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Discussion Panel, EMC² Festival, 25 March 2017 (video transcription)

Video in 6 parts on the experimusic channel of YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/experimusic

Moderator: Sarah Walker (centre)
Panel (l–r): John White, Virginia Anderson, Hugh Shrapnel, Christopher Hobbs (with Kieran O'Riordan, Chris Surety, Tim Bausch, Mick Peake, and others)
Introduced by Anna Claydon

Anna Claydon: ...wonderful collection of speakers for this afternoon's panel, and Sarah Walker is both generously playing a later concert and chairing this for us, so thank you very much. I'm sure we're going to find this discussion absolutely riveting. Bear in mind that the concert begins at 2.30, so we need to be aware of some timing and questions. Thank you very much, everyone. [applause]

Sarah Walker: Well, I'm completely delighted to be here; so happy to be invited by Virginia to come here to this very important event, celebrating the Experimental Music Catalogue and CoMA collaborators. It really is wonderful to be here and I'll just introduce our panel, although you may well know them. We have Christopher Hobbs, the composer and founder of EMC; we have Hugh Shrapnel, experimental composer and member of the Scratch Orchestra; Virginia

Anderson, who works very tirelessly at the EMC and runs the website...you're the kind of webmeister of the EMC....

Virginia Anderson: ...web thingie! [laughter]

SW: Web thingie, even! And we have John White, another wonderful composer, who was like Chris and Hugh a member of the Scratch Orchestra. So, I'm going to start by asking Chris a little—I know Virginia has covered a little of this—but to give you a bit of background. Chris, why did you set up the Experimental Music Catalogue, why did you think we needed a catalogue?

Christopher Hobbs: I think there was a lot happening in the late 1960s in Britain, and there were a lot of scores floating around from people, not only from those of us who were associated with Cornelius Cardew, but because of Cardew's travels and also the travels of John Tilbury, the pianist with whom he's very closely associated. Between them and between us we'd accumulated a lot of scores, most of which were very bad photocopies. Cast your mind back, remember that photocopying was actually very bad in those days. So it was difficult for people interested in playing new music to get their hands on it. Most of it wasn't published because conventional publishers wouldn't touch it because they wouldn't sell enough to make a reasonable profit. And the costs of actually getting typesetting a piece of music, which was not very conventionally notated.... You see the problems that John Cage had, with Henmar Press, that the reproduction qualities that were bad dye-line print were atrocious and were sold for huge sums of money. So it seemed logical to gather all of the music which had been accumulated under one roof, so to speak, and so I agreed to do that job, to curate the collections of music which Tilbury and Cardew had, and also the music by myself and my associates at the Academy, and other people whom we knew.

SW: And were you a naturally organized person, or did you have to learn the cataloguing skills?

CH: There weren't any catalogue skills! [laughter] I'd get a piece of music, I'd get another piece of music, and eventually I'd send round a Xeroxed list of what we had, and I would price it according to how much it cost to reproduce. And reproduction in those days was quite simple. I think it was mentioned yesterday that I would go to the Royal Academy of Music, get onto the photocopier, and pay sixpence—that's six old pence, which was quite a lot of money in those days—to get one A4 page. So calculating how many pages there were, how much it would cost to post it to somebody. So non-profit-making, basically, but at least there was a way of getting a list together. People knew if they wrote to me and said can we have this particular piece I could give it to them without having to chase up Tilbury or Cardew, who led very busy lives and didn't have time to respond to this kind of thing. And it went on from there. The name Experimental Music Catalogue just came out of the blue: it was experimental music, and it was literally a catalogue. So that was it.

SW: That brings me onto my next point in a way, because I want to bring John and Hugh in here, and Virginia as well. What about the label 'experimental'? How did it feel then, did it fell like a good fit then? How did you feel about it, Hugh?

Hugh Shrapnel: I've always been puzzled by the term 'experimental music'. That's always been the term. I've possibly been a bit doubtful about it because it suggested something in a laboratory, something a bit clinical. But it's the opposite of it. I've always been thinking, is there a better word? But 'experimental music' it is. So I've retreated from that.

SW: John, is there a better word? Have you ever thought of a better word?

John White: Well, it's a label rather than a real description. I think a lot of us who felt a bit tormented in the early sixties by the need for new music to follow a certain pattern and that was the pattern established by the Second Viennese School. While I was a student at the [Royal] College [of Music] during the '50s, and while I was teaching there in the '60s, anyone who didn't write twelve-tone music was Neanderthal. It was such a relief to run into Cornelius Cardew, who, I suppose, was one of the inventors of performance art. In the Scratch Orchestra we did pieces that involved a whole Richmond Park, and pieces that involved the whole of the Circle Line of the Underground. They were extravagant manifestations, and in that way, I think the word 'experiment' is appropriate. I think there was a kind of loosening up, so instead of being forced to do a certain kind of modern music, we found ways of performing that were new to us —and probably were new to a lot of our audiences, also. It was very liberating and very exciting at the time.

SW: And Virginia, now you're very, very strongly involved in the running of EMC. Do you have a very clear idea of what fits in the Catalogue and what isn't quite your territory?

