

a trio with the addition of Dutch violist Ig Henneman. Since that time the group has toured Europe and North America as a trio. Henneman's presence has also tipped Queen Mab more towards composition, rather than on-the-spot improv or sets based on singular concepts the players had agreed upon earlier. The trio's most recent CD for instance, finds the three revisiting and improvising on Hector Berlioz' "Queen Mab Scherzo."

More importantly, both Freedman's and Lerner's approach to performance changed as a result of the partnership. While the clarinetist's playing moved further away from pre-composed new music and closer to organic improv, Lerner feels that

“**Music to me is as natural as breathing**”

she was affected even more. "I was at a point where I had a bad relationship with the piano," she recalls. "Lori could bend notes and play things that made the brain vibrate, yet here I was with this elephant."

The transformation occurred, she says, when "I realized I was only playing one-quarter of the piano because I was only thinking of it as eighty-eight keys. Instead I got inside the piano to play—and by doing that was finally able to come back to the keys."

With Henneman in Amsterdam, Freedman in Montreal, and Lerner in Toronto, each also maintains a solo career. Then there's Lerner's psychotherapy practice. Returning as an adult to a lifelong interest in psychology, the pursuit of which she left behind at York, Lerner says she now brings life experience to her practice. "Being in the moment with intention, listening deeply and responding—these attributes correspond exactly to my life as a musician and therapist," she explains.

As someone who often finds herself lying in bed at night processing thoughts through music rather than words—"music to me is as natural as breathing"—Lerner's many roles satisfy her need for creativity in both the verbal and nonverbal realms.

At the same time, the integration of these aspects of her life helps maintain the balance for which she strives. And each relates back to improvisation. "To me, what makes a great improviser is personality: the ability to take the sum total of your experience and distill it. That's your voice. That's what I make my living doing. That's what I live for."

Ken Waxman is based in Toronto, where he writes about jazz and improvised music. Much of his writing is archived at <www.jazzword.com>.



The outline for Lerner's structured improvisation *3 Strikes* (2001) written for the Queen Mab trio in which she performs.

TWO CONTRASTING SOLO PIANO WORKS

Each of Marilyn Lerner's solo piano CDs explores in great detail one facet of her two musical focal points—the lyrical and the abstract. *Luminance (Ambiances Magnétiques AM 115 CD)* is a 2003 session concerned with the nuances of extended piano technique and microphone placement. *Romanian Fantasy (2006, Marilyn Lerner ML 001)* is made up of improvisations based on Eastern European Jewish melodies.

The outgrowth of a residency that Lerner spent at Quebec City's Avatar, an artist-run centre specializing in audio and electronic art, *Luminance's* sixteen improvisations range from one to almost eleven-and-one-half minutes. During the course of the two days of performance, Lerner improvised, using different techniques: playing the keys; plucking, stroking, and striking the strings; smacking the wooden sides of the instrument; and playing with the hammers disengaged from the strings. To capture additional timbres, different microphones were used during the sessions, positioned at various locations—behind the piano, close to the soundboard, over the bass

