Kopavogur Computer Music Center (KCMC)

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Abstract

This is an introduction to the newest developments in Iceland's electro-acoustic music scene, centering on the recent additions of the Kopavogur Computer Music Center and the Kopavogur Music Hall, the ART 2000, Iceland's first international computer music festival, and the establishment of a Music Department at the newly founded Iceland Academy of the Arts.

1 KCMC History

Kopavogur Computer Music Center (KCMC) was founded in 1995 by the composers Hilmar Thordarson and Rikhardur H. Fridriksson. Being part of the Kopavogur School of Music this was the first studio in Iceland where students were offered Computer Music as a main subject and not as a part of a composition or instrumental studies.

The studio was founded as an experimental project in order to find out if there was indeed sufficient demand for such an operation in Iceland’s music educational scenery. Now, six years later, it is clear that the demand was there, more of it than ever expected, and more than can be supplied by present resources.

It has been proven that there are many prospective musicians out there that will not fit into the regular traditional music education system, but still want to further their musical ambitions. KCMC has opened a possibility for them and the experience shows that by using the latest technology in music, new doors have opened into the music educational system where the final goal is not being a virtuoso performer on a traditional instrument, or a respected classical composer, but simply being an “electronic musician” in the widest sense of the word.

Starting out in a windowless basement room with one Macintosh computer, a mixer, and one MIDI sound module, the studio has grown into Iceland’s best equipped computer music facility, and with its move into the Kopavogur Music House in early 2000, it became the only studio in Iceland built as such from the ground up. More information on KCMC can be found at http://ttk.ismennt.is.

2 ART 2000

To celebrate this move and its five years of operation, the KCMC organized ART 2000, the first international computer music festival to be held in Iceland. The festival took place in October 2000 and lasted for eleven days.

2.1 The Festival

The purpose of this festival was to raise people's awareness of the influence of electronic and computer technology on music; its composition and performance, to search for answers to the question of what will be technology's role in the music of the coming century and how music will subsequently develop. Last but not least, it was meant to introduce music that has been made with the help of electronic and computer technology.

Coinciding with the ART 2000 festival there was a conference on electro-acoustic music, where lectures and exhibitions dealt with the development through an historical perspective and tried to answer the question of how the development might be in the future. The festival took place from October 18th - 28th 2000, and included eleven concerts where the history (past), present and future of Electronic- and Computer music was the main theme. On the side there were other happenings, such as installations, late night club performances et al, where Electronic and Computer music played a central role. Lectures combined with the concerts assembled the bigger picture.

2.2 Consequences

The festival attracted huge attention and was well attended by a strange mixture of conventional music lovers and hard-core neo-fashion-noise-ambient-techno-whatever-the-latest-trend crowd. Wherever they came from, they seemed to enjoy themselves, as did the diverse flora of renowned international guest composers and lecturers invited for the festival.

For those who couldn’t attend, the whole festival was broadcast live on the Internet, with re-runs broadcast between concerts. This gave everybody, anywhere a chance to “attend” the festival, regardless of geographical location and time difference.
In conjunction with the festival a web page was set up at http://www.musik.is/art2000/, a web site that now has been converted into a general information site on electronic and computer music from Iceland under the name http://www.musik.is/electronic/. That page gives all available information and links to Icelandic electronic composers, studios, educational options, concerts, CDs and other publications.

The ART2000 festival was awarded the prize as the Music Event of the year 2000 by Dagbladid (“Daily Paper”) one of Iceland’s largest newspapers, the only cultural prize for music awarded in Iceland.

3 Kopavogur Music House

The Kopavogur Music House was opened on January 2nd 1999 when “The Hall” was inaugurated, and fully utilized in the fall of the same year when the Kopavogur School of Music moved there. Iceland’s best acoustics experts were brought on for the design work. The Music House opened various possibilities never before available, this being the first building in Iceland specially designed for such purpose. The Music House has a web page at http://www.salurinn.is, unfortunately still only in Icelandic. It includes a graphic “virtual tour” of the house, as well as the KCMC main studio. The URL is http://www.salurinn.is/Virtual/default.html.

From the onset it was clear that The Hall should be suitable for performance of as wide a variety of music as possible. Therefore it was decided to locate the Kopavogur Computer Music Center next to it, as well as a first class recording studio with a window into The Hall. That construction enabled possibilities for performance of music using unconventional instruments, like electronic and computer music instruments that can be remote-controlled from the studios and projected through one of the best speaker systems ever constructed for music concerts in Iceland. The KCMC studio is fully equipped for sound design, sound research and sound recording.

A central patch bay connects both studios to each other, the Music Hall and a rehearsal room at the Kopavogur School of Music. This way analog and digital audio, as well as MIDI, video and Ethernet signals are freely transferable between all these places, as well as the outside world.

In addition to a big projection screen, a good lighting system and good facilities for interfacing with radio- and TV broadcast equipment, the Kopavogur Music House is the only place in Iceland that can offer equally good facilities for music and hi-tech multimedia art, as well as being very suitable for modern conferences.

These new facilities have totally revolutionized production and performance of electro-acoustic music in Iceland. In fact, it is only now that one can say that Iceland can offer working conditions of international standards, comparable to most other developed countries.

4 Iceland Academy of the Arts

In the fall of 2001 a Music Department was founded as part of the Iceland Academy of the Arts joining the departments of Visual Arts, Drama and Graphic Design. This new development in music education has raised high hopes for new areas especially since new technology seems to be high on the preference list of the academy authorities.

Computer literacy is required of all students. A computer lab is accessible for all students and interdisciplinary work is highly encouraged. In cooperation with the Reykjavik College of Music the latter’s computer music studio has been upgraded significantly, giving the potential of another first class studio facility in Iceland in the near future.