

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW #5

Date	20 October 2021	Duration	00:52:19
Interviewer	Principal researcher	Informant	Informant E

Informant (00:00): Am I making a lot of noise, because my computer's fan is running hard? I'm rendering some videos.

Interviewer (00:05): No, I can't hear anything.

Informant (00:07): Okay, that's good.

Interviewer (00:12): If you're ready, I'm going to give you a bit of an introduction as to what I want to ask you.

Informant (00:18): Sure.

Interviewer (00:19): What I really want to understand is how network music performance works from the perspective of a performer such as yourself. I want to understand your experiences, in your own words. If I do interrupt you, I might ask you to explain something further. Just so that you're aware of that. It's going to be a very [relaxed] discussion – more how I want it to be than anything else.

Informant (01:06): I guess doing your ground up type of data collection? Open questions?

Interviewer (01:10): Yes.

Informant (01:14): Yeah, I love that. I find that it works so much more. Well, I wouldn't say better. It's a very ambiguous term, but it generates information that I didn't know to ask about. It's [more] real in many ways. When you ask very specific questions, the data are sometimes clear, but they're not as rich and as interesting. I love that because that's how I do research too and it's very messy. Very messy research.

Interviewer (01:53): As a first timer, you can also imagine. I've never done this before, so it's an interesting learning curve. I will say that.

Informant (02:03): Yeah, and it's a lot of responsibility too. [This is] the last anecdote before I answer a question, but when I did my PhD my supervisor was a very quantitative type of [person]. [They] wanted me to ask very specific questions, but it really didn't work for me in terms of what I wanted to discover. It was very new and very emergent. And so, I did both. I asked very specific questions, did some sort of quantitative stuff to get it over with and then the real meat was in the qualitative, open questions for me. In terms of the experience of network performance, I've been doing it for a while now, in different forms, but not just live coding. Live coding came later. At first, I think it was 2008, [I] was basically curious [and] exploring, because in university we're in the business of exploring. We're always just searching for different things - we don't know where it goes – [and] it's sort of like discovering potential new ways of collaborating with other people, new ways of making art, new ways of inspiring ourselves. That was sort of the, the entry point. I followed with an invitation from a festival to perform with another professor in Edmonton. It was just a duo, and we both played electronics and flutes [using] JackTrip.

Informant (04:22): It was fun, just like other new things, but since then I realised there are new channels to make friends. Artistic friends. To open up to farther distances, but also I found there is a community that focuses on telematics as its main research and research creation. Part of it had to do with developing tools. Part of it had to do with developing methods; dealing with the unpredictability of network problems and beating the obstacles in some way. It was another challenge and it was interesting. One thing that I can point out in relation to that idea of overcoming obstacles, which is an interesting thing [and] fun in itself, [is] just a sense of fulfilment. There is this big obstacle to making contacts with other people and collaborating with other people, and we found a way around it. After doing a bunch of telematic things, since 2010 I started doing it with the laptop orchestra too. It was interesting to see how groups are sort of resolving the problem. When it's two people [it's] a fun thing, but when you have a bunch of people there is, beyond the technology, this

whole dynamic that's interesting as well. I remember a couple of moments as distinct in my memory from the early days. One is, we're doing this performance with five different cities and the laptop orchestra, and I remember we were rehearsing five hours in the classroom at [the university]. The classroom at [here] has nine speakers all around, and I assigned each city to different stereo pairs. We were there, and people were talking to us from different places for five hours. We were all together in the same space, because we're not just playing, it was actual conversation happening. That was magical. People were not physically there, but the sound quality was so good and they were located in different places around the classroom. It felt like, we're really in one space.

Interviewer (07:37): Right, I see.

Informant (07:39): Another thing I remember distinctly, [that] brought me into being more interested, was thinking it's hard technically, technologically and sometimes logistically. Especially when you have 35 people playing, or sometimes more. I think we had 50 at some point. I thought, wouldn't it be cool if we open it up fully and make it into a fully telematic jam session. We didn't have Estuary back then. It wasn't as open [where] people can just jump in and start making sound. Technology, especially using JackTrip, back then internet was not that strong, unless you're at a university. I wanted people from home to do it, so that anyone, anywhere can jump in and play. I was talking to this telematic researcher [who is] very established. That's [their] main field and [they] said [that it's] preposterous, telematic performances have to be very well planned, otherwise they're going to fail. That automatically made me think I'm going to do a big performance and anyone, anywhere can join in freely. I thought I could pull it off. There was no ego in wanting to do it's just a I'll prove you wrong kind of thing. It wasn't primary. The primary thing was I really wanted to do it. I really wanted it to be sort of messy. People coming in and out and see what happens and to make it happen. People signed up and when the event itself happened, the craziest thing was, I did not want to limit anyone to any protocol. I didn't want anyone to just

use JackTrip. If you want to use JackTrip because the sound quality is better, fine. If people want to do something else [that's] fine. I had one computer in the classroom, managing all the different protocols. Well basically we were using two; one with JackTrip and the other one was TubePlug. TubePlug was this old VST plug doing what JackTrip does, but with mp3 and much, much higher latency but much lower demands on the network. JackTrip was just failing if you were anything but university level type of people that couldn't do it from home.

