

isim international society for improvised music

ISIM Newsletter Summer 2009, Vol. 5, #1 Message from the President

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I was recently in Berlin, shortly after the city celebrated the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the infamous wall, speaking at the annual meeting of an organization called the Scientific and Medical



Network. SMN is one of several organizations that have been formed to offer a kind of “safe haven” for colleagues interested in areas of scientific inquiry that extend beyond conventional boundaries. Consciousness research, particularly that involving expanded noetic capacities, is a common theme in these circles, and I was invited to speak on my work on the creativity-consciousness connection. Improvisation provides a powerful lens through which this connection might be explored, and although I was one of the few individuals at the SMN meeting who is not a professional scientist, I was deeply impressed by both the interest in improvisation and the sophisticated kinds of questions on the topic that were posed by the attendees. Just as this city’s long-standing barrier between competing socio-cultural-political ideologies finally gave way to a union of great historical significance, improvisation cuts across seemingly disparate disciplinary boundaries and helps us penetrate to core aspects of human experience.

Those of us in the academic musical world know well another wall that, while showing signs of weakening, has yet to come down. This is the divide between the long-standing orientation at most schools in

European classical music and the rest of the musical world. Improvisation once again is a key connecting thread, and one of the basic premises of ISIM’s newly-formed Diversity in Musical Academe (DMA) project is to illuminate the capacity for improvisation to promote deeper kinds of engagement with all music. It is not a matter of genres in competition with one another but rather genres—and the infinite hybrid forms that defy categorization that increasingly define today’s musical landscape—in creative, synergistic confluence. A strong argument could be made that not only does the classical music world have everything to gain from a reclaiming of its improvisatory roots, but that this is essential to its very survival.

DMA will convene the first of several Think Tanks on this topic at the upcoming ISIM/UCSC conference/festival at the University of California Santa Cruz. Several panel discussions will also be devoted to this theme. I am happy to announce that funding has recently been secured from the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan to help support this project.

I presume most everyone has perused the fabulous website that Karlton Hester and his staff have created for the upcoming festival/conference. As you can see, this promises to be a truly memorable event and once again I cannot wait to meet many of you once more and be enriched by your ideas and music. Please be sure to sign up for the gala dinner on Saturday night if so inclined by contacting ISIM Conference Director Kate Olson at kate@isimprov.org. At \$25, it is a bargain considering the feast that is planned, and the camaraderie will be unbeatable.

Finally, I am happy to welcome three new members to the ISIM Board of Directors, with terms beginning next January. Jin Hi Kim is composer-in-residence with the New Haven Symphony. William Johnson is station manager at Temple University radio. Stephen Nachmanovitch, active in ISIM since its first days, is a violinist and author. I and the rest of the Board are excited to begin working with Jin Hi, Bill, and Steve and certain they will make significant contributions to the organization. I would also like to convey my and the Board’s most heartfelt thanks to Betty Anne Younker and Maud Hickey, whose terms are ending, for the wonderful enthusiasm and energy they have brought to ISIM. We will certainly miss them and hope they stay in the loop.

Ed Sarath

DIVERSITY IN MUSICAL ACADEME

Recent years have seen increasing attention devoted to expanding the demographic, intellectual, and creative horizons of the academic world to reflect more accurately the diversity of the broader society. If education is to prepare coming generations to address the unprecedented slate of economic, ecological, sociological and other challenges—and opportunities—of our times; the infinite spectrum of ideas, values, ways of knowing and being, pedagogical approaches, and modes of creative expression of the world's richly-varied populations must be harnessed in learning and research models. It is difficult to imagine an area that embodies these qualities of breadth, inclusiveness, and change more than the contemporary musical world. Integrating a vast spectrum of cultural, ethnic, racial, creative, technological, historical, geographical, epistemological and other perspectives; music is a robust vehicle for transcending most any boundary imaginable and thus assuming a leadership role in the diversification of the educational world.

Unfortunately, musical study, long oriented toward interpretive performance and analysis of European classical repertory and its offshoots as its praxial, aesthetic, and pedagogical core, has distanced itself from the ever-diverse musical landscape. Accordingly, the field not only poses obstacles to the broader diversity imperative, it arguably places its own future in jeopardy. This is not to ignore the coursework and programs in jazz, music technology, and world music that have sprung up at many schools over the past few decades. However, it is important to recognize that these areas are largely relegated to the academic fringes through curricular marginalization—they are generally excluded from the core curriculum and available largely as electives within an overflowing slate of conventional requirements that leave students little room to expand—as well as through organizational and cultural barriers. As a result, not only do students have difficulty gaining the diverse skill set needed to navigate the contemporary musical expanse—a particularly conspicuous problem for music education students—but a limited cross-cultural/ethnic/racial awareness is also perpetuated at a historical juncture where the need for such an awareness has never been more urgent.

