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**"No room in the garage..."
the traditions of experimental independent music publishing
in the United States**

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Selected quotes by and about American experimental independent music publishers

Altho' this composition hath cost me much time and pains; yet I little thought of exposing it to public view: But being repeatedly importuned by my friends, I was at last prevailed upon to commit it to the press... Perhaps there may appear in the eyes of the accurate much incorrectness that I was not able to discern; therefore I would beg the critic to be tender, and rectify those errors which through inexperience may happen to have escaped the notice of a youth, in the course of so large a volume.

—William Billings

from Billings's "preface" to the *New England Psalm Singer*

Oh! how did my foolish heart throb and beat with tumultuous joy! With what impatience did I wait on the Book-Binder, while stitching the sheets and putting on the covers, with what extacy, did I snatch the yet unfinished Book out of his hands, and pressing it to my bosom, with rapturous delight, how lavish was I, in encomiums on this infant production of my own Numb-Skull? Welcome; thrice welcome; thou legitimate offspring of my brain, go forth my little Book, go forth and immortalize the name of your Author; may your sale be rapid and may you speedily run through ten thousand editions, may you be a welcome guest in all companies and what will add tenfold to thy dignity, may you find your way into the Libraries of the Learned.

—William Billings

from the introduction to *The Singing Master's Assistant*, referring to the publication of the *New England Psalm Singer* eight years earlier

It would be difficult to find another single publication in the history of American music—in the history of western music, for that matter—whose priority in its tradition is more conspicuous than that of Billings' collection [*New England Psalm Singer*]. . . . [It] was the first published compilation of entirely American music; moreover, it was the first tunebook produced by a single American composer.

—Richard Crawford and David McKay

from *William Billings of Boston*, Princeton University Press, 1975

The Wa-Wan Press never paid us anything except as we could draw upon it a little. I called it my 'wife,' as I had mostly to support it which I did by my lectures.

[Concerning the impossibility of getting his own works, often based on Native American materials, published:]

. . . such a state of affairs made it intolerable for a composer in this country. . . . I was just plain mad, and I vowed I would change the United States in this respect. I was just not willing to live in a country that would not accept my calling.

—Arthur Farwell

from Evelyn Davis Culbertson, "Arthur Farwell's Early Efforts on Behalf of American Music, 1889–1921." *American Music*, Vol. 5, Number 2, Summer 1987

Some have written a book for money; I have not. Some for fame; I have not. Some for love; I have not. Some for kindlings; I have not. I have not written a book for any of these reasons or for all of them together. In fact, gentle borrower, I have not written a book at all—I have merely cleaned house. All that is left is out on the clothes line,—but it’s good for a man’s vanity to have the neighbors see him—on the clothes line.

The printing of this collection was undertaken primarily in order to have a few clear copies that could be sent to friends who, from time to time, have been interested enough to ask for copies of some of the songs; but the job has grown into something different—it contains plenty of songs which have not been and will not be asked for. It stands now, if it stands for anything, as a kind of ‘buffer state,’ —an opportunity for evading a question, somewhat embarrassing to answer,—“Why do you write so much—, which no one ever sees?” There are several good reasons, none of which are worth recording.

— Charles Ives

from *114 Songs*, AMP/Peer/Presser Edition, 1975

[Cowell’s *New Music Editions* is] a circulating music magazine via a library of unsaleable scores.

— Charles Ives

from Rita Mead, “The Amazing Mr. Cowell,” *American Music*, Vol. 1 #4, Winter 1983

All I have to say, finally, is that I think it is time for a new revolution in American music. And I wait for those, younger than me, who will carry it out. Who can predict the nature of this revolution which has yet to come?

— Peter Garland

from *In Search of Silvestre Revueltas*, Soundings Press 1991

Lingua [Press] is part of a growing movement to restore and to further the values we speak of. Certainly there are those, such as yourself, who know they need to participate more fully, and actively.

There’s so much urgency and so much to do. Lingua’s absence of customary editorial and rigid deadline policies, . . . policies which I consider to be serious acts of censorship against the creative act. . . , sometimes drive people nuts.

[On publishing as eco-system:]

The creative act consists not only in the stipulation and formation of concrete structures, but in responsible maintenance of them. Furthermore, such structures demand of us the necessity to create and maintain environmental systems within which they can function properly.

— Kenneth Gaburo

from *Collaboration Two: David Dunn and Kenneth Gaburo, Publishing as Eco-System*,
Lingua Press 1983

We take people, not pieces.

