

THE SONIC GENOME

It was a thrill for all of us.

Something to remember for a lifetime.

Ken Pickering (Artistic Director of Vancouver Jazz Festival)

The Sonic Genome is one of the most thrillingly ambitious experiments by musical visionary, saxophonist and composer Anthony Braxton: less a concert than the creation of an interactive musical environment, almost an avant-garde theme-park for performers and listeners alike.

For 8 continuous hours, over 60 performers use the compositions and improvisational languages developed by Braxton through his 40 years of artistic investigation to create a living sound world. The *Ghost Trance Music* that has been Braxton's primary compositional focus for the past 2 decades serves as the connecting principle for the musical structure.

The musicians can move in a big space (large hall, museum with several rooms, factory/shed etc.) as a music cells (little ensembles) that change time by time, or individually from an ensemble to another. Ensembles form and split apart like cells dividing and reforming into new organisms; likewise, the members of the audience (or *friendly experiencers*, as Braxton call them) are invited to be *active* participants, choosing who and what to listen to as they move about the space and between the music cells. All of this involved the audience showing in the hearth of creative production and dip it in a strong way. So towards the end of the event the audience can cancel itself as audience, creating autonome performances or with the musicians.

Anthony Braxton's music has been described by *New York Times* critic Steve Smith as «less a compositional strategy, and more a utopian model for an ideal democracy. There are rules to follow, laws to abide, and these are largely controlled by the ruler of the clan. But those laws are more guidelines than strictures; if followed properly, the result affords complete individual freedom within a well-defined societal structure that hums along quite musically».

The Sonic Genome is the ultimate expression of this ideal.

The entire body of over 60 musicians can be deemed the “country”, which can be broken into 15-to-20 person “state” sized ensembles, then to three-to-five person “city” groups. But of course, each individual is welcome to travel about the larger country, making new artistic alliances and musical connections.

It will be placed at least 25 music stands, each with dozens of Braxton’s scores so the performers can pull from throughout Braxton’s rich oeuvre, from solo and duo to a large ensemble. Musicians can improvise in reaction to the sounds around them, choose to remain silent and simply listen, or walk outside to take a break from the action. But the activity in the space continues unabated.

Braxton enlists 12 band members of his *Tri-Centric Ensemble* as his musical lieutenants in the endeavor, with each given the responsibility of leading sub ensembles of the larger group. The rest of the performers are drawn from the surrounding community, ranging from local professionals well-versed in creative music to open-minded college and conservatory students. Two members of the *Tri-Centric Ensemble* will come into the host city early to conduct workshops to familiarize the local musicians with Braxton’s musical system, and the full *Tri-Centric Ensemble* under Braxton’s leadership will perform a concert a few nights before *The Sonic Genome*, to offer a portrait of the music in a more streamlined manifestation.

After 2, 4 and 6 hours from the beginning of the performance, Braxton will join mostly of the musicians to conduct his compositions for *Creative Orchestra*.

James Fei will lead also a big ensemble (in a way similar to Butch Morris’s *Conduction*) moving through the Venue and... mixing also with the Orchestra lead by Braxton! The audience will be disoriented seeing just one big Orchestra, playing one music, but lead at the same time by 2 different director, in 2 different ways, and with musicians blended that follow one or the other director!!!

In addition to being a massive statement by a master artist, *The Sonic Genome* also serves as a powerful tool for creating bonds in the local community. No listener or performer emerges unmoved by the experience; participants describe the event as “life-changing,” resulting in new friendships, creative partnerships, and lasting artistic inspiration.

Musicians:

- **Tri-Centric Ensemble** consists of 12 musicians of *Tri-Centric Foundation*.
- **Local musicians** (any kind of music) and students from the conservatories.
- **Selection procedure** will be on the basis of a written motivation, resume and audition. Logistics still be further discussed.
- **Rehearsal** under guidance of 2 or 3 *Tri-Centric Foundation* musicians. A minimum of 3 days are required. Plus a general rehearsal with all the musicians, preferably the day before the performance.

