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FROM MUSIC IN THE LABORATORY TO MUSIC OF THE FOLK:
ON THE FUTURE OF SOUND-BASED MUSIC

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Preamble

Approximately twenty years ago I started a campaign in word and creative deed against what I have called the marginalisation of contemporary experimental music; in particular most forms of electroacoustic music. In the early years of this campaign, I combined my whinging with a healthy dose of idealism. Today, as the first decade of both a new century and a new millennium have come to an end, I am pleased to see my idealism drifting by way of cautious optimism to an encouraging and, I believe, realistic view of the future. In this view, my key concerns regarding the accessibility of this music will have been vastly reduced and the elitist nature of much of its output will have morphed into the new reality of sound-based creative work being embedded as a fundamental aspect of rapidly evolving new media art forms that are created and disseminated in new ways, whilst offering new forms of participation. In fact, it is my view that this music is being taken from its academic or studio- based isolation into more mainstream communities and therefore I speak of new forms of folk music evolving; that is, music for ever broadening groups of people interested in the creation and sharing of their sonic ideas.

The call for the current issue spoke of *"the emergence of new paradigms and platforms for the creation, performance and dissemination of music"*. This article will acknowledge that vision through the investigation of three intertwined subjects before reaching its conclusion regarding the not so distant future of sonic creativity. The subjects are: the concept I have named the 'sound-based music paradigm', access by means of an intention/reception loop and new forms of dissemination that complete the move from the laboratory and its associated well informed public to much broader communities.

The sound-based music paradigm

It is important to commence this text with some sort of delineation. In the preamble, the terms 'contemporary experimental music' and 'electroacoustic music' were mentioned. Without going through the rationale that led me to invent an alternative term for the latter (the full rationale can be found Landy 2007a and 2007b), the term 'sound-based music' will be the focus from this point onwards. In *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (2007a, 17), I defined this term as follows: *sound-based music typically designates the art form in which the sound, that is, not the musical note, is its basic unit.* The key differences between this chosen term and electroacoustic music are: a) sound-based music can, on occasion, be fully acoustic

and, therefore, not involve technology, and, more importantly b) some electroacoustic music works are note-based compositions and sound more like their vocal/instrumental cousins than they do like sound-based works. There is, naturally, a grey area in the middle and consequentially many works contain both emphases.

The term is useful for a couple of key reasons. Firstly, it allows me to state clearly that sonic art works are music: the term 'sonic art' allows people to think otherwise. Secondly I have come to the conclusion that sound-based works, in contrast to electroacoustic ones, demonstrate paradigmatic behaviour. This is described at length in the 2007 books, in particular in *La musique des sons/The Music of Sounds* (2007b). I admit that the word 'paradigm' is over-used and have suggested that the term 'supergenre'[1] as a possible alternative. However, one cannot speak of supergenre behaviour as that makes little sense. Paradigmatic behaviour, on the other hand relates to the body of knowledge that holds sound-based music together in terms of its construction, its performance, the related listening experience and its theoretical basis; therefore, it is something that I believe can be demonstrated and coexists comfortably with note-based music's paradigmatic behaviour. In the case of the sound-based music paradigm, there is an obvious connection with new media arts. I believe that we should be as inclusive as possible; therefore, sound-based creativity ranging from acousmatic works through strict electronic ones, to electronica, sound installations and sculptures, and other relevant forms of sound art, soundscape composition, pertinent forms of visual music as well as what I have called 'music-based music' (e.g. plunderphonics and turntablism), all fit fully or largely within the sound-based music paradigm.

One of the interesting consequences of the discovery of this paradigmatic behaviour is the view that a significant portion of sound-based music transcends the old-fashioned split between art and popular music. In other words, a musician's roots can inform a sound-based work, but the works themselves need not directly fit into one of these categories. This discovery offers many advantages, in particular regarding communities of interest; the subject will be returned to at some length in the discussion on dissemination below.

