

Media representations of the laptop as musical instrument

Dr. Nathan Wolek

Associate Professor of Digital Arts

Department of Creative Arts

Stetson University



Flickr Photos: Atau Tanaka, Sam Brelsfoard, Grace Bastidas, Matt O'Hara, Hagbard_

Goals

- Identify early items covering "laptop music"
 - emphasis on United States sources
 - sources with national audience
 - pieces intended for general audience
- Trace development of common stereotypes
- Reflect on issues and questions raised



Sorted by date

[Princeton Laptop Orchestra melds music with technology](#)

The Times of Trenton - NJ.com - 4 days ago
Hence, we have installation art, interactive art, **performance art**, ... the **laptop's** numerous other conveniences, it also makes **music** accessible to everyone.

[Making magic with musical Macbooks](#) The Daily Princetonian
[all 2 news articles »](#)



The Times of Trenton - NJ.com

www.computer-blasters.net/

Computer Blasters
Prices Starting At \$250

[See your ad here »](#)

[Sony Vaio E Series 14P laptop gets Kinect-style gesture control ...](#)

TechShout! - 1 hour ago
... which allows users to carry out certain commands like pause **music** playback, ... card with 1GB VRAM kicks in when the need for added **performance** arises.



TechShout!

[Beethoven meets the laptop in a series of Borromeo String Quartet ...](#)

San Jose Mercury News - Mar 28, 2012
Well, the four **musicians** will be playing Beethoven Ñ following the score on their **laptops**, while the audience watches the notes go whizzing overhead, ...

[SBTRKT + Willis Earl Beal at House of Blues | Photos](#)

Time Out Chicago (blog) - 19 hours ago
Soul **music** will never be without its revivalists, acts like Lee Fields or ... With their **performances** this past weekend, there's little doubt London act ...



Time Out Chicago (blog)

[Mozart on the Mousepad](#)

PCWorld - 5 days ago
The Symposium on **Laptop** Ensembles and Orchestras, which is being held April ... will showcase group **performances** by **musicians** using **laptops** and smartphones, ...

[The aesthetics and politics of a glass door](#)

LexisNexis® Academic

Hide

Show Search within results

Go

Sort

1-25 of 110

View Tagged

Duplicate Options

What's this?



Result Groups



View Multiple Groups ▾

All Results (110)

Sources by Category

- Newspapers (95)
- Magazines & Journals (12)
- Industry Trade Press (11)
- Web-based Publications (3)

 Publication Name Subject Industry Company Geography Language People

Help

- 13. [REVIEW TALENT TAKES THE ARCHES' FAST TRACK VAULT 2001](#)
The Scotsman, March 27, 2001, Tuesday, Pg. 11, 598 words, Andrew Burnet
- 14. [Local star lands big role on U.S. tour of 'Lion King'](#)
St. Petersburg Times (Florida), September 29, 2001, Saturday, PASCO TIMES; ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT; Pg. 1, 693 words, BARBARA L. FREDRICKSEN
- 15. [Euro star kids head for Frankfurt to assist Wim](#)
The Irish Times, December 28, 2001, CITY EDITION; BUSINESS THIS WEEK 1; GERMANY; Pg. 57, 985 words, By DEREK SCALLY
- 16. [They're not bored, they're just listening to experimental music](#)
Sydney Morning Herald (Australia), July 20, 2002 Saturday, NEWS AND FEATURES; Pg. 5, 393 words, Lenny Ann Low
- 17. [The big picture](#)
Herald Sun (Melbourne, Australia), October 29, 2002, Tuesday, LEARN; Pg. 40, 303 words
- 18. [Art's message loud and clear](#)
Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia), April 3, 2003 Thursday, NEWS; Pg. 12, 242 words, Emma Chalmers
- 19. [FILM: DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH... NO, REALLY; FILM STUDIES](#)
Independent on Sunday (London), May 4, 2003, Sunday, FEATURES; Pg. 9, 609 words, DAVID THOMSON
- 20. ['CINEMA HAS BEEN DEAD SINCE THE 1970S'](#)
The Scotsman, May 29, 2003, Thursday, Pg. 16, 1426 words, Stephen Applebaum
- 21. [Clash, Then Synthesis: Joys of a Laptop Jam](#)
The New York Times, July 10, 2003 Thursday, Section G; Column 1; Circuits; Pg. 5, 962 words, By JOHANNA JAINCHILL
- 22. [OD2: And through the wire](#)
New Media Age, September 11, 2003, Pg. 23, 791 words, Gabriel,P; Co-founder OD2
- 23. [OMM: MINISTER OF COOL: Yoga in the morning, diplomacy in the day and hip hop at night. Sue Steward spent an exhilarating eight days with Gilberto Gil, the icon of Brazilian music who returned from political exile and is now Culture Minister.](#)
The Observer, October 19, 2003, Observer Music Magazine, Pg. 34, 4840 words, Sue Steward