At question is not the value of the European classical tradition—the richness and importance of which is beyond dispute—but the degree to which this heritage has predominated and precluded access to a multitude of other rich and important genres. A new model is needed that is rooted in both an expanded process scope, in which improvisation and composition are central modes of musical engagement for all students, and engagement with a broader range of musical sources. By expanding their creative horizons, technical skill base, and understanding of the inextricable link between music and culture, a diversity-driven paradigm of musical study will enable students to penetrate more deeply into whatever genres they encounter in their artistic growth. It will also bridge the ever-increasing gulf between musical study and today's highly dynamic and syncretic musical world.

Diversity in Musical Academe (DMA) has been formed under the auspices of the International Society for Improvised Music to work toward these ends. Through penetrating dialogue (including a series of Think Tanks), curricular innovations, and corresponding research and publications, DMA will engage faculty, administrators, students, and leading professional artists and visionaries in far-reaching deliberations that extend from highly-detailed curricular considerations to the ever-elusive mechanics of systemic, institutional change to issues pertaining to economic, ecological, and societal sustainability. In short, DMA ultimately views Diversity as not only a demographic, intellectual and artistic imperative within the confines of a single field; but as a gateway to entirely new vistas of human creative development that may inform all aspects of educational and life practice.

Diversity in Musical Academe Think Tank Personnel (10/09)

Karlton Hester, Jazz Studies, University of California Santa Cruz

India Cooke, Mills College

Ed Sarath, Jazz Studies University of Michigan

Geri Allen, Jazz Studies, University of Michigan

Kyra Gaunt, Anthropology and Black Music Studies, City University of New York

Cheryl Banks-Smith, Dance, Pasadena City College

Avotcja Jiltoniro, Independent artist, radio announcer, KPFA, KPOO, Berkeley

Christopher Waterman, Dean, School of the Arts and Architecture, UCLA

Lester Monts, Senior Vice Provost, University of Michigan

Jin Hi Kim, Composer-in-Residence, New Haven Symphony

Nelson Harrison, independent artist/scholar

Larry Ridley, Jazz Studies, Rutgers University

Maud Hickey, Music Education, Northwestern University

Terese Tuohey, Music Education, Wayne State University

Stephanie Phillips, Composition, Texas State University

Bill Johnson, Managing Director, WRTI-FM, Temple University

Marilyn Nelson, Poet Laureate, State of Connecticut, Professor of Poetry, University of Connecticut

Pamela Espeland, Jazz writer



Dear ISIM Board, Advisory Council, and Members,

I am incredibly pleased and excited to be embarking on the adventure that is the next ISIM Annual Conference. This year the conference is in Santa Cruz, hosted by Karlton Hester and the University of California, Santa Cruz. The combination of the conference this year with the UCSC festival allows conference participants and attendees to see some world class musicians, among them ISIM's own Karlton Hester and Geri Allen. This year's theme: Improvisation, Diversity and Change promises to be the springboard for deep and engaging discussions, and we've set aside time for multiple panel discussions on the topic to facilitate just that. I look forward to seeing all of you at the conference!

Sincerely,

Kate Olson

Interview with Joelle Leandre

KO: How is improvisation incorporated into your work, your creative process and other parts of your life?

JL: The fast answer is, I think we improvise every day. We improvise; this action is so natural. Everyday we improvise. I think I've improvised since I was so young. It's natural to take your instrument . . . first we make music, we go deep to learn, to understand an instrument; sax, bass, voice, piano, it needs a long process, it's always a work in progress. This is a natural organization in your body; take your instrument and play something that comes from you. It comes from your body, your emotion, your brain. For me it is natural, and I think I could say now that I've been improvising for 30 years, maybe more, it's a part of my life. It's natural. It's because the institution, the conservatory, refused to take this music, this art. They put it in the corner. I don't know why, it's so natural. In the past the musicians in the 14th, 16th, 18th century . . . it was natural for a musician to be an improviser and a composer. I read that in the 17th century, a good musician was not recognized if he was not first an improviser. All the good musicians improvised. The fact is, you can improvise in jazz, in rap, in classical music, but this is another thing: just to improvise, to do what's happening in real time because it's in real time. In this moment you take your tool, you play some music without any style. This is totally a freedom we have. We can improvise in the style of New Orleans music, or in the style of Elizabethan music, or in the style of Johann Sebastian Bach. This is another story, we call idiom. But without idiom, you play what you are.

