Abstract

This season the Peabody Conservatory will celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of its original Electronic Music Studio by Jean Eichelberger Ivey in 1968. Over three decades the Computer Music Department has grown and expanded its activities considerably in the areas of education, composition, performance, and research. Computer music has become increasingly central in the Conservatory, as well as in our parent organization, the Johns Hopkins University.

1. Introduction

The Peabody Conservatory of Music, one of the oldest and most widely respected music schools in the United States, has an unbroken tradition of musical excellence dating back to the mid-nineteenth century. High musical standards and extremely low student/teacher ratios create an exceptional environment for musical education on both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Peabody alumni include some of the world's best-known concert artists, composers and teachers. Students are attracted to Peabody from all over the world, creating an international musical environment.

Electroacoustic music was introduced to Peabody in 1968, when our first Electronic Music Studio was founded by Jean Eichelberger Ivey. The affiliation of Peabody with Johns Hopkins in 1977 gave the conservatory access to the computers and expertise available at the University and made possible the Conservatory's entrance into computer music, under the direction of Geoffrey Wright. The current Computer Music Department, with Dr. Wright as coordinator, now manages its own network of computers, and provides computer expertise to the rest of the Conservatory, and multimedia leadership throughout Johns Hopkins.

2. Facilities

The Computer Music Department occupies a suite of six rooms on the third floor of the historic Conservatory building. There are two offices for the department's faculty and administrative assistants, and four special purpose studios for student faculty composition, performance rehearsal, and research.

The Teaching Studio is the largest studio, and doubles as the department's primary classroom. This room houses the carefully maintained and functioning original Moog modular synthesizers of the first Electronic Studio. In addition there is an extensive MIDI setup, with MIDI-controlled synthesizers, signal processors, and mixing facilities, centered around a Macintosh G3 computer. The adjacent Production Studio is a smaller room designed for single users and small group collaborations. This room features a more extensive array of MIDI equipment than the Teaching Studio, and is reserved for use by faculty, graduate students and other advanced users for composition and research.
Both studios feature professional mixing facilities, monitoring systems, analog and digital audio patch bays, direct-disk recording and editing systems, and digital multi-track and DAT two-track recording systems. These two studios are interconnected by audio and MIDI tie lines and Ethernet, allowing the studios to be linked for large-scale projects.

Recent renovations to the Conservatory building have given the Department two new studios: the Digital Arts Studio and the Digital Performance Studio. The Digital Arts Studio is a multi-user facility supporting a variety of digital arts applications including MIDI/Digital audio workstations, a multimedia/digital video workstation, and several computers for programming, internet access, and general use. The Digital Performance Studio is primarily for rehearsal, with a MIDI system which includes a Kawai MIDI Grand Piano. Plans are underway to convert this room to a new kind of rehearsal space that simulates many different performance environments, with computer-controlled acoustics, reverberation, and lighting.

A variety of computing platforms are available for student and faculty use, including Macintosh, Windows, Windows NT, NeXT, and Unix machines. The department supports a large number of music, sound, and multimedia software applications from both commercial software companies and shareware from independent developers. Conservatory faculty and students are also active in software development. Peabody is connected via DS3 to the Johns Hopkins SONET network, with access to the vBNS high speed research network.

3. Degree Programs

In 1989 Peabody launched its Master of Music degree in Computer Music. This two-year program was designed to prepare students with some previous computer music experience for careers in the field, or for further graduate study. The Conservatory's degree is unique in that it allows students to focus their attention in one of three major areas: composition, performance, or research. The highly selective applications procedure allows only the most highly qualified candidates admission, with no more than six students entering the program each year.

During the first year of study in the Master's degree program students are exposed to the department's core curriculum of Studio Techniques, Synthesis Theory, Programming and Electro-acoustic Music History. Private instruction with departmental faculty in the students' chosen area is also required, as well as a series of Special Topics Seminars which focus on specific areas of current interest. Students must also complete the Conservatory's core Master's degree requirements in Music History, Theory, Bibliography, and Ear Training.

In the second year students focus more on their chosen area. Those in composition are expected to complete a portfolio of at least four significant works, demonstrating a mastery of a variety of computer music techniques, in combination with acoustic instruments and other media. Performance majors concentrate on producing a full recital, featuring "classic" electroacoustic repertoire as well as newer works and compositions created expressly for them in collaboration with other students. Students in the research track are required to describe their research activities in a Master's Thesis.

Collaboration between students in different areas is strongly encouraged and is common at Peabody. Composers greatly benefit from working directly with performers, and research activities are often aimed at addressing compositional or performance issues. In addition to their study inside the department, students are often directed to other conservatory or university faculty when need arises. Study with appropriate studio faculty is recommended for performance majors, for example, while research projects often involve faculty expertise from other departments within the University.

Since its inception more than 30 people have received the Master of Music degree in Computer Music from Peabody. Many have gone on to further study or research at leading computer music centers throughout the world. Peabody alumni can currently be found at IRCAM, CCRMA, the University of California at San Diego, and many other locations. In addition Peabody graduates find that their computer music skills make them ideal candidates for work in the multimedia industry, and are often employed as composers, web authors, programmers, and network administrators.
For study beyond the Master's degree level Peabody also offers a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition and performance. Computer music is one of the areas on which composers and performers may choose to focus in their DMA studies. The Doctoral program is highly selective, usually admitting no more than 2 or 3 students per year. Those interested in further information regarding graduate study at Peabody should contact the Conservatory Admissions Office at (410)659-8110.

