



“Artists and Technology Working Together” Evolution of the Arts in a Digital World Symposium - Session No. 6 Notes February 10, 2021

PAOLA PRESTINI

CREATING IN A PRE-COVID WORLD FROM A COMPOSER'S LENS

Paola's Background

- Paola grew up living on the Nogales border, the border between Arizona and Mexico. Her and her mother emigrated from Italy. Many of the experiences Paola wanted to express take inspiration from this dividing line.
- Skip to New York City and the 10 years following her graduation from Julliard.
- Paola started a company with two facets: [VisionIntoArt](#), a one stop company for artists across styles, age, style, and culture. They also had a record label.
- There were a lot of failures during this time, but the failures were important.
- Paola needed to create a context for herself and fix her surroundings so to not limit her work.
- **“If there is only one piece of pie left, don't divide it - make more.”**
- She was told: **“Until your music is strong, you cannot cart around a community”**. Collectives rarely work and she needed to own her music.
- A steady climb is more fitting for her journey. Trust your inner compass.

The Hubble Cantata: VR Experience

- A musical performance combined with a virtual reality experience.
- Done in collaboration with [ARUP](#).
- Brought together a combination of arts and science.
- This is a great example of a multi-platform and multi-disseminated work.

Aging Magician

- This work went from museums to Broadway, and now to the San Diego Opera.
- Present across stylistic presenting norms - this is important to Paola.

The Colorado

- A film, live performance, book, and education tool set to music by five leading composers.
- Also, a good example of a work with multi forms of dissemination. These types of works are key to finding more opportunities and to engaging with different audiences. - song and book collaboration

National Sawdust (2015)

- A Brooklyn based incubator for creators and audiences to explore dynamics of New York City.
- Space designed by ARUP - tough space to work with because of the small square footage and the challenge to create an excellent sonic environment.



- The map for National Sawdust focuses on incubation to dissemination with a focus on mentorship, producing new work, and creating a global laboratory collection.

National Sawdust Programs:

Hildegard Commission

The Hildegard Commission is a mentorship initiative highlighting outstanding trans, female, and nonbinary composers in the early stages of their careers, supporting them with a commission, visionary mentorship, and access to a network of leading working collaborators. This began as a female composer's program until a transgender person applied. Paolo felt that the wording of the program had to change to not isolate another person. Female identification program? Opening the program up became about voices not typically represented in the canon.

BluePrint Fellowship

- Done in collaboration with New York's The Juilliard School.
- Paola teaches and brings in a roster of female-identifying composers to also teach.
- Students eventually write for the ensemble at Sawdust.
- A mentorship project with leading female, nonbinary or trans composers.

Sensorium

- A multi-modal art, opera, documentary research project involved in the community, working at the intersection of disability, technology, and identity.
- It explores the fundamental question of what it means to have a voice and what it means to be human.
- One of the main characters in the opera is based on a person with a severe case of cerebral palsy.
- For the opera, questions include: how can we portray non-verbal communication in opera, finding voice through the full spectrum of sensory experience that the operatic space provides?
- For the disability community, what are the connections between accessing joy and advancements in music technology?

CREATING IN A COVID AND POST COVID WORLD FROM A COMPOSER'S LENS

In March of 2020, National Sawdust did not have a digital platform when they were forced to shut down. They had to pivot.

PHASE ONE (Urgent care)

- Pay and train artists to work and express themselves at home.
- They sent recording packages and commissioned more than 100 artists to work on a digital stage.
- By May, they were established enough that they could run out of artist's homes. They were able to have their first Digital Discovery Festival.

Fall

- Mentorship and composition, we doubled down on deep learning and idea-based work.
- And then came Zoom Fatigue and a need for a new direction.



PHASE TWO

- What does it mean to expand a digital forum?
- Imagine the digital stage as a space for improvisation and it becomes a question of how we combine all the things we have learned into that hybrid form.
- Need to lean into what we embody as live performance artists. Just because we are not in the same space, that we continue to hold that space and push ephemerality into the new digital realm.
- This means using live elements, using simul-cast content and improvisational elements alongside interviews, recordings, and different kinds of production value.
- Use live content discussion to create immediacy and intimacy.

Con Alma

- Done in collaboration with the Mexican Government.
- What do we miss right now? We miss our audience.
- How to use social media to tap into this sense of community and what people were feeling?
- Created two prompts:
 1. For people to share their sounds of isolation.
 2. Ask people to participate in a country-wide chorus.
- Streamed from National Sawdust to PBS to the Mexican educational radio station, TV, and digital platforms.
- 30 musicians across 3 continents, recording in isolation.