KO: When you were first learning to play bass, did you have trouble with finding other musicians that wanted to improvise with you, or within the institution, did you feel like improvisation wasn't important?

JL: That's a good question. I feel when I started the bass, I started very young, less than ten years old. I was so small, and in this stage you follow the teacher, you monkey, you do that, you do also that. You finish your studies first, in the beginning, after you go to high school. Like the conservatoire in Paris. But nobody in this time proposed a teacher, I just learned by myself. I listened to a lot of jazz. I understood by myself. When you start classical you have this kind of, you could say, power. The maestro, he knows more than you because you're the pupil. And nobody says "Hey, take your bass, and just play!" They could say that, but they don't. And even now, it has changed a little bit, less than 20 years, they include the jazz class. But even in jazz, we improvise in a certain style. But I don't improvise in a jazz style. I could, but it's not my roots, first, and I have a lot of . . . recognisance, I don't know in English, it's not my music, and I understood the jazz people. I've listened to a lot of jazz, live jazz, listened to bebop. I remember in Paris, different clubs, I was just in the audience. I understood in jazz, first it is an instrumental music. Second, I don't know in the history of jazz . . . without any musicians in jazz, after the blues, gospel, where it started. Where even now any musicians, continuing to play their instruments, they ask me a lot of questions. Because in Europe, you have the composer who just composes, and you have the performer. And I don't like that. Why does this kind of creation, to write something else on the paper is just for composers?

But I was bored, and I learned by myself after 20 years of classical music (I was in symphony orchestra or chamber orchestra), because I'm bass player, we have this beautiful but poor repertory instrument. Too much role and rules in music. Too much, I repeat, roles and rules in music. This is all so tiring. We are in the 21st century now. Why only this kind of big figure called the composer? This kind now is an obsolete position. Everyone is creative. Not with all this hierarchy, "I'm a composer." What does that mean? Because you put the pencil on the paper? What do you think about oral music?

This is very important. When I was in this club, quite young, 18 or 19 years old, I looked; sometimes the music can be seen, Eric Satie said, Mr. Eric Satie

(call dropped, picked up again below)

This interview, I could speak with you all day 2 or 3 days, night and day. I am 58 years old. I have played so many musics. You cannot imagine, for 35 years in the world, I've met so many people, not only musicians, but theater people, dancers, poets. Life is a pure adventure, just meeting. I've met so many people, also to read a sentence in a book, music, life, to go in the street and look what's happening in the street. Just to come back in time . . . When I was around 20 years old, I listened to jazz people, jazz men mostly, of course, this is another question; where are the women of this music? That's why I could keep you here for a week. I see these people and they play and they look so intense, deep . . . with this jubilation. Jubilation to play, they make music.

