

OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

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on 6 June 2014, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of
Music, *honoris causa*, on **PAULINE OLIVEROS**

Chancellor, President, Colleagues, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pauline Oliveros' achievement is not one that packages neatly. When we consider the works of our greatest artists, we are used to seeing them safely encapsulated in single disciplines. Painters paint; actors act; composers pose... erm... essential questions through their pieces. But Pauline has somehow managed to be simultaneously one of the most significant composers, improvisors, music technologists and theorists at work in the last 60 years. She has had a profound and far-reaching impact on remarkably diverse areas of music, both theoretical and practice-based, across a wide range of genres and approaches; but her influence stretches even further than that - into personal learning, community music, assistive technologies and more.

She has said, "Generally, I resist categorization, as important issues are often dropped when categories are applied." And, indeed, the freely interdisciplinary nature of Pauline's work is part of what marks it out for very special attention: while the popular saying claims that we'll find the "devil" in the details, in Pauline's case it is the spirit of creativity that is in the details that we so easily overlook, the cracks between ideas, between disciplines, between ways of thinking.

Of course, once those cracks have been gently prised open, they turn out to contain rich seams; they lead to crucial new approaches, trail-blazing ideas that go out into the world and change everything. Her innovations underlie the creation of many popular and art genres of music: it would not be unfair to say that if there had been no Pauline Oliveros, we would have had to have invented her, or else so many of the musics of our time would never have come to be.

But Pauline has not done this by creating the conveniently novel; her innovations have been consistently radical. On Pauline Oliveros's first visit to Cork in 2008, a student asked her whether she could play any 'normal' music :-), to which she replied that she could, but preferred not to. And indeed it is Pauline's steadfast refusal to toe any kind of line - except one of her own devising - that is behind a body of work that manages to be both cutting-edge and exoteric.

Pauline grew up in rural Texas, where the sound of the environment and the sonorities of an untuned radio were ever-present and fascinating sonic worlds for her. She took up the accordion, an instrument which could potentially lead to lucrative gigging, but was not universally accepted as a 'serious' instrument at the time. She took up the tuba and french horn in order to be allowed to play in her school band, but I guess it's obvious which of these instruments would become this dissident's life-long companion.

As a student at San Francisco State University, she embraced free improvisation at a time when it was uncommon in the wider musical world and worked with many collaborators who later also became renowned for their cutting edge music.

A life-changing discovery came in 1958. During a session of environmental-sound recording, she realised that the tape machine had captured more sounds than she herself had been aware of, which led to a fascination with music technology and to the life-long development of the discipline of listening.

As a founding member and Director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center in the 1960s, she is a pioneering figure in the development of electronic music. Not only did she establish an essential presence in this hugely male-dominated field, but she also developed the unorthodox practice of using the electronic music studio in an improvisatory way, as a performance instrument, in extreme contrast to the stringently systematised compositional practice of many of her contemporaries elsewhere in the US and in Europe. Later, she would blaze the trail for what is now called live interactive electronics with her Expanded Instrument System, a way of using electronic resources to extend the sonic capabilities of her accordion in real time.

Simultaneously with this expansion of technical resources came what is arguably an even more important development. Pauline began to explore what it means to listen, both as a

personal practice but also as a foundation for a new type of musical score. While a professor at the University of California, San Diego, she started to produce her Sonic Meditations, works for those with or without musical training that are both performance pieces and learning exercises, that unite awareness of the body, the mind, and hearing, and break down the distinctions between composer, performer and audience. For Pauline, creativity is an essential part of human dignity, so that a central goal of the Sonic Meditations is the facilitation of creativity in others. These compositions are multifaceted interactions in potential rather than fixed products; shared creativity within a community rather than the statements of a lone individual. In 1981, she left UCSD to move to upstate New York, and began a sustained study of traditional meditation practices, including those from Zen and Tibetan Buddhism.

By 1991, the practice she named 'Deep Listening' was well established, and Pauline instituted retreats in which she and colleagues Heloise Gold and Ione taught the practice to others - these retreats continue today. Pauline summarises Deep Listening as "listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening represents a heightened state of awareness and connects to all that there is." Like so much of Pauline's work, it extends beyond conceptual limitations: this is listening as a life-practice, embracing sound beyond sound; listening not just as passive reception, but as a creative engagement with the world. New York Times music critic John Rockwell argued that "on some level, music, sound, consciousness and religion are all one, and Oliveros would seem to be very close to that level".

