other large ensembles such as Sequitur and Sospeso. He explained that in the US there is no equivalent of groups like London Sinfonietta or Ensemble Moderne in Europe. He believes that this is a gap in the new music scene, which is currently filled by smaller ensembles, and wonders whether any American group will ever establish a similar position. The up and coming Alarm Will Sound "band", who have produced award-winning recordings and recently performed on the Bang on a Can Marathon, look set to take on the challenge.

Boston

Although Boston is small, with less than the half the population (600,000) of Brisbane, its music scene has a busy-ness that belies the city's size. Live music, especially jazz and pop, can be heard on any night of the week. Combined with the compactness of the city centre this makes for a music scene that seems almost super-saturated. Boston has two major universities, Harvard and MIT, both with music departments, as well as three conservatories in the city centre - Berklee (a popular music academy), New England Conservatory, and Longy School of Music. In addition Boston is home to one of the country's best orchestras, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, whose incoming Music Director James Levine is an acknowledged champion of contemporary music. The prevalence of music schools means that student musicians are always available to play gigs, which adds to the number of concerts going on, but can make it difficult for professional musicians to make a living.

Boston is reputedly home to a disproportionately large number of arts organisations, about 600 of them according to Catherine Stephan, managing director of the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. Correspondingly, Boston has a large number of new music organisations, many of which these seem to follow a fairly traditional model, with set instrumentation or a core group, and to be a little conservative in programming.

I saw concerts by the Radius Ensemble, a young group, and Collage, a group with much more established credentials. Each group had its own particular audience, many of whom are also financial supporters of the group, giving them a real sense of ownership and involvement in the concerts. Some groups go even further and allow audiences to take part in programming choices. This intimate connection between ensemble and donors is an excellent way of retaining audience. According to Stephan, Boston has a strong tradition of personal funding of the arts, and people feel an obligation to personally contribute. The new music scene conforms to Boston's image of being conservative, affluent and somewhat cliquey.

Boston Modern Orchestra Project (1996)

The Boston Modern Orchestra Project is one of the few full-sized professional orchestras in the US dedicated exclusively to performing new music. BMOP was created "in response to an ever-widening gap between the concert-going public and the music of its time, music that is composed by artists with whom audiences share a collective cultural experience and language." Conductor and current Artistic Director Gil Rose founded the group in 1996, and initially ran it himself, as an outlet not only for his beliefs but for his work as a conductor. The orchestra acquired a managing director rather cleverly: Catherine Stephan was originally contracted to do grant writing on the side, and then managed to get a grant so that she had a full-time position. BMOP now maintains an office in suburban Boston, and also has a full-time marketing and outreach assistant, as well as an assistant conductor, orchestra manager, composer-in-residence, and two interns.

The orchestra is made up of freelance musicians, who are paid at the usual rate. The principal players tend to remain the same, but rank and file players change around from concert to concert according to availability. Some players, although freelance, are committed enough to pencil in BMOP concert dates before they are officially booked. According to one BMOP player, this situation is not ideal, as they sometimes end up with players who are just doing it for money, rather than dedication to new music. However it does mean that the orchestra is flexible, and can present concerts with between 25 and 85 players. As well as presenting their own concerts, BMOP are now in a position where they are booked to present concerts for other organisations, and have had works commissioned on their behalf. BMOP received a 'seed' grant from a Foundation when they first started, and are now funded mostly through private foundations, a little federal money, and a very small amount of state funding. However they're

working on attracting private donors, since most foundations have 'exit plans', and want arts organisations to become self-sufficient.

Luckily Rose has a knack of coming up with very funding friendly themes for concerts, for example a recent concert of Chinese music was sponsored by the Foundation for Chinese Performing Arts, and the orchestra also presents concerts in collaboration with local Universities MIT, Harvard, and the New England Conservatory. Recent BMOP programs have included works by composers as diverse as Leonard Bernstein, John Cage, Paul Hindemith, Igor Stravinsky, Luciano Berio, and Aaron Copland, as well as concerts based on themes such as "Indigenous influences", "Pan-Latin Rhythms" and jazz. This year BMOP has expanded to include an ambitious opera project in conjunction with the Boston Academy of Music. The "Opera Unlimited" festival will include the new England premiere of Thomas Adès's *Powder Her Face* and the world premieres of new works by Boston composer Daniel Pinkham and BMOP composer-in-residence Elena Ruehr.

