THE JAMMALAY THAT IS MY BRAIN

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by

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ABSTRACT

The Jambalaya That is My Brain is a musical collage of prerecorded music and speech. The sampled material was selected from a variety of sources including Latin Jazz, American Popular Music of the R-n-B/Funk persuasion, Bosnian folk singing, movie clips, and spoken poetry. The piece was realized in the Center for Computer Music at the College-Conservatory of Music (ccm²) at the University of Cincinnati. This document is to accompany the recorded piece to explain the aesthetic and technical issues of the piece.

1 A complete listing of all the sampled material can be found beginning on page 5.
Introduction

In the fall of 2000, I was exposed for the first time to some of the art movements of the twentieth century. The collage technique of the Dadaists, where everyday items called “found objects,” were combined to create new shapes, intrigued me. Also the interrupted lines favored by the cubist painters caught my eye. I began to wonder if it is possible to develop sonic collages of found musical objects. American Composers as far back as Charles Ives have used musical quotations, and using sampled sounds is prevalent in a large amount of electronic art music. In addition, the “sound bite” is an almost overused technique of radio stations, television news broadcasts, motion pictures, and other forms of electronic media. The challenge became to produce a significant piece using samples of prerecorded music that did not sound cliché. I used three basic structural ideas to organize events in the work. While none of the movements exclusively use any single one of these techniques, the first movement primarily uses interruption, the second uses layering, and the third rhythmic alteration. Sections of the piece will be analyzed to display the use of these techniques. Time from the beginning of the piece will be stated to refer to each section discussed.

Interruption

Using minute portions of samples, I assembled them in the Silicon Graphics application Sound Editor to form new objects. An example for reference is at one minute eight seconds into the piece. The construction here is very linear. A new melody and rhythm are produced from the old material. This is an extension of the Dada aesthetic of collage, of such artists as Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst, and Joan Miro, into sonic realm. While the parts of the found sonic objects
maybe recognizable, the results stand as a musical objects themselves. After building these blocks, I assembled them in Paul Lansky’s sound file sequencing software RT.²

**Layering**

Layering is the primary structural element of the entire second movement. An underlying sound that lasts the entire second movement was synthesized first using the real time WAVESHAPE instrument of the CMIX software package³. The resulting sound can be said to crest and descend like an ocean wave. All of the sampled sounds were placed on top of this wave. It is the relative volumes of each of the samples and their relationship to each other that creates interest in this movement. Contemporary composers, such as Christian Marclay and John Oswald, often work with sampled music of a pop or folk nature. However, none to my knowledge use samples in the manner in which I do in this movement. First, I use a longer portion of the sampled material. This may produce a question of ownership, but I believe that something new is created with the layering of the sounds. Second, most composers would alter the sampled material usually using some form of digital signal processing. I have chosen not to do that in order to better display the relationships produced by the layering of the different materials.

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² Paul Lansky at Princeton University developed RT.
³ Paul Lansky developed the original, non-real time CMIX package at Princeton University, and Brad Garton developed the real time version at Columbia University.
Rhythmic Alteration

Five minutes and thirty seconds into the work we get a great example of the use of rhythmic alteration. For this, I again used Sound Editor to construct sections that I later ordered in RT. This time, however, instead of combining the material from multiple samples, I reordered the samples within themselves. Sections of the samples were removed, shifted, reversed, or a combination of these methods to produce a new object. The resulting items have a complex rhythmic structure that hints at the basic 2 and 4 groove of American Popular music, but it never allows the listener to settle into this pattern. The resulting tension of this constantly changing pattern is the strength of the movement.
**List of Sampled Material**


