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POST-CLASSICAL: "I'm putting what I consider the essentials out there," Cox says of the playlist at Web-based Iridian Radio.

## Left to their own devices

Classical radio didn't satisfy Robin Cox and Kyle Gann, so they carved out a niche for new American composers at their Web stations.

By CHRIS PASTER  
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**O**nline plays nothing but recordings of Schubert's "Ave Maria." There are about 300 of them.

Another plays only flute music.

A third is devoted to "demented" opera scenes — the sort of musical and dramatic experience that sends you out of the theater reeling and gazed, announces the producer of La Cieca's Opera House. He promises "opera as blood sport."

Welcome to Internet radio.

Since President Clinton signed the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in 1998, thousands of Internet radio stations have sprung up around the U.S. No one knows the total number, but many are devoted to — how to put it? — specific interests.

Moreover, these stations are only part of an enormous field that includes the BBC — which three years ago shifted its shortwave transmissions headed for the U.S. and Canada to an online service — as well as numerous European and Asian websites.

But there's no reason to look down on the small guys.

No less an organization than the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, or ASCAP, considers them sufficiently important that in 1999 it created the Deans Taylor Internet Award. This year's prize went to two stations devoted to new American music: Iridian Radio ([www.iridianradio.com](http://www.iridianradio.com)), produced by Santa Barbara-based composer and violinist Robin Cox, who also has his Robin Cox Ensemble; and Post-Classical Radio ([www.live365.com/stations/pcr2pm](http://www.live365.com/stations/pcr2pm)), produced by Kyle Gann, a composer, Bard College professor and new music critic for the Village Voice.

Although the award is not much in financial terms — Cox and Gann split \$500 — it signals the tip of an increasingly imposing iceberg.

The Internet as a communicative force is becoming more and more important, and it brings music from around the

world, not just America," says Frances Richard, director of concert music at ASCAP in New York.

"It's a logical extension of the Deans Taylor Awards" — named after the composer and critic who served as the organization's president from 1945 to 1948.

Indeed, the Internet links this year's winners in more ways than one: New Yorker Gann was inspired by Southern Californian Cox.

"I got the idea from Iridian Radio," Gann said by telephone, discussing the genesis of his station. "I didn't know anything about Internet radio, didn't even know it existed. Well, that's not quite true. I had tuned in to Air America, Al Franken's station."

"But I didn't know there were stations you could run yourself out there. I didn't know there were any websites making that service available."

Cox, for his part, said from his Santa Barbara studio that when Kyle put up his own station and said I inspired him to do it, I thought I had died and gone to FM heaven. My acidity spiked.

For Cox, the reason to start a station was simple: He couldn't find the music he wanted to hear on the radio.

"For all the possibilities that the Internet may provide, what was actually out there was still very much what you would hear over the airwaves much of the time," he said. "The best you could hope for was a John Adams piece squashed between early 20th century works."

"I'm putting what I consider the essentials out there. It's been a good exercise going through all the music I love and picking out the desert island discs I feel most strongly about."

Cox plays music by not only Adams but the Kronos Quartet, Beng on a Cun, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson. He bills it as "music that's smart but still warm to the ears," and he has a playlist of more than 100 pieces.

For Gann, the issue is more serious. "When I was younger, classical radio was the way I discovered a lot of new music," he said. "It was extremely important. Today, you can't turn on the radio and hear any of this stuff."

"What he and Cox do, he said, "points out the utter emptiness of most radio and most classical radio. Certainly, it points out how much better a job can be done on anything when commercial considerations are taken out of the picture."

Long Beach composer Carolyn Brereton agrees. She considers both stations "extraordinarily important because they are giving voice to a niche in music that

generally requires a lot of work to find. If this multiplied, it would be the best thing that ever happened."

Said New York composer Nech Creswell: "Ideally, you will come into your home and listen to whatever you want. Internet radio is a step toward typing into your computer what it is you want to hear and hearing it."

Gann described his station as broadcasting "wonderfully beautiful new music from composers who've left the classical world far behind."

He has a 17-hour playlist that loops and includes works by John Cage, Terry Riley, Christopher Rouse and a host of composers who are fairly obscure even to many music lovers.

"When I write about music people don't hear, people think I'm nuts," he said. "I've always needed a way not only to tell people about the music but to play it so they could hear it. Otherwise, there's no way of checking on the truth of what I'm saying."

"I do tend to stay away from stuff that I like that is really scary and dramatic but which, I think, comes off better in concert than in recording. There's a difference in aesthetics there. A piece that's fabulous in concert I might not want to listen to through speakers at home."

### Streaming radio

**B**OTH Cox's and Gann's stations operate 24/7, provide links to other stations that listeners might want to sample, and have links for purchasing recordings.

And as it turns out, almost anyone can follow the pair's lead. All you need is a personal computer and a streaming-radio-station service provider such as Live365, which carries Cox's and Gann's stations as well as thousands of others.