Current Projects:

- ZODIAC a music installation for [Mass MoCA](#)
- No One is Forgotten - a Radio Opera

Where do we go from here?

1. Conservatories and training grounds must make changes - students are going to enter a world that is community-focused, but they also face the opportunities of us having opened this global stage. You cannot do it all, so what do you lose in order to focus on the minds that are needed for this new phase?
2. For institutions and artists, multi-platform and multi-dissemination works are the way to go. How can we facilitate that way of working and economize it? How can institutions partner globally while rethinking touring, presenting, and community building?
3. Old presenting models will need to be completely rethought. This is an extraordinary time to be creating and thinking.

Scott Smallwood

Five Aspects of Scott's work

For Scott's presentation, he shared a variety of sound clips. These notes are best read with the video recording so that the sound clips can be heard.



1. LISTENING AND DOCUMENTING

Samish Bay, Washington State, USA (2016)

- Water running, interrupted by a plane.
- Work concerned around the orientation of listening (deep listening).
- Deep listening - listening meditation.

Wood Buffalo National Park, Alberta (2017)

- Natural Sounds, bird chirping.
- These sites are so important to us in these times.
- These vast forests are essential for our planet but are threatened by things such as oil sands production.

Smallwood. *Chest & Chair*, 2001

- Sound recorded in Utah; it is the sound of an old wooden chest in the desert.

Smallwood. *Rusted Womb of Bomber* (2001)

- Old plane hangar during a windstorm
- Haunted sound

[Field recording](#) (20 years)

- This resulted in a CD project (*Desert Winds*, 2001, Deep Listening CD)
- CDs are a lost art. People do not listen to albums like they used to. We now mainly rely on media streaming companies.
- Artists need to change their focus as technology changes.

Healseville Sanctuary, Western Australia

- Bell miner bird.
- Influenced the composition of *Sanctuary*, 2005.

Lake Mjosa, Hamar, Norway (2014)

- The dramatic sound of large pieces of ice bumping against each other.
- This influenced *Lumbering Ice* (2015).

Evidence: *Go Where Light Is* (2016-17)

- Create pieces by combining field recordings together.
- Still an ongoing project.
- Recorded as an album and released on cassette (2019).

2. OIL AND NOISE

Oilwell Battery Station, rural Alberta (2011)

- Scott loves to travel and understands the impact of petroleum on the environment when travelling.

Pumpjack, West Texas (2004) inspired Boyd & McWilliams (2005) and given to earth in dark blood (2007)



Sonic Pumpjack Explorer (2012)

- Present the different pumpjacks to the public and shows what they sound like and where they are found.
- This became an installation kiosk.
- Visitors can listen to eight different Alberta pumpjacks.

3. SOLARSONICS

Fins of the Elements (2010), Bahn + Smallwood Turnpike (2002)

- Sustainability in electronic music.
- Create electronic sound and music through hybrid instruments.

A Breeze Brings (2006)

- Laptop ensemble - create situations where people are listening to each other, but creating music using electricity.
- Laptop ensemble that can play outside with solar panels.

Scott is working on soundscapes that are powered entirely with light without batteries. These installations are dependent on the light of the moment.

Coronium 3500: Lucie's Halo (2014-15)

- A summer-long summer sound art exhibition
- Speakers planted in the lawn, each with solar panels and the sounds would only play if there was enough sunlight. The sounds that would play changed depending on how much light there was.

Eloe Series (2020)

- Experimental noise using the sun.
- Scott has these little devices equipped with solar panels.

4. DATA AND SYNTHESIS

Works:

- Adobe Photoshop 5.5 (2000)
- Fogbreath (2016)

Macromareal (2016-17)

- Work with data from the Bay of Fundy - water temp, solar radiation, the length of day/night.
- Interesting forms of the different artefacts.

Wave Passage Effects (for Macromareal): 2016-17

- Sounds are synthesized and controlled by the data.
- There is a corresponding video so you can watch the time lapse of the day.
- Each day is 1 minute.



Caulfield, Olive, Smallwood. Evolving Anatomies

- How is data contained within the medical community?

5. GAMES

Sync or Swim (2012)

- A puzzle game where players have to synchronize the sounds they are hearing together.

Statistics show that games are eclipsing movies and music right now in terms of entertainment. This makes games a good space to work as a composer.

The Lost Garden (2017-2020)

- A game that Scott is currently working on that is almost complete. Features sound heavily throughout the game.

