

Thoughts on IMO II

August 2012, d'incise & Cyril Bondi

(roughly translated from french, apologize for mistakes and misspells)

This text aims to make the connection between the second year of the IMO and its sequel. Quite naturally, it is necessary from time to time to do an analysis of our practice and clarify and justify our choices and decisions.

We sent each musician involved in the orchestra a series of questions, both general and personal, sometimes very consciously provocative.

Provocating answers that we needed to see appear, a need of feedback, a need to feel everyone alive and involved, even if we had to be disturbing in our our questions.

Number of sensitive points appeared, popping here and there The following text tries not to omit any issue raised, while being aware of the difficulty of the exercise.

Rather than quote individual responses, we tried to make a synthesis, hoping to be sufficient and convincing.

Way of working

Let's start with practical and non-musical things. The previous year has been very busy for the IMO, probably too busy in fact. For the incoming year we will do fewer concerts, announcing them well in advance, taking the time to prepare them in detail, which includes a number of rehearsals maybe a little higher (2 before each concert or concert series) to enable everyone to be present at least once and also do preparation meetings that provide the opportunity to discuss out of the play context about the problems encountered by the IMO, management, anticipation and clarity issues.

We recently took, too much, on ourself about the judgment of the right / wrong, good / bad, we wish an individual reinvolvement. By putting down first in writing and later in the practice what the IMO wants, everyone should be able to express relevant critical judgment.

Basically we launch a call for new ideas, ideas that should provide a contribution to the IMO's ability to improvise. We must do a maximum of discussion meetings. It is no more about simply executing one's proposal but to finely tune it with our work and goals basis.

Parenthesis on cartes blanches and interdisciplinarity

We believe it is crucial for the IMO to concentrate primarily on its practice itself, to develop its own tools.

Cases of cartes blanches (if they happen) should be done with people who are really involved in what the IMO is and what they could bring (How a carte blanche can make us do some things even better, not just different). These cases have to be discussed very seriously during meetings.

Same for interdisciplinary projects, they are not a priority because they involve another levels of reflection and overtime work, and we must really be sure to have the ability in time to manage these situations.

Another idea is in every rehearsal time we would delegate one or more external ears that sit and listen from outside the orchestra, and would be the first to give an opinion on what previously happened. Generally everyone should be able to express his feeling of success or failure if we

define quite clearly what we want to achieve.

(The three working days of the end of summer 2012 will be the best way to tune our conception of what the IMO is and what it plays)

Way of working (continued)

We need to take into account much better the concerts parameters, indoor / outdoor, dry / reverberant spaces, frontal or circle, etc., all parameters that can be more or less anticipate, it is a last season critical point.

We must spend time for it (and do fewer concerts yes), make preparatory meetings, visit the venues, be clear about the conditions we desire, do specific programs for concerts, leaving nothing to hazard. It also means that we need to know to refuse concerts that seem to offer inadequate conditions.

In the same vein, we need to take the time to make feedbacks on past concerts, share and criticize their recordings (perhaps create a 3-4 people tournus per concert which would do it in detail) Perhaps create an online discussion forum to make it easily public.

We did realize how unclear and unprepared situations could create tensions within the band, and put us in a situation beyond our abilities.

We note with great attention the words and vocabulary problems . On one hand we must work together to ensure that technical and musical terms are understood by all (so do not hesitate to ask questions). Then there is a way to find about how to talk and criticize our work, to be able to show the positive and encourage one, underline situations as examples for all and not as personal reprimands. In short, to ensure that communication within the orchestra becomes easier and constructive.

The anonymity should also be broken in the IMO, we all know more or less each other, we know from where everyone does come. IMO is a total of 42 permanent musicians, it should allow us to know each other better, to recognize ourself as part of the same story, the same ensemble. Ideally, this should not / no longer be a problem to tell your neighbor when he plays too loud or you think he's out of the instructions. Such situations are often reported to others but the interested, it does nothing to advance or create underlying discomfort we'd gladly live without . We must much more stimulate the individual responsibility regarding the group. We must avoid situations where the play of someone invades too much one's another space (and further more avoid such situations to repeat themselves).

The "errors"(with many quotes) of a few should not to make the ensemble undergo some necessarily boring didactic. We'll make everything to prevent this kind of stalemate.

Way of working (members)

The IMO now (and since this summer 2012) consists of permanent members. (42 musicians in August 2012). There is no need to argue a lot to prove this formula is one that allows the band to be good, to be run most easily (some recent concerts with fewer, regular, musicians, who had participated in rehearsals worked obviously much better.)

We are always open to the arrival of new members, if they are ultra aware of what IMO is, its past and its present especially, and ultra motivated! We'll invite them to participate first at some rehearsals.

In addition, there will also be always occasional guests, their presence is entirely based on our personal judgment to imagine if they can integrate seamlessly into the orchestra and to enrich it by their ephemeral presence.