Streaming radio is different from downloading or copying music, which involves huge legal issues.

"We're completely legal," said Raghu Gupta, chief operating officer of Live365, a privately held Bay Area-based firm.

"What the Digital Millennium Copyright Act essentially does is create this mandatory or statutory license to webcast," he said. "It says, in effect, 'As long as you follow certain rules — you're not obscene, profane or illegal and pay royalties — you can do this.'"

"We pay the record labels and ASCAP and BMI [Broadcast Music Inc.] and so on. That's why people are attracted to us. We're a one-stop shop. All they have to do

is provide the music and the programming. We take care of all the back end — streaming and royalties and licenses."

No one need worry about being squeezed out of the field, either.

"That's the beauty of the Internet," Gupta said. "You've got this unlimited spectrum. It's not limited by the spectrum of the FM band. You can have very niche-oriented stations devoted to Zen soundtracks in movies, ragtime, sci-fi action and movie scores, and opera, of course."

Internet radio is also low-maintenance. One person can easily set up a station.

"I had it up and running within a couple of days," Cox said of his station. "I've been adding to it ever since. This doesn't take a lot of money or time."

Gann also took only a few days to set up his station, but he wishes Live365 was a little more classical-music friendly.

"I'm listed as 'classical, experimental and college,'" he said. "Those are shots in the dark. They don't have 'post-classical,' which I wish they did, or 'avant-garde' or 'new music.' They're very geared — like the rest of the world — to pop music."

While the numbers are modest by some standards, people are tuning in. Cox's station has logged almost 1,000 hours of listening a month.

"That's about 30 hours per day," he said. "This did catch me off guard — how quickly it took off and how much fun it's been."

Gann has registered more than 1,800 hours since launching his station Sept. 4. "I've had 3,192 hits," he said. "That's something like 50 a day. The average listening time is 34 minutes. That's better than I had expected."

No one is getting rich through these stations, however. Even Live365, which survived a rough period during the dot-com meltdown in 2001, is only "now close to being profitable," according to Gupta. The company makes its money through subscription fees, broadcaster fees and advertising.

"There is some turnover in stations," Gupta said. "Typically, it's either people that maybe can't find an audience or spend the time or, for whatever reason, they lose interest."

"We're companies that find their audience and are unique and very stable. "Once people find their audience — and it might be a small one — it's hard to turn your station off. You want to keep their happy."

The number of listeners is definitely growing. The latest study by ratings service Arbitron estimates that 18% of all Americans, or 30 million people, listen to Internet broadcasts weekly, up from 8% in 2001.

Stations often overlap in offering the same kind of music, but this doesn't bother Gupta.

"We're a platform for people to do what they want to do," he said. "We let the listeners and the system work out who gets an audience and who doesn't. It depends on how they program and how they market it. We provide the tools and advice on how to do it, but we can't do it. We try to exert little editorial control."

How large is the audience for the "Ave Maria" only station?

"Probably not huge compared to Howard Stern's," said Gupta. "But we know he's a very happy broadcaster."

### I heard it on streaming radio

#### What is Internet radio?

Internet radio — also known as "streaming radio" — is digital broadcasting available through a personal computer. It's different from downloading because it's designed to be saved to a hard drive for subsequent listening or sharing, although it can be recorded or shared while streaming.

#### What do I need to access it?

Most modern personal computers already come with a player (Windows Media Player) built in. Other players include RealPlayer, iTunes and Apple's QuickTime. Different stations require different kinds of players. Because of the large amount of data being processed in streaming radio, a broadband (DSL or cable) connection is preferable to a dial-up modem, especially for high-fidelity music.

#### How do I find stations that play the music I'm interested in?

At BBC Radio 3 ([bbc.co.uk/radio3](http://bbc.co.uk/radio3)) you can pick the music you want. You can also go to [www.radio-leonora.com](http://www.radio-leonora.com) and type in your choice. Other addresses include: Live365.com, WindowsMedia.com, ComFM.com, ClassicMusicAmerica.com, Rhapsody.com, Shoutcast.com and Launch.com.

#### Some favorite stations?

AMC.net  
RND104.org  
On Live365: For new music, in addition to Iridian Radio and Post-Classical Radio, there are MusicMavericks — Smooth MusicMavericks — Crunchy, and Innovamus-classical. For Calles workshops, there's La Cieca's Opera House.  
On BBC3: Composer of the Week the Cowan Collection.

#### How do I get my own station out there?

In addition to your PC or a server dedicated to radio use only, you need an Internet service provider such as Live365. If your station plays music, you'll have to pay the provider a monthly fee to cover licensing fees to music publishers.

#### How much should I expect to pay?

Live365 fees start at \$9.95 a month and go up depending on service options. Other services' fees vary.

— CHRIS PASTER