Evidence. The Way In (2020 -)

- Scott's next album. Instead of releasing a track, the sounds are shown through the form of a maze game.
- To get out of the maze, you just have to listen.
- Each level will feature a different track.

Skills and Expertise for Composers/Sound Artists in 2021

Traditional Skills

- reading music / performing
- arranging
- harmony/counterpoint
- orchestration
- score preparation / notation
- conducting

Analog/Digital Audio Skills

- recording
- editing and mixing
- sound design
- synthesis (Orchestration)
- mastering
- studio engineering

Computer Skills

- audio file creation / Conversion
- streaming
- creative coding
- file management

- physical computing



- sensor interfacing
- HCI (Human-Computer Interfacing)
- AI / deep learning

Other

- improvisation
- video editing
- graphic design
- game design
- collaboration / interdisciplinary

Venues for Composers in 2021

- Concert Halls (Acoustically Excellent and Flexible)
- Black Boxes
- Galleries for sound art
- Site-Specific and outdoor spaces
- Improvised spaces/collaborative spaces
- Residency space and programming
- Media streaming and “albums.”
- Games and interactive experiences

[Experimental Media and Performing Arts Centre](#)

- Model of spaces for digital art in the 21 Century.
- Good space creating synergy for digital artists - check it out!

QUESTIONS

Scott, has your creative process changed in the past 10 months?

- Absolutely! This time last year, I had lots of travel plans and plans for installations that had to be cancelled.
- The experimental work I was doing with games came to the forefront. The pandemic was an opportunity to double down on that work. The maze game was a direct outcome of the pandemic.
- It also changed my point of view.

What are some things that need to change going forward?

Paola's Answer

- The way we teach and learn.
- We need to take a Marie Kondo approach to the curriculum.



- Lots of today's students will be the leaders of tomorrow. The emphasis needs to change. Students need to be thinking about digital platforms and leadership.
- As of recently, we have had a huge community focus and we are easily connected with the global stage, how do we marry these things?
- In terms of education, what can universities and conservatories do to facilitate the leaders of tomorrow?

Scott's Answer

- At the university, there are many students who come from non-traditional music backgrounds. These students create sophisticated music but do not know how to read and write music. They cannot get into many music programs because of the high traditional barriers.
- Opinion: It should be possible for people to get a degree in music without ever knowing a thing about music notation.
- Students need to be encouraged and not prevented from entering this space.

I think it is interesting how you addressed “Zoom Fatigue” in phases 2 and 3. It is amazing how the National Sawdust has engaged musicians throughout the pandemic. Do you have any more thoughts about how to engage audiences who are experiencing zoom/virtual fatigue? Or how to engage audiences with these incredible projects musicians are doing while there are still COVID restrictions in place.

Paola's Answer

- This was the big draw for working on a radio opera. Sometimes, people need to just listen and not engage visually.
- The use of live performance creates some sense of ephemerality of live theatre.
- The digital space is your concert hall. Your space can accommodate so many different art forms.
- How do we reconnect with our bodies in this moment when we cannot touch? Through dance performances.
- Rethinking digital space as your home and not a barrier. It allows you to do the things you could not do before.

What do you both see as the role of Arts organizations in making spaces for diverse voices? What sort of change, commitment and or investment does this imply?

Scott's Answer

- Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) is important. Arts organizations should double down on this. If they are going to support young artists and those who are from minority communities, they need to make those connections.
- Providing more opportunities for residencies. These give artists a chance and space to work with people they want to and have no pressure to create anything.

Paola's Answer

- Diversification is the only way to go forward.



- How to diversify without tokenizing in terms of creating opportunities? We must make commitments to do this in our mandates and invite the people you want to include in the conversation.
- There is no way to do everything, but you can find ways to create opportunities for those communities you want to address.

It is great to see education, creative and digital skills united in the presentations! How can we connect them further and avoid the division between them that curriculums increasingly enforce?

Paola's Answer

- Multiplatform and multi-dissemination - artists and presenters need to be thinking in this fluid form so they can reach wider audiences.

Scott's Answer

- In traditional institutions, we must fight every day to change and evolve our curriculums.
- The metrics that are associated with the university need to be challenged.
 - Example: cross listing a course to allow more students in. Those students can benefit from the course and professors can learn from the experiences those students can contribute.
 - Example: Team-teaching. This allows more than one voice in the classroom.
- We need to change the structure to be more flexible within the institution. They do not pivot quickly.