

The Laboratory of Darmstadt 2010: An Outlook

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The 45th Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music 2010

At the end of 2008 the Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music faced a new set of challenges, with a change of artistic director and increasingly tight financial conditions. It faces now the challenge of a new direction in the program, which I envision as guided by an integral concept. The two central disciplines, namely performance and theory/musicology/research, will be closely connected both with each other and with other parameters of experimental research. Hence practice, theory, programmatic concepts, clear dramaturgical boundaries, and the integration of theoretical discourses and music-historiographically relevant perspectives—ideally founded on archival research—will require extensive interconnection. This new conception of the programmatic orientation, which emphasizes the unique laboratory situation in Darmstadt, will apply primarily to the biennial Summer Course, but will also influence the activities of the International Music Institute (IMD) throughout the year.

Because of the significant history of the Darmstadt Summer Course for the post-war musical avant-garde, "Darmstadt" is still synonymous with a specific idea of state-of-the-art composition. For a long time, "Darmstadt" and "Donaueschingen" have been mentioned in the same breath, reflecting the view that the newest compositional methods were presented and the most relevant discourses conducted in these two places. Alongside such nodal points as Cologne, Paris or New York, Darmstadt and Donaueschingen were considered the geographical centers of an aesthetic avant-garde whose composed and formulated aims needed precisely these platforms so urgently from 1945 until well into the '60s. With the change of musical times and aesthetic positions, against the background of a veritably exploding international festival scene, the Darmstadt Summer Course inevitably also takes on a new face in relation to the external perception of the course. Nonetheless, through its structure and its clear differences from other contemporary music festivals and program formats, Darmstadt shows a clear and significant potential for expansion. This potential must now be developed further and given an even clearer profile. The importance of the Darmstadt Summer Course for the future undoubtedly lies on the one hand in its distinctness from other festival formats, and on the other in the accentuation of its own course format—constituting what today would be deemed its "unique selling point." And herein lies the element that gives the Darmstadt Summer Course its identity: it is defined by the merging of past and present. Therefore, the establishment of a forum where artistic ideas, aesthetic achievements, works, interpretations and theoretical approaches are presented and opened to critical discussion should, not least in the light of a noticeable lack of the events typically found in festivals and performances, hardly require justification.

Darmstadt, this functional whole in which the history of institutions, mentalities, composition and performance are complexly interwoven, has always been a place of dissemination; but it must also become a place of discourse again—here the pressing questions posed by all relevant composition and production aesthetics should be

examined, and theoretical discourses should take place that are (or have become) absent or only marginally present in the academic sphere. In addition, the notable lack of discourse that characterizes the New Music system is to be confronted here. A special research area within the course, combining theory and practice but also presenting highly varied research projects, and subsequently generating new ones itself, will form one of the pillars of the course alongside the concerts/performances and workshops. In addition, an open format ("Open Source") will provide an opportunity and space for theory and practice to enter into a fruitful exchange. And finally, because of its significant historiographical archive, editorial projects of lasting benefit to the history of theory can be initiated at Darmstadt. Some provisional remarks on the thematic area "Archive," which can be considered one of the central tools of the IMD in mid-term planning, will follow.

Any statements about the current state of planning for the next Summer Course, the 45th, which will take place from July 17th to 31st, 2010, inevitably risk appearing as grandiose claims; such plans can, and almost certainly will, be modified in various ways owing both to budgetary restrictions and conceptual adjustments. It is therefore important to emphasize in advance that the projects mentioned here are in a nascent state, and will only be feasible with external funding. Nonetheless, I shall provide a brief preview of the various projects accompanying the aforementioned composition and interpretation workshops, which will also be shaped programmatically from case to case, and the theory/research area. At the center of next year's Summer Course will be four projects fitting into the integral overall concept:

1. An extensive project to support young ensembles and work with contemporary chamber music under the title ENSEMBLE 2010.
2. An ELECTRONICS ATELIER in which current techniques, works and procedures are discussed, presented and applied. The multi-part project is intended as an open studio.
3. A form of OPEN SOURCE (thus the working title) in which course participants are free, aside from certain emphases placed by the curators, to take over a space made available for this purpose.
4. A WRITING WORKSHOP in which writing about (contemporary) music will be thematicized primarily through practical work.

Some notes on the individual projects:

1. ENSEMBLE 2010

This integrally conceived project comprises several modules combining the elements of workshop, chamber music, scholarship program, conducting forum, and concert. Internationally renowned ensembles, young up-and-coming ensembles that have never performed in Darmstadt that have received special invitations, and ensembles participating in the course via the aforementioned "Call for Young Ensembles" form the

basis of the project. The composition and performance teachers, with their extensive experience in the realm of chamber music, will be involved in the project as coaches. The project will be directed by Lucas Vis, who will also be leading the scholarship project and conducting forum once again in 2010. Further details about application conditions can be found on the IMD website. After the deadline of the "Call for Young Ensembles" and the inspection of all applications by a five-member jury, there will be a "Call for Scores" directly connected to the expected instrumental resources, so that young composers have the chance to send in their pieces in due time.

2. ELECTRONICS ATELIER

Electronic resources in their many variations have always had a place at the Darmstadt Summer Course. In 2010, the theme will be discussed with as much contention and aesthetic diversity as possible in the form of different presentations. Experiences from non-academic areas of electronic music (Christian Fennesz has already agreed to participate) will be featured alongside renewed encounters with important perspectives from the early years of Darmstadt (Luciano Berio, Pierre Henry, Pierre Schaeffer, Hermann Heiss and others). In order to gain perspective, examination of current work might be brought into relationship with retrospective views.