According to Stephan being an orchestra can be a disadvantage in terms of projecting an image as an ensemble. From the concert platform there is little contact between the audience and players in the orchestra, so the audience don't get a sense of the personality of the players as they would in a smaller group. However, Rose doesn't believe in informality: they purposely don't speak from stage, declaring that in an orchestral situation "there are formalities that have to be respected in order for the music to work". Instead BMOP have an excellent outreach program, regularly presenting smaller educational concerts and lectures to audiences of about 50 people. They also present larger evenings in a local club, which attract audiences of up to 150 people. Their outreach audience consists mainly of older people who have spare time, but also includes younger composers and musicians. In addition the orchestra has produced recordings, which are distributed by established record labels, and sold at concerts. Stephan believes that they give the orchestra legitimacy, but that they're also a vital part of BMOP's *raison d'être* - which is simply to "get new music out there".

Non Sequitur (1996)

The ensemble Non Sequitur started as the contemporary ensemble at the Aspen Music Festival, where they were assembled from people who applied to be in the festival's contemporary music program. Their function was to play pieces by student composers at Aspen, and also to give several concerts of published repertoire. The six original players were in residence at the annual Festival from 1996 to 1998, and during that time decided that they had a lot in common: they all liked to play contemporary composers and loved to improvise together. Even after three years together there were a lot of things they still wanted to do together, so they formed an ensemble. Their original instrumentation was the standard "Pierrot plus percussion", but their clarinetist and pianist have recently left the group. Non Sequitur is now a quartet, with violinist Gabriel Bolkosky, percussionist Nathan Davis, cellist Ha-Yang Kim, and flautist Ned McGowan.

The members of Non Sequitur have never lived in the same place. Their cellist and percussionist both live in Boston, while the flautist lives in Amsterdam, the violinist in Ann arbour, and their former clarinetist and pianist are in Colorado and New York. Rather of presenting concerts in one place, or choosing one city as a base, Non Sequitur come together a few times a year, for tours or residencies in various different places. Nathan admitted that most of their friends and colleagues are amazed that they're still together.

"Particularly at the beginning it was a big problem, because just the overhead to get us all together is a lot of money. So we're able to get together for about six weeks of the year, usually for these residencies of one or two weeks at a time. so it's very intense work, we don't have anything else going on except to be with the group so rather than being a part time local gig, it's sporadic but when we're there we get a lot done."

Non Sequitur has toured the Netherlands and New England, played at the “Ought-One Festival of Nonpop”, and has had residencies at schools such as Harvard University and Brandeis College. The ensemble gives interactive workshops, often involving improvisation, to students ranging from pre-school up to postgraduate level.

These residencies, where they give workshops or go in and play student works, are the projects that really make them money. Unfortunately these situations give the group very little programming freedom, and may only get to do one piece of their own choosing. When they organise our own concert tours they have complete control over programming, but may not earn enough to cover costs. Most of the players are composers as well, so as well as pre-existing repertoire their tour programs will include some of their own pieces, as well as improvisation in various forms and crossover works by artists such as Frank Zappa and Richard Balsam. They try to piggyback their own concerts off more profitable projects, so if the ensemble is going to be somewhere for a residency they try to do another concert nearby.

Non sequitur is run as a completely equal partnership, with no leader or artistic director. Generally, big decisions are made by debate and unanimous assent. Each of the players finds gigs or projects for the group, and usually whoever initiates the contact with a presenter becomes the “point person” and does all the direct contact and organisation for that project. As a result that role shifts around, and this is important to Non Sequitur’s members, because they have a lot of respect for each others’ creative input into every aspect of the group. It also means no-one gets stuck with all of the administration work, and if someone’s really busy for a few months the group can function without their active everyday participation.

However, this structure is a little bit cumbersome: it can take a long time to get everyone to decide on something. Non Sequitur’s democratic model involves more difficulty than they would have as a locally based group, or as a more “top down” structure where one or two of the players managed the group. With two original members gone, the quartet are now rethinking the structure. They are unsure how bringing in replacements will affect the group, and are considering whether to restructure so that one or two original members become the artistic directors.