Jody Diamond
Frog Peak Music web FAQ

We thought it might be kind of nice to construct a home, if only a virtual one — a home where many of our artists could simply say, “I know I’m a composer because I’m part of this group of composers.” That’s not much, but it could be very, very important to a lot of people, and it has been. It seemed like a commodious, manageable thing to offer. We couldn’t support them. We couldn’t give them money. But we could say: “For the rest of your life, your work will have these lines in a catalog, that people will see, and as a composer, your work will be available.

Larry Polansky
Splendid e-Zine interview
<http://www.splendidzine.com/features/frogpeak/2001>

"If you want to see, learn how to act"
— Heinz Von Foerster

abstract

This talk presents some of the philosophy, politics, history, motivations, and technologies for experimental independent music publishing in the United States, especially in the present. We will discuss our own publishing collectives, Frog Peak Music and the American Gamelan Institute, and highlight some of the ways that the organizations have evolved the concepts of publishing and distribution of experimental music.

We will specifically address issues of concern to music librarians, and relevant topics with regard to new digital technologies and cultures.

opening statement

some goals of the talk, some goals of publishing

Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective)

the advocacy of pluralism: anyone can and should do it (provide an example)

the main rule: no rules

the avoidance of distinctions between different media and between different publishing technologies

appropriate technologies

principle of the collective (no imprimatur, artist control, fluidity of design and growth)

the economics of a small, artist-based collective (=0)

AGI (American Gamelan Institute)

gave a name to a new genre of music

serves as a network for an international community of artists and scholars with specific concerns

extends the benefits available to composers in a prosperous society to those in countries with limited resources (e.g. Indonesia)

makes international recognition possible as a matter of principle, not payment

Balungan, a journal of artistic and scholarly perspectives on gamelan, Indonesian arts, and related developments worldwide

towards a definition of American experimental independent publishing

why do it?

the importance of pluralism in approaches to publication and distribution

the organization is itself a creative and experimental act: publishing as a compositional act

parallel activities in other arts (zines, collectives, chapbooks)

the prevalence of independent publishing (maybe that's *all* there is)

historical examples of American experimental independent music publishing

William Billings' *New England Psalm Singer*

Arthur Farwell's *Wa-Wan Press*

Henry Cowell's *New Music Editions*

Charles Ives' *114 Songs*

Peter Garland's *Soundings Press*

Kenneth Gaburo's *Lingua Press*

Frog Peak Music (A Composers' Collective)

philosophies and aesthetics of experimental independent publishing

- beyond "imprimatur"
- important, honorable to do it yourself!
- hands-off editorial policy
- artist as publisher/publisher as artist
- establishing a "home" for important work, even works which don't yet exist
- publish your friends, befriend those you publish
- salvage work
- consistency of design as philosophy of identity
- seek out necessity, not opportunity

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* Open Space CD
* M.H., Anthology

technologies of experimental independent publishing

- what makes it possible?
- the relationship of experimental publishing to new technologies: control over "look and feel"
- appropriate technologies and the revolution in technological availability
- the high technologies of yesterday become the consumer technologies of today
- the web, digital media, and the next revolution in production and distribution (or not)

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politics of experimental independent publishing

- avoidance of hierarchical models
- independence from institutions
- beyond "imprimatur" (or so we thought)
- pro-active artist work
- avoiding capitalism (not too hard)
- intellectual property and experimental publishing ideas: whose is it? who cares?

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problems of independent publishing

- economics (= 0)
- distribution
- pace of work
- advertising
- artists working with and for artists
- the growth problem: how to stay small and survive
- the "burnout factor"

some examples from Frog Peak Music & AGI

- collaborations project
- Johanna Beyer project
- Lyrichord "New Music Indonesia CDs"
- here comes everybody: antiorp, trubee, byron, corner, sims, Open Space, et al

* collabs CD
* Beyer

~~* Open Space~~

experimental independent publishing and you: the music librarian's dilemma

- how to evaluate experimental, unconventional work and formats
- avoiding stylistic biases in the acquisition of holdings
- who's in charge?: pro-active librarianship
- what's worth having, what's worth saving
- the future of paper: who wants it? who can handle it? who needs it?
- reliable media, changing media
- the web: labor intensive, class divisions, longevity, essential
- the future of distribution and the future of availability

examples of talking to people here

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