Early Media Coverage

- “Laptop Composing” - *The New York Times Magazine*, 9 December 2001
- “Laptop Music” - *NPR: All Things Considered*, 26 February 2002
- “Songs in the Key of F12” - *Wired*, May 2002
- “Clash, Then Synthesis: Joys of a Laptop Jam” - *The New York Times*, 10 July 2003

NYT - 9 December 2001

- “And Herbie Hancock has **added an iBook to the arsenal of instruments** in his touring ensemble. In the electronica underground, the familiar image of a musician hunkered over a laptop has become something of a running joke”

NPR - 26 February 2002

- “Will Hermes looks at a trend in music making and performance; musicians using the power of laptop computers in live performance. They cut up samples and use synthesizer programs to create new and quirky music. Hermes says that the music fills a wide range, but watching **a band performing live with a laptop can be a bit like watching the grass grow.**”

Wired - May 2002

- First software **turned the laptop into a musical instrument**. Now who's in control: the machine or the musician?

NYT - 10 July 2003

- "It's not far from a traditional music jam where people bring instruments and play together in a band," said Geoff Matters, 26, one of the event's [Openair] founders. "It's just that **the instruments people are using are software and hardware tools.**"

Talking about an instrument

- The biggest star of the festival, Fennesz from Austria, comes on April 24. The musician brings **two instruments – a laptop and a guitar** – to mix his unique sounds - *The Baltic Times*, 18 April 2007
- Computer **laptops were among the instruments** in an American Composers Orchestra concert. - picture caption from Music in Review, *New York Times*, 28 April 2008

Talking about an instrument

- Tonight, Brian Joseph Davis performs his “**first ever laptop gig**” with dulcet sounds he has produced over the last few years. The show will include the world premiere of his "Sony/BMG End User License Agreement scored for a women's choir," which is a collaboration with Dawn E. Lewis. - *torontoist.com*, 25 April 2007
- **Live on laptops**, the pair is in-the-mix, DJ-style, infusing a bullet train of beats with industrial aggression. - *lacitybeat.com*, 26 April 2007

Talking about an instrument

- [Alexander Robotnick] **picked up a laptop** to develop a style of performance somewhere between that of a live electronic act and a DJ. - *NOW magazine*, 17 May 2007
- The intriguing performance is a bizarre mix of noises and bleeps from **the laptop** perched near to the front, **accompanied with guitar** fretwork. - *soundthesirens.com*, 21 May 2007

Flickr Photo: Hagbard_



THE stereotype

- As Mr. Appleton put it, laptop music can be "strange for the listener" because "the performers understand what they're doing, but the audience doesn't." - The New York Times, 10 July 2003

THE stereotype

- Listening to electronic music can be a thrilling experience. Seeing it performed is another matter: as **artists can spend most of their time on stage huddled behind a laptop.** The highlight of a show might be the musician thrusting one finger in the air while they slide up a fader knob with their other hand. - *The Independent (UK)*, 5 March 2008

THE stereotype

- "I mean, three guys hunched around a laptop can be good," [Ed] Simons [of Chemical Brothers] says, evidently a little embarrassed about some of his peers... "[We] we still get that misconception [that we aren't doing anything]. **People that don't play the guitar can watch someone playing the guitar onstage and kinda feel like they know what's going on.** Or they see someone hitting a drum." - *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 2008

Reaction against THE stereotype

- "We have four laptops **but we're not at all a laptop act** [where] people just look at the screen and it looks like they're answering emails." - Armo Kammermeier (of the group Booka Shade), *Sydney Morning Herald* 5 April 2007
- "Mutek in Montreal, it's my number one favourite festival in the world and I love it, but last year it was too much. **Only laptops. It's so boring.** I realised that there is some problem in the personalities of the people who are making electronic music. The people are not able to express their feelings." - Dandy Jack (aka Martin Schopf), *residentadviser.net* 16 April 2007

PLOrk & THE Stereotype

- Laptop computers are now the instrument of choice for live electronics, promising to once again separate the roles of composer and performer while **adding the cherished element of spontaneity** that had been left behind. - Chicago Tribune, 8 April 2008

PLOrk & THE Stereotype

- The stage visual remained relatively static: Aside from the dynamic conductors, [PLOrk] might as well have been a bunch of students sitting next to speakers doing homework on their computers. - northbynorthwestern.com, 6 April 2008

Summary & Future Directions

- Get over the novelty
- Pervasiveness of THE stereotype
- Musical genre v approach
- Understanding media frames

Discussion / Questions

Media representations of the laptop as musical instrument

Dr. Nathan Wolek

Associate Professor of Digital Arts

Department of Creative Arts

Stetson University