So just to try to explain, why I improvise; I remember always I've improvised. I was young and I took my bass, and okay, I played concertos and scales. And I just played for playing, for joy. It's a pleasure to improvise first. I don't understand why, again and again it's not in teaching. I was a visiting professor at Mills college to talk about that. I received the Darius Milhaud share for the fall semester in 2002, 2004, and 2006. I had more than 20 musicians in my class, and I had some composers, because for me it's not a big difference. When you improvise you compose also, spontaneous. That's why all my work is around small bands, duo, trio, quartet, maximum. Because after quartet, there is too much ego. Because we have to listen deeply to listen. To understand how when we improvise we don't invent, we're just making music together. But it is exactly the same: structure, forms, repetition, dynamics, sounds, memories, talking about memory when we improvise. It's not just playing to play. "Oh, I improvise!" What do you mean, you improvise? We are totally responsible when we improvise. Just free improvisation, I'm talking about. Not when you improvise on the chords, that is idiomatic. Without an idiom you can just listen and make music together. Of course, we have a different culture. Another musician has . . . but to play with another musician, it's like you become the other. You go to the other and you become the other. You say "Hey man, hey woman, who are you?" And we cook. We make a cake, we make a soup, and we put some ingredients inside, and we try the best to make something else that has a form or balance, organization. This is improvisation, but the action is totally natural. And it is a pity that in this century we are . . . This thing is not fluid, you know, and just free, in a way. Probably, I don't know in America. I don't want to talk about America, because you have jazz. In America even the classical music is jazz, in a way. But here in Europe, all of these conservatories, conservatory equals conservative. You see? They want to keep this hierarchy. "I'm the teacher, you're the pupil, so shut up, and play." I speak like that because it's my age, also. I understood more and more slowly. Life is also a work in progress. Passions and passion. I understood a lot by listening to jazz people. And my reflection and my thoughts now, my concept of understanding; more and more myself in my life. I think musicians easily have this trilogy: improviser, performer, composer, any order. It depends if you want to take the time to write something down on the paper, or if you just talk with somebody, or if you say nothing and you learn after years and years, and you take the time to understand the processes. Improvisation is the last music that is more human. You care about the musicians with whom you play. That's why for me, I don't play in the big band for example. Because in the big band you need again all this hierarchy. The composer who arrives with the paper, you need the music stand, and you play the music from who? You play some tunes, I understand that, but that's not my stuff. I like this work, not easy, intense, but with passions, to understand what we are. The result, the sounds, the music results are really for me like compositions, spontaneous compositions. That's why I repeat again: I'm not against anything, but I don't believe we can play after 6 or 8 or ten musicians. It's too difficult. There's a kind of chaos. But if you go into sounds, phraseology, to repetition, what those instruments do, to memorize to provoke something else, to have fun . . . But not totally free, free music means nothing. That's why I contest this appellation in Europe. We are not free. How to be free with your sax? It's impossible. You have to care about the breath, about the fingers, you have to care about a lot of things. We are not free, especially musicians. But improvisation is a language. It's an art. L'art d'improviser. It takes years and years. And so the first question, yes. How do I include improvisation. It's everyday. If you have time, if you're an artist, we have time. We do some business, we practice a little bit, and we think, and we have a silence, and we think of what we are, what I did last week with these musicians. Or you listen to your CD . . . It's a big work, and we have the time for that. So when I told you these roles and these rules. Because I am a bass player I had a lot of questions about why the bassist is always a sideman or sidewoman, why no repertory, why so fat and low, and heavy, and these rules. Why is the sax like the violin in classical music, has the song? Why not the bass, for example? The bass provoked in me a lot of questions. Is it political? of course it's political. Because the conservatory, also this kind of culture later; we have to listen. We have to invent other things, we have to provoke other things.



New Board Member Biographies

Jin Hi Kim



Jin Hi Kim is highly acclaimed as both an innovative komungo (Korean fourth century fretted board zither) virtuoso and for her cross-cultural compositions. Kim has introduced the Korean indigenous komungo for the first time into Western contemporary music scene through her wide array of compositions for chamber ensemble, orchestra, avant-garde, cross-cultural ensemble, multi-media, and avant-garde jazz improvisations. Kim is "Meet The Composer Music Alive" Composer-In-Residence with New Haven Symphony Orchestra for 2009-2011 seasons. Kim has performed her own works at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Smithsonian Freer Gallery of Art, Asia Society, Royal Festival Hall (London), Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), Expo Zaragoza (Spain), and many significant new music festivals around the world. Kim's komungo solo works represent an evolution of the instrument into the twenty-first century. Her new komungo compositions are imbued with meditative and vivid energy that makes it mesmerizing. Kim has co-designed the world's only electric komungo and created live interactive pieces with a MIDI computer system. Using MAX/MSP, the komungo sound is processed through a personal computer program in live that is triggered by MIDI foot pedal. Staying true to the nature of the instrument, her solo interweaves from old timeless mind to space-age blips. In 1986 Kim was first discovered by avant-garde guitarist Henry Kaiser and has plunged into improvisation scene. In a decade of creative activity, she has improvised with many prominent figures in new music and avant-garde jazz including Elliott Sharp, Henry Kaiser, Bill Frisell, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Joelle Leandre James Newton, Eugene Chadbourne, Oliver Lake, William Parker, Hans Reichel, and Gerry Hemingway. Kim's autobiography *Komungo Tango*, a 25 years journey of komungo collaborations with master musicians around the world, was published in S. Korea in 2007. Kim has developed a series of compositions, *Living Tones* --The timbral persona of each tone generated is treated with an abiding respect, as its philosophical

mandate from Buddhism, a reverence for the 'life' of a tone, the color and nuance granted each articulation from Korean Shamanism. Kim's *Living Tones* compositions including komungo were performed by Kronos Quartet, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Xenakis Ensemble (Holland), Kairos String Quartett (Berlin), American Composers Orchestra, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, Stanford Symphony Orchestra, Key West Symphony, KBS Symphony (S. Korea) and many others. In South Korea, Kim is highly respected for her role of cultural ambassador and her invention of the electric Komungo. In 2007 an interview about her electric komungo was broadcast on Arirang-TV and MBC-TV in conjunction with Korean Traditional Craft Exhibition at United Nation. In 2006 Kim's electric komungo solo performance was broadcast by YTN National TV. In 2003 She was featured in the MBC-TV broadcast of the film *100 Years of Sanjo* In 2001 National Broadcasting System (KBS-TV) produced an hour documentary film on Kim's musical contribution.

