

Zachary Seldess, *Fred, Victoria, Bruce, and Agnes – LIVE*

Fred, Victoria, Bruce, and Agnes – LIVE uses as its sonic building blocks utterances from the 8-bit work “Fred and Victoria in Concert, Bruce and Agnes Too” by Swiss composer Istvan Zelenka. In the original piece, Istvan used a text-to-speech computer program to create a multi-movement gibberish sound-sculpture, each movement featuring one of the program’s “characters” (Fred, Victoria...). Using Max/MSP/Jitter, I have created four programs with which the performers musically and visually realize these characters in real-time. As with acoustic instruments, but to an exaggerated extent, these virtual instruments respond in a subtle and sometimes unpredictable fashion.

During performance, the conductor sends (via headphones) an array of prerecorded sound files to each performer. These sound files frame the performers’ musical relationships and responsibilities – giving them behavioral and technical parameters within which to improvise (sometimes specific, sometimes vague). The players, by entering certain commands, recall stored musical states and processes from the program and then, based on messages sent to them by the conductor, proceed to manipulate the program’s sonic and visual output in various ways. The content of these messages consists of the following:

- instructions on what part of the score to read,
- technical details regarding operation of the program (i.e. which aspect of the program to manipulate),
- and narratives about the characters themselves (their current social situations, physical/emotional states, etc.).

This last category of message is intended to help frame the performers’ musical relationships and activities. The conductor may, if so inclined, break out of her assigned instructional role (as conductor) and choose to send messages of a more personal nature (i.e. complements, insults, distractions, questions, commentary, etc.), intended not for the “performer” (as is usually the case in this scenario) but for the person BEHIND the performer.