

2015

## NuMuzArt: an original, multi-sensory, creative experience

Tori Christine Ovel  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright © 2015 Tori Christine Ovel

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt>



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Ovel, Tori Christine, "NuMuzArt: an original, multi-sensory, creative experience" (2015). *Honors Program Theses*. 232.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/hpt/232>

This Open Access Honors Program Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Program Theses by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

**Offensive Materials Statement:** Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.

NUMUZART:

AN ORIGINAL, MULTI-SENSORY, CREATIVE EXPERIENCE

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

Tori Christine Ovel  
University of Northern Iowa

May 2015

## Part I: The Genesis of the Idea

NuMuzArt grew from a small seed planted in my brain over the summer of 2014, when I attended a few summer composition programs to experience and learn more about my compositional craft. While at the Charlotte Music Festival, I participated in a conversation about the sterile nature of music recitals in the academic and concert music world. This conversation stuck with me and became a no-brainer subject for my honors thesis. I would research the concert music world and construct an alternative which would solve a few of my personal vendettas against the standard recital format, while retaining a “serious about music” quality, that is to say, keeping the event something that those readily immersed in the fine arts atmosphere could still appreciate.

My aspiration to create a new concert experience is in line with several past and present composers. In fact, several composers share my concern with a disinterested audience separated by physical space from a performing ensemble. In an essay by Claude Debussy, written in 1901, titled “Conversation with M. Croche,” Debussy comments, through a conversation with his alter ego, about the “hostility in the concert room audience” (Simms 6). He discusses the expressions of “drugged boredom [and] indifference” found rampant in the audience. Debussy goes on to talk about how a real intake of beauty rarely results in applause, as is so forced in the concert hall (Simms 6). There are a socially constructed set of behaviors in the public concert that are not conducive to drawing in new audiences. If that were not the case, I believe concert halls would consistently be packed with eager symphony aficionados. Elliot Schwartz and Daniel Godfrey have pinpointed exactly this issue in the current concert format: it is “replete with axioms and assumptions that, [for composers], are too confining artistically... For most concert goers, it goes without saying that music is performed on a stage or in some other space

set apart from the audience. A certain etiquette is attached to the tuning of an orchestra; it is assumed that audience members may converse and applaud only at certain junctures.” (38).

The Fifth House Ensemble, a professional music ensemble based in Chicago, was in residence at the University of Northern Iowa this past October. They offered a variety of workshops ranging from music education to the business of music and the creation of new concert experiences. At a workshop titled Putting Your Audience Center Stage, they explained how an orchestra concert was like a bad date; someone planned the duration of your time together, they ordered a very specialized meal for you (programmed the concert music) and invited you to read the menu (program notes) if you would like to know more information about what you are eating (listening to). This proved to be a very eye opening revelation and served as a catalyst for my interest in creating a more inviting concert experience. There is a slight deviation between our ideals, for I do not wish to create music to comply with the audience aesthetic. I aspire to appeal to a newer audience by disposing of the old recital habits while still programming my own compositions. I recently attended a recital that was rigidly formal. The performer did not speak to the audience once during the concert. Despite the high quality of the music, I found my own musically educated mind wandering and my feet to be restless in their stationary position. I remember very clearly being intrigued about the genesis of the last piece and found myself desiring information about the composer, which was not given.

In my research into the area of public concerts, I found readings related to a style of concert called the house concert, which is sometimes referred to as a salon. In an article written by Anne Ku, she defines the house concert or salon as a “live musical performance given in someone’s home. In comparison with a musical performance in a concert hall, a house concert is a much more intimate atmosphere. You can speak with the musician before and after the

performance, and sit close enough to really see and hear how they play... and the hosts usually have drinks and light snacks for the guests... In any case everyone wins: musicians have an audience and some income in a comfortable setting, guests have a chance to hear high-quality live music up close, and the hosts get to enjoy it all without even leaving home” (2). There is an important distinction involved in a house concert, when compared to a public concert, where the audience member becomes a guest. An invitation to join the experience, rather than purchasing entrance to a public concert, creates a relational atmosphere in which the guest becomes part of the experience instead of simply observing the actions.

