

## SOUND AT THE 2007 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL by Richard K. Thomas

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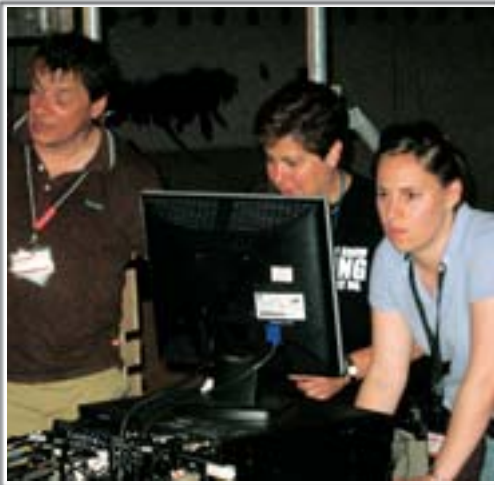
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# SOUND at the 2007 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL

by Richard K. Thomas

with additional contributions  
by Don Tindall, Rick Malone, and Ross Brown

The 2007 Prague Quadrennial opened in the Industrial Palace (Vystaviste) on 14 June 2007, and with it came a cacophony of sound and the promise of extraordinary experiences as over sixty countries converged to celebrate the diversity of theatre being created around the world.



Steven Brown and sound assistants Eileen Smitheimer and Veronika Vorel tackle another crisis on the eve before the 2007 PQ opens.

PHOTOS BY RICHARD THOMAS, EXCEPT AS NOTED

The explosion of sound design and music composition in every facet of the Quadrennial this year built on the inaugural embracing of sound at the 2003 Quadrennial. Steven Brown, Associate Head of the OISTAT Sound Working Group, spent the last four years concocting an extraordinary experience for PQ listeners, making this PQ a triumphant success if for no other reason than the boldness of his team's vast plans.

## DAY 1: Thursday, 14 June 2007

The opening night event was hardly dampened by the few sprinkles that fell as the Czech Minister of Culture welcomed the crowd that had gathered outside the Vystaviste for the grand opening. A small brass band played a march fitting to the occasion, and led the way as the eager crowd finally got their opportunity to experience the world that awaited them inside. They quickly dispersed to the left and right wings, where the national exhibits were located, and to the center hall that Scenofest had largely taken over. The first thing one heard upon entering the Vystaviste was a veritable cacophony of sound that came from exhibits and soundstages throughout the PQ.

From the opening bell that announced the start of the 2007 PQ, the influence of sound was everywhere. At this PQ, sound design was in abundant exhibition. USITT provided the largest sound exhibits, including one curated by David Budries and Tom Mardikes in the National Section, and a student exhibition in the Student Section curated by Don Tindall. It was great to hear USITT continuing to lead the way as the Prague Quadrennial

evolves to fully embrace the art of sound design and music composition in the theatre.

The proliferation of sound at the PQ did not come without some problems, of course. While some countries such as the U.S. opted for the more benign use of headsets, others blared out sound through loudspeakers that did not seem to be aware of the boundaries imposed on the country's exhibit space. While the additional noise added a great deal of excitement to the air of opening night, the need for the PQ organizing committee to protect the noise floor for all exhibitors was abundantly clear. Hopefully, the organizing committee will address this problem in their planning for the 2011 PQ.

The OISTAT Sound Working Group provided a number of ongoing exhibits at the PQ. The second International Exhibition of Sound Design and Music Composition was curated by Joe Pino and presented with a decidedly "retro" look—masquerading as an old wireless audio recorder. One couldn't help but be reminded that sound and sound design—even recorded sound—is really a rather old discipline at this point. Joe provided two exhibits, one near the Internet Café, the other just under the Babel Tower. Joe obviously saw the noise problem of the PQ coming, as he devised special headphones that provided 30 dB of noise reduction that he had custom-fitted with AKG drivers. He also provided visitors with what was perhaps the most easily navigable interface at the PQ, allowing visitors to selectively choose the exhibit they wanted to audition. One suspects this sort of interactivity will become a standard offering one way or another in future sound design exhibitions. The exhibit itself featured thirty-three entries from twenty-eight sound designers/composers from fourteen countries and five continents, truly establishing itself as a major international exhibition for theatre sound designers.