Last point in this paragraph, we should better delegate some roles, such as translations (during

rehearsals and texts), or to manage the concerts promotion. We will come back to that more concretely very soon.

Definition / Non-definition / Double definition

There are two ways and places to defining the IMO's music.

The first is the public definition, for the website, the promo, it is a label with all its negative but necessary. This is where we will be defined as electroacoustic / post-reductionist. It is also to place ourselves in a certain kinship and say the music we do takes into account a number of a more or less close past experiences, and which we seek to develop new aspects, specific to our ensemble.

(Note that this provocation was there very justified, responses ranging from "I have no idea what it means" to "this is already an old thing" through all intermediaries and emphasizing the difference between those who define their practice more or less with these words and those who do not).

Parenthesis on aesthetic confinement

Fear of a castrating or even destructive confinement concerns. We see things as, creating a strong and unique character for the IMO passes through the elimination of many potential directions (given the number we are, these might be infinite) in favor of a clear direction. Where the point is sensitive (and indeed we need to avoid the wall) is the fact that this strong definition has to contain evolution potential over time as our experience should lead us to always seek improvement, admit mistakes, be surprised by the unexpected and the unknown, etc.. The fact is you need to know when to be strict in order to realize the validity or not of a proposal. We must be able to lock our concept for each concert, allowing to analyze, critique, improve, change it for the following one.

We must be able to link each of our choice, if we open our field, if you add a new element we must draw a line between that and what we own, our background.

The proposed innovations can have two forms, the first being the word, everyone is obviously free to propose to work a certain aspect, to dig it in detail, etc. within the IMO's predefined. general framework. If a proposal is relevant, we can then try to apply it.

The second form is more complex since it is to musically propose something within the improvisation. Again this is a tension to be managed between flexibility and off-point.

The second IMO's definition is the one we should build simply between us to know what we're doing, what looks like the music you want to play.

So it's gonna be with common, regulate, talked, practice, we can acquire this consciousness of what defines the IMO's music, by having all in our eras the same sounds and forms.

This is a work definition, the IMO's identity comes from it and not the opposite.

It's not about « one must do it like that because it's the right way », but « we go that way, we're gonna play it, fully and collectively, even just to see how it does sound in reality ».

(That's what allows us to say a moment is « wrong », no more subjectively, but objectively, regarding defined things, where we can point success or failure)

What we seek, it's definitions of our own techniques, specific to a large ensemble, and further more specific to the IMO.

Voici un certain nombre de points de base, et comme c'est souvent plus simple de définir ce qu'on ne veut pas, ouvrant sur tout le reste, commençons par cela,

Here is a couple of basic point, and as often it's much easier to start by what we don't want,

- No phrases. Understand no notes, nothing like jazz/freejazz/ pointillism, but also no percussion or even noise phrases. Each sound must be thought as part of the globality, it must be linked to it, it must be potentially understood, caught, transformed by any other musician. It must be a proposal or a support, it can't be individualist.

- No intuitive reaction, questions-answers between individuals, no plink-plonk, no sounds thrown into the void. This kind of play either focuses too much on the individual, or generates too complex proposals, the sonic result lost automatically its coherence and it becomes too hard to send articulation signal into it.

- No rhythms. One must avoid to vertically structure the roles inside the orchestra, a rhythmic basis automatically divides musicians between the one who hold it and the one who fly over it. Then each sound over it becomes decorative, and loses its structuring power (the one to indicate message to other musicians).

- No melody, out of the first point, plus the fact that the addition of free melodic lines would rapidly overload the spectrum and be a pain for the general auditive discernment.

- No solo. By solo we understand a sonic moment that wouldn't be attached to the rest, that would just take a free space and fill it with an individual expression (if everyone would do such a solo for one minute, then everyone would play only a minute per concert). One should not mistake that with the process of affirming a sound over others, an action that would intend to provoke a reaction, to propose a new path, to catch in its fall a tension to rise it again.

Yes one can caricature saying, IMO does « shrrrr » and drones ! For us its sounds and things allowing a better and clearer listening. It comes from experiences (who does remember the first concert in 2010 ?) who lead us to build protocols to make 40 musicians work together. There is obviously other methods but this ours, in construction but well advanced.

Starting with these principles, let's look for tension, dynamique, let's look for our own potential and our own way to transcend this basis !

There is a strong potential between simple and minimal contributions and the way to play them.

Working trays from a positive point of view are,

- Think the music as addition/fusion of sound materials. A sort of granular thinking, a « big » sound made of multiple voices creating an extremely rich masse.

- Work of masse-mimetism, work by sonically identifiable blocks, from where necessity to play « close » materials. This idea is central to our method, it allows us to fight against the natural entropy where by multiplying sources we would tend to a more or less constant chaos, it allows to create (identifiable) moments, to create a readability, understand to be able to hear each one's position (generally, following the moment, or proposing a change).

