

This article was first published in *Sounds Australian*,
the journal of the Australian Music Centre,
no. 58 (2001): 'Publishing: the Digital Dimension'

A composer connects

From music to web site to web rings and more...

A versatile composer, **Philip Czaplowski** also writes music for documentaries and corporate videos, and has written many jazz pieces. Philip recently completed an arts degree at La Trobe University, majoring in cinema and in 2001 commenced studies towards a Masters degree in music, at Monash University.

From the moment I first experienced the Internet I wanted to have my own website.

The web is like an encyclopaedia, where anyone and anything can have an entry, and the nature of these entries is largely dependent upon the communicative skills of the website creator. Thus, websites range from those that are visually alluring and informative, to those that are downright ugly and boring. My first priority was to try to make mine one of the former!

Just as with music composition, websites offer myriad possibilities for visual design. I visit many composer websites where, because of poor legibility, layout or content, you come away with a negative impression. Many people put their site up in a flurry of initial enthusiasm, and then just leave it unchanged, to decay...

All of my compositions say something about the person I am, and I suppose my website is the same. I tend to see it as just

another one of my creations that satisfies my need for communication. Just as I'm obsessive about the creation of my music, I also strive for excellence in the way that my website is constructed. I'm a great believer in doing things properly, particularly if people are going to be listening to or viewing the results. For example, I've changed the colour scheme at least a dozen times because it didn't please me aesthetically! But then I started to realise that at some point I just had to let the overall design stand, and limit myself to updating the content. It's exactly the same process as composing music. You could edit and refine your work forever, but at some point you have to release it into the world - and hope for the best!

My website started out being fairly simple, with just a bio and a list of compositions. Then, whenever I found some aspect that I liked about someone else's site, I would look at the code they used, and adapt it for my own purposes. In particular, once I learned how to use frames I was able to increase the amount of content substantially, and give my site a much more logical format. The use of frames also made it much easier for visitors to navigate the different sections, and find the things that might interest them.

As a composer, my primary purpose is to write music. The problem is that no matter how successful I may become, I'm still responsible for many other activities such as seeking performances, publicity, applying for funding, etc. I spend more time

on these things than actually writing music! This is just the way things are, and so it's crucial for me to allocate my time judiciously. My website helps to give me a public face, a level of engagement that I probably couldn't achieve in any other way. As more and more people access the Internet I suspect that not having a website will ultimately amount to a form of anonymity. It's somewhat ironic that I've had students write papers about me as a result of discovering my website, even though they may never have heard any of my music!

My website also serves as a kind of archive for my own benefit. Instead of keeping a written record of my compositions, performances, etc., I now add the information to my website and it's there as a permanent record of my activities. This is also important for me from the point of view that, probably like many of my colleagues, I have periods of self-doubt about my chosen career. My website then serves as a kind of repository of my achievements, which I can refer to whenever these doubts arise! It serves to remind me of my competence.

Early on I realised that it was a good idea to provide visitors with some "bonus" or incentive for wanting to visit. For example, there are websites that feature links to things such as music fonts that are available for download. These sites receive visitors who are initially looking for the music fonts, but at the same time gain awareness of the composer who makes them available. Initially I added a page of Australian classical music links to my

website, at a time when this kind of resource was not widely available, and this seemed to bring in quite a few visitors. Then, having searched for and collected a substantial number of music graphics for possible use on my own website, I decided to make these into a collection and make them available for download. This also brings in visitors who may otherwise have never heard of me as a composer.

My website is part of several web rings. A web ring is a collection of websites that relate to some common interest or activity, and where a set of links enable visitors to one site in the ring to visit other sites that may also interest them. I'm the founder and administrator of the Australian Classical Music Web Ring, and I get a lot of my visitors from this facility.

Perhaps the major issue for me with regard to my website is the absence of any music for visitors to listen to. I'm very aware of the rather incongruous situation whereby for many of my visitors, no matter how much they learn about me and my activities from the information provided, they still go away with little idea of what my music actually sounds like!

I could provide MP3s for people to download, except that my Internet Service Provider limits my allocation of website space to 10mb - barely enough for one short piece. Many composers choose to provide MIDI files for download, which work well in that they are much smaller. However, because the audible result is totally dependent upon the downloader's soundcard and the sounds available thereon, I find the results to be less than satisfactory, especially in any music where instrumental timbre is of importance - which of course is most.

Some sites use "Streaming" audio, whereby you receive the sound via a kind of transmission. I've usually found that congestion on the Internet causes the signal to be disjointed at best, and this

doesn't make for a worthwhile listening experience. I don't think that the problem of sound will be fixed until the capacity and speed of the Internet is increased - something we keep hearing about, but which may still be some way off.

I did recently find another way of providing visitors with the opportunity to hear my music. There are now sites on the web where they will store your music in MP3 format, and anyone can go and download it. You then provide a link from your own website to the page where your MP3s are available. Some composers might hesitate at using such a facility on the basis that they are giving away their music for free, and without much control. On the other hand, given that I'm never really likely to profit much financially from writing classical music, my desire is simply to have my compositions broadcast as widely as possible.

Some composers would shy away from spending the amount of time I've put into my website. But in addition to being of value in itself, I find it a relaxing thing to work on, something that cannot always be said of the lonely act of music composition! My website is a creative endeavour that satisfies me greatly, but also serves several other purposes, and I firmly believe that having a website that has the potential to inform people and publicise my activities is one of the more practical ways in which I can increase my profile and the general level of awareness of my career as a composer.■