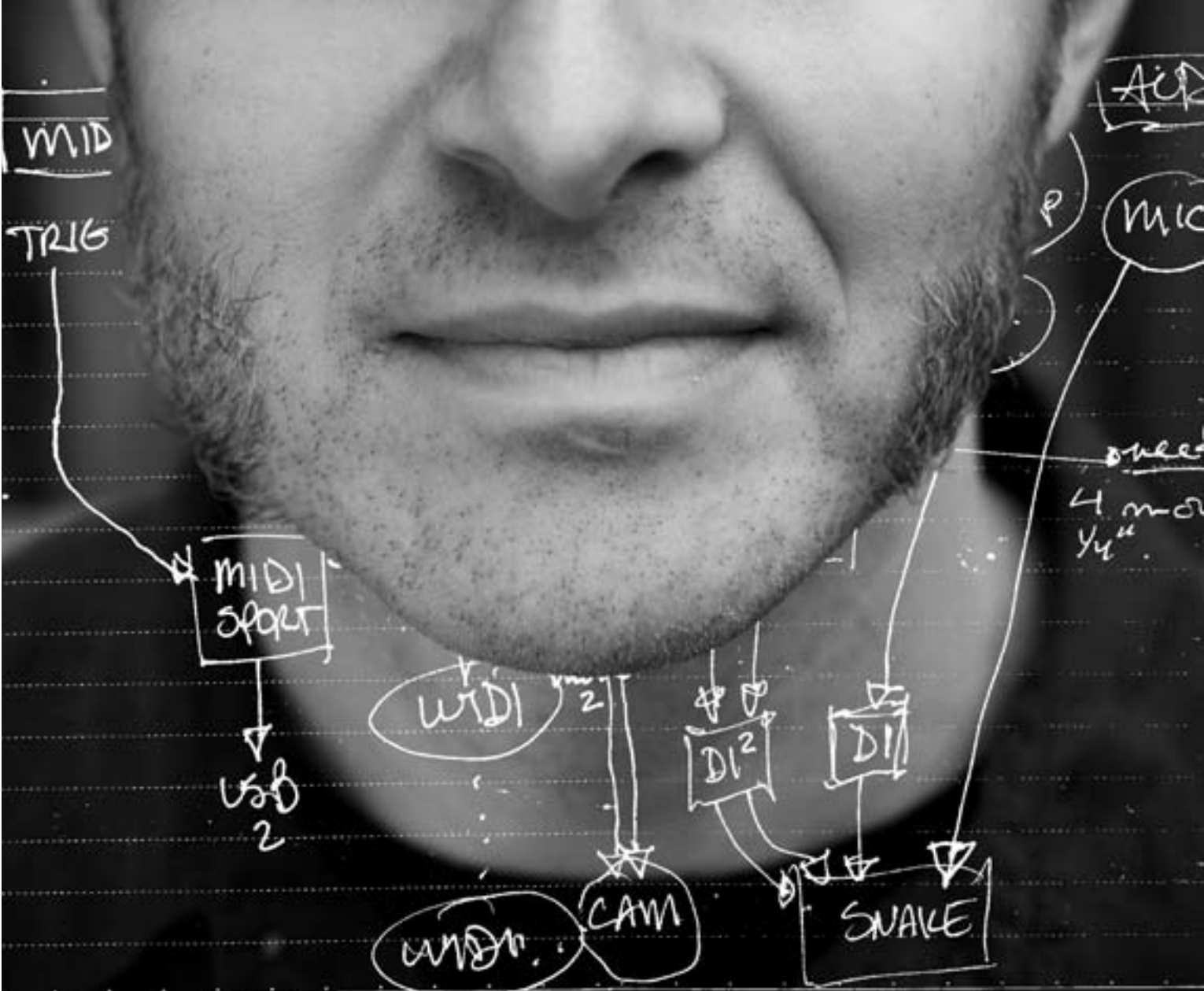
strings, in the sound holes, near the tail piece, and alternately in a small room nearby. "I had often been the victim of questionable piano-miking in the past, so I decided to make microphone placement the creative focus of this project," she explains. Some of these sounds were subsequently used to create *The Toll* [see accompanying sidebar], an audio artwork.

With a more conventional audio setup, *Romanian Fantasy* is a reinterpretation of eleven traditional melodies. Arranging and improvising on these ancient airs took intense concentration, Lerner reports. "It was a tricky kind of re-composing, because I had to dig deeply into the tradition. I had to figure out what to change and what to keep. To develop the focus, I had to process the music inside me, come up with an exploration of the essence of each piece, and stay true to the songs while putting myself in them." At the same time, Lerner, who listened to many early twentieth-century versions of the pieces, didn't want to reproduce them or graft styles together.

LINKS

<www.marilynlerner.com>

FYI Another pianist/composer, Ann Southam, is featured in Eve Egoyan's article "Composition as Enquiry" in *Musicworks* 101.