Another downside to Non Sequitur’s mode of existence has been a difficulty in establishing an identity as an ensemble. There are a lot of sextets in the US with their original instrumentation, which has an upside in that there is a lot of repertoire available, but also means it can be hard to distinguish one group from another. Non Sequitur is different from other sextets in that they improvise within various backgrounds and that they write their own music. Unfortunately they have found that even within the new music scene there’s also a lot of conservatism, favouring composed music rather than improvisation and open structures.

Because they don’t have a local presence in any one place, Non Sequitur has to rely for its publicity on reputation and materials such as press packs and their website. According to Davis this can be a little frustrating, as it is difficult to express their identity through these materials, and to explain what they do, especially to someone outside the new music business. However, the group still manages to get about as much work as they can fit in.

The ensemble member all have other careers: some of us teach more, and some play more. The cellist and percussionist also have a duo called Odd Appetite, who’ve been able to work more closely with composers, than Non Sequitur has, as they’re both based in Boston. This close relationship between composer and performer is very important to Davis.

We can show composers our weird sounds and our favourite techniques, and so we’re able to really have very close collaborations with composers. I think that’s helped get pieces, because then a piece is not quite so abstract, it actually takes into account individual players strengths and things that they like to do, and multiphonics that sound

really great on their [instrument]. There is an issue which is how transportable these pieces are... a lot of them could not probably be played by any other players. But my feeling is that instead of writing a piece that any group could play, but probably won't, which will probably get its premiere and then will languish for a long time, it is better to write a piece for a specific group of musicians, who feel they've contributed to it as well. They're going to play it a bunch and it'll get recorded, and, you know, that may lead to more collaborations with other groups who have heard it.

It's this hands-on aesthetic that seems to define Non Sequitur. They are known for their adventurous programming, and for taking contemporary music as a point of departure and incorporates improvisation, theatre, pop, and non-western music into their performances. According to Nathan Davis:

"A lot of it is, for me, the do-it-yourself aspect... if you play in a rock band you figure out what your own sound is, and what you have to offer, and it's perfectly natural to hustle for your own gigs and try to find your niche... musicians aren't really encouraged to look inside themselves and find what they do well, and what they want to do and create"

and for me, this aesthetic epitomises the task ahead for presenters of new music.

Conclusion

I had embarked upon my research in the United States in search of answers. Somewhat naively, I expected that in visiting successful ensembles in America I would find clear solutions to challenges facing new music presenters which could be directly applied to projects in Australia. I had taken for granted familiar “top down” organisational models, but instead found a wealth of different models and possibilities. However, some common ideas and strategies did start to emerge.

There are certainly qualities and ideas that Australian presenters can learn from their colleagues in the US. These include an openness to more diverse organisational structures, efficient teamwork and a certain persistence and entrepreneurialism. Whether through a sense of individuality or selfishness, Americans don't appear to be quite so averse to devoting a large part of their lives to a pursuit which may seem single-minded, incomprehensible, and insignificant to others. They seem quite unaffected by “Tall-Poppy Syndrome” or “cultural cringe” endemic in Australia. By far the most important message of my travels was not to become discouraged, that challenges can be overcome and great things achieved by people with little material resources but lots of commitment, creativity and tenacity.

Generally in terms of structure, the real leap in possibilities comes when organisations break free of the traditional model in which all administrative work is undertaken by one or two people who are also heavily involved in the creative activities of the group. Of course there are successful organisations which are exceptions to this rule, but these tend to operate at high cost to their directors, and are often restricted to continuing in the same vein once they are established, instead of exploring new possibilities. The spreading out of administrative duties can be achieved in a number of ways: simply by increasing the number of directors, forming collectives, or by employing administrative staff, agents, or PR companies. Without the burden in terms of time, and the weight of responsibility, people become free to develop their own skills as performers and composers, and explore new ideas.