The sound-based music paradigm allows the readership of CMMAS's *Sonic Ideas/Ideas Sónicas* to be quite broad. What I find exciting about this is that the journal's readership should theoretically be able to demonstrate appreciation and understanding for this rapidly developing diversity. In other words there is a community of interest related to

sound-based music that consists of smaller communities for the areas that fit under the umbrella of this supergenre. This allows us to learn more about its foundations and potential together, whilst working in more modest areas in which we specialise. What has just been written may seem patently obvious to readers, but when one looks at other forms of musical activity, this sort of crosstalk is the exception, not the rule. Thus, sound-based approaches hold their community together in a manner that is unusual in other contemporary music circles, where understanding and open-mindedness of others' work is rarely practiced. It will be demonstrated below that the acknowledgement of the sound-based music paradigm should have significant repercussions regarding participation and appreciation, thus supporting this issue's call and my personal decades' old goal regarding access and involvement. Before discussing this, let's jump to issues regarding musical communication, as this subject forms an important, if not somewhat controversial, element supporting the vision of this article.

Access by means of an intention/reception loop

Having investigated the causes of marginalisation for many years, it seemed important to do something to combat it. This realisation influenced my artistic work enormously, initiating a journey that led me to the means of increasing access to sound-based music and to the discovery of access-related information relevant to this music. Two major milestones that formed part of this journey were 'the something to hold on to factor' related to sound-based music (Landy 1994) and the *ElectroAcoustic Resource Site* (EARS, www.ears. dmu.ac.uk). The former concerns aspects in sound-based music that can help listeners, in particular inexperienced listeners, to navigate their way through a work; thus assisting them in terms of crossing the threshold into a new world of sonic creation and supporting their (initial) discoveries. The EARS site has aided access through its substantial multilingual bibliography, glossary and index as well as through its publications section.

A third milestone in this journey is, I believe, particularly pertinent to this article and was a logical successor to 'the something to hold on to factor' research. The *Intention/Reception (I/R) Project*, originally undertaken by Rob Weale and myself and now further evolved by way of sister projects in Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and the UK, is based on a premise that will most likely be an uncomfortable one for any 'art for art's sake' musicians amongst the readership. This premise may be seen to be conservative, but those involved in the project do not see it that way at all. The view is that music works best when it is a communicative, *shared* art form, one based on lived experience in which the innovative as well as the better known components are also shared. The project's hypothesis, now sufficiently

proven, is that inexperienced listeners encountering sound-based music for the first time find the listening experience more satisfying when offered the musicians' information regarding communicative intention; this is also known as the music's dramaturgy. Clearly, this only works when such an intention exists, something anathema to those who subscribe to art for art's sake (see, for example, Weale 2006 and Landy 2006).

Instead of walking through the project's methods and potential applicability, it seems more relevant to discuss the project's raison d'être. I am well aware that the view exists that listeners encountering a form of sound-based music for the first time come from a position of strength as they have absolutely no idea what to expect and can react to it with a completely open mind. This is a true, but very dangerous statement. Those involved with the project will readily admit that it is true for a small percentage of members of the public. However, most people with absolutely no background related to this music are reticent to cross the threshold and try out something completely new: they are either not interested in widening their horizons or they lack the confidence to listen as they might fear that they will not know how to engage with it. Some feel uncomfortable sharing their 'uneducated' views after listening to the music. There are a host of other reasons why many people feel ill at ease trying out something new. As our broadcast media and our schools do not introduce them to our music normally, how can we best make our work inviting to them?

Although the response offered by the project was obviously not completely uniform – some people are not open to new experiences; others might find some works too alienating or complex, a few others are not interested to know about the musicians' views, etc. – what we have discovered is that when musicians offer an explanation of how their work relates to shared lived experience, this aids both appreciation and understanding. It is worthy to note that this project has also demonstrated that potential interest in this body of music is *much* higher than one might imagine. Both cited texts offer convincing sets of statistics; all works investigated thus far have elicited a response of well over 50% interest regardless of the participants' backgrounds.

