



## Introduction to the *MTO* Nancarrow Symposium

Robert Willey

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<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.1/mto.14.20.1.willey.php>

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[1] This *MTO* Symposium on the Music of Conlon Nancarrow grew out of an online symposium held September 27–October 27, 2012 in honor of Nancarrow’s centennial. From the start of the planning for the event, Daphne Leong (Program Committee Chair) and I hoped *MTO* would be a partner. We are very pleased now to present this collection of articles to the readers of *MTO*.<sup>(1)</sup> They represent the four main branches of current work on Nancarrow: arranging his music for performers, adapting it to contemporary technology, analyzing the scores, and researching his life history.

[2] Half of the presenters in the symposium participated in two major international events honoring Nancarrow in 2012, first at the The Music of Conlon Nancarrow: Impossible Brilliance conference held in April at London’s Southbank Centre. Dominic Murcott brought together an international group of Nancarrow experts including Charles Amirghanian, Felix Meyer, Kyle Gann, Trimpin, Rex Lawson, Wolfgang Heisig, and Yoko Sugiura-Nancarrow to discuss and perform Nancarrow’s music. The complete Studies for player piano were played on an authentic instrument along with performances by the London Sinfonietta. In November most of the same group gathered for the Nancarrow at 100: A Centennial Celebration organized by Charles Amirghanian in Berkeley, California along with Peter Garland, David “Mako” Nancarrow (son), and the Bugallo-Williams piano duo. This event will likely go down in history as the greatest gathering of Nancarrow cognoscenti. Audience members included Bob Shumaker (the engineer for Nancarrow’s recordings), Mary Oppen (a longtime friend), Eva Soltes (Nancarrow’s manager), and Luis Stephens (Nancarrow’s stepson). Recordings of most of the events are available online due to the generosity of radiom.org.

[3] Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams have achieved acclaim for their performances and two CDs of arrangements of works by Nancarrow. Bugallo’s contributions as a Nancarrow scholar are represented in this issue in “Harmonic and Non-Harmonic Temporal Structures in Nancarrow’s Study No. 47 for Player Piano,” which includes a critical score and rhythmic analysis for a piece that has only previously been available on recordings.

[4] Clifton Callender’s “Performing the Irrational: Paul Usher’s Arrangement of Nancarrow’s Study No. 33” explores

compositional, mathematical, and performance issues involved in the approximation of irrational rhythms. Callender concludes with a close study of the Arditti Quartet's remarkable performance of Study No. 33, in Usher's arrangement.

[5] Dominic Murcott's "Tomorrow's Music on Yesterday's Machines" surveys the many ways the Studies have been presented in recordings, and explores the artistic and practical questions that arose while preparing the comprehensive series of concerts for the "Impossible Brilliance" festival.

[6] Julie Nemire builds on Thomas's and Gann's work to provide a comprehensive study of convergence points; the article is "Convergence Points in Conlon Nancarrow's Tempo Canons." She concludes with an in-depth analysis of Study No. 27, which features geometric acceleration in eleven four-voice canons.

[7] Margaret Thomas explores new ground in "Conlon Nancarrow, 'Hot' Jazz, and the principle of Collective Improvisation." Nancarrow's activity in his early years as a jazz trumpeter is well known. Thomas proposes a shared musical aesthetic between Nancarrow's Studies and the collective improvisation of the early jazz that he enjoyed listening to.

[8] The challenge made to a listener's ability to disentangle multiple voices, whether it happens in collective improvisation or Nancarrow's dense polyphonic textures is considered further in my paper, "The Editing and Arrangement of Conlon Nancarrow's Studies for Disklavier and Synthesizer," along with an explanation of how information encoded on player piano rolls can be interpreted with MIDI systems.

[9] Jürgen Hocker spent many years restoring a suitable piano on which to perform Nancarrow's Studies in concert, and then touring Europe with the composer. Hocker's book, *Encounters With Nancarrow*, is reviewed here—a work intended for a general audience that is full of anecdotes and background information. While it is of more interest to music historians than theorists, it remains an important resource for those interested in Nancarrow and his music.

[10] I count myself lucky to have spent a few hours with Nancarrow in 1986. Kyle Gann got to know him better while doing research for his definitive book, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (1995). "Outside the Feedback Loop: A Nancarrow Keynote Address" gives us some feeling for Nancarrow's personal qualities and attitudes as a composer. It reflects on a life of composing for oneself, requiring no other listener, and the effect the intensity of Nancarrow's private experience had on his music.

[11] A list of resources on Nancarrow, including recordings, scores, videos, interviews, books, articles, dissertations, and websites, can be found on the resources section of the [conlonnancarrow.org](http://conlonnancarrow.org) site.

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## Footnotes

1. I appreciate the journal's support in the review process. Dora Hanninen (*MTO* editorial member and Program Committee member for the symposium) assisted with the initial selection of papers and Yonatan Malin (*MTO* editor) and Karen Bottge (*MTO* associate editor) provided input throughout.

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*Prepared by Michael McClimon, Editorial Assistant*

The recent introduction of fluorescence-based kinetic RT-PCR procedures significantly simplifies the process of producing reproducible quantification of mRNAs and promises to overcome these limitations. Nevertheless, their successful application depends on a clear understanding of the practical problems, and careful experimental design, application and validation remain essential for accurate quantitative measurements of transcription. This review discusses the technical aspects involved, contrasts conventional and kinetic RT-PCR methods for quantitating gene expression and compares the different kinetic RT-PCR systems.

Media Albums 10th Alexander Friedmann International Seminar on Gravitation and Cosmology & 4th Symposium on the Casimir Effect. 10th Alexander Friedmann International Seminar on Gravitation and Cosmology & 4th Symposium on the Casimir Effect took place in Polytech. Institute of Physics, Nanotechnology and Telecommunications. Sitemap.

Samuel Conlon Nancarrow (/nˈkɒnr̩ˈkɒr̩/; October 27, 1912 – August 10, 1997) was an American-born composer who lived and worked in Mexico for most of his life. He became a Mexican citizen in 1956. Nancarrow is best remembered for his Studies for Player Piano, being one of the first composers to use auto-playing musical instruments, realising their potential to play far beyond human performance ability. He lived most of his life in relative isolation, and did not become widely known until the 1980s.