In addition, new music presenters in the US tend to have more awareness of and contact with other artforms as a source of audiences, collaborations, and marketing ideas. They have an overt sensitivity to issues of image and identity, and put much thought into devising cohesive programs for concerts, often revolving around a central idea or theme. In terms of funding, American arts organisations tend to rely more on private Foundations and individual donors than on government sources.

There were suggestions and “wish-lists” that seemed to apply across the board in both countries, reflecting common challenges and perhaps a cultural Zeitgeist. These included a desire for more “multi-media” in music performances and better education and venues. Significantly, there were things that we do well in Australia that could be taken on board by American groups. For example, a certain sense of community encouraged by organisations such as the Australian Music Centre and the New Music Network; an attention to regional touring as a method of outreach, and clearly structured government funding arrangements. Lastly there were ways in which new music organisations in Australia and America can work together to strengthen the situation of new music in both countries.

Recommendations

Audiences and Image

Audiences for new music concerts in Australia seem to be made up largely of other new music enthusiasts and other open minded musicians. Audience development is vital to the health and future of new music, and in order to do this presenters need to look outside the narrow and narrow-minded classical music audience. Interestingly enough it is often existing classical

music audiences, with their preconceptions of what musical performances should be like who are most resistant to new music. According to Bang on a Can director David Lang,

In a way the lesson [is] that people who already know something about music in a way are lost. The way that music is taught, and the way musical knowledge comes to you is, on one hand, knowledge, and on the other hand it's an inculcation of a certain kind of value. And that value tells you how to interpret the world and that interpretation is very narrow.³⁰

An overwhelming need expressed by presenters in both countries is to demystify new music, making it available to people in the way that other contemporary arts have been. Classical music and new music have been crippled in audience terms by the idea that you need to be knowledgeable in order to respond to a musical performance. Groups like Bang on a Can who play to primarily non-music audiences have disproved this idea. Potential audiences need to feel allowed to respond naturally, to “feel permission to hear it however they do”, instead of feeling that they need to “understand” the music.

Sympathetic presentation of new music at all levels of education may boost awareness and appreciation of this kind of music. However outreach needs to be aimed at a broader range of audiences than schoolchildren. A large potential audience for new music are “people who are hungry for different things”, people who are interested in art, dance, theatre, and poetry. Ways of attracting this audience include using mailing lists from other artforms, presenting concerts in non-traditional venues, and incorporating elements or practitioners of other artforms in musical performances.

New Music presenters can also take cues from their colleagues in other artforms in areas such as organisational structure, and funding and marketing strategies. Successful small theatre and dance companies like Chunky Move, as well as large companies and institutions such as the Queensland Art Gallery's very popular Asia-Pacific Triennial could provide ideas and inspiration. Modern visual Art is a good example of a form which has thrown off an image of irrelevance and impenetrability and become part of popular culture. Miller Theater director George Steel agrees:

As a college student, I knew next to nothing about Abstract Expressionism. Yet I was drawn to a Willem de Kooning retrospective in New York that somehow seemed cool. I remember being confounded, moved, stirred up and altogether fascinated by what I saw. Why shouldn't new audiences be encouraged to have the same range of reactions to a concert of Carter?³¹

Groups like the Kronos Quartet and Bang on a Can have shown that new music can be hip and glamorous. This kind of image requires the often quite deliberate projection of a distinct personality or identity. While personnel and performance style make up a large part of a group's identity, well-considered design of promotional materials including websites is an important part of projecting the image of a group. American organisations seem less averse to this kind of calculated image making than their Australian counterparts. Many of the ensembles I visited also worked on projecting identity by directly interacting with their audience, whether by having composers or performers talk to the audience directly during concerts, or separately during special outreach events.

Another way of giving potential audiences something to “latch onto”, is to base concerts around a central theme or concept, thus giving them a general idea of what to expect. It is important that choice of works and even program order is well thought out, to produce a

³⁰ A-D

³¹ George Steel

cohesive, satisfying concert experience. Choosing works merely for their newness, or by their instrumentation will usually not give this result. A common programming strategy for traditional chamber ensemble and orchestras has been to slip a piece of new music into a program of classical music, in the hope of converting existing audiences. However this strategy often backfires: while new and old music can be juxtaposed thoughtfully and effectively, conservative audiences who are expecting a program of favourites can be unsympathetic and even resentful of new music's intrusion. As Michael Gordon asks, "Who else in the world would go: 'Oh, you're going to a country music concert? Well, I'm going to put aside 15 minutes of this country music concert so you can hear music you don't want to hear!'"