Another unusual concert format comes from “private orchestras” which were chiefly common around 1840. Private orchestras would provide concerts in the concert hall, “but also in large restaurants and similar establishments and outside during the summer” (Ringer 132). Coined as open-air concerts, they were able to expand the audience reach to those who would not come to the concert hall. The concerts gave students and citizens the opportunity to hear music by great composers and afforded student performers the opportunity to gain experience by playing works which used a traditional orchestra (Ringer 133). In allowing their music to be performed in non-traditional spaces, they were able to reach out to new, less sophisticated audiences.

Schwartz and Godfrey write extensively about the ritual involved in the traditional concert space. This ritual involves “printed programs, the performance space with its raised platform... the ban on moving about, speaking, applauding, eating or drinking while the music is in progress.” There are even obligations on the part of the performer to be present at a certain time, perform the music in a certain prescribed order, and a restraint on their freedom to move about (297). Several composers have created pieces which specifically challenge common rituals of performance, such as John Cage’s *HPSCHD*. This piece utilizes a multitude

of media other than acoustic music; slides, film, light projections, and amplification work together to create the five hour production. Due to its enormous length, the audience is encouraged to come and go as they please and to move about freely in the venue—a large public space, not a concert hall (Schwartz and Godfrey 229). Phillip Glass's composition *Einstein on the Beach* is another example of a five hour composition, during which the audience is allowed to wander off (Schwartz and Godfrey 452). Performance ritual is engrained in our practice of concert music. For some performances, I understand why this might be important, but for a recital put on for my friends, family and mentors, I do not believe that this ritual must be followed.

The Fifth House Ensemble's workshop, in addition to offering insight into the usual orchestra experience, explained the concept of creating an ideal audience member. After figuring out who they were trying to attract to their concerts, they began creating concert experiences that focused on the preferences of the specific type of audience they hoped to attract. The Fifth House Ensemble is only one group trying to generate a newer audience. The Sacramento Symphony started an outreach program in the 1990s with the goal of increasing interest of new listeners. They formed concerts around world-music traditions, coffee houses and chamber music, and movie theaters with a program that brought together several styles of music. With all of these concert series, the ticket cost was kept low, the attire was informal, and the musicians were able to mingle with the audience after the performance (Sigurjonsson 267).

After completing this research into the history of my idea, I set to work crafting a methodology and a moderately strict timeline to insure success with my project goals. The three main areas I wanted to change were set-up of space for performances, duration and purpose of space in-between pieces, and creating a more relaxed atmosphere for both the

audience and performers. While my third area was deeply affected by the setup of the space for performance, it also had everything to do with audience expectations of the event.

The elements I was bringing to NuMuzArt manifested themselves right away while I was researching the idea. I wanted to create a multi-sensory experience so that, in today's multi-tasking age, there would be lots to experience with the recital, rather than just the sound of the pieces. I decided to collaborate with artists to bring visual art to be displayed alongside my music. Finding myself easily inspired by music and art, I decided it would be worthwhile to have an interactive art table set up in case anyone needed to relieve their muses. The reception was destined to be available during the concert with this multi-sensory concept. Since one of my issues with the standard recital was the lack of communication with the audience before performance, I knew I would have to give context and genesis spiels before each piece. But then I thought, what if the pieces were staggered in their performance so that people had an opportunity to talk amongst themselves or move about the space? With this idea came one about allowing people to come and go throughout the space as they desired and need to, similar to John Cage's HPSCHD. Because of this staggered plan, I felt I needed to have a sizable program to accommodate for the length of time that a true open house style event necessitates. Therefore, I set my compositional output goal at 15 pieces of music. I'll admit this was a rather arbitrarily picked number, but I felt that five pieces per hour would fill up the time to the required amount and still leave precious space between works.