Informant (10:46): But I wanted people on JackTrip to also jam with people on TubePlug. I had this one computer with basically going on all the networks [and] mixing all the sounds together. I had a student, who came in and was navigating traffic. People were chatting with [them]. We couldn't have everybody play together, but we did six people at a tower, six locations at a time and people coming in and out of the jam for six hours. It was 23 different cities around the world. People were coming in and out through the night. One lovely [person] was just performing in the evening from Greece, leaving and coming back. Then in the middle of the night, I remember [their child] woke up and it was [like we were hanging out]. People were chatting and that was really cool. For six hours. That was in 2012. It was what made me really love network music. Then with [another friend of mine], probably in 2014 or so, we started messing around with the idea of also doing synchronized metronomic performances [and] we thought of different ways of doing it.

Informant (12:40): We wanted some kind of metronome over the network, and we did the collaboration between [my orchestra] and [their orchestra] where it was a metronomic connection happening. It was JackTrip, but I can't remember how we did it exactly. We kept the same tempo and it was very crude. I remember. We just played the same tempo, but also did a delay because we're laptop orchestras and we don't need to hear ourselves immediately when we play. So, we delayed our own signals to match the incoming signal. We didn't delay sending it on the network, but we delayed our own monitoring to match the signal that's coming in

from the other orchestra. Each of us sounded together, and when we were playing we overcame the idea of latency by just monitoring ourselves late. I took this idea further to working with instruments as well. You basically develop this whole system where, as long as there's only one ensemble that plays acoustic instruments and the rest are electronic, you can only do that. Because for live instruments to delay their own monitoring, it sucks. It really sucks to play a saxophone and hear yourself 500 milliseconds later. It doesn't work. It's really hard to play this way. But for laptops, we don't care. We can live with it. We did this performance with one ensemble of acoustic instruments, and the rest were electronic instruments and it sounded metronomic. It sounded together.

Informant (14:45): [In collaborating] with [my friend], we thought about ideas of how to automate this. I created this Pd patch where, on JackTrip, we use one track. It was an audio track with a sweeping tone, and you could basically recognize the frequency. If everybody was running that – a full bar from a sweeping tone [and] from top to bottom with the same frequency - everybody could share that one track and basically the matching of the of the monitoring delays could be automated by frequency identification. I've tried that. I just did a little prototype of that. I started working [on it], but I never actually performed with it. Then came live coding with - what was the name of the program before Estuary?

Interviewer (15:48): Extramuros?

Informant (15:51): Yeah. That took over for me. Alex McLean, [my friend] and I started an ensemble, [using] Extramuros, so we kind of put aside this other idea. Suddenly we didn't have to worry about this stuff. It's all together. We did a bunch of performances together; the three of us. Then [two more people] joined. This ensemble was working for a year and I think this was just the beginning; the seed for the development of Estuary.

Interviewer (16:29): Yes.

Informant (15:31): And Estuary. I love Estuary, because it makes it so accessible. Anyway, that's the history of where network music has taken me.

Interviewer (16:52): That's cool. I have some prepared open ended questions that I do want to ask you, and I'll kind of see how it flows. I might ask some. I might not ask a few of them just because you might mention something that already came up. But I want to ask you, how would you define your current official career title? Where you are in your profession right now?

Informant (17:23): Right, it's a big question. Formally Associate Professor of electroacoustic studies, but it's developed in so many very cool directions. I think part of it has to do with [the university] being what it is, which is a very strongly, Fine Arts university. [This] means that as a department of music where I'm [teaching], [is] very open or very well situated to mix with a lot of other things in the arts. If I take away these sorts of formalities, to say where I am and how I experienced that, I don't care so much about the fact that I got here through music. I love music. There's no question that I love it, but I love people. I love collaborating with people and in a way music has been my natural channel into a world where I can just collaborate. These collaborations can take any form. It's not limited to music and it's not about me, either. It really is about making connection, creating together and discovering together. I'm hugely thankful for being able to come here because I can and because I'm in academia. There is room for this to go in a very experimental, exploratory way all the time. It's harder when you're an independent artist, because you don't have the safety net for that sometimes. Don't get me wrong, there's some freedoms being an independent artist that academia doesn't provide. That's true too, but I like academia for the balanced drive to explore, but also with a safety net of structure. And, of course, just being able to work in your field. I think within academia I've found a good channel too, because I find that it's not true for all academics as well. It really depends on where you are.