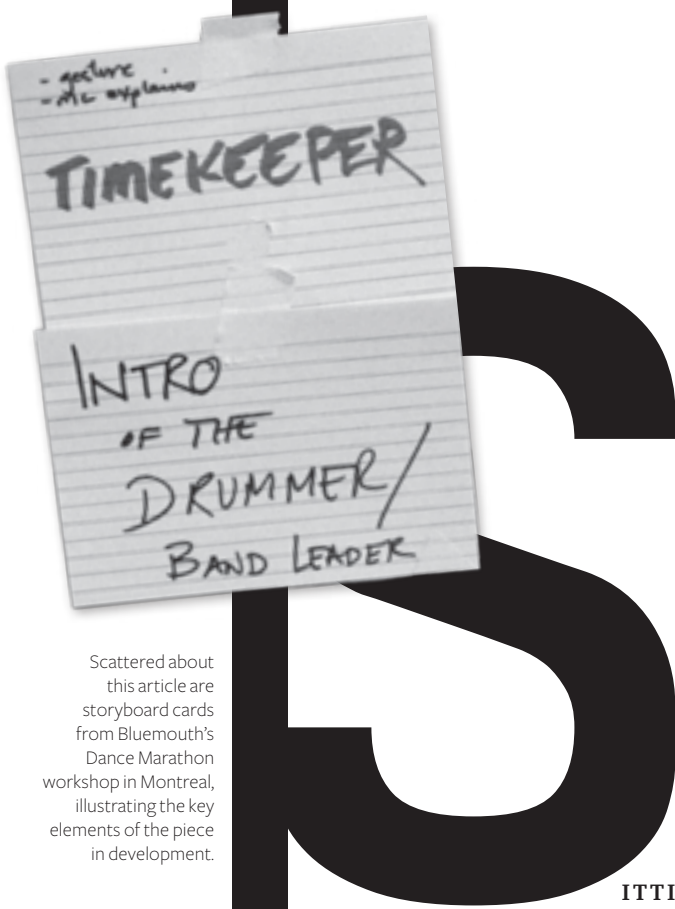


with an ear for
sound as gesture

RICHARD
Wind
eye

immerses
the listener

BY CHRIS
KENNEDY



Scattered about this article are storyboard cards from Bluemouth's Dance Marathon workshop in Montreal, illustrating the key elements of the piece in development.

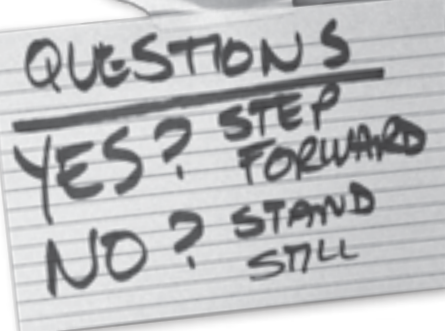
HITTING BEHIND HIS drum kit and laptop, Richard Windeyer manages the energy of the dance floor, while his colleague Sabrina Reeves emcees the evening's events. A slow folk ballad suddenly ramps up to 120 bpm; the room pauses for a dance-off; the tempo returns to a slow gait for an impassioned monologue. This is not an ordinary dance hall. It is in fact an interdisciplinary theatre event, and Windeyer works the playlist as for a dramatic narrative, with varying tempos and moods, and allowing for momentary ruptures in the progress of the evening's entertainments.

Often in a theatrical situation, the soundscape provides a quiet complement to the onstage action. If we notice it at all, we might realize that the musical cues work to emotionally charge the dialogue and that the incidental soundtrack fills out a representational environment in which the action takes place. Toronto-based sound artist and sound designer Richard Windeyer has long worked to create such environments in conventional theatrical settings, but his most exciting work occurs when he applies his ideas for sound design to more unconventional productions. Notable among Windeyer's creative endeavours is his role in Bluemouth Inc., a five-person interdisciplinary performance company that he has been instrumental in co-developing over the last ten years. Within this collective, Windeyer has been able to expand the sound designer's role to active participation in the development of each piece. Within Bluemouth's productions Windeyer's soundscapes are not just backing tracks, but integral parts of the performance.

ON THE CD: *Death by Water* (excerpt), *Wolfblitz/Broken Sleep*



ABOVE: The audience keeps moving on the dance floor for fear of being eliminated during Bluemouth Inc.'s interdisciplinary theatre event *Dance Marathon*.