## **Part II: Actualization, Planning Meets the Deadline**

Armed with these ideas, I set to reserve a recital date. This crazy plan of mine seemed to call for ample set up and tear down time, so my aim was to secure both the 6pm and 8pm recital times for one date in Davis Hall in the Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center. Because of this limitation, the latest date I could obtain was February 23rd. It did not take long for me to

realize that, with the initial goal of an April date, that February was much too soon to accomplish all I had hoped to. To be brief about this near tragedy, I was able to move locations to Threehouse, a Wesley foundation off campus, and secure April 12th from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The main goal was to create a new concert experience that could be built and expanded upon. One of the very important sub-goals I had was to be so organized throughout the process that none of my collaborators would hesitate to join my efforts in the future. Since an undergraduate composition program is about learning the process of writing for and working with musicians, it seems that many musicians are easily frustrated with the lack of organization involved with our studio-wide recitals. I wanted to be very conscious of the time I was asking of my artists and musicians.

For the art collaboration, I sent out a call for art in November. The call contained a brief summary of the thesis project and five pieces of information regarding the necessary information about time, place, and set up process.

The musician recruiting was a little different. With the artists I simply sent out an email asking if they were interested, and several of them responded favorably. For the musicians, since I needed specific instruments and groups, I asked for their help in person. First, I had to organize which pieces I wanted to present, so I crafted an Excel spreadsheet. I created a table with the following information: piece title, approximate duration, instrument 1 followed by performer through instrument 4, and a category for any extra or bonus information needed. I only allowed myself to move pieces into this table once they were completed and ready to distribute. The first six pieces I listed were things I had already composed but had not yet had the opportunity to share with many others. The subsequent six pieces were composed between the end of the fall semester and March 6th. I was aware of my instrumentalists'



playing abilities, so I set a goal of distributing pieces about six weeks out from the recital. I felt this would be plenty of time for their aptitude, while keeping them from stressing out about preparing for my recital in addition to their school work. All of the pieces met this goal, with the exception of one that I composed over spring break. This piece was created to fill a hole created by one of my musicians who did not particularly enjoy the duet I had written the previous semester. The spreadsheet became one of my most valuable tools for this project. I highlighted the performer information in a light blue if they were my ideal performer and changed it to a light orange once they had confirmed their ability to participate. I used it to keep track of part and score distribution, confirm artists, track financial matters related to NuMuzArt, assemble the performance order, and keep other notes.

I collaborated with a friend of mine, Kathy Roling who works in the field of graphic design in order to create a marketable image for NuMuzArt. She designed post cards, posters, locational signs, and put together the paper program information for the audience members. The scope of the event required more than just a one-page listing of the piece titles and instrumentations. I asked for a color cover that could function as a poster when opened flat as a neat little take home memorabilia of the event. The first page in the booklet had the title "*What the HECK did I just get myself into?!*" with the goal of informing the audience about the general procedure of the recital. I used this page to explain the new format and audience expectations in a witty, light hearted way. Following that information was a table of contents, and then musician names and instruments, information about the artists, my biography, biographies of key contributors to the event (my assistant, my graphic designer, and my videographer), a concert performance order, and a special thanks section for people who had really helped me bring NuMuzArt into existence. I began collecting program information in early March. Since I was working with about 40 college students, I wanted to make sure I was giving them time to

communicate their thoughts and not hurrying through the process. The information about the artists was written by each of the artists, so I would not assume blame for errors in that part of the program. Further, I kept a consistent chain of emails asking for artists' and musicians' corrections, which resulted in the programs being printed flawlessly. In addition to a paper program, I uploaded the information to a website called Appypie.com to create a smartphone application that audience members could download while at the recital. It had all of the same information as the physical programs. The concept was to exploit the idea that many audience members would have their phones available, so printing costs could be saved by utilizing their devices. Kathy designed a business card with a QR code linking to a page on my website with downloading instructions.

I followed my proposal timeline and managed to put everything in place within my original deadlines. I sent out postcards to family and mentors one month before the event, printed posters over spring break and put them up downtown a full two weeks before the event. I made sure to consistently check in with my ensemble members. In the initial email of information (after I had secured their help in person), I requested that ensembles attempt to coordinate their own rehearsals whenever possible. I programmed a total of 12 different works for a variety of ensemble types. As it would be nearly impossible for me to coordinate their schedules and mine together for every rehearsal, I explained that I would be available to sit in on at least one rehearsal if they let me know when they were. This took a lot of trust on my end in my musicians to fulfill their end of the collaboration. Fortunately, all of these musicians were my friends and colleagues which meant it was very easy to contact them or see them in class and inquire about the rehearsals of the pieces.