The Babel Tower included eight surround-sound loudspeakers that Steven Brown designed into the tower for the variety of sonic adventures that would take place over the next ten days.



Some of the exhibits provided weary travelers with a welcome place to sit while enjoying examples of sound design; here, the USA sound exhibit designed by David Budries and others.

Tucked in among visual artifacts, the USITT student exhibit featured a sound design exhibition designed by Don Tindall.





The Ireland exhibit, and some of the other exhibits that included sound design, featured headsets so the sound would not disrupt other exhibits. Some even included sound isolation techniques and noise canceling headsets so sound from other exhibits would not intrude on the listening experience.



The Second International Sound Design and Music Composition Exhibition at the Prague Quadrennial.



...THE SOUND WORKING GROUP CREATED AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH IT WAS HARD TO MISS THE ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF SOUND TO THE PQ.

Visitors were encouraged to play with the giant sound-producing devices strategically placed in the Vystayiste's entrance mall by Gregg Fisher and his sound team from the Central School of London.

Central School of London provided a marvelous sound exhibit on the way into the PQ: a group of mechanical sound producing devices that engaged children and adults alike. One side contained various gigantic wind chimes, and the other contained a veritable storm-producing machine, with mechanical effects for wind, rain, and thunder. Every Scenofest performance was preceded by "Babel Bells." These "bells" were actually sounds created by sound designers around the world and played back over loudspeakers at the Babel Tower. In these ways, the Sound Working Group created an environment in which it was hard to miss the additional contributions of sound to the PQ.

DAY 2: Friday, 15 June 2007

***The Composer and the Sound Designer: Ben Ringham and Chris Shutt***

The second day of the PQ saw an extensive array of sound programming begin. UK Sound Designer and Composer Chris Shutt and composer Ben Ringham discussed the emerging art of collaboration between sound designers and composers on straight plays. They discussed how the evolution of the roles of designers and composers had made it increasingly difficult to clearly draw a line of responsibility between the two artists, which, for them, has been a decided advantage in their work together.



Ben Ringham and Chris Shutt.

***The Scenography of Sound: Igor Drevalov***

Russian composer, director and sound designer, Igor Drevalov, provided a wonderfully stimulating workshop that laid an extremely persuasive foundation for sound as a scenographic art. He noted traditional definitions of scenography, its history in the theatre, and provided living examples of how sound fulfilled scenographic roles related to providing the place of the action, time and music, metaphor, atmosphere, and more. In each case, he used live actors to recreate scenes from Shakespeare and Chekhov, and then demonstrated how sound could totally transform the actor's performance depending on how the composition scored the scene. The three-hour workshop provided an extensive analysis that ranged from Meyerhold, through Chekhov's "Broken String," through the ontological characteristics of sound and the extraordinary impact and importance of silence as a design element.



A brief interruption in the workshop caused by a sudden thunderstorm provided an opportunity for everyone to get to know each other better. Here, Jethro Joachim demonstrates indigenous Phillipines instruments for Igor Drevalov.

On the first evening, a group of about thirty sound designers and composers gathered for a sound party at the Alfred ve Dvore Theatre. While the evening started out with everyone acting quite shy about sharing their designs and compositions, after a few beers from the bar everyone became quite outgoing about their work, and the party extended into downtown Prague for many hours after.

Day 3: Saturday, 16 June 2007

***Noise Memory, Gesture: Ross Brown***

On Saturday, Ross Brown, from London's Central School of Drama, led a workshop called *Noise Memory Gesture*. The Scenofest workshop—which was largely conducted without any words—invited the audience to share in the interplay between noise, memory, and gesture. Working with two professional dancers, the audience was immersed in a world of noisy journeys and still silences. The performed memorial silence was heralded by the ear cleansing sound of a Tibetan singing bowl. As the ears and the body acclimated to the silence, the normal relationship of the subject to background noise became inverted. Bags and the other flotsam and jetsam of daily life become personal cenotaphs, and the murmur and hum of distant life become tragicomic anecdotes.