Informant (20:09): I did start in the jazz world, then switched to the classical world in my studies, then started a PhD in composition. That didn't quite feel right. I

learned a lot in terms of how research goes in the world of music. In theory, in musicology and this kind of stuff, I found the composition to be very weird for me. For one thing composing with this very structured environment, where you can't just be exactly who you want to be. You don't have the freedom to fully be whatever. Well, there are two sides to it. One, it's somewhat restrictive with your supervisors and what is accepted as contemporary classical composition or whatever. Even though it's supposed to be pretty open it's not exactly open. It's very traditional, in some ways. Although it's experimental, it goes far in terms of the sonic world, the structure and the way of composing are not really free. Not really. I mean, they're definitely rigorous. That's fine. I think rigor is great, but they're also extremely culturally restrictive. And

Informant (21:59): There was this one side that [made me] feel like I [couldn't be] whatever I [wanted] to be. I don't have the room for that. At the other end of it, it also felt like structure was very narcissistic. I'm the composer. I compose. I find people who may want to perform it and people who may want to listen to it. It felt like I'm not sure where I want to be exactly. I left this PhD program. I wouldn't say just because of that. I realised later that, or what I'm telling you now, emerged later as something I understood. But when I left it was basically because we were moving from [one place to another] and it felt like I wasn't really going anywhere with this program. I was doing fine in terms of like courses and stuff like that. I didn't quite understand my place there. Leaving something in the middle also makes you get lost even further. But when you're really lost, you have more urgency to find - and it took me some time - but eventually I found myself in a doctoral program in music education. Although this was completely off my field of electroacoustics, that I streamed into after classical music, I found that in electroacoustics there was a little more freedom. Electroacoustics itself is structured and has its own culture, don't get me wrong. It's very strongly gender and culture focused. It has its own issues right now. If you look at the electroacoustics history it's hugely white male structured and although

there is some diversity in its history, it's very minimally covered in literature. Anyway, it's another issue.

Informant (24:42): What I found at with music education is, that although what I was studying [it] had nothing to do with electroacoustics. The culture of music education or music as a more collaborative people-centered thing, made way more sense to me. I matched it to what I love to do, but also because it wasn't about composition anymore. Nobody told me how to compose anymore. I had more room to do whatever I wanted. Thankfully, I found myself at [here] at the same time. [The university, where I am now,] was a good match in terms of this exploratory, experimental openness. New research, types of methods, and constantly thinking outside the box kind of way. It's welcome there. It's still academia, don't get me wrong. It's not a wonderland where you can do whatever, but from all the universities that I've gone through as a student, this was the first time I felt like I can actually think for myself here a little bit. So, that's the story. That's where I am in terms of careers, putting aside the formalities of positions and stuff, which I'm happy with. It's just a real good environment right now, for me to really explore and experiment and do whatever. If I have a cool idea, I can go with it. Maybe not today, but I can sort of structure it for tomorrow.

Interviewer (26:40): You started the laptop orchestra [there right]?

Informant (26:44): Yeah, in 2010.

Interviewer (26:47): Cool. Let me see what I want to ask you next. You gave me quite a good of background, so I think we can move on from that. There are two more areas that I want to focus on. The first is your individual approach to live coding practice, and then how you approach collective live coding as well. If you could start with your individual approach, and if I could give you a starting question; how did you get into live coding and was it easy for you to learn how to live code?

Informant (27:38): The entry point was [my friend]. I always loved coding, but I didn't feel exactly prepared for doing it live, but [they are] my friend. We became friends, and maybe around 2012 or 2010, I can't remember exactly. I

think around there, we basically met [at an electroacoustic community event and] we've been really good friends since then. And so, [they] invited me to join this ensemble with Alex McLean and I didn't know anything about live coding at the time. I mean, I [knew] coding. I coded in Pure Data pretty well and I've coded things since a young age. When I was 16 I already coded in assembly, in Commodore 64 at the time. Coding was not foreign to me. I hadn't coded using text based coding for many years, but when [my friend] asked, [they] said it's really easy. I learned TidalCycles, it was called Tidal back then, and that was the entry point. I loved it because the network element was so accessible in this way. Also, going into beatmaking after doing all these abstract telematic performances especially when you have latency, by default you're going into more abstract non-metric things. That was a real attractive element. Suddenly you can play together metrically. We've been trying to do that before, but now it's just easy. That was a good incentive. I learned [TidalCycles] by reading Alex's code and by reading [my friend's] code. That's how it started and the logic of coding is - it always made sense to me - it's just a matter of learning new languages. The time it takes and the pains in the beginning, that I know you also suffered from. It is painful at the beginning. It's like speaking in a language you don't know, and you feel so dumb sometimes, but you suffer through it.

