The Theremin Center for Electro-Acoustic Music

Andre Smirnov
Director

Moscow Conservatory, 13 Hertsen Str., Moscow 103871, Russia
Phone: (095) 229-3803, Fax: (095) 292-6511 TCEAM Box 18425
E-mail: tsmir@ipras.msk.su

1. Forwords

Rapid development of electronic technologies and their applications in art gave to the artists new technical tools and changed their world outlook. At the same time in former Soviet Union Electro-Acoustic Music became undesired daughter of the former Soviet cultural establishment as well as many others experimental innovative directions in contemporary art. Till nowadays new technological instrumentation and created with its help new artistic environments were unknown in our country. In many respects musical education in former Soviet Union was strong and deep, but very conservative and traditionally there was a strong and rigid opinion what is right and what is wrong, what artists have to do and what is strictly prohibited. Only now our old professors of music awaked and found, that our pluralistic post-modern world much more diverse.

Since the use of technologies are as yet not taught in state music schools, conservatories and universities in Russia, the development of new media arts came to a contradiction with the lack of special knowledge and global contemporary outlook in the local artistic community. Dissociation of representatives of different professions was the reason, that all achievements in electro-acoustic music, interactive arts, computer animation, virtual reality, video- and TV technologies are unknown to the artists. Meanwhile Russia with her traditions, huge artistic potential and constant inclination for innovation could not be indifferent to revolutionary cultural transformations. In Russian underground many individuals were working without any governmental support creating music, developing unique equipment, conducting research. Most of these efforts never came to public attention, but created the basis for the future cultural revival.

2. The Theremin Center

The Theremin Center for Electro-Acoustic Music was founded in 1992 by the group of composers and specialists in computer music as a new, democratically constituted private institute, independent from the former cultural bureaucratic institutions, opened to all composers, musicians and scientists of all nationalities, regardless of their political affiliation. It was named for Leon Theremin - Russian inventor of one of the first widely used electronic musical instruments.

Creating the Theremin Center we made an attempt to solve most of the above mentioned problems. We involved in our project really enthusiastic people, having the experience of underground work in the field of electro-acoustic music and excellent professional skills.

At present the Theremin Center is the first institution in Russia providing training through courses and tutorials

in Electro-Acoustic Music.

The interest of the Theremin Center falls between the art and science. The Theremin Center does not give priority to any particular aesthetic or genre, having the particular interest in responsibility towards other artistic fields such as the visual arts, dance, theatre, video and film, conducting various educational and research programs, producing concerts and festivals, making conferences and workshops.

The Theremin Center is intended to operate on a non-profit basis. Revenues earned from courses offered are used to pay modest administrative and technical support staff. As the most of new non-profit cultural organizations in Russia, the Theremin Center has no governmental funding. At present all services are being donated by the founders of the Theremin Center as is most of the equipment. The Moscow State Conservatory has provided space for the Theremin Center. It is housed in the Sound Recording and Musical Acoustics Laboratory at the Moscow State Conservatory - the place where in 60s Leon Theremin conducted his research.

Professor Jon Appleton (Dartmouth College, USA) found the International Advisory Board and helped in developing the Theremin Center and establishing continuous relationships within the international musical and scientific communities.

3. The Theremin Center goals:

- to provide a working environment for young composers, musicians, musicologists, theorists, programmers and engineers who are interested in electro-acoustic music and who have demonstrated musicality, imagination, inclination for innovation, ability to produce uncommon creative ideas and projects, to integrate different professional skills in multimedia projects and cross-disciplinary research;
- to provide training through courses and tutorials for those who want to master the techniques of electro-acoustic music;
- to conduct multi-disciplinary research in computer science and acoustics in the field of music and multimedia;
- to provide studio facilities for composers who need special purpose equipment for their work and to encourage composers into producing new works of music, using the results of scientific projects;
- to bring to the public attention, works created at the Theremin Center, and results of the research;
- to establish continuous relationships within the international musical and scientific communities;
- to provide support for new electro-acoustic music centers in Russia;
- to promote electro-acoustic music and to serve as a model institution.

4. Structure and staff

The Theremin Center consists of four departments:
- Electro-Acoustic Music Studio Utopia;
- Laboratory for Interactive Systems and Meta-Control;
- Laboratory for Restoration and Digital Sound Processing;
- TPO Composer.