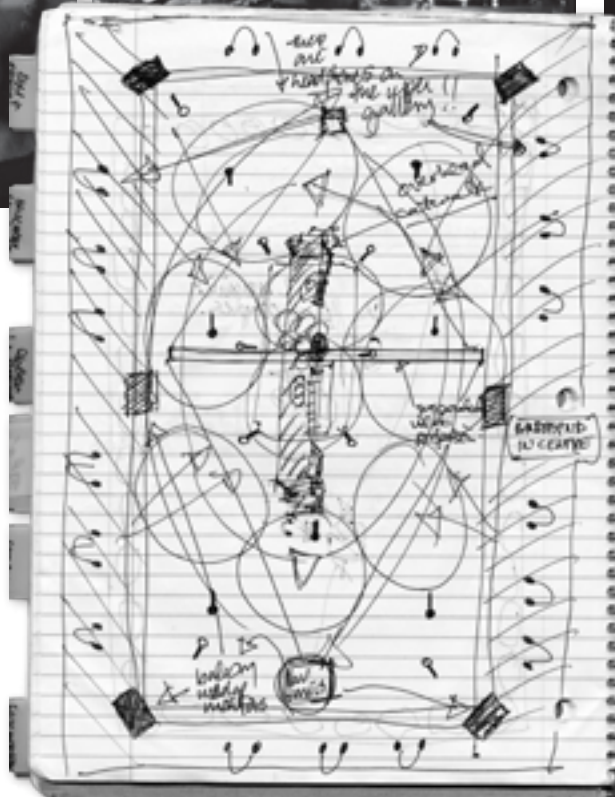
In the group's most recent production, *Dance Marathon*, he plays a much more visible and unconventional role than does a typical sound designer.

Dance Marathon is a five-hour theatrical performance disguised as a dance competition, with the audience engaged more as contestants than as spectators. The piece, which debuted at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre in 2009 and was most recently performed at Vancouver's Cultural Olympiad, is a further expansion of Bluemouth Inc.'s ten-year history of developing site-specific and interdisciplinary performances that aim to involve audiences in an immersive and participatory way. When audience members enter, each is assigned a number, and they all spend the entire evening on the dance floor. They have to keep dancing and to compete in various elimination challenges, all the while being treated to suddenly occurring skits and performances that include planted contestants who irrupt into sudden choreographed dance routines.

Windeyer explains that this current approach by Bluemouth to its audience grew out of the company's previous



THEY PAINTED
A THICK WHITE
LINE AROUND
THE FLOOR
ICEHOUSE
MORGUE
(SHIP DISASTERS)



RIGHT, FROM TOP: Audience members and actors tango together during the immersive performance of *Dance Marathon*, Vancouver; Windeyer leads the band from behind his drum kit; Windeyer's floorplan sketch for the *Dance Marathon* première at the Enwave Theatre, Toronto; the audience is put through their paces on the dance floor in Vancouver.

projects. “We’ve always been trying to break the fourth wall and involve the audience directly. Most of the time when theatre people do that it’s by bringing one audience member onto the stage and asking them questions—a very straightforward interaction. But I was really interested in what would happen if you went to a dance marathon and the whole night you got to dance with an actor. What could that experience be for the audience member and what would that be for the actor?”

The result is a potentially chaotic interaction. Toronto audiences flowed with the performance elements more easily than the boisterous audiences in Vancouver, where one night, Windeyer recalls, “this big dance circle just naturally formed in the middle of the floor and people were going into the circle and busting a move and coming out. We couldn’t get their attention, so I just had to keep deejaying.” But ultimately, when the performance goes as planned, with the audience fully engaged, “once you start introducing more theatrical or performance elements it creates this wonderful frame where suddenly everything or anything could be viewed as performance.”



the performers who were out in the park wearing lavalier mikes and I was in a van behind the shed mixing in music and environmental sound and dialogue, all on the fly.” The result was an evocative image of the suspended time of purgatory, or the Bardo Plane, rich with an active interplay between site, enclosure, sound, and distance.

“Death by Water” also serves—in part because of its unique mise-en-scène—as an exemplar of the interdisciplinary approach of the Bluemouth company. All the elements interlocked in an intriguing way. Because the theatrical performance was outside, the sound played an integral part in the piece’s cohesion. An additional layer was provided by projecting a film on the window of the shed, from inside, creating a moving patina through which the spectators viewed the action outside. All of these elements coalesce in the idea of “compositional counterpoint” between the properties of film, movement, sound design, and speech. That is the group’s explicit goal, as evidenced by the company consisting of artist’s from a variety of disciplines. Each project is a new attempt to achieve this compositional counterpoint.

