

## *Erasmus-Erfahrungsbericht Universität Utrecht/Niederlande*

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### **Reflections on my experiences at the HKU**

During an exchange term at the University of Utrecht, a collegial connection between Dr. Albert Gräf, head of the Department of Music Informatics at Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, and Marc Groenewegen, lecturer for software and system design at Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht in Hilversum, made it possible for me to attend several classes at the latter one's faculty of Art, Media and Technology.

The classes taken by me were the following: One about Java and SuperCollider, two classes on composition by Hans Timmermans, and a workshop on Indian rhythm by Hans Leeuw. I was an active participant in the computer and rhythm classes while being a listener in the composition classes.

In Marc Groenewegen's class on Java and SuperCollider, we first became acquainted with the basics of creating a programming environment, i.e. editing code files in the command line and compiling code files into executable files. We were also introduced to the foundations of programming with the language Java. Subsequently, we learned how to interact with the MIDI-interface with the help of predefined modules to produce simple sound events such as chromatic scales and triads. When being introduced to SuperCollider, after elucidation on the nature of working with a real-time-environment, we were trained in the use of its fundamental structures, such as oscillators, effects and arrays. We also learned how to control these arrays and how to manipulate the program via control structures.

Hans Timmermans' classes on sound art composition presented methods of organisation of sound, such as layering, as well as the choice of sounds and their modification and processing. Here, examples were discussed and students presented their own work in different stages of their working progress.

In the workshop by Hans Leeuw, the participants were introduced to Indian rhythms. These were conceived as a possibility of organising compositional work that, being of additive nature, differs from the divisive European rhythm practises. We learned to get used to the different gatis (tempi) that are indicated by designations with syllables that match their division and are memorized by hand gestures. Then we practised the phrasing of gatis into jathis (groups) by chanting along and writing our own etudes. Finally, we were presented with an example of the use of Indian rhythms in a composition for a jazz group.

I had not been to an institution comparable to the HKU before, and for this reason it was a very exciting experience to meet students and teachers that work with the same subject as musicologists, but use a very different perspective. This was most impressive in the composition lessons: With respect to tonality, which is

usually taken for granted by musicologists, while, for sound designers, though at times swapping over from the use of keyboard instruments, is not a general basis for composition, or the contrasting ways of listening. I noticed how difficult (maybe even impossible) it is for me to listen in the same manner as the students did – that is, merely to listen without immediately associating or analysing. I did try to engage in the different approach, however, sitting there with my eyes closed like the others, and I surely have made some progress.

I was also struck by a comment by Hans Timmermans, when I made a (for me) conventional differentiation between computers and instruments. He remarked that in fact, computers are instruments, just as today's synthesizers, which are generally considered as instruments, are computers.

Just like sound design, Indian rhythms were also an area of study I had never been in touch with, since it might be regarded more as a subject for ethnomusicologists. It was quite imposing how easily HKU-students seemed to adapt to these, while I was still in a mode of getting used to them and trying to translate them into familiar forms. A composition that made use of Indian rhythms, which Hans Leeuw presented in the final lesson, offered an insight into an incongruity: While European composers who make use of such techniques might emphasise the relativisation of ethno-specific research on musical languages, musicologists still tend to exclude such material.

Using the computer to produce music already came naturally to the HKU students. During the Clusterday, a competitive workshop at the HKU, I watched with astonishment how the groups succeeded in their task to combine hardware and software within a fairly short time frame. While Java and Super Collider lessons could shed some light on the matter for me, too, I made progress on a much baser level. I remember being quite amazed when I achieved to program such things as influencing the sound by moving the mouse.

I also made a few visits to the HKU library, which offers a quite different choice of books than the ones I know from musicology departments and helped me to round up my experiences with more insights on music technology and the relativity of tonality. And of course, I also had interesting talks with HKU students about their work and points of view.

So, by taking part in classes I would not have encountered otherwise and by meeting inspiring people, my stay at the HKU did not only give me an idea of the creative side of music and its teachings, but really changed my frame of reference. Therefore, I consider this experience very valuable for my education as a musicologist.