The Theremin Center Studio Board: Andre Smirnov, Denis Zhalnin, Yury Spitsin, German Dovzhenko, Peter Pospelov.

International Advisory Board: Jon Appleton (USA), Mark Battier (France), Max Mathews (USA), Jean-Claude Risset (France), Lars-Gunnar Bodin (Sweden).

Director of the Theremin Center: Andre Smirnov

The purpose of the Studio is to become the Island Utopia for the young talented composers who need help and special purpose equipment for their creative work. It provides them free studio use-time and technical support, possibility to create special purpose equipment and software, opportunity to participate in concerts and broadcasts. It is possible to work at Studio twenty-four hours a day, every day, year round.

The purpose of laboratories is to provide technical support for the Studio Utopia, to conduct interdisciplinary research and to create special purpose software and hardware for studio, performance, concert and theatre applications, interactive systems and multimedia. The staff of laboratories provides educational courses for the students of the Theremin Center and participates in commercial projects for making the Theremin Center exist.

Laboratory for Interactive Systems and Meta-Control is developing special hardware and software for different interactive music projects, trying to solve the problem of control versus responsiveness aspiring to achieve performer's interpretive freedom to respond to the moment.

Laboratory for Restoration and Digital Sound Processing developed a system based on Tornado-30 DSP board by MicroLabs company, AT-486 computer and created software for direct-to-disk recording, synthesis, sound processing and real-time restoration, using Fourier Transform for elimination various noises and distortion.

TPO Composer is the special department, arranging composers for the different complex collaborative projects. It is a kind of Musical Factory where each composer is working on his own segment of the whole project.

5. Educational activities

The Theremin Center provides free courses and laboratory/studio use for conservatory students and free tutorials for individuals with selected projects.

Andre Smirnov, Valery Beluntsov, German Dovzhenko conduct the general one year lecture course on history, aesthetics and tools of electro-acoustic music and weekly group practical training.

The Theremin Center arranges regular lectures and master-classes of visiting composers.

In 1993-1994 visiting composers Jon Appleton (USA), Kojiro Umezaki (Japan), Christian Clozier (France), Eduard Artemiev (Russia), Maurice Mettrot (USA), Dror Feiler (Sweden), Paolo Chagas (Germany) represented their music and talk about the postmodernism aesthetics, history of electro-acoustic music, interactive music systems, MAX program, sound processing, neural networks, fractals in music and computer graphics, Cubase and Finale programs, live electro-acoustic music, Radio Baton etc.

6. Knowledge transfer

The Theremin Center is trying to establish continuous relationships within the international musical and scientific communities since it is the best way to expand outlook of the young musicians.

In collaboration with prof. Jon Appleton we made a conference for Music Technology and Postmodernism in Russia, Europe, the Americas and Japan at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Study and Conference Center (Italy) in January, 1994, which brought together composers, teachers, radio producers, and music information executives from Russia, USA, Sweden, France, Argentina, Brazil and Japan.

Ten Russian composers working with technology will come to the United States in October 1994. We will conduct a three-day orientation workshop in New York following which each composer will travel to a different university for two week period of study and consultation arranged by an American composer working with technology. The workshop produced by Jon Appleton and Andre Smirnov with the kindly support by IREX (the International Research & Exchanges Board).

7. Creative activities

More than thirty composers and programmers from Russia, Ecuador, Croatia and Greece were working at the Studio during last two years. They created a lot of tape compositions, music for acoustical instruments and tape, interactive music, algorithmic compositions, text-sound compositions, music for radio broadcasts.

In 1993-1994 the Theremin Center produced ten concerts of Electro-Acoustic Music by composers, working at the Studio Utopia and visitors, participated in four Festivals and Forums.

At 21-st International Competition in Bourges (France) Valery Beluntsov's piece «Lzy» got a mention in section one (Residences).

The Text-Sound Composition «Gospozha Lenin» by Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov, composer Valery Beluntsov, sound engineer Andre Smirnov and artistic director Aleksander Ponomarev won a prize for the best mini-drama at the 1st International Festival Ostankino Prize in Moscow.

The Theremin Center participates in producing of the annual International New Music Festival in Moscow, called Alternative, expanding it, including more electro-acoustic music, interactive and multimedia compositions, inviting performers and composers from abroad.