After arranging for performers and composing the music, I needed to figure out a way to order the pieces to facilitate conversation space between them. I knew this was something I

wanted to be planned out both for my knowledge, and so the musicians could better plan their arrival, without the audience to feeling as though they were locked into a schedule. Another aspect I wanted to include in order to support the idea of the audience milling about was to include a variety of performance areas. After looking at the ensemble types, three areas of performance became clear: piano and percussion set, free set, and quartet set. The piano and percussion set would be used for any pieces that needed piano accompaniment or had a percussive aspect (my percussion equipment had to be borrowed from Waterloo Schools, but that is quite a long story). I set up the percussion to be a part of the set up the entire recital so that no one would have to move large keyboard instruments through the crowd. The free set was just a collection of stands for any duets, quintets, or traditionally standing ensembles. Finally, the quartet set up was used for traditionally sitting ensembles such as the clarinet trio and saxophone quartet.

When devising the order of pieces, I tried to accomplish two ideas: I wanted anyone who was performing in more than one piece to have his or her pieces within the same hour so he or she would not be obligated to stay the entire recital, and I desired a balance of *weird* to *pretty* so as to not disengage the audience members who may not like or appreciate dissonant music. Armed with these ideals, I created another table of organization:

Start Time	Approx End Time	in between	Piece	Instrumet #	Inst. Type	Location	approx. # of stand
2:10pm-2:15pm	2:15pm-2:20pm	10 minutes	Permission to Cross	4	Saxophones	Quartet	4
2:30pm-2:35pm	2:35pm-2:40pm	10 minutes	Crouton Mood	2	Piano/Clar	Piano	2
2:50pm	2:53pm	6 minutes	Momma Don't Waste	2	Flute/Viola	Free	2
3:00pm-3:05pm	3:04pm-3:10pm	5-10 minutes	Episodes of ( )	3	Sax/Perc	Piano	4
3:15pm-3:20pm	3:18pm-3:23pm	~ 6 minutes	Count(er) Productive	3	Clar trio	Quartet	3 or 6
3:30pm	3:36pm	4 minutes	Intriguing Whites	3	Mar, Clar, Vio	Piano	4 or 6
3:40pm	3:45pm	5 minutes	Wintermoon	1	Dancer	other	0
3:50pm	3:56pm	11 minutes	What D'ya Call it XIV	5	Saxophones	Free	5
4:05pm-4:10pm	4:08pm-4:13pm	~ 7 minutes	ReRouting	1	Trombone	Free	1
4:20pm	4:26pm	~ 9 minutes	Dear to me, Dearest	5	Fl/Flg/FH/Sa/N	Quartet	5
4:35pm	4:40pm	5-10 minutes	Love's Philosophy	2	Piano/voice	Piano	1
4:45pm-4:50pm			Fanfare for Tap Water	3	Trumpets	Free	3

To keep a relaxed atmosphere and to keep the schedule from consistently running late, I gave many pieces a time range to start in. I asked the musicians to arrive a half hour before the

performance in order to warm up and tune downstairs before their start time. Some of the newer pieces only had approximate durations, so I needed to make sure that there was a little wiggle room if one piece ran longer than I had thought it would. All of this information was given to my production assistant. Using a calendar application on my Samsung tablet, I organized the order of performance to include the names of performers, location of performance, and ideal start time. The production assistant's job was to check in with the musicians and take them to their locations within 5 minutes of the ideal performance start time. She then was to add a note with the actual start time of the pieces. The performers would tune which also served as a clue to the audience that there would be a performance soon, and then I spoke about the genesis of the music about to be played. The starting times were absolutely necessary to NuMuzArt's success because it gave a clear framework to allow each piece to be performed within its designated hour. The printed program only listed which pieces were to be performed between 2 and 3 p.m., 3 and 4 p.m., and 4 and 5 p.m. Again, I was striving to keep the audience from realizing we were on a tight schedule. The feedback I received was very positive about the conversation space between pieces although some people thought ten minutes in between felt too long in the beginning. Whatever the case, with the help of my production assistant, each of the pieces began within *one minute* of my envisioned start times.