4. The Friedberg Lectures in Music and Psychology

Peabody and Johns Hopkins are fortunate to jointly host a unique series known as the Friedberg Lectures in Music and Psychology. Funded by a generous grant by the Sidney M. Friedberg foundation, these lectures feature leading researchers in their fields from around the world. Guest speakers are chosen jointly by the Peabody Computer Music and Johns Hopkins Psychology departments. Previous Friedberg lecturers include Roger Reynolds, Stephen McAdams, Bruno Repp, Max Mathews, Carol Krumhansl, Chris Chafe, and Raymond Kurzweil.

5. Composition

Composition is an important part of Peabody's activities, and is central to Computer Music as well. Two of the department's faculty members are active composers, and the composition track remains the most popular area within the Master's degree program. In a typical year, 25 to 30 new works composed for a variety of different media are created in the Peabody studios by students, faculty and guest artists. Many of these works involve acoustic instruments as well as electronics, and an increasing number of these are "interactive" works which involve a computer in performance. Collaborations with artists from other disciplines is facilitated by good relationships with the Dance Department of nearby Goucher College, and with the Video and Digital Arts programs of the Maryland Institute College of Art, one of the oldest visual arts schools in the country. Compositions from Peabody are performed regularly on student and faculty recitals within the school, and have been featured in recent years on ICMC, SEAMUS, and other electroacoustic music festivals as well as on radio and television.

Excellence in computer music composition is rewarded at Peabody through the annual Prix d'EtŽ competition. Funded by a generous grant from Peabody alumnus Walter Summer, the Prix d'EtŽ awards cash prizes and a guarantee of a public performance to 3 compositions selected by an outside panel of judges. This year, in conjunction with its 30th Anniversary, the department will offer two Prix d'EtŽ competitions, one for acoustic instruments with electronics, and one for acoustic instruments with electronics optional. Winners will be announced at our gala concert series in January, with a public performance of the winning works in the spring.

6. Performance

Peabody is home to over 700 concerts every year, ranging from student and faculty solo recitals to fully staged operaproductions. Resident ensembles include two orchestras, a Wind Ensemble, the Peabody Camerata (specializing in twentieth-century chamber music) and the Maia String Quartet. There are three main concert halls, the 950-seat Friedberg Hall, the mid-sized Leakin Hall, and the recently renovated Griswold Hall which contains a marvelous tracker pipe organ. The majority of students at the Conservatory are performers, and this talented pool of musicians is a wonderful resource for Peabody composers and researchers.

With the Conservatory's strong tradition in performance, it is natural that performance is an important component of the Computer Music Department's as well. Each year, in addition to degree recitals by Master's degree candidates, the department produces several concerts featuring student composers and performers. Most important of these is the annual Prix d'EtŽ concert, featuring winning compositions from that competition. These concerts are usually featured as a part of Peabody's Thursday Noon Concert Series, which presents the best Peabody student performances to the public free of charge.
The Peabody Computer Music Consort, founded in 1984 by Geoffrey Wright and McGregor Boyle, is a professional ensemble in residence at the Computer Music Department and dedicated to the performance of the digital arts. The Consort aims to bring the best current computer music and multimedia performance to the public in unique and original ways. The Consort frequently invites guest composers and performers to participate in its events. Previous guests have included composers Morton Subotnick, Roger Reynolds, Mario Davidovsky, Dexter Morrill, and alcides lanza and performers including Joan LaBarbera, Janos Negyesy, Uttera Asha Coorlawalla, and wheelchair dancer Charlene Curtis. Critically acclaimed performances have been given by the Consort in New York, at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C, and the Maryland Science Center, among others.

7. Research and Technology Transfer

Computer Music research activities are focused in the areas of psychoacoustics and music perception, support of real-time composition and performance systems, multi-media systems, and music cognition. Peabody researchers regularly work with Johns Hopkins researchers in a variety of related areas of mutual interest.

Peabody is known internationally for the performance and composition of classical music, and for providing gifted artists with a musical education of the highest quality. Now, in the Information Age and with Johns Hopkins support, Peabody is combining its traditional strengths with science and entrepreneurial vision to establish a Technology Transfer Office, and to bring to market music-related electronic and distance education products, digital audiosystems, and multimedia composition and performance.

8. The 30th Anniversary

This year the Computer Music Department celebrates the 30th Anniversary of the founding of the Peabody Electronic Music studio with a series of concerts, lectures, master classes and related events. The Computer Music Consort will present two concerts in Friedberg Hall on Friday January 29th and Saturday January 30th. Featured guest performers include Mari Kimura and F. Gerrarde Errante. In addition the concerts will feature Conservatory faculty and alumni and previous winners of the Prix d’Eté. For further information on the Anniversary celebrations contact the Office of Public Information at (410) 659-8165.

9. The Future

Building on the established musical traditions of the Conservatory, and the academic excellence of the Johns Hopkins University, the Peabody Computer Music Department will continue to pursue its activities in composition, performance, and research. Our mission is to accept the most gifted musical artists, and to provide them with a musical and technical education of the highest quality.

Bibliography