So where might this desired shared experience come from? Clearly the link to lived experience does not need to be as explicit as, for example, can be found in a soundscape composition with narration. People can understand much more abstract works when: a) there are things for them to hold on to and/or b) the work's dramaturgy aids the untrained listener into the universe of the piece.

It is also evident that intention information is not always reflected in the listening experience. Some listeners may not have experienced the description offered by the musician(s). In other cases, the listeners may hear something else or, al-

ternatively, simply cannot receive what has been described at all. I would suggest in such cases, where the latter outcome is common, that pieces perhaps be altered so that the intention is indeed finally received by a large percentage of listeners. But, again, this assumes there is an intention in the first place, no matter how specific or broad, and many readers will not feel comfortable with this. These readers deserve to be told that music that avoids such forms of communication is finally elitist as is art for art's sake. There is clearly space in our eclectic world for elitism, but I, for one, reject the notion of my work being too inaccessible for a broader audience outside a circle of learned peers and would never desire to create such artistic work. This does not imply in any way that works need to become superficial or simplified.

Let's take a brief and perhaps extreme example. Noise music has certainly developed a respectable public over recent years. Some listeners have made a natural step to noise music from club culture. Others have perhaps migrated from live-electronic practices focusing on so-called unwanted sounds. In both cases, the community of participants and listeners share common interests and can communicate to those who engage with the related aesthetic. Now let's take this further and see how to get someone with absolutely no knowledge of noise music to engage with it. Clearly many will have a view about loudness (I am assuming for this article that noise music is loud, although that is in fact not true in all cases). The question is how to create a context where loud, so-called 'unwanted sounds' make sense to new listeners. Those involved with the I/R project hold the view that the musicians often make a statement that may be political, dramatic, narrative, emotional or otherwise based on a particular dramaturgy, and that communicating this to new listeners before or possibly after a first listening can strongly influence the issue of crossing the threshold of acceptability. Allowing listeners to hear a piece of work or a type of work more than once can also be highly valuable. Granted, many will reject noise and seem inflexible. This is inevitable. However, the number of people who could be attracted to this type of sound-based creativity is potentially fairly substantial. The same process described here can be applied regarding acousmatic music, and so on.

The I/R project set out to gauge potential interest in sound-based music and, as said, the conclusion was that much of the music's marginalisation is a result of socio-cultural issues, not the music itself, which was crucial information to have if my ideal of greater access were to be remain defensible. It also set out to determine to what extent those 'things to hold on to' and the music's dramaturgy could aid in offering support to those who are unable to listen to sound-based music in the same manner as those who have listened to this music several times; particularly in terms of shared experience (comparing a work to another similar

one, focusing on the use of particular sound materials, etc.). Again, this second goal was proven unambiguously as these musical and extra-musical aids did support accessibility and understanding. This project has been gratifying, as it has lain to rest any thought that I may have retained from my musical studies that there was value to art that you do not understand. It also has been invaluable in terms of demonstrating the importance of a wide variety of aspects related to sound-based music that can be shared between the artists and their listeners as well as amongst listeners themselves; thus leading to the types of communication that I have claimed to be at the basis of any artistic endeavour.

New forms of dissemination

Our journey now moves forward and focuses on a number of ways in which today's technology may offer a positive influence regarding the lot of sound-based music. This section is based on another part of this issue's call concerning discussion related to "technological advances ... influencing the way in which we approach and relate to the arts".

In talks over recent years related to the sound-based music paradigm, I have hesitatingly included a slide that asked the question: where would you expect to find a recording of your work in a CD shop? Readers can immediately understand my cause for hesitation, for the CD shop (similar to score publishing houses and so on) is not far away from retirement age according to recent stirrings from the music industry. I retained the slide because it symbolised several things: a) not least, the fact that many such shops would not include such works; b) if they did, they might not have an appropriate section where it best fits – perhaps larger CD shops form an exception; c) often a work deserves to be placed under more than one category; and d) as suggested in the paradigm discussion, the very separate art and pop music areas in the shop would make categorisation even more challenging as much sound-based music belongs, in the first instance, to itself more than art or pop music.