All of the musician and order planning was easy to accomplish from my desk at home. One of the most challenging parts of NuMuzArt was conceptualizing the Threehouse space. I was unable to accurately plan its set up until I was able to move out extraneous bookcases and superfluous wall hangings. My father and my good friend Carolyn helped me troubleshoot the space on Saturday, April 11th. It took us about three hours to clear and arrange the space. The area we used was on the main level. It was essentially two medium sized gathering spaces with two sets of doors in between. We set up the quartet set in the lobby area, the piano and

percussion set in the chapel area, and left the free set to be somewhere in between the rooms. We rearranged the couches to have sparse, comfortable seating on both sides of the rooms. Due to the structure of the rooms, all of the art ended up being contained in the chapel area. The reception table was in the lobby area, as were the bigger of the couches.

Here are a few photos of the setup, courtesy of my father, Don Ovel:

Example 1 is a photo representing one half of the art room and more specifically, the piano and percussion set. This piece was for piano and clarinet, and since it did not call

ex 1



for the percussion, we kept the instruments covered with blankets to keep them from being

damaged. The art was set up all around the perimeter of this room.

Example 2 is the opposite half of the art room. In this picture, my saxophone solo with percussion is about to be



ex 2

ex 3



more relaxed seating available. It was taken from behind the reception table.

performed, and I am mid-spiel to the audience members standing around. The interactive art table is visible in the left middle of the picture.

Example 3 shows the quartet set up in the lobby area, as well as the

The free set is shown in example 4. This set up usually ended up being wherever was available for the ensemble in relation to congestion of the crowd.

The performance order with my requirements for the musicians being able to play their second piece in the same hour as the first, as well as keeping a good balance of *pretty* to *weird*, also allowed for there to be a pleasant mix of ensemble sets. There were two sets of pieces that ended up being in the same location back to back, however most of the time the location of performance changed with each piece, which helped encourage movement throughout the space.

ex 4



With the help of my production assistant and family members working with the reception, my role during the recital was to introduce the pieces and socialize with my mentors and friends that were able to attend. My being able to greet audience members and speak about the pieces informally before their performance was very important to making the event less formal and more accessible to all audiences. The distinction of composer-performer to audience became composer-host to audience. I was not on the concert hall stage with a formal speech prepared, rather I was bridging the five foot gap between the audience and the performers with a casual, usually humor filled circumstance surrounding the piece which was about to be performed.

### **Part III: Improving a Successful Venture**

To help inform my reflection, I requested that the audience members fill out comment cards. I stressed the importance of their constructive criticism as a means to help me improve the even for future use. Nearly 40 audience members filled out comment cards and the general consensus seemed to be that this style of music showcase was effective, even amongst those who had formal music education (those immersed in the *fine arts* atmosphere).

The only negative criticisms pertaining to the actual event had to do with timing and congestion of space. There was a range of timings between pieces, but occasionally there was about ten or eleven minutes between two works, which felt like too much space for some audience members. Being hostess, I had absolutely no concept of time throughout the entire event, which was one of the reasons having a production assistant was so necessary. For the next open house style event, I would try to keep time between pieces around five to eight minutes.

As far as the congestion issue, I am not sure there is a whole lot to be done about that in the Threehouse space. I felt that we utilized the space well, but this type of event might work better in one larger open room rather than two connected ones, which would also solve my personal distaste for the art being only in one of the rooms. There was not a lot of usable wall space in the lobby area, which meant that the art was contained in the chapel area. Since this was meant to be a large collaboration, it would have been nice to have the art as integrated throughout the space as the music ensembles were.

Some comment cards had intriguing spin-off ideas for future events. One person thought it would be advantageous to connect the art and music more thoroughly. For the sake of merely obtaining art, I did not require the artists to create new pieces for this event—I figured I would get a better response from the busy art students if I let them use pieces they had already created. I love the idea of connecting both art forms even more. Another interesting idea was to group three or four compositions together with space in between the groupings. It would essentially become a series of super-mini concerts which could be conducive to space requirements and more integrated art collaborations.

