# AOSM COMPOSER INTERVIEW —JERRY GERBER

Jerry Gerber became an Art of Sound Music Composer in Q1-2009. His music is eclectic and melodic, with dynamic electronic textures as well as sampled instruments and voices. He has been exploring the world of MIDI sequencing since 1982 and owns and manages an electronic music studio  He has composed for film, concerts, dance and interactive media, and wrote all of the original music for the remaking of "Gumby", the popular children's television show. He has studied with Wayne Peterson (Pulitzer Prize), Alex Post, David Ahlstrom, Matt Doran, and other composers and musicians in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

**What is the difference writing for real vs. computerized musicians?  How do you approach each?**

It would take a long paper to explain the many differences and similarities between writing for machine and writing for humans.  Computer hardware and software are themselves created from human ingenuity, imagination and passion, and perhaps one of the purposes of the artist is to further humanize these machines with subjectivity, personality, and a vision of artful beauty that can only be partially realized in any artistic medium.  The social element of working with players and the human energy — the synergistic communal energy of people — doesn't play much of a role in electronic interpretation, which in modern terms is what the production of a recording is — a musical interpretation fixed in a temporal medium.  Can one interpret artistic meaning without a performance?  Painters and writers of literature do it all the time.  Why can't musicians interpret music without performance? On the other hand, on a purely compositional level, there are far more similarities than differences.  The composer still has to dig deep into imagination and construct good melodies and create harmonic interest, there is a concern for color, drama, structure, cohesiveness and overall artistic expression.  There is still the issue of effective counterpoint, creative orchestration, having something to say and saying it in an effective, original way.

**Do you begin with sequences or with musical notation?**

My work usually begins at the sequencer using the staff view, although there is much "pre-work" at the piano and "just thinking about music".  Rather than take pen (or quill!) to paper, I take mouse to screen, and grab notes and rhythms onto staves.  The craft of composition and the craft of sequencing music have merged in a sense.  The role of notation is a bit different with electronic scores.  As in writing for acoustic players, notation is about clarifying, deepening and refining one's ideas in great detail, but where its purpose diverges is in its role in giving musical instructions to musicians.  This is why I don't include, for example, dynamics in my electronic scores.  Dynamics are already "notated" in the sequence, and definitely an aspect of the craft of sequencing.   If no player is to realize the part, there's no need to duplicate specific playing instructions.

**Are you a composer that hears everything in your head or do you work at the keyboard?**

I do hear music in my mind, I compose at the computer, and I explore and improvise music at the piano or synthesizer.  I have no illusions of being able to effortlessly conceive of an entire piece in my imagination and then just going into the studio and producing it, that's not the way my talent works. My process is slower and more labor-intensive and I'll use whatever options I have available to coax the musical idea into real experience.

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**How do you balance your personal aesthetic and the strict demands of writing for movies/TV?**

I haven't done a soundtrack since the mid-1990s. I have focused only on writing for my own recordings and developing my craft in the new medium of computer-based music. I bring in soloists and singers every so often to keep the connection with collective music making, but I really don't mind spending thousands of hours alone in the studio, I enjoy it a lot. I am working now on my 11th CD, which is to have a new symphony (#7) and a medium-length vocal work. I am also teaching regularly and enjoying it.

**Are you a performing musician or strictly a composer?**

I have performed in the past, but I consider myself first a composer. I play piano daily or nightly and keep up my piano technique 5 days a week. Performing doesn't offer me the creative thrill that composing does, but I do love to play music and miss it if I don't play very often.

**How does this influence your writing?**

Playing the piano influences my sequences in a strange type of way. When I play, I feel the emotional and physical exhilaration that only playing music can evoke. I try to think like a player when I sequence, and strive to create nuance, variation, emotion and expression in my sequences. At other times I want the instrument (that's what I like to call my studio) to sound nothing like an acoustic instrument, for example when orchestrating a software synthesizer timbre containing oscillating (in tempo) harmonics changing their spectrum, volume and intensity over time into the texture. There is no acoustic player in the world that can do what a well-programmed software synthesizer can do and the sound can be intoxicating in its own way.

**What do you enjoy writing most?**

Music into which I can pour my deepest hope, pain, vision, feeling and thought. Music which has both sensual appeal and intellectual beauty. For me, complexity is not an end in itself. Music must at times be complex, at other times it must be simple. If it serves a higher expression, that's all that matters to me.

**Do you work on many pieces at once or one at a time?**

I only work on one at a time, and usually from start to finish.

**What is the one thing you've learned that others could benefit from?**

I'm not sure. Everyone takes what they want from their appreciation of another's experience, or their interpretation of another's experience, so it's hard to say. I hope others are inspired by my work as I have been inspired by the music of others. It's a give and take universe.

**How do the new tools available help/hinder your composing process?**

They help me realize my ideas and allow me to edit and craft my ideas to great detail. As far as hindering my composing process, I think every artist tries to make his own and his best work with whatever tools he has available. Sometimes I wish I had a bigger sample library that contained more articulations and playing styles. My library is currently big enough to run on 6 computers or so, but I run what I can on two because I have to factor in the time it takes to manage computers, which takes time away from writing music. I think of Stravinsky's statement "limitation is freedom".

**How do you make your next piece better?**

That 's a pretty interesting question…

*Thanks very much to Jerry for sharing his experiences. If you'd like to be featured in an upcoming issue of the Sounder please contact* ed@artofsoundmusic.com