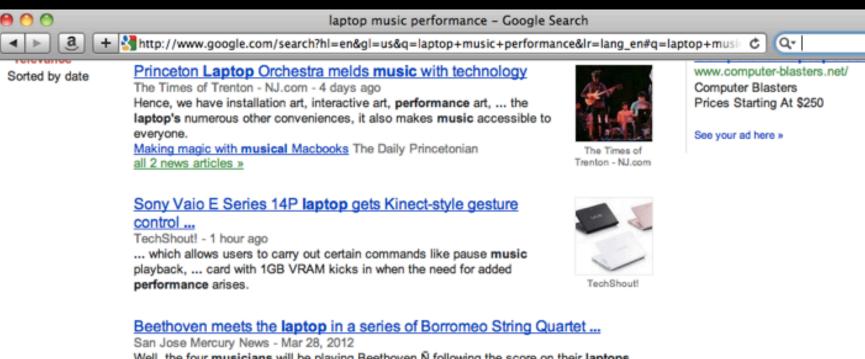
Media representations of the laptop as musical instrument

Dr. Nathan Wolek Associate Professor of Digital Arts Department of Creative Arts Stetson University



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



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)

> > 4 1

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

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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 FI2" 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 font, accompanied with guitar fretwork. - *soundthesirens.com*, 21 May 2007



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

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