Today we have fantastic tools that we can use to search for music, and much of that music exists on and can be downloaded from the internet. Still, for those who do not know anything about sound-based music, those tools are not self-evident. Then there is the wealth of music to choose from – how does one start? Without pre-university educators or broadcasters and the like supporting us, where does my optimism come from?

An invitation from Roger Dean to contribute to *The Oxford Handbook of Computer Music* (Landy 2009) forced me to put together my ideas concerning how new technologies just might provide the key that leads towards much greater access to sound-based music. Some of the thoughts presented in that article will be summarised below. In fact, this section goes beyond the words in the call regarding how

we 'approach and relate' to the music, it also includes the effort involved in terms of discovering it in the first place.

Let's begin with two of the three key culprits, education and the media (the third culprit consists of musicians who either are not interested in a communication loop or make their works too inaccessible to be appreciated by a wider audience, but they have already been put in their place in the paragraphs above). It is my firm belief that education and broadcasters will only introduce and support this work when a vox populae demands it. In other words, if sufficient interest were to be generated, there would be no choice but to offer an introduction to sound-based music in schools, on the traditional broadcast and by way of the written media.

We are not there yet; nonetheless, attempts in several countries are being made to open up music curricula to aspects of music that interest young people, aspects with which they engage outside of school. This includes forms of popular music that do not involve music literacy and sound-based music as heard on films and the television (be it by stealth), and heard and furthermore manipulated on computer games and other software that allows for sounds to be organised in real time. Beyond this are the attempts being undertaken, including by the research centre where I work, to create educational tools for beginners and advanced students related to sound-based music, such as our EARS II Pedagogical Project which is in development at the time of writing this article. Such online resources will be amazingly useful as they will offer information to anyone interested in discovering knowledge and repertoire associated with sound-based music. They will assist the music teachers as well, who traditionally maintain that they do not have a clue as to how to teach these novel forms of music making.

Similarly those diligent souls who have at least put some of this work on the radio over the years are finding that they are competing with internet broadcasts and archives that are offering a greater selection of the repertoire to their own communities of interest. As these communities grow, they will opt into such broadcasts and out of more generalist programmes from the more traditional broadcast media that largely exclude sound-based music.

Another interesting point is that traditionally non-commercial forms of music have resided, as the expression goes, between a rock and a hard place. Today, such music can thrive. It can reside anywhere between copyright and copyleft. It can be given away, listened to anytime, online, on an iPod or by similar means. One can try things out such as short tasters out of longer pieces. MySpace, YouTube and a host of other marvellous collections of audio and audio-visual recordings offer us a vast richness of selection. Some such sites are accompanied by a wealth of information. In fact one of the key challenges for novices is finding means to navigate through all of this information. Fortunately, a good deal of tools that are evolving related to new forms of social networking, including ontological tools, are expected to come to the rescue. Web 2.0 developments should catalyse the types of community forming that have been suggested above. It is in fact tomorrow's form of the multi-user domain where communities will be located.

And these communities will be interested in hearing music, learning about the music and, last but not least, making music. It is this holistic combination that, in my view, is going to become so influential. Internet music of all types is growing, slowly but surely. This slow growth is understandable given the radical change it incorporates, namely virtual networked performance. We are naturally grappling with issues including latency when audio is being sent several ways at once as well as how to create internet music environments. The easy ones to create are those that have fairly well developed rules. The problem with such environments is that the rules tend to be rigid and thus do not allow different forms of creativity to be manifested simultaneously or different forms of ability to be easily combined. This is not a form of criticism, but it is not on such systems where I believe the folk music of the future will be taking place. The 'venues' for these developing forms of folk music will be like a home to a given interest group who will want to approach that interest in their own way and to the best of their ability; in particular when being combined with the abilities of others. Such systems are more sophisticated and will need to be updated constantly following the developing interests of that community. This parallels the dynamic of traditional folk music that evolved from a community but remained flexible and open to change following the community's development or assimilation with another one. As communities with similar interests will tend to be aware of one another and often share members, the map of sound-based genres belonging to our supergenre will evolve.

