

Conference Opening Statement

By Kobe Van Cauwenberghe

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I would also like to thank Thomas Schaeffer and IMD for providing the platform for this conference. It has come a long way since the first attempt in Hamburg in 2020 by Timo, followed by a smaller version I organized in Antwerp last year. I would like to dedicate this conference to Hugo De Craen, a personal friend from Braxton and a significant supporter of creative music in Belgium and abroad. Hugo served as president of the Tri-Centric Foundation board for several years. He generously opened up his personal archive to me, which was incredibly helpful in my own exploration of Braxton's music. His sudden passing two years ago came as a shock. I would also like to thank his wife, Gerd Borms, for granting me access to Hugo's archive over the past months whenever I needed it. Without his support, I probably wouldn't be here today. I have brought copies of the Tri-Axium Writings and Composition Notes from Hugo's collection, which are available at the bookstore and can be consulted in the reading corner for the remainder of the festival.

I myself became involved with Braxton's fascinating musical universe not as a scholar but from the perspective of a performer - classically schooled, a total new music nerd and hardly any knowledge of jazz, but eager to discover and learn unknown musical territory. (Here, I'd like to give a shout-out to Nate Wooley's Sound American magazine, whose Braxton Issue really opened a door for me, especially into Braxton's latest musical systems.) Little did I know it would transform much of how I thought about music. Even though Braxton's wildly imaginative theoretical concepts and compositional systems seem intimidating and complex at first glance, by simply stepping in and playing the music, it quickly became clear to me that this repertoire is as inclusive, original, and rewarding as it can be. Braxton's concepts and theories are never separate from the music and its performance practice. I'd like to emphasize here that the conference is as much addressed to performers, composers, and curators as it is to musicologists and theorists. So I'm very happy that we can directly address many aspects related to performance practice in the next two days through different lectures. We will also have two introductory workshops on Braxton's recent musical

systems, namely Ghost Trance Music and Echo Echo Mirror House Music, to give Summer Course participants a chance to directly engage with Braxton's Creative Music.

This is important because despite Braxton's enormous and unique output as a composer, and even though he created a vibrant and lively community around his music and thinking through years of teaching and his Tri-Centric Foundation, very little of the music and its performance practice trickled through in terms of performances by ensembles other than his own. There's no reason such a massive and unique body of work shouldn't find its way into courses, workshops, repertoires, and programs centered on what we would call the canon of New Music, or should we call it Creative Music? The question of labels and the border-policing functions of genre have definitely been part of the problem, such that Braxton's music, like that of many African American composers and experimentalists, has all too often been excluded and considered as 'other' by the New Music community. Through Braxton, I also discovered a wide repertoire, starting with the many composers emerging from the AACM in Chicago—Muhai Richard Abrams, Roscoe Mitchell, Henry Threadgill, to name just a few—that I believe need to be part of our cozy New Music community as well. New Music, Creative Music, Neue Musik— I certainly agree with some of Michael Rebhan's critique of the label New Music when he, ten years ago here in Darmstadt, declared to "Resign from New Music." However, I wouldn't necessarily resign from it but rather follow George Lewis' suggestion that we need to create "a new, usable, and creolized past for New Music." My hope is that this conference on the music of Anthony Braxton, taking place here at the Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt, will contribute to this.