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Conference

Explaining Universe – Systems, Humans and Arts.

Dedicated to 100th anniversary of Udo Kasemets

November 16–17, 2019

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Organ Hall (A-404)

Graduate School of Culture Studies and Arts

ABSTRACTS

Immo Mikkelsen

Globally-thinking musician and a human being with Estonian origin: Udo Kasemets as part of broader Estonian musicscape

As Udo Kasemets had Canadian citizenship and his rise to worldwide recognition took place through Canada, his person and work in music can much more easily be connected with Canadian and American music scene than Estonian one. But Kasemets was born in Estonia, he started music studies in Estonia and most likely he got first impulse for his restless search to find answer to the question “what music is?” (his own words) in Estonia before he left his birthland in 1944 as a war refugee.

In 2006, Kasemets visited Estonia first time after more than six decades. He was invited to present his music at the festival Estonian Music Days. The trip was a bit surprise for those who knew him in Canada, as he backed away from the Estonian community there long ago. He was known as a man with global reach of thought, his closest friends were not Estonians. Nevertheless, he came to Tallinn, spoke surprisingly good Estonian here and at some moments (of weakness?) got sentimental about his roots.

His unconventional interview in Tallinn can be seen as an attempt to explain Estonian-speaking people his ideas about music. It was like the old man wanted to express some conclusions of his long search, and he also tried to show the foundation his own music-making was based on. It is possible that Udo Kasemets was and still is much more connected to Estonian music in general than it might seem.

Jeremy Strachan

“From Whence Cometh He?”: Udo Kasemets and Experimental Music in 1960s Toronto

This guest lecture will outline the impact and influence of Udo Kasemets on experimental music practices in 1960s Toronto. Drawing from research conducted for the author’s doctoral



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thesis on Kasemets, this lecture presents an overview of Kasemets' important work as a concert organizer, critic, and composer during the first decades following his emigration to Canada in

1951. Upon his arrival, Kasemets quickly became an important figure in the small circle of modernist postwar composers in Canada. During the late 50s and early 60s, Kasemets earned a reputation for his trenchant music criticism lamenting Toronto's suffocating conservatism—"From Whence Cometh He?," wrote a member of the city's outraged social elite in response to an unfavourable review of a beloved pianist. Upon his discovery of *Silence* in a Greenwich Village bookshop in 1961, Kasemets began a decade-long project of introducing Toronto audiences to Cagean experimentalism and mixed-media. This lecture will present Kasemets' main projects during that time: *Men, Minds, and Music*, the so-called "first" experimental concert series in Toronto, from 1963; *The Isaacs Gallery Mixed Media Concerts* of 1965–67; and the *Canavanguard* series of graphic scores, which most forcefully illustrated the influences of McLuhan and Cage on Kasemets' thought. This lecture also offers thoughts on the lasting impact made by Kasemets in Canada, beyond Toronto and the 1960s.

Theodore Parker

North American Experimental Music: ONCE in Ann Arbor

The context of North American experimental music is often discussed with keen focus on the contributions made by John Cage. However, by the early 1960s several strands of experimentalism could be found across the United States. Of course, naturally individuals gravitated towards the use of graphic scores, live electronics, and multi-media presentations. Yet, the motivation for such activities may not have been so rigidly influenced or concerned with the theories and propositions put forth by Cage. This presentation will focus in on one particular group of composers known as the ONCE collective. The group arranged concert series and promoted new music in the unusual area of Ann Arbor, Michigan. Furthermore, the group was directly involved in working with Udo Kasemets and served as an inspiration for his own activities in and around Toronto, Canada.

Tze Yeung Ho

Tracing the Footsteps of a Diaspora Composer: Udo Kasemets in Canada

Sharing the diaspora experience as a composer in Canada with Udo Kasemets, my presentation focuses on two institutions which we have inevitably been tied to as composers: the Canadian League of Composers (CLC, established in 1951) and the Canadian Music Centre (CMC, established in 1959). These two institutions were created in the period of post-war Canada, where the country was creating its own national identity within the arts. Today, these establishments bear the mission to promote the works and rights of Canadian composers. The current directors of these two establishments (Matthew Fava of CMC and Kathryn Knowles of CLC) are interviewed to discuss their visions of the past and the future. They reflect on the institutions' functions at the time of their conception (also when Kasemets settled in Toronto) and how they differ from what they have become today. Furthermore, this presentation will discuss how these institutions have affected the lives and careers of diaspora and immigrant composers in Canada since their beginnings.



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Taavi Kerikmäe

Problematics of interpreting open scores

What is an open score? What is the role of the interpreter in performing open scores? Is it any different from working with a standard notation fixed composition? What is the contribution needed from the performer? What does "to interpret" mean in this context? Can we talk about HIP while dealing with early open scores?

Performing open scores rises a lot of questions since there are no standard tactics to approach them as they can be very different from each other and might need a different way to deal with them.

In any case it is crucial to try to analyze and understand the nature of the very composition, the role of the "openness" in it and the balance between preparation and real time decisions while performing it.

Giovanni Albini

A 'mechanical duologue': science and systems in the art of Udo Kasemets

What is a system and how the concept can be related to art? How and why scientific notions merge with artistic ones, especially during the 20th Century? These questions will be addressed by presenting some ideas and music scores of Udo Kasemets. In a 2002 interview, he stated: "Something new had to be found. What I do now, how I think about it now? [...] everything was possible. But you have to find a disciplined way to deal with it, because there is so much of it, too much of it. [...] Everything is available, so you have to find ways to order it. [...] Some of nature works in very aggressive ways that are not conducive to our everyday patterns. By understanding it [...] we can use them to our advantage. It's very analytical."

Ragne Kõuts-Klemm

Humans and technology: Inspired by Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan was a philosopher and public intellectual who influenced wide audiences with his ideas on media and technologies in Canada in the second half of the 20th century. His concept of technologies as the "extensions of man" and search for environments where a human can live in "sensory balance" had impact on Udo Kasemets's musical searches as well. In the focus of the presentation would not be the heritage of Udo Kasemets, but rather the inspiration McLuhan gave and can still give in searching for answers to questions on relations between humans and technology. Marshall McLuhan, one of the most famous representatives of the Toronto School in media and communication studies has still many followers to this day. The presentation will thematize the developments of digital technologies from the view point of individuals and audiences. The concerning questions are: What will happen with sensory balance and individual identity in a digitalized environment with algorithmic control? Can music and art be more important than ever to balance the technology-saturated everyday-lives?



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Andres Kurg *to be updated*

Mani Mazinani *to be updated*