As Windeyer explains, “When we start working on a new project we all come together, and most of the people in the company come in with text, dialogue, writing of some sort, images, points of inspiration or reference. I bring in a lot of sound, and then we try different things until we find music that doesn’t just support or underscore, but that upsets the sense of the scene. We play with contrast and contrasting ideas. The whole counterpoint kind of thing has always been a goal of ours and I’m not sure if we’ve really hit it yet. But it’s the idea that each element in the show—whether music, lighting, movement, text, sound—all exist in it as separate voices in a counterpoint. And through controlling them you can find this interesting, interlocking space where they’re all working together, they’re all kind of perceivable simultaneously, and they’re all sort of independently dynamic. Again, I can talk about it, but achieving it is challenging.”



TOP: The outdoor winter location where Bluemouth Inc. staged one scene of *Death by Water*. The audience watched the scenes unfold while seated inside the shed.

MIDDLE: The funeral parlor scene from *Death by Water*.

BOTTOM: Audience members were transported between scenes by rickshaw.



W

INDEYER'S own process of gathering sound is inspired by the work of Walter

Murch, the Holly-

wood film editor and sound designer, himself heavily influenced by *musique concrète* composers Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, and best known for his work with Francis Ford Coppola, most notably on *The Godfather: Part II* and *The Conversation*. Windeyer reflects on his interest in Murch's work, not only for its sheer creativity but also for "its sensitivity to sound, the use of sound as gesture, and [Murch's] ability to get at the one or two particular sounds that the scene really needs in order to really make it potent." Murch is known for his economical use of sounds and his ability to extract them from the environment for later reconstruction in the studio. Like Murch, Windeyer "enjoys the process of going out and capturing sounds and then going back into the studio and trying to flip them upside down, trying to re-invent and re-imagine those sounds, and to use them as raw material."

The idea of sound as gesture is key to Windeyer's soundwork, both in Bluemouth and in his other music projects. He originally headed to graduate school at Simon Fraser University to study composition with Barry Truax, one of the original members of R. Murray Schafer's World Soundscape Project and an acoustic communication researcher. But the usual distractions of graduate study led him in other directions. As Windeyer explains, "I remember being fascinated by the whole notion of what it might mean to be a soundscape designer, whether in purely artistic terms or in terms of actual environmental design or urban planning. But what all of this taught me, in the end, was that sounds are rich gestures teeming with expressive content: their use, value, their physical sources, their sociocultural, historical, and ecological contexts, as well as the expressive tension that seems to develop as a sound is gradually transformed and/or extracted from its original context in the studio. I record the existing soundscape of an intended performance site and use that as the primary source material; or I try to envision the site's past (and sometimes even its future) and try to evoke the sensations of that soundscape through a 'colliding counterpoint' with all of the other performance elements."

As committed as he is to the sonic space of a performance, Windeyer is also keenly aware of how the other performance elements pull together in the development of a piece. In conversation, he talks about how *physical* gesture plays a role in his work with



Scenes from Bluemouth Inc.'s *How Soon Is Now?* staged in a West-Toronto warehouse in 2008.

the group Finger, which consists of him and electroacoustic musician Cameron McKittrick and pianist Leslie Wyber. While the group has not performed for the last few years, they have been working on a new project called *Habitat*, and the idea of gesture has become predominant in their thinking. As Windeyer explains, "We've been taking a lot