Orm Finnendahl will be leading a studio of his own with the participation of seven composers and the same number of performers. The project has already been announced by a call to ensure time for two-stage preparations (meetings at the Freiburg Musikhochschule in October 2009 and spring 2010). The instrumental teachers involved will be Uli Fussenegger (double bass), Marcus Weiss (saxophone), and Christian Dierstein (percussion). Naturally, the work phase in Darmstadt is intended as an open studio accessible to all course participants.

So far, Ludger Brümmer (ZKM Karlsruhe) and Franz Martin Olbrisch (Hochschule für Musik Dresden) have been invited. In addition, the Basel Music Academy will be represented with a project currently under development, exploring the intersection of interface and performance.

3. OPEN SOURCE (working title)

a. Space

The basic idea here is the implementation of a new framework in the Darmstadt Summer Course that will augment the established teaching models (teachers/students, experts/learners) by opening up alternative processes of knowledge transfer, intended as a complementary element within the conventional teaching framework. This format is based on such principles as self-organization, self-motivation, peer-to-peer networks, open source practices—i.e., principles serving the self-empowerment of the individual. It is intended to offer open, unregulated exchange of knowledge, informal situations for passing on experience, and the possibility of spontaneous activities.

The principal elements of this format are freely accessible and usable spaces, basic technical resources, and an easily accessible and flexible communications system. These concrete resources are available to all participants of the Darmstadt Summer

Course (teachers, performers, students) for the spontaneous realization of their own activities for transferring knowledge. Every participant can take over these spaces temporarily and organize lectures, courses, workshops, presentations, discussions, concerts, performances, etc. All activities will be made publicly accessible via a central communications tool. The organization of these activities will be entirely in the hands of the initiators (including the audience).

b. Theory

The theory accompanying this practically oriented format will be the subject of a series of presentations spread over the Summer Course, offering art-theoretical, scientific, philosophical and other reflections on the aforementioned key concepts such as self-organization, self-education, open source, etc.

c. Program

Special projects, workshops and feedback sessions can be planned and offered within the open form of this format to provide individual points of initiative. Beyond these initiatives, the participants will decide on the programs themselves.

4. WRITING WORKSHOP

The idea behind this format came about through the analysis of the unsatisfactory current situation of writing about music in general, and about New Music in particular. Even if the possibilities for young authors are becoming increasingly restricted through a steady reduction of resources, nevertheless it is a realistic assumption that many involved in New Music will be involved in freelance writing and production. The aim of this project is the transmission of basic working methods (for concert reviews, radio features, preparation of soundtracks, broadcast programs, book reviews, articles for specialist journals or weekly newspapers, etc.) on the one hand, and practical work—i.e., the application of these methods—on the other. The International Summer Course for New Music is an ideal location to bring musicians (composers as well as performers), musicologists, and music critics and journalists together. Two weeks—more or less round the clock—will be a sufficient time span to bring the different fields into communication with each other about their respective potentials and individual jurisdictions. These encounters can produce numerous results in the most varied formats, as the "Writing Workshop" outlined here is not restricted to theoretical discourse, but rather primarily seeks to offer guidance for practical work. These interactions not only provide training, but also serve in the formation of internal archives.

The possibilities for using the experimental field of the Summer Course as a practically oriented "emergency situation" are as manifold as the formats themselves, and can extend from daily editorial conferences via the production of radio and Internet broadcasts to a special course journal. Practical work should always be preceded by a theoretical segment, which could very well also examine the basic conditions of music-critical activities in a historical light.

Postscript: The Archive of the Darmstadt International Music Institute

For the largest and most relevant part, the archive of the IMD is the history of the International Summer Course for New Music. Therein, the IMD unquestionably houses one of the central archives for a source-oriented, differentiated history of music after 1945, with practically no gaps: 60 years of German and international music history with a high level of documentary and research relevance. Because the Summer Course, founded in 1946, stands even more than Donaueschingen for the intense and manifold exchange of current compositional methods and thought, there is also a clear culture-political responsibility towards this institution, especially if one considers that the dissemination and communication of music—the institute understands its archival work as a central tool for this purpose in the most comprehensive sense—is one of the foremost concerns in culture-political activities today (see, for example, the "Netzwerk Neue Musik," initiated in 2008 by the Federal Cultural Foundation). As a recently compiled, detailed overview of the IMD's archival resources shows, it is unquestionably an equally extensive and diverse complex of material that is of great significance for recent music historiography: the combination of documentary material, performance scores and countless audio documents (lectures, discussions, panels, live recordings, etc.), extending back to the earliest phase of the course, makes the archive particularly interesting and lends it notable breadth. Institutions comparable to the International Summer Course, located at increasingly recognizable and important intersection of theory and practice, teaching and research, and also between presentation and discourse, are difficult to find.

The history of the International Summer Course since 1946 is documented continuously in the IMD archive. The significance of its resources is undisputed, as is indicated by the reactions to the project "Im Zenit der Moderne. Die Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik Darmstadt 1946-1966," supported over several years by the German Research Foundation (DFG) and directed by the Berlin musicologist Hermann Danuser. However, the situation of the archive is increasingly precarious, especially from an archival perspective, because of its lack of infrastructure. The archive's entire material is kept on the IMD premises on the Nieder-Ramstädter Strasse in Darmstadt within a surface area of ca. 240 square meters, of which around 476 archive meters are available, and its storage means fall severely short of today's archival standards. Owing to the lack of financial resources, the material is in a state of critical erosion. Any fire or water damage to the IMD building would destroy the archive, as there are no backup copies of individual sections (except for the 1946-1978 audio archive, which was secured by the German Radio Archive in connection with the DFG project). Under these highly alarming circumstances, one of the central concerns for a new IMD director must not only be to emphasize the archive's significance, but also to find ways to rescue this exceptional store of material and make it accessible to the public. All external help to this end—especially financial help—is most welcome.

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