

**Electronic Musical Instruments
in Collection Context**

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Electronic Musical Instruments in Collection Context

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Preface

This volume is the result of a conference held in May 2019, hosted by the Musikinstrumenten-Museum des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung PK, Berlin. The content of this book is meant to present preliminary perspectives on electronic musical instruments in the special context of instrument collections and museums.

Although the use of electronic instruments is wide spread today, touching more or less almost every aspect of music, they still represent a distinct group of musical instruments. Most musical instrument collections focus primarily on an earlier time of history – the 20th and 21st centuries generally play a subordinate role. Nevertheless, electronic instruments have found their way into collections, and they pose questions and challenges concerning the different areas of work there.

One of the most obvious questions might be how to present them in context with other instruments, most of these being several centuries old. Aspects of conservation and restoration are even more complicated, not only concerning outer shape but electronic components processed within the instruments as well. Also, curation-related fields of activities have to be reconsidered and newly approached for this relatively young group of instruments. Documenting a collection as well as conducting research may turn out to be difficult due to the lack of records, data or reliable information.

This book attempts to help lay the foundations for collection-related areas of responsibility in regards to electronic instruments – for researchers, conservators and any interested parties. Although electronic music has been researched for many years, the instruments that enable the new and radical sounds were long deemed to be of marginal interest. Only within the last two decades, with some exceptions of course, has organologic research increasingly taken interest in those very different sounding and looking ›machines‹. As a consequence, museums and collections also might now start to take these instruments into consideration when reflecting on their presentation, research and conservation concepts.

For collections and museums, the fact that the components and parts that make up these instruments sound and look ›different‹ or even ›strange‹ poses a key issue. The distinction in material, in contrast to acoustic instruments from earlier centuries, presents a major challenge and possibly even a problem in both restoration and presentation factors. Besides that, the quite different designs of the instruments discussed in this book obviously make it difficult to try to find a one-approach strategy that is transferable. It becomes apparent that because of the widely varying designs

of electronic instruments (varying in all their aspects – exterior, internal sound generation, musical purpose, etc.), each instrument demands specific strategies.

For example, the often difficult-to-explore individual history of instruments and devices for producing sounds also creates profound issues, due to the lack of reliable sources and circulating tales. In addition, contextualising found issues and characteristics of the instruments with other aspects of organological or musicological research brings up particular difficulties because of the highly diverse scope in design, functionality and musical affiliation of the instruments. These exemplified points of difficulty are explored throughout the articles presented in this book.

Further, the potential for composing music that is offered by new technology is an underlying theme of the texts. As well, curatorial-focused questions from different perspectives on electronic instruments are discussed, providing impressions and creative impulses for further thoughts and revealing detailed, specific areas or fields of work and responsibility in a collection context.

All articles are based on the talks given during the aforementioned conference. Beyond their individual emphases, they provide a kaleidoscope-like insight into the multifaceted world of electronic musical instruments presented to museums and collections, as well as to related research fields. Any translated quotes within the articles are realised by the authors themselves or by the editor, unless otherwise mentioned. In addition to that, written versions of the discussions that followed the talks are printed here. With these we hope to offer deeper insight for the reader into some points that were of special interest at the conference.

As editor of this volume, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all of the authors for keeping in touch and staying open-minded with this project through these tumultuous times, thereby making this book a varied and precedent-setting publication and, hopefully, a helpful reference for the reader's own work. Last but not least, I would particularly like to thank Tristen Bakker, for all of her diligence and patience in working with us. Her effort greatly improved this book.

Benedikt Brilmayer
Berlin, summer of 2022