
Graphic Music Notation Translated for Movement



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The workshop session was organized by Iva Oplištilová, and held at HAMU on 27 November, 2011. Two dancers and two musicians participated. The aim was to introduce the concept of the musical graphic score to the dancers, and to explore different possibilities for the movement to interpret the scores, along with the musicians. Many scores were presented, representing just some of the many approaches possible with graphic notation, a compositional technique with a now long history in contemporary music dating to the 1950s. Simply put, graphic notation uses visual symbols and pictures outside the realm of traditional music notation to represent and inspire music and sound. The practice started with composers such as Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, Krzysztof Penderecki, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and is now used extensively throughout the world, often in combination with traditional notation. Graphic score symbols can mean very specific sounds, but as well they often have a broad improvisational scope, which means that graphic notation represents a theoretically unlimited area of possibility in between full traditional notation and free improvisation. Many composers have explored also the visual art possibilities of graphic scores – Sylvano Bussotti and

John Cage, for example, have produced many scores which can and do stand alone as visual works of art.

For the session at HAMU, Ms. Oplištilová brought along about 25 scores from several Czech composers, including Milan Adamčiak, Peter Graham, and Vlastislav Matoušek. Various styles were represented, from specific notation arranged in unique visual ways to completely abstract drawings.

We chose several of the compositions, and worked on various ways of interpreting them collaboratively. The musicians explained to the dancers how the symbols are interpreted from a sound perspective, and all discussed possible translations of the symbols from indicators of sound in space over time to indicators of movement in space over time. Many of the scores were quite open, leading to an extensive use of improvisation. As a graphic score moves more toward abstraction, the possibilities open up; one can choose to work within a particular stylistic area, or move toward non-idiomatic expression. In our case, as the musicians had much prior experience working in this manner, the session began with the sounds suggesting structures. Later, as the dancers became more familiar with the concepts, they found interesting

ways to interpret and structure the symbols. One unforeseen result for me was that in attempting to explain the symbols in terms that would make sense for movement, new ways of sound interpretation revealed themselves in a sort of feedback loop of ideas. It was clear that this is an area of interdisciplinary collaboration rich with possibility. As dance becomes more interested in working with improvisation, and with music in a more integral and equal way, and vice versa, we should see this type of sound and movement language exchange and expansion become a standard part of the educational process.

Experiment proběhl v rámci grantu *Živá hudba 2011* a na něj navázal v roce 2012 ještě dvoudenní workshop. Zájemci se mohou podívat na sestřihy videozáznamů na www.ziva-hudba.info