Granted, the internet is never going to be the source to serve all interests. Anyone involved in spatialisation with respect to sound-based music is trying to figure out how best to obtain an optimal real-time listening experience given differing broadband rates and the general state of play regarding the internet itself. The same can be said regarding the viewing of multi-location performance online. Still, many of these problems are ephemeral as what is impossible today may become normal within a few years.

More poignantly, many people naturally still believe in live performance and live interaction involving physical presence. The increase of live performance within sound-based music over the last ten years or so has been spectacular and this has been reflected in the increase of interactive environments, whether in the form of installations or audience participation in live events. In this way, participation is being evolved from 'being there', wherever 'there' may be, to being involved. This is, in turn, influencing and altering

the former separate roles of composer, interpreter and listener to a single role of creative participant. By erasing the specialist borders, I believe that access issues will consequently be diminished. Sonic creativity will become a more shared experience and the act of sharing is that which will make the music more accessible, will aid in the creation of communities of interest and a much less marginal or elitist future for our music.

Conclusion:
towards a 21st century form of folk music

The time has come in this short article to pull together our three threads and attempt to demonstrate how they lead towards a healthier map of music - especially sound-based music,- in the future. First and foremost, it is important to acknowledge the existence of the sound-based paradigm and thus recognise how this helps to draw its growing community together. Secondly, by accepting the notion of communities of interest related to sound-based music, we acknowledge key aspects of the paradigm, namely interests in its means of construction and performance as well as interest in terms of the listening experience (I like to call these communities of co-hear-ence) and, related to that, the sharing of musical experience. The inclusion of communicating shared experience is something I found was largely avoided when I studied contemporary music. Not only was the difference between good and bad avoided, but the entire experience of sharing the aspects related to reception was anathema. Please note that I am not seeking a new universal system of aesthetics. This is entirely impossible in our diverse multi-cultural planet. What I am seeking is the acknowledgement that music has to do with our inner processes of relating pieces to what we have heard and experienced in the past and shared with others' experiences. Communities can hardly exist when this information is kept to individuals. Thirdly, we are now seeing tools and opportunities evolving that will catalyse community forming, and enable inquisitive individuals and communities to discover similar initiatives anywhere in the world. As a consequence of this, repertoire, information related to the repertoire online as well as live creative opportunities will evolve that may take many people away from their commercial celebrity culture and offer them more collaborative opportunities for sharing and participation. It is the activities emanating from these communities that, for readers in countries that have seen their original forms of folk music largely disappear over the last century, will become the basis of tomorrow's folk music including sound-based varieties for people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities.

A consequence of all of this would be: a) greater recognition of sound-based music and, in turn, more attention given to it in tomorrow's education and means of dissemination, and b) that the music will become an object of pride soci-

ally, thus being more integrated into society than in today's marginal and fairly anonymous position. It is for this reason that I consciously used the word 'healthy' in relation to the map of music in the previous paragraph.

I sincerely believe in a dynamic future for sound-based music. As the 2010s progress, it is my hope that this music finally completes its move from the laboratory with its associated well-informed public to much broader communities of interest. We shall still need those laboratories to ensure that sound-based music's inherent innovative nature remains dynamic; but the music's future is one of not yet fully developed new means of creating, sharing and understanding, which will allow for the ivory tower to support the music of the folk. When this finally happens, what shall I be able to write about? My focus of whinging will have been removed.

Acknowledgement

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