"Deep Listening" has spawned many outlets, not least a substantial part of Pauline's compositional and theoretical output. The Deep Listening Band has released 14 albums. The Deep Listening Institute™ is internationally recognised, and provides (I quote)

"a unique approach to music, literature, art, meditation, technology and healing. DLI fosters creative innovation across boundaries and across abilities, among artists and audience, musicians and non-musicians, healers and the physically or cognitively challenged, and children of all ages. This ever-growing community of musicians, artists, scientists and certified Deep Listening practitioners strives for a heightened consciousness of the world of sound and the sound of the world.

Pauline's work appears on at least 44 CDs, as well as numerous LPs, tapes and DVDs. She has given thousands of performances, world-wide. She has made essential text-based contributions to research in sonic perception, roles and methods of listening, composition and improvisation, performance, musical indeterminacy, gender studies, community music, machine intelligence, human/machine interfaces and live electronics. She is the author of 5 books and has contributed to 6 more; she has published uncountable articles in a variety of professional journals.

Today marks the award of Pauline's fourth honorary doctorate. She has held lecturing positions at several academic institutions. She has received numerous prestigious awards including in the last two years the Giga-Hertz-Award for Lifetime Achievement in Electronic Music from the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, Germany; and the John Cage Award from the Foundation of Contemporary Arts, New York.

While Pauline's achievement is undoubtedly extraordinary, you may be wondering why an Irish university would bestow an Honorary Doctorate on a composer from Texas, with a Spanish surname, living in upstate New York, and with, as far as I know, little interest in the GAA; Pauline has no apparent link to Ireland other than that her home town of Kingston is located in Ulster county.

There are many reasons I felt it appropriate to propose her for this award: most immediately, her way of approaching music – creative, constructive, innovative and deeply humane -- is a shining example of the best that can be achieved through fertile interdisciplinarity. The idea that different forms of musical study should inform each other, rather than stand as isolated disciplines, has been at the centre of the philosophy of UCC's music department for more than two decades. Here, the practice of music is not separate from its academic study; composition does not stand apart from performance; Western music is a World music; every genre is valued equally. The first area of relationship between the Department and Oliveros, then, is that she is a musical polyglot: her work not only encompasses several distinct areas of musical activity, but in many cases finds creative and invaluable ways to draw together those separate areas into a productive synthesis. Deep Listening itself is an outstanding example of this. There are also more precise links between Pauline's specialist practices and those of the Department as well as a history of engagement between us that dates from 2008 and continues to the present day.

On a broader base, UCC has established a long tradition of valuing independent thought, now enshrined in its slogan “Great Minds Don’t Think Alike”, and I don’t think there can be any doubt that Pauline’s indefatigably independent, consistently innovative and pioneering spirit are exemplary aspects of one of the greatest minds of recent musical history.

The first Sonic Meditation was called Teach Yourself to Fly, and in the spirit of helping all of us here to fly, I would like to close by offering a couple of meditations from Pauline’s ‘Deep Listening Meditations-Egypt’. They are characteristically multihued. The first observes, “As you listen, the particles of sound ... decide to be heard. Listening affects what is sounding. The relationship is symbiotic.” We have likely all experienced that strange sensation when we become, suddenly, hyper-aware of sound, whether it’s because of that creepy noise in a quiet house in the middle of the night, or because we have heard a moment of ravishingly beautiful music. In those moments, sound seems to swallow us; our experience goes beyond merely hearing and becomes living. Pauline’s work leads us toward that kind of deep involvement with existence through sound, and then takes us further. This is music that is awareness and life, but is also creativity, for when we fully experience the world we also change it; in those moments, we fly. And when we know that, it becomes a source of inspiration and strength: “If you could ride the waves of your favorite sound”, she asks, “where would it take you?”

Præhonorabilis cancellarie, totaque universitas!

Præsentō vobis hanc meam collegam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quæ admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Musica, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.