Bags and the other flotsam of daily life surrounded by dancers during Ross Brown's workshop. Photo courtesy of Ross Brown.



Nancy Tobin shared her remarkable sound design aesthetic.

Day 4: Sunday, 17 June 2007

***Distorted Sound: Nancy Tobin***

Nancy Tobin shared her sound design aesthetic with the Scenofest audience primarily through demonstrations of four different projects she has recently completed. In the first, *Bataille* (literally meaning “battle” although in this production the term was used to explore the wider concept of “struggle”), Tobin used six piezo-electric speakers spaced across the upstage wall at head height to complement the full-spectrum sound system. This allowed her to create a different musical instrument out of loudspeakers in contrast to the full-frequency capabilities provided by the main speaker system. A self-described fan of minimal repetitive music, Nancy explored in *Les Aveugle* derivations of sounds suggestive of vocalizations, leaves, the ocean, etc., that were all linked together by a common color palette in order to magnify their ability to evoke emotion. Tobin eschewed the use of pre-recorded sound effects. In *Novecento*, a piece about a piano player stranded aboard a luxury cruise ship during a war, Tobin derived all of the sounds of the ship’s engines, etc., from a piano. Finally, in *Desnoyer*, she explored actor-generated sound by tapping microphones to dancers’ legs, thus allowing them to create their own sounds by manipulating the feedback between their microphones and guitar amplifiers located nearby.

Nancy also described an experiment that she was conducting with the Scenofest crowd to study the effects of noise on the reception of a sound design. In her experiment, she played back sound to each listener first in silence, and then with noise in the background. She then discussed the experience with the listener.



Paul Gilleron and his Ambisonic Team described the Audioscape 3D software. Photo courtesy of Don Tindall.

Laptop Connections at the Marysakovo Railway Station. Photo courtesy of Carol Cunningham.

***AudioScope 3D AA New Ambisonic Platform for Sound Design: Paul Gilleron***

Paul Gilleron and six members of the software development team demonstrated Ambisonic’s new platform, Audioscope 3D. They also provided a brief history of the company and ambisonics, and gave a practical demonstration of the Audioscope 3D software which included several examples of performances and venues that have recently used it.

***Deconstructing the Vocal Instrument: Curtis Craig***

Curtis Craig next conducted a session in which he explored how the physiology of the human vocal instrument produces sound, particularly during speech and non-operatic singing. He geared the session towards sound designers and sound engineers in order to provide practical information that would allow them to more accurately record and reinforce the human voice.

Day 5: Monday, 18 June 2007

Monday was Laptop Connections Day as five groups of sonic artists with laptop computers settled into locations setup at the Marysakovo Railway Station in the Heart of Prague to stage a great sonic happening for travelers at the station and for the assembled PQ Scenofest participants. Joe Pino organized the event, with support from Davin Huston, Cait Janpol, and Jason Ducat. The group set up a wireless Internet connection that provided the on-site participants with the capability to interact with other laptopers around the globe.

Shahrokh Yadegari (University of California, San Diego) worked with Max/MSP at the train station, while connecting with Michael Dessen at the University of California, Sand Diego. Vincent Olivieri set up a MIDI-controlled sequencer at the railway station, which allowed him to trigger Daniel Baker’s sounds in New York City, while Vincent triggered





Dutch sound designer Cees Wagenaar discussed his approach to sound design at the Netherlands exhibition on its day devoted to sound design.