There were a couple of older audience members who did not quite understand that the informal setting still asked for purposeful listening during performances. I spoke with some of my mentors who attended the event, and we agreed that most people probably would come at the beginning or end of the hour, so introducing the concept of the recital as a whole every hour might have helped with those who were speaking audibly over pieces.

Some people had problems hearing me when I was in the other half of the space. A microphone might have helped quell the conversation right away to hear my introductions,



rather than the inevitable ten to twenty seconds of speaking extra loudly trying to gather attention if the tuning sounds didn't trigger silence.

NuMuzArt was an incredibly successful adventure. I had done enough planning and problem solving in preparation for the event in order for it to run very smoothly. There were many parts of my process which I believe to be necessary to creating another NuMuzArt success.

If one wishes to produce their own compositions, having a production assistant is absolutely necessary. If it was not intended to be showcasing only my works, I would be much more comfortable in a behind-the-scenes position rather than being out front. The production assistant helps ensure that the host or hostess is not running between the warm up area and the performance space, taking them away from guests. He or she will also inform the host about any issues that need to be dealt with.

Having a visual artist available to arrange the art in the space is also very important. I was able to deal with arriving musicians, taping up directional signs and checking in with the reception goods, while my art arranger made the space look appealing.

Next round, I will not bother with the phone application. I did not see anyone use it, and it was a pain to figure out, since I did not want to pay hundreds of dollars in developer fees to host the application in the play store or iTunes. I had not been aware of the developer fees when the idea had presented itself, or I likely would have thrown away the idea then. I also do not believe there were many new audience members. I believe most of the people who attended were my family and friends, as well as some friends of the artists. With my next project, I will make a point to seriously consider more publicity—beyond posters. I did not think about putting an ad in the UNI newspaper until the week before. I could have thought to arrange an

interview on KUNI. I will definitely spend more time considering marketing outside of signage with my next venture. Since I was not sure this event would work, I spent more time figuring out logistics with my performers and space. Now that I have lived through one successful version, I will be confident in the next one and put more efforts to gaining new audience members.

The goal of NuMuzArt was to create an alternative recital format which would be inclusive to an audience outside the academic music world. NuMuzArt had many elements which made it an *experience*, including flexibility which allowed for someone to stop in for one or two pieces, when otherwise they might not have been able to come at all. I believe this project set an example for other students to create a new presentation style for their music. It questioned the normal practices that other students may have taken for granted. Presenting music with these alternatives as the standard performance practice would create more memorable experiences for student and chamber music recitals. I am grateful for having had experiences during my time at the University of Northern Iowa which allowed me to think outside of the box and question the standards of recital performances. I sincerely hope that my honors presentation encourages someone else to push the boundaries of what is considered *normal* in music performance.

## Works Cited

- Clark Cutter and Eric Snoza. "Putting Your Audience Center Stage." University of Northern Iowa School of Music. Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center, Cedar Falls IA. 16 October 2014. Workshop.
- Ku, Anne, ed. 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Cultural Economics, Copenhagen 9-12 June 2010. n.p. June 2010. Print.
- Ringer, Alexander L. *The Early Romantic Era: Between Revolutions, 1789 and 1848*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1991. Print.
- Schwartz, Elliott, and Daniel Godfrey. *Music since 1945: Issues, Materials, and Literature*. New York: Schirmer, 1993. Print.
- Sigurjonsson, Njordur. "Orchestra Audience Development and the Aesthetics of "Customer Comfort"." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* (2010): 266-78. Web. 21 Oct. 2014.
- Simms, Bryan R. *Composers on Modern Musical Culture: An Anthology of Readings on Twentieth-century Music*. New York: Schirmer, 1999. Print.

This study by: Tori Ovel

Entitled: How NuMuzArt Became a Successful Venture

has been approved as meeting the thesis or project requirement for the Designation University Honors.

---

Date

---

Dr. Alan Schmitz, Honors Thesis Advisor, School of Music, Composition Department

---

Date

---

Dr. Jessica Moon, Director, University Honors Program