Expanding the Concert Experience

Rethinking the concert experience is very much on the agenda for new music presenters in both countries. Rather than radically redefining concerts, effective changes can be made within the familiar concert structure, whether by careful programming, or slight changes to programming ideas such as playing pieces more than once, interspersing pieces and sections of pieces, and adopting elements of jazz and pop performance such as moving around the stage or using amplification and non-traditional instrumentation. There is a general trend in the US towards the idea of musicians presenting themselves as more human and natural, instead of the stiff and formal atmosphere of the classical concert performance.

In our age of sensory bombardment, most new music presenters express the desire to incorporate extra-musical elements in their concerts, as a way of enriching the concert experience and attracting new audiences. Lack of visual stimulation has been cited as a reason for declining classical music audiences; however, many music presenters are uncertain of how to proceed in this area. To be effective, "multi-media" must be organic, and not just "bells and whistles" tacked onto a musical performance. Multi-media performances are expensive to produce, and to be done well require collaborators who are experts in other arts. Finding such collaborators can be difficult for presenters operating within the narrow classical world. However, when done well, multi-media performances can be riveting, and contribute an attractive sense of the performance being an "event".

Education and Infrastructure

A common complaint among the directors of new music organisations in the US was that Conservatory music courses do not provide relevant training to students who may follow a non-mainstream musical career, especially with the number of orchestral and soloist jobs decreasing. Skills such as administration, fundraising and marketing are vital to the running of all music organisations, not just new music. It is also important for students to learn that there are other options open for having a career playing music, and to be shown examples of how to find your own niche, new ways of making music: recording, electronics, improvisation, world music. As Nathan Davis of Non Sequitur said, "musicians aren't really encouraged to look inside themselves and find what they do well, and what they want to do and create"³²

Despite their shortcomings, American universities indirectly support the existence of new music by providing a comparatively large number of part time teaching positions, which are ideal for those pursuing alternative or freelance performing careers. In places like New York there is also a large amount of freelance work by which such musicians can support themselves. The importance of fostering freelance work and other such avenues of support are often overlooked by government funding bodies in Australia.

Lastly, new music desperately needs more small, appropriate venues. Venues in universities and churches have traditionally been havens for new music, however, university venues are becoming increasingly inaccessible and expensive to outside groups as institutions face funding cuts, and churches do not provide the right atmosphere or facilities for all styles of

³² Non Sequitur

performance. New music presenters can be creative in performing in non traditional venues, but specialised venues like Merkin Hall and Miller Theater in New York, and in Brisbane the Powerhouse and Judith Wright Centre have a huge impact in attracting and keeping audiences.

Funding

Artsworkeers in Australia tend to imagine the US as a land of golden opportunity in terms of private philanthropy, and while this may be true for large organisations in the US, the prevalence of private funding merely means a different set of challenges for American new music presenters. The largesse of personal philanthropy and private foundations is more linked to the vagaries of the economy than state funding, and government funding in Australia is more clearly structured than in the US, and application processes seemingly easier to understand. One area in which Australia can learn from the US is in the fostering of individual donations by people who are close to the organisation: friends, family and audiences. This sort of funding has the added benefit of creating a sense of community and ownership around an organisation. Additionally, perhaps wealthy Australians can be encouraged to set up perpetual foundations benefiting the Arts like those in America.

In the US as here it is easier to get commissioning funds than operational funding, which makes it difficult to plan on anything more than a project by project basis. New organisations may be discouraged, because it is much harder for them to find funding than established organisations. In addition, new music faces the challenge of requiring a larger amount of rehearsal time than other musical performances, so getting more out of the one program by repeating concerts or touring can be an important way of maximising use of funds..