Daniel's sounds at the railway station. Karen Hay manipulated sound by Patrick Lauke, who miked the train station and his own computer, and Kris Popat provided sounds from Leeds, U.K. Cliff Caruthers and Kristin Miltner broadcast sounds from San Francisco Bay into the train station. Finally Purdue University sent a team that included Ron Shoemaker (onsite processing), Rob James (communications, file exchanges), and Rick Thomas (program playback and sequencing) onsite, and three remote studios that included David Swenson (San Francisco, U.S.), Mark Kammerbauer, Harald Kammerbauer, Harald Muller and Fabian Winkler (Lake Constance, Germany), Andrea Cohen, Sylvie Combal, Yasmine Akman, Nicolas Perrin, Philippe Mion, Christophe Hauser, and Wiska Radkiewicz (Paris, France). Providing a visual counterpoint to Purdue's project was improv Dancer Christy Jacobs. Although the Internet connection proved to be rather intermittent, the performers didn't let that stop them from generating a host of interesting sounds for the crowd that gathered around.

Monday also featured a full-day workshop provided by Scenofest sponsor Yamaha Corporation at the Little Alfred Theatre. In two hours, the Yamaha crew took folks with no previous digital console experience through setting up the basics on a digital console (the Yamaha M7CL) and mixing simple configurations.

Day 6: Tuesday, 19 June 2007

#### *A Day with Cees Wagenaar*

The Netherlands tried something completely different with their National Exhibit in 2007. Instead of displaying the design work of scenographers from their country, they brought the scenographers themselves. A different scenographer was featured each day, and a format that included an interview with the artist, a lecture by the artist, and a roundtable discussion with guests in similar disciplines from different countries. On 19 June, the Netherlands featured sound designer Cees Wagenaar, who presented his perspective on the art of sound reinforcement. He was joined in the interview by U.K. sound designer Steven Brown, and U.S. designer Rick Thomas.

## ...THE SOUND DESIGNER FINDS UNIQUE WAYS TO BLUR THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE THEATRE SPACE AND THE DREAMSPACE.



Basil Hogios lectured on Theatre Sound and Architectural Dreamspace.

Day 7: Wednesday, 20 June 2007

#### *Theatre Sound and Architectural Dreamspace: Basil Hogios*

Wednesday was another busy day at Scenofest. It opened with Australian sound designer Basil Hogios providing his unique perspective on the art of designing sound. Hogios worked for many years as an architect while simultaneously studying music and composition. The combination of disciplines had a decided effect on his career as a sound designer, and he presented thoughts on how three different spaces impact a sound designer's choices: the theatre space designed by the architect and acoustician, the body space (how bodies move and occupy the space), and dream space, the world of non-literal sound, thoughts, dreams, nightmares, and emotions. Hogios is especially interested in ways the sound designer can blur the distinction between the theatre space and the dreamspace.

#### *An Afternoon with John Leonard*

Later in the day, legendary British sound designer, John Leonard shared the fabled story of his career as a sound designer in theatre. Spanning thirty-seven years, Leonard's career has taken him from discovering the art of sound design listening to

radio, to designing sound for London's Royal Shakespeare Company beginning in 1979, and through many productions on London's West End, Broadway, and many other theatres in between. Truly one of the grand pioneers of theatre sound, Leonard's stories were as charming as they were illustrative of the long journey the discipline has taken from dog barks to art.

### **Sound Working Group Meeting**

Wednesday evening concluded with the annual Sound Working Group meeting, which featured food, drink, and a certain amount of business appropriate to the occasion. Thirty sound designers from eight countries and five continents participated. A great discussion took place about the exciting sound developments at the 2007 Prague Quadrenniale and Sceonfest, and a grand toast was offered to Steven Brown, who organized the events, and brought them all to extraordinary fruition.

The big news of the evening was that Jethro Joachim had accepted an appointment as the Sound Curator for World Stage Design 2009.

Following close behind this important development was the vote by the Sound Working Group to accept the invitation of the Swedish OISTAT center to conduct its annual sound working group meeting in Stockholm in June of 2008. To make the event even more exciting, Janne Auvinen simultaneously extended an offer to host the Sound Working Group in Finland as part of the visit. This will create an extraordinary opportunity for Sound Working Group members to experience the lands of the mid-night sun during the peak of the Midsummer Night Festivals in Sweden and Finland, while sharing in the camaraderie among members of the Sound Working Group. The event is currently scheduled to take place from 12–20 June 2008.

