



Dan Albertson, The Living Composers Project & The Villa of Composers

« The Living Composers Project began as an outlet for my frustration. I was young, I was new to the world of contemporary music, even new to the idea that composers could still be alive. I had been raised in the world of non-classical music, like most children in the USA, and my ignorance was extreme. When I heard my first piece of contemporary music, not long after I had heard my first piece of classical music, I was curious. I soon discovered, in a library, "The Dictionary of Contemporary Music", published in 1974. I perused it obsessively, learning new names, reading articles about new developments in music, etc. It may have been more than 20 years old, but this tome and I were almost inseparable. I renewed it at the library, again and again and again. However, I could not find information of newer vintage.

This reality, in combination with the fact that I am naturally drawn to catalogues, charts, lists, maps, etc., by personality, led me to develop the idea of a website where information on contemporary music would be first-hand and thus reliable, as well as in a central location. The Internet was very disparate back then, with data, but not necessarily accurate data, which was in turn not easy to find. I launched the database tentatively in

June 2000, but not as a website. I had no idea how to make a website! I began to write to composers and gather data, but the website only became a reality in the autumn of that year, through the benevolent intervention of Ron Hannah, a Canadian composer, and the hosting of Dennis Báthory-Kitsz, an American composer. Each one continues to be integral to the functioning of the website today, 13 years later: They are the technological brains to my cataloguing brain!

In the first half of the life of the database, I wrote many "profiles" for composers, pages with fixed elements: A biography, a list of contact information and a catalogue of works, with an optional discography. This process was a collaboration with the composers involved, going through the texts, making adjustments and only posting the profiles when they had been approved. In the past half-decade, though, the proliferation of personal websites has mostly rendered the database a collection of links, but I only apply links to websites that meet, more or less, the criteria of my profiles. I am adamant that information, not photographs or sound files, are the key component. I continue to write profiles, but now at a reduced rate.

As of the end of March 2013, the database contains information about nearly 2700 composers, representing 93 countries and altogether more than 85,000 works. It is the cumulative result of tens of thousands of hours of labour. The nascent partnership with the Villa of Composers is ideal, as the information that I gather and present will now be echoed elsewhere, in a database that is searchable. The more access that the public has to data about contemporary music, the higher the odds that more people, young and old, will make the same discoveries that I made. »

Dan Albertson is an American who works in the fields of musicology, poetry and translation. In addition to his curatorial work with the Living Composers Project, he has guest-edited several volumes of "Contemporary Music Review" and is a regular contributor to "La Folia".

Website: <http://www.composers21.com>