Creating a scene: "A Cobweb of Interactions"

Although audience share can be improved, new music will most likely remain a niche artform; the market for experimental, new experiences is not a mass market. As such, it makes little sense for new music organisations to work competitively, they should instead be looking at ways to work together to maximise resources and audiences. Australia deserves commendations for the excellent work of the Australian Music Centre and the New Music Network, but more can be done in this area. Ways of doing this are forming collectives and think-tanks, which lessen the burden on any one person or organisation, creative partnerships, for example between composer collectives and performing ensembles; joint commissions shared between multiple performers or ensembles; and sharing concerts and audiences, through sampler concerts and festivals. In the US presenters seem to be more aware of the importance and usefulness of this interconnectedness.

This kind of work can also be extended internationally. Australian music audiences tend to have little if any knowledge of new music organisations in America, and are only aware of big name composers or ensembles with record label. Americans certainly know very little about new music in Australia. Clearly there is a lot to be learnt from similar organisations in other countries, so this is an unfortunate situation.

Obviously one way to promote interconnectedness between the two countries, is to have artists physically travelling between Australia and the US. Fellowships such as the Churchill and Fulbright are extremely valuable for Australian musicians, however perhaps more could be available in the other direction. Another avenue for consideration is putting similar individuals or organisations in contact with each other, or linking composers with performers, promoting Australian compositions to American ensembles and vice versa. For example there are around 30 works in the Australian Music Centre library written for the Seymour ensemble, a Sydney group with "Pierrot plus Percussion" instrumentation, and these could be marketed to similar sextets in the US. Institutions such as the Australian and American Music Centres are well situated to embark on such tasks, but are often hampered by lack of funding in this area.

International touring of ensembles in both directions is also important, however work needs to be done on promoting Australia as a destination for touring artists and not just tourists. Projects involving artists from both countries are ideal, however, they tend to be very difficult to get fund, as funding bodies in both countries have policies on promoting their own artists. The value of such collaborations and travels should not be underestimated. Pat Spencer of Da Capo considered that “if the artists could just build a cobweb of interactions that maybe that would help strengthen international relations...

My own plan is to maintain my contacts in the United States via email, and visiting wherever possible, and hope to return to the US for further study in the future. In the meantime I plan to try to publish a shorter version of this report through the Australian Music Centre, or similar organisation, so that new music organisations in Australia have access to ideas from their colleagues in America. In the pipeline are a series of concerts combining works by Australian composers with works by American composers I have met through my research. These programs will try to take into account the ideas expressed in this report. In addition I have had some success in promoting American organisations and composers in Australia and vice versa.

In the end, as I found, there is no one way of successfully presenting new music. as Nathan Davis if Non Sequitur put it, “Unfortunately for contemporary music groups it’s like... you have to love it, you have to pay your dues, and maybe you’ll make it, and maybe you’ll burn out”³³ New groups are constantly being formed by dedicated musicians and facing similar challenges. Hopefully the information outlined in this report will be of value to such organisations. Bang on a Can director Michael Gordon described his organisation as follows:

Basically, we are a mom and pop store. We have found that we carry the products we like and we don't carry the products we don't like. We don't owe anybody. We are not being controlled by a corporate entity, and we have figured out how to survive. You can survive, and you can do better than survive.

Perhaps by following the example of successful organisations in the US, more Australian groups can go on to do more than survive.

³³ Adam Silverman

References

Information for this report was collected in interviews with members of each organisation and from their websites (see [links](#)). Additional information and quotations were also taken from newspapers in each city, Lonely Planet Guides to Chicago, New York and Boston, and NewMusicBox, the online magazine of the American Music Centre.

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Links

CUBE Contemporary Chamber Ensemble
<http://www.cubeensemble.com>

International Contemporary Ensemble
<http://www.iceorg.org>

eighth blackbird
www.eighthblackbird.com

Bang on a Can
<http://www.bangonacan.org>

Da Capo
<http://www.k-c-p.com/dacapo>

Minimum Security Composers Collective
<http://www.minimumsecurity.org>

Sequitur
<http://www.sequitur.org>

Alarm Will Sound
www.alarmwillsound.com

Boston Modern Orchestra Project
<http://www.bmop.org>

Non Sequitur
www.nonsequitur.org

NewMusicBox
<http://www.newmusicbox.org>

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David Reminick

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Russell Dagon

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