The Sound Working Group also voted to develop a new mailing list specifically focused on the business of the group. They will still keep the Sound Colloquium Mailing List as a place where thoughts and ideas may be shared related to the art of theatre sound, but will narrow the new mailing list to those who are actively involved in the business of the Sound Working Group.

### **Day 8: Thursday, 21 June 2007**

#### **Sound Educator's Seminar: Christopher Johns**

On Thursday afternoon, Christopher Johns presented the issues and concerns involved with developing curricula for teaching technical courses at the BFA and MFA level. He focused on the sound design components for a new MFA program at the Hong Kong Academy of the Performing Arts. His discussion of the process they went through and the problems and issues that arose prompted a lively discussion among the seminar participants.

### **Day 9: Friday, 22 June 2007**

#### **Designing Auditory Aura with the MaxStage: Kevin Purcell**

Kevin Percell demonstrated the MaxStage program that he has developed to allow users to input actor positions on a stage in reference to a video of a rehearsal, and then attach triggers in Max/MSP to audio and MIDI files. In this manner, a designer can not only show directors how sound cues unfold in a scene, but also, the cues can then be easily moved and repositioned in the scene so that the director can immediately grasp the impact of the changes.

#### **An Afternoon with d&b: John Taylor and Ralph Zuleeg**

Later in the afternoon, John Taylor, from d&b Audiotechnik gave an outstanding lesson in how loudspeakers interface with acoustic environments, emphasizing the basic ways in which loudspeakers transduce sound, how multiple loudspeakers in an array interact, and how coverage patterns affect the performance of a loudspeaker in a theatre.



British sound designer John Leonard recounted highlights of his career.



Kevin Purcell (*left*) demonstrated the MaxStage software application.



Day 10: Saturday, 23 June 2007

**Archiving Sound Designs: Gregg Fisher**

Saturday turned out to be a pretty big sound day at the PQ. It began in the morning with a discussion led by Gregg Fisher of London's Central School of Drama and Speech about the sound exhibits at the PQ. Gregg had collected a number of statistics about the sound exhibits that provided strong evidence that we still have a long way to go before we have really developed methods for exhibiting sound that accurately reflect the designer's intent. He then led a lively discussion about possible ways in which some of those solutions could be approached and addressed and promised to publish his findings in a future journal article .

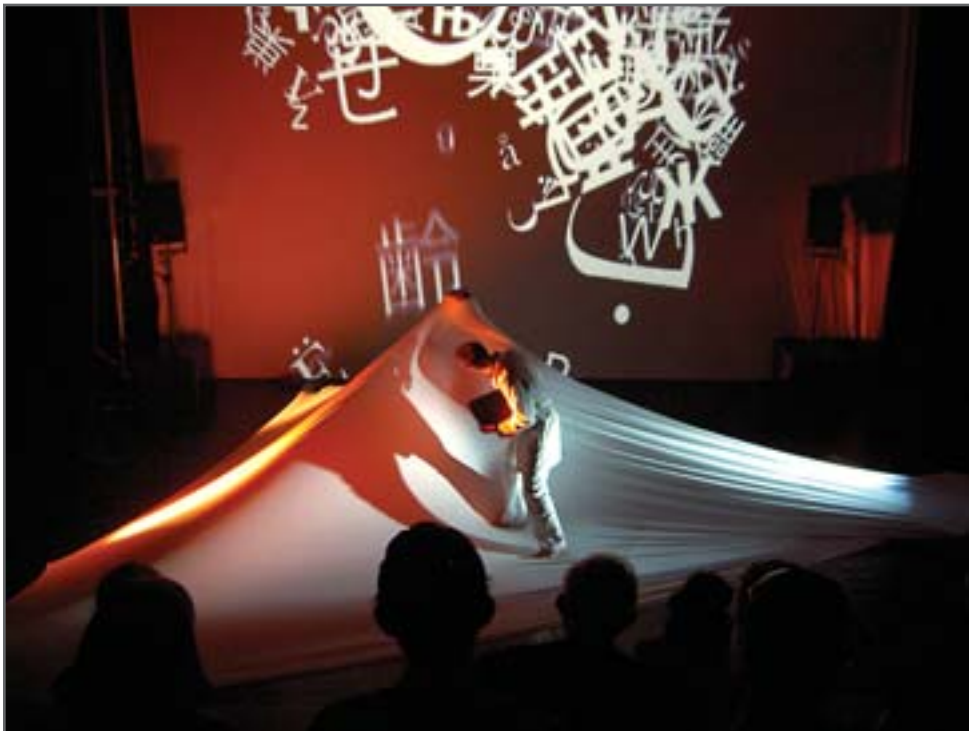
...WE STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO BEFORE WE HAVE REALLY **DEVELOPED METHODS FOR EXHIBITING SOUND** THAT ACCURATELY REFLECT THE DESIGNER'S INTENT.