- Initiative takes, that's the point to generate breaks and dynamic into the mimetic playing. Throw clear new materials.

Parenthesis on the accident

This is a vocabulary point to clear out. The accident has no place in the orchestra. Understand a non-voluntary sound, coming from a mismanipulation

of the instrument or an unwillingness of the musician. In the opposite IMO misses radical interventions, not accident but breaks, contrast, surprises, u-turn, parallels. A sound that would be premeditated into the IMO's music to shake the flow, create a sudden variation of the music, more than an accident it's an initiative take.

- Stay focus, all the time, learn how to start, but more, how to stop regarding signals.

Parenthesis on shyness

It's worthy to stop on that word that came back few time in the answers. Curiously, this timidity has allowed recently to reveal a new sound quality, a quality of retention and fragility. Of course it's not a situation that should sustain. We must, first, do everything necessary so everyone find the operation margins in our general proposition, by the talks and practice define it, and secondly, find the way to recreate this tension quality in the almost nothing, no more by non-planning, but by mastering.

Because the wished directions has been not very clear sometime, we often musically did take the « leader » roles, somehow it allowed us to be relatively satisfied by the result. But now we hope to reach a point where this position will dilute itself in everyone's initiatives. This movement of responsibility from a small group toward the ensemble can only be the result of rehearsals and exercises.

Once more this is an attempt to lay down our thoughts out of our experiences. Now we need to reverse the gesture, and write the definitions by the collective practice.

Most of you expressed a positive opinion about the fact to make strong statement regarding IMO's future. From now on, as IMO can pretend to be a band with regular members, we can hope to build something solid and collective where everyone could bring in its contribution.

Instrumentarium & individual language/background

A remark that came back often was about the esthetic domination of percussions/objects and electronics, generating sometime discomfort and difficulty of positioning for other instrumentists types.

It's quite true for a few reasons, of course we build a bit our music conception from what our instruments are – but also and further more we build our instrument out of our ideas. The other reason is a problem we talked about upper of the lack of initiatives generated by a bad communication from our part, inducing a lack of confidence or connivance with a few.

There is a work to be done to allow everyone to bring in « fundamental » materials, it's something one must do during rehearsals, taking very concrete examples from each musician, so we can discuss them, listen to them, and conclude of their relevancy in the orchestra's frame.

There is a potential to be developed in the fact to make certain propositions sound with a large number. It's our duty to find the way where every sound could be made by everyone (except low register perhaps), to look for it, the help each other, to find techniques on our instruments to make the desired sounds.

On one hand one must take in consideration the instrumental diversity, on the other a certain type of music calls for a certain type of tools ; i.e, every string instrument should have bows or ebows to play sustained tones, to use preparations and objects to « break » some instruments too typical sound, to use amplification not to push up the global volume, but to reveal some spectrum parts (like the low one).

So, no, one must not follow the the percussion/electronic model, but take time to define together what each instrument potential and how adapt it the best way to the IMO's context.

The casting diversity should be felt, but in a subtle manner, everyone would be able to bring in its little touch to make the basic and fixed proposal. There is a tension to be found, and equilibrated.

The questions each must be able to ask himself are, if we say something in your usual/personal language doesn't work into the IMO will you feel oppressed, or are you ready to take in the face to make another music perhaps radically different from your usual one ? Are you able to get in this process ? Are you ready for a tabula rasa of all preconception and see the IMO as a new experience defined by its own rules and not by its multiple and individual components ?

These questions are here to underline the fact IMO requires a form of discipline and devotion (arrgg ugly word) to a not dogmatic or universalist process but one resulting of two years of experiences who lead us to choose some path more than others in the hope to move forward with our manner (specifically one of the manner) to make an large ensemble improvisation work.

Parenthesis on pleasure

The pleasure is coming from a sound achievement, each one's pleasure to be part of it is still an important stimulation. Where we want everyone to be clear is about the question, do you have pleasure to play in a restricted, "conducted" and specific way (regarding your personal improviser practice out of the orchestra) ?.

Professionalism

This is an issue that raised eyebrows, and this is normal. We all agree on the basic, we would really be professional if we were paid as such. We are in anyway putting a lot of energy to find fundings and advance in this field, we absolutely don't neglect this aspect.

But we consider ourself "pro" (the word is ugly it is true) in the way we work, we're involved in our relationship with our instrument, with orchestra and its objectives, as opposed to a "amateur" (bad word again) practice, and that's a position most of us agree with.

Conclusion to this text and preamble to the future

We deeply thank all IMO members for the time and energy they give to support this project. We thank the frankness with which everyone answered our questions. This provided us the necessary support for the present reflection and made possible for us to imagine and describe here the foundations of a way we're looking forward to take together.