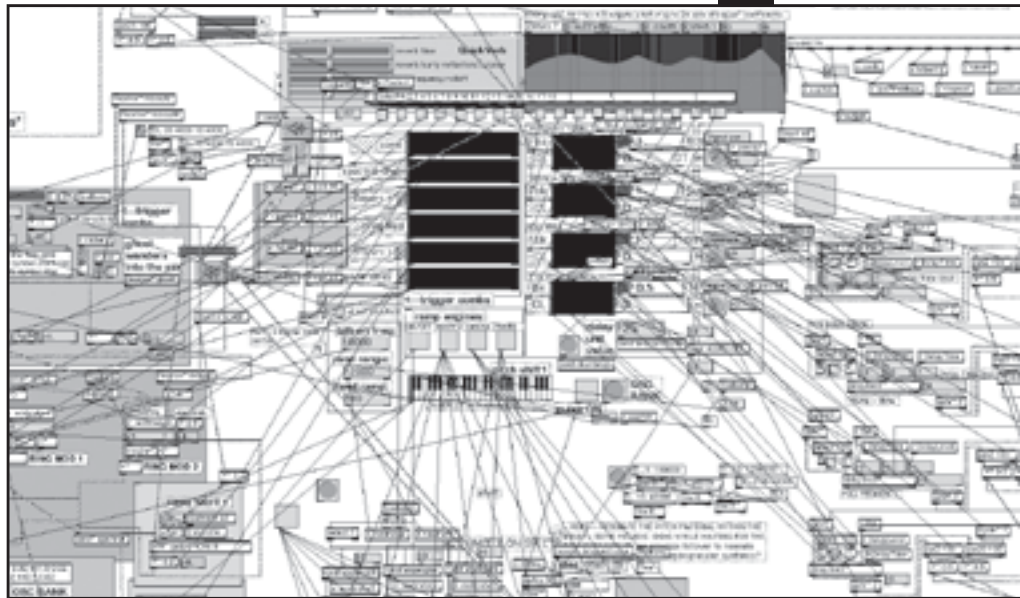
of time trying to figure out our instruments, what exactly they are. For example, Cam McKittrick's instrument is now the theremin, but it is a theremin that will control MIDI sample playback on the laptop. We've been spending a lot of time looking at gesture, and how that translates to the audience. So, we've been trying to teach ourselves as much as we can about performance gestures—especially with new technology—to develop some strategies around that. We've gone on this big journey and come back to the realization that, well, sometimes a drum just really needs to be a drum. Whatever the physical gesture is, it has to be a known gesture . . . The relationship between the visual gesture and the sonic gesture that's produced is what has to work. That has to be convincing. That has to somehow be authentic."



THE
LAST 2
COUPLES

Everything
slow motion

W



WINDEYER'S SOLO act, National Exit Strategy, along with his work in Finger, underscore a strong concern with the visual performance gesture. Although National Exit Strategy's techno music is a complicated melding of instrumentation composed in the studio, Windeyer performs the music live in concerts on a drum kit and a laptop. In performance, some of Windeyer's drum-playing triggers MIDI patches that alter the laptop music, but the main setup is Windeyer drumming along to pre-recorded music. Again, he talks about the visual. "[I was] thinking about a drummer onstage by himself. What is that? What's the cultural space around that? How can I explore that and do something that's interesting? . . . At this point I've just been playing along, so it's really sort of like karaoke or music-minus-one or something like that."

But, as Windeyer points out, "Karaoke is a response to the manner in which we regularly enjoy music, which is very passively. Karaoke is an opportunity to insert yourself and your personality into someone else's music, and to be more active, to play a more active role in your consumption of music. That's actually really interesting." This returns us again to his work in Bluemouth, which creates an opportunity for the audience to participate in the production they are attending. "In *Dance Marathon* especially," Windeyer agrees, "the audience really becomes the show. The audience becomes the performance and we're kind of there just to create this frame, this perspective, this point of view."

It is clear that *Dance Marathon* represents one of the strongest meldings of Bluemouth's desires to open up the stage and activate the audience. The production mobilizes diverse disciplines in interesting ways, especially by having the sound actually stimulate audience interaction rather than just supporting a performance. As Windeyer reflects, "I think what happens is that people just kind of let go and then they get more enjoyment or pleasure out of just being a contestant, being a participant. I think this is where this piece really succeeds, where the other pieces really haven't." As a result, plans are in place to continue touring the work, as the company builds on its success to create new audiences for future works.

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For Bluemouth's next project Windeyer wants to approach sound design from the perspective of a Foley artist, the person who dubs in sound effects on feature-film soundtracks. This would involve Windeyer performing sound effects in person during the performance itself, not unlike what Guy Maddin recently did for his film *Brand Upon the Brain*. The result that Windeyer achieves will further develop the idea of sound as gesture that underlies his work, providing visual evidence for the previously hidden effects we take for granted in a theatre setting. Perhaps this piece will also finally break down the fourth wall in relation to all aspects of Bluemouth's performance work, opening up not just the theatrical elements, but the sonic space as a place of interaction and visibility.

Chris Kennedy is an independent filmmaker, film programmer, and writer currently living in Toronto.

FYI For more coverage on interdisciplinary work, see Maria Gould's article on URGE, "Ascending into Chaos" in Musicworks 78.

LINKS

<http://www.richardwindeyer.com/>
<http://www.bluemouthinc.com/>
<http://www.fingerperformance.com/>

A Max/Msp patch outlining the sound processing in a piece from Windeyer's drum kit and laptop solo act, National Exit Strategy.