**Engineer of the Imagination: Heiner Goebbels; TiMax: Robin Whittaker; and Goldilocks, Vladmir Franz**

Legendary director and composer Heiner Goebbels gave a lecture in the PQ lecture hall on the *Engineer of the Imagination* in which he detailed his aesthetic and approach to both his art and his creation of sound in his art. Nearly simultaneously, Robin Whittaker, director of Out Board, gave a demonstration of his company's TiMax digital signal processing system. Meanwhile down the street, longtime Sound Working Group member Vladmir Franz was premiering his new ballet *Goldilocks* at the State Theatre in Prague. It was one of the busiest times of the entire PQ!

**The Freesound Project: Bram deJong**

This session was an introduction to the collection of sound files started about two years ago by Bram deJong from Barcelona, Spain. Freesound is a computer server and Web site that currently contains over 35,000 recorded sounds (most in at least CD quality) that are available for download and use for free under a creative commons license. In brief, the creative commons license simply requires that credit be given, in writing, to the person who recorded the original sound. Full details about the project, the creative commons license, and a pretty cool tee-shirt can be found at <http://freesound.iaa.upf.edu/>.



Performer and sound designer Ron Shoemaker studies a mysterious shape in *Labcoats on Clouds*. Photo courtesy of Laura Arns.

Day 11: Sunday, 24 June 2007

Sunday began with the performance, *Labcoats on Clouds*, by a group of designers from Purdue University. A sound designer and a visual designer performed an exploration of how communications evolve into civilizations, and how civilizations end, only to begin anew as new forms of communication develop. The performance also explored interactive designs in which the actors controlled both the visual and auditory designs through Max/MSP.



Jethro Joaquin lead a marvelous group improvisation to close out the sound programming at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial.

**Sound Design—a Communal Process: Jethro Joaquin**

In an extraordinary contrast to the high-tech *Labcoats* performance, Jethro Joaquin led a wonderful and memorable workshop that helped designers understand the challenges and joys of designing in an environment where technology was limited, but sound had still grown to become an integral part of the performance. Jethro’s work and his workshop focused on human relationships and how the various factors affect sound design. It was a marvelous way to close the PQ, as everyone gathered together one last time to share in the creation of a communal sound design.

And with the close of Joaquin’s workshop, a small but committed group of Scenofest volunteers, led by the tireless Steven Brown, began the arduous process of striking the sound equipment and returning all of the borrowed equipment to its rightful owners. The dedication and drive of the Scenofest Sound Team at the PQ made the event one that all participants will surely never forget, and firmly established sound as an integral part of both the PQ, and of the art of theatre; one that cannot be ignored if one is to fully consider the impact of theatre in the modern world. ❖

**Richard Thomas** is a professor of sound design at Purdue University and is head of the OISTAT Sound Working Group.



It ain’t over until it’s over: the Scenofest sound team strikes the many sound setups that made PQ07 a rich tapestry of both sonic and visual delights.