Interviewer (30:39): And then one day you wake and you're all good.

Informant (30:41): Yeah, suddenly you can walk and then you can run.

Interviewer (30:45): Would you say that you have a particular process that you follow? You mentioned you prefer working with people. Would you say it's true that you don't really code by yourself a lot?

Informant (31:03): Not performance. I don't really perform on my own as a live coder. In general, I kind of put away this idea of performing and composing. I sometimes miss the joy of sitting and just spending time on writing a song. Not so much an electroacoustic piece, but more like songs. There's something very intimate about them that I love and do miss, but now

thankfully my daughter has been writing a lot of songs. I have the joy of helping her record and produce them. In terms of making music in performance I way more prefer the collective setting. I just love people. I love to see how they work; I love to learn from them and I love to share with them.

Interviewer (32:07): A lot of my questions wouldn't apply in this situation, but one thing I do think does is a question I think I've asked pretty much everyone. How would you describe your identity as a performer?

Informant (32:33): Silly. I love doing new stuff all the time. In a way, I don't look for an identity that's established. I do not want to develop a style. That's never been my interest. It's always been [that] I want to develop skills so I can quickly adapt. I want performances and rehearsals to be exploratory. Finding new sounds. Finding new modes of collaboration. Finding new fun technological things. I think it's just always looking ahead for what I don't know, which also requires this openness to fail and to mess up. I love doing that in a collective setting where there is a lot of unexpected stuff to handle and build on. If I'm sort of idealizing what I would like my identity to be as a performer, it would be this adaptable, constantly experimenting, constantly collaborating mode of operation where it's kind of like being playful within a group. It doesn't always work this way, because a bunch of things that are sometimes hard to predict, like power dynamics. Sometimes technologically, it's not really working, but I know that in the laptop orchestra my ideal performance is this shared co-creating. Everybody has a voice, but I find it doesn't always happen as I want to. It rarely does. Actually, there's always people who get lost in the mix and people who don't feel comfortable as I think they would. That's what I'm constantly looking for. I wouldn't even say it's a performer thing. It's more like a collaborator thing that I'm looking at, which to me is the same. I'm not interested that much to be "the performer."

Interviewer (35:45): I see. [That] makes sense. That's cool. What has being in SuperContinent specifically meant to you, as you say, a collaborator?

Informant (36:08): Well, I'm in a band. First, it's a really great learning environment in terms of code, music and visuals. I love the friendship element that develops through the years. It's in some ways slow because we don't personalize that much, but I do feel that there is a general kind of affection going around. It's nice and it does seem to evolve towards this ideal setting that I've been looking for; this collective. Everybody has a voice and everybody can contribute no matter at what ability level you are. To provide each other with respectful feedback when necessary without it feeling [judgemental].

Interviewer (37:40): I appreciate that so much.

Informant (37:43): Yeah. I love that with [the university orchestra] as an environment. In being the teacher, as much as I do everything I can to soften the power dynamic element, I'm still a teacher. In SuperContinent, I don't have to deal with that [as] much. I'm just one of the one of the guys. I'm using guys very well here, because we're mostly not guys.

Interviewer (38:24): Yeah, and that's really awesome. I really love that because coming from the audio industry, it's a very male dominated industry, as you know. So, it's refreshing to say the least.

Informant (38:40): I'm really excited by that too. I think that because it's a male dominated field, males in the field have no choice but to be active in changing it. It took me some years, but I wondered what is my role in making a difference. It's not exactly my fight. I don't want to take the lead in something [where] I'm not the person who is marginalized, at least not for gender. I think for many years, I didn't realize I had any place or role to play in it at all, except for it's weird, it sucks, but what can I do? I was awakened to the place or to the role that I could or should play, by a student. Our program typically has been about 5% non-cisgender male. I don't like saying non-cisgender male because it's still male-centered. I don't have the inclusive term yet, because if you say non-binary, then you exclude transgender [individuals]. If you say non-male it's also negative, but you also exclude transgender men. There is a lot of genders. The one term that I sometimes still use is women and gender

non-conforming, but I don't like the “non” and I don't like the non-conforming idea. No, what do you mean non-conforming? I am who am. To what am I not conforming? I don't have the right term, but you know what I'm talking about.