Stephen Nachmanovitch



Stephen Nachmanovitch performs and teaches internationally as an improvisational violinist, and at the intersections of music, dance, theater, and multimedia arts. He is the author of *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. Born in 1950, he studied at Harvard and the University of California, where he earned a Ph.D. in the History of Consciousness for an exploration of William Blake. His mentor was the anthropologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson. He has taught and lectured widely in the United States and abroad on creativity and the spiritual underpinnings of art. In the 1970's he was a pioneer in free improvisation on violin, viola and electric violin. He has presented master classes and workshops at many conservatories and universities. He has had numerous appearances on radio, television, and at music and theater festivals. He has collaborated with other artists in media including music, dance, theater, and film, and has developed programs melding art, music, literature, and computer technology. He has published articles in a variety of fields since 1966, and has created computer software including *The World Music Menu* and *Visual Music Tone Painter*.

He lives with his wife and two sons in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Bill Johnson



An artist, entrepreneur, and public radio executive, Bill Johnson's career has many facets. As a trumpet player and member of Hesterian Musicism he has recorded six albums with the group. As co-founder and managing partner of African-American Innovators he pursues a progressive education and economic empowerment agenda for artists and other creative professionals. As station manager of WRTI-FM in Philadelphia, one of the largest public radio stations in the country, he is at the heart of the issues challenging jazz and classical music broadcasting and public media in America. As former executive director of the African-American Museum in Philadelphia he worked to broaden the reach of African-American artists in the school system and the public at large. As a young executive in downtown Manhattan he learned to deal with the pressure of being responsible for processing over \$100 million a year in money.

His experience in arts management, corporate America, the performing arts, higher education, information technology, board service, and fundraising have given him a unique perspective on the interrelatedness of his work. He uses this interdisciplinary approach to define new solutions to difficult problems. His current projects include modeling and

building an online community for creative learning, teaching, collaboration, and experimentation, exploiting new technologies such as HD Radio and Internet2 for public radio as well as tackling the information technology challenges and opportunities presented by digitized music, and working with fellow artists to explore alternative sustainable economic models for the music popularly known as jazz.

Bill has received the 40 Under 40 Minority Executive Award, recognizing him as one of the top young executives in Philadelphia. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in policy analysis from Cornell University and lives in Glen Mills, PA with his wife and six year old daughter.



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Member News:

NEW DUES FORMAT

ISIM has not been immune to the fiscal challenges that have been afflicting society at large and we are forced to make some changes in our dues structure.

First of all, we are raising our dues for the first time since the inception of the organization.

Beginning in January, 2010:

Regular membership will be \$90.

Student membership will be \$45.

Associate membership will remain at \$250 and we would like to encourage those of you associated with academic institutions or other kinds of organizations to join at the associate member level.

Why the increases? An important reason is that conference costs have left us in the red the past few years and when faced with the choice between charging a conference fee for presenters—which is not an uncommon practice among organizations—we have opted to raise dues instead. We hope these increases do not pose undue hardship for anyone and feel like the amounts are still not inordinate.

A second change in our dues structure is that membership cycles will run according to the time of year you pay, not according to the calendar year as is currently the policy. Therefore, if you join in February, your dues will be payable each February. We will send an email reminder when your payment is due.

Conference Update:

Registration for non-performing/presenting members of the ISIM Conference is \$100 per person, which includes admission to all conference activities. Passes to individual performances/presentations may be purchased for \$10 each. Registration will take place on site in Santa Cruz starting at 9am on Thursday, December 3rd. The fee is waived for conference presenters.

Parking passes will also be available for \$18, and are good for the whole weekend. They can be purchased during registration by check or cash.

Please continue to check the festival/conference website at <http://music.ucsc.edu/improvisation/> for updated information as well as travel assistance.

University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance

Department of Jazz and Contemporary Improvisation Studies

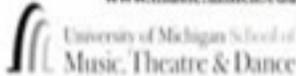
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Jazz Faculty

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- ROBERT HURST, *horn, conduct*
- MARK KIRSCHENMANN, *Creative Arts Orchestra*
- BILL LUCAS, *trumpet*
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- ED SABATHI, *contemporary improvisation, creativity & consciousness, conduct*
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