Date and duration:

- *The Sonic Genome* performance runs for **eight hours**. Generally a **Sunday** in the afternoon (i.e. time: from 12.00 pm to 8.00 pm or from 2.00 pm to 10.00 pm as happened in New York and Vancouver) is the most adequate day to organize it, but in Torino at Egyptian Museum the performance was on Saturday evening from 6.00 pm to 2.00 am playing between papyrus, mummies and sarcophagi!

Location:

- **The venue must have a capacity** for over 60 musicians and over 100 listeners (Braxton call them “friendly experiencers”). In the course of the event, the total amount of spectators will increase and decrease since not all of them will attend the full eight hours. This is not a problem.
- When possible walls must be available where the graphical composition can be displayed or projected when played allowing the audience to follow the procedure of the compositions.
- **Fixed lifted platforms** at various spaces will be provided for the purpose to adequately facilitating recording and videotaping the execution of 3 Orchestra compositions. These fixed lifted spaces will be equipped with sufficient microphones, amplification, drums, pianos, percussion instruments and music stands. Also, in the fixed spaces chairs or sofas or carpets for the public will be provided.

Costs:

- Fee fee is US\$ 50,000 (this amount include travels and meals) plus accommodation, backline, catering and usual requests.
- The “local musicians” will finance their travel and lodging expenses. By the way the local promoters are free to use any strategy to organize the fee and logistic for the “local musicians” in a best way they think.

Organization:

- **Lectures on Braxton's works and music system** might be organized prior the workshop to introduce Braxton's compositional work. Speakers (local or international musicologists) have to be selected. It will be video recorded for archive or to use in a documentary.
- The availability of the **tertiary compositions** will be organized backstage. Sufficient copies will be **xeroxed** before the workshop to be ready at arrivals of musicians.
- ***The Sonic Genome* will start in a big hall** (or atrium or any big space) from where all sections or quadrants depart once *The Sonic Genome* takes off. Also in this space all musicians will get together again at the end of *The Sonic Genome* to conclude the performance.
- **Refreshment** and dining area for all musicians must be separated from the performing space(s). **Security** must be guaranteed during the time of the performance so that musicians can – when necessary – leave their instruments temporarily.

Other ideas:

- When using game strategies, e.g. puppets and flags of sections or quadrants, a **separate space with a large table** should be made available where game strategies can unfold, e.g. using a Warhammer game board. Braxton move the puppets (that represent the musicians) on a big map of the venue over a big table creating new combinations, with scenarios of war, guerrilla, demonstration, courtship etc.
- Use of **costumes/vests** or other identifiable outfits for the musicians (e.g. T-shirts of different colors with reproductions of Braxton's graphic compositions).
- **Giant monitors** might be placed at various locations in the cities of performance (or in other cities), museum, railway stations and other public areas.
- Short performances outdoor (when weather conditions allow) in the centre of the city to involve the population.
- Other concerts with Anthony Braxton and his musicians or creating combinations with members of *Tri-Centric Foundation* with local musicians can happen the days during *The Sonic Genome* (or eventually before or after).

Recordings:

- **Broadcasting companies:** e.g. *Arté, Mezzo, RAI 5, BBC* and others local televisions will be invited to record and videotape in order to produce a documentary or at least insert in their News.
- **Life broadcasting** of an Orchestra composition, will be considered. Eventually live streaming through websites.
- **Footage of a rehearsal** with the 2 musicians of *Tri-Centric Foundation* can be considered for the purpose of airing it by the participating broadcasting companies and this during the days prior to *The Sonic Genome*.
- All Orchestra compositions will be **audio recorded** for a CD Box.
- Would be great to realize a documentary on DVD (possibly in English with subtitles in other languages) reporting musicologists lectures, the rehearsals with TCF musicians, parts of the performance *The Sonic Genome*, interview(s) with Braxton, musicians and audience impressions during and after the performance.
- **Video companies, video-makers and school of cinema** are welcome to help for this. It needs at least 8 video-makers + 5 go-pro (little videocameras wearable installed on 5 musicians) plus – to have a larger representativity of *The Sonic Genome* – it will be stimulated that spectators bring videocameras and cell phones to record from their particular point of view: some will record, other will walk or run through the musical cells. A kind of public co-research for full participation in the experiment. A website will be available to upload all the material (or creating a *YouTube* channel).