Interviewer (41:00): The student came and spoke with the group of students who are mostly women, some [were] transgender and non-binary, and awakened us to what it means to be marginalised in this fashion and in the program. I realized that the problem is not just worldwide. Yeah, there is a worldwide problem in this field, but I realized there are some things that are actionable right here. They don't feel comfortable in the classroom sometimes, when they're the only woman in the class of 25 or 30 people, and it's because of the stupid jokes that are going around. It's because of the [male] camaraderie culture that's happening that is very exclusive. This stuff can change. It's not that hard, right? So, she really made a difference [in] that she created this whole culture of transformation in our program. She started this amazing symposium on sound and gender. She brought me into a group of sound and gender that she created with the head [of] this institute at [the university] that has intersectional feminist studies. I started very quietly being part of this activist approach, but after a while I felt a little more comfortable to say some stuff always knowing that basically because the field is so lopsided, you need men to speak up too. Otherwise, [their] voices are just too quiet. I can't remember how we got there. Oh yeah, you mentioned you're in this field and it's very male-oriented. It's been getting better at [here], by the way. The numbers have grown and the culture has improved, but it's definitely a process. It takes time and takes keeping the momentum. There's a book that I'm really hoping somebody would write to help out in the history of women, non-binary and trans [people] in electronic music. There are a lot of people along the way that contributed the field that are very little written about, and I think that will really help to see some role models along the way. I even sort of tried my hand at pushing this to happen, but I know it's also not exactly my place. So, I've started with Donna, my friend who is an electronic musician and we even got a

publishing contract, but, you know, we're parents. She's a single mom. We started and I've invited another person, but then this other person had some other idea and somehow it just ended up not happening. But I really hope to see this book. If this book were out there - it would really make - it could really make a change in showing younger people there are non-men in this field that made a huge difference. This literature is really missing right now.

Interviewer (45:24): Yeah, I hear you. I think we're towards the end of our interview, but I have one final question that I want to ask you and then we can end the call. In what ways, if any, have your experiences with collaborative network music performance influenced or impacted your life?

Informant (45:53): That's a good question. It made me happier. I always find it hard to separate, because by saying how this impacted my life is almost saying that this is something that's external to my life. I know it's not meant this way, but this is my life. It definitely gives me joy and it's set up as an environment for me to constantly learn. To constantly grow and get better at seeing other people and their ways of being, their ways of knowing and their needs. To me that's crucial. It's always been the main drive for me to be with other people and to be on a journey together. To grow together and to find how to be happy together.

Interviewer (47:15): Yeah, and to be able to be in the same space as other people. Yeah. I see that.

Informant (53:33): Yeah, yeah. Sound, music and visuals is to me the side issue. It really is about people. Of course, the sound, music and visuals are fun and beautiful. They have joy in them, but really they are to me a means for connection.

Interviewer (47:45): Right. All right, I think I have everything I need from you. Thank you very much for making some time to talk to me and contribute to my research.

Informant (48:02): Yeah. What's the stage of the research? Now you're kind of at the end of the data collection for you more or less?

Interviewer (48:09): Yeah, I'm getting close. I think I have two more interviews and then data collection will be done. Then I can start organizing it and then go on to the next phase or doing my initial codes and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, very excited.

Informant (48:25): It's a masters, right?

Interviewer (48:27): Yes. Yes.

Informant (48:30): And you're thinking ahead though for a PhD and stuff.

Interviewer (48:34): Yeah, definitely. Maybe not next year, but maybe a couple years down the line. I think it will be cool.

Informant (48:43): It's fun if you love this kind of stuff. Aiming to sort of live in academia. It's not for everybody. Some people don't like to swim in this abstract knowledge all the time, but those of us who love just like being exploratory in this form, academia is marvellous. It's really a blessing to be able to continue doing that for life. Especially in the arts, because it's a mix of creation and knowledge. A very open kind of knowledge. Not lab oriented or theoretical oriented or whatever. This mix of creation and researching is a really beautiful mix and [there's] a lot of potential for so many directions.

Interviewer (49:49): Definitely. Yeah. Alright. I'm going to let you go. I will see you guys pretty soon for ICLC stuff. Until then, I hope you keep well and all the best with everything you're busy with.

Informant (50:08): Thank you. You too.

Interviewer (50:11): Thank you very much. Chat soon.

Informant (50:15): Bye Melandri.