VA: What I have is the idea of experimental music not being a certain technique, which is what a lot of people define experimental music as—it's indeterminate, or it's tied with a lot of other technical terms. I found I liked the indeterminate experimental music, then when the composers went off and started writing piano sonatas—John, you wrote those before—sonatinas and tonal pieces, it still was that alternative to the whole Second Viennese School. I thought it more a cultural element, so I've kept the 'experimental music' logo for that as well. So you might get extended tonal sonatinas, or you might get a text piece.

CH: I think the thing to point out is there would seem to be a dichotomy at that time between the European avant garde and the American avant garde. We've referred to the Second Viennese School, and the subsequent generation after Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, which would be Boulez and Stockhausen and their acolytes and disciples. On the other hand, the disciplines practiced in America by Cage, foremost, and the people who were influenced much more by the East than by the European canon of 'high art'. For want of a better term, the way we distinguish the one from the other is to say the high European art was the 'avant garde' and therefore those people who were influenced by that avant garde, say, Peter Maxwell Davies would still be considered avant garde. Whereas the other word, 'experimental', can be applied to Cage, Feldman, Wolff, Earle Brown and those people who were influenced by them. One wouldn't think of La Monte Young as being an avant-garde composer, although, paradoxically, his *String Trio*, the first minimal piece he wrote, is serial. But it doesn't use any of the gestures which are innate in the serialism of its time, which lasts almost an hour with long held sounds. The exact opposite of the kind of cult of personality which the Second Viennese School inherited from Wagner—in the end self-expression. So avant garde music is, if you like, about self-expression. Experimental music is more about the music expresses itself, which is what Cage would have said, rather than expressing the composer's personality. That of course is a very 'sledgehammery' dichotomy—there are lots of grey areas in between it—but it is the same basic blocks of concrete, you make your building somewhere in between those.

HS: There are all sorts of implications, as John was saying, experimental music was a huge influence on Cornelius Cardew in opening the world, like anything can happen, like getting away from things, like Chris was saying about, for want of a better word elitist that modern music should be available for all and experimental music played a very big role in that, of course. Music amateurs as well as professionals, Scratch Orchestra...

CH: CoMA!

HS: ...and CoMA, of course. Not forgetting CoMA.

SW: Sorry, John, if I can just bring you in. I like the term that Chris used about the concrete dichotomy between the avant garde and its alternative. Do you still feel that is still the case? Are the boundaries becoming a little more blurred between the experimental aesthetic and the rest of what is going on in contemporary music?

JW: Well, I think the issue that comes to mind there is the Zen monk who achieved enlightenment and then proceeded to lead his life as normal except a few millimetres off the ground. [laughter]

SW: Is that how you feel, Chris? A Zen monk a few millimetres off the ground?

CH: I was also thinking about the Cage story of the Zen monk who achieved enlightenment and said, 'I'm just as miserable as I was before!' [laughter]

SW: What about you, Hugh, did you gain a feeling of enlightenment?

HS: Absolutely, oh, yes, because I was brought up with the Second Viennese, and....

SW: Well, you studied with....

HS: I studied with Elizabeth Lutyens, yes. At the time I was writing twelve-tone music and I produced a piece that had a big octave in the middle and she said in her low voice, 'Hugh, I can detect a C minor at this bar!' [laughter] I realised then that my days as a serialist were numbered. [laughter]

CH: That's what we made manifest later!

HS: But getting back to the Catalogue and the early Xeroxes...the Terry Jennings piece that you're playing [Chris], *Winter Trees*, that was like a breath of fresh air. It just demonstrates that you can write a beautiful piece that is 'tonal' and it was great to hear it at the time. It had a big influence on me.

CH: And in getting back to how the Catalogue began. To continue the story, I got all these manuscripts. But some of them—the Terry Jennings piece, for example—were such bad quality Xerox that they could not be Xeroxed again. They would be illegible. The only way to do it was for me to physically write them out, sticking as closely as I could to Jennings' notation, what the music actually looked like on the page. So I wrote it out. The same thing happened with *In C*. The photocopy that we had wasn't really reproducible, so I wrote out In C and why that manuscript for years and years and years and years. It was the same with the Jennings. What has happened with the Jennings now is rather interesting. Another scholar called Brett Boutwell, an American who is also very interested in Jennings—we'll get on to Jennings eventually, if anybody is interested—has now done a Sibelius version of *Winter Trees*, the piece that I'm going to be playing in a little while. And he in his turn has tried to make it look as much as possible like my manuscript. So we've got generations: Jennings' original, which no longer exists, probably, my copy of his original, and then Brett's computer-driven copy of my manuscript, and so it goes on.

HS: So Jennings' original is not around?

CH: Jennings had the original, of course. He had given copies to Tilbury, I think with Jennings in America.

SW: It's certainly great to remember how much sheer effort was need just to get the Catalogue up and running in the early days.

CH: When we started doing the Anthologies, because we realised after a while that—Virginia went into this—that selling pieces singly is all well and good but it was easier to bring them all together: all the piano pieces, all the vocal pieces, and sell those as Anthologies. But they were all on different size pieces of paper, different manuscript. The only way to do it was for me to write them out, which I did on transparencies in those days. So the *Keyboard Anthology* is about sixty pages long, lots of pieces in it, all of which written out by me in Rapidograph pens on transparent paper which would then be dyelined, and that was the way of reproducing it. So yes, the amount of work was enormous.

SW: Virginia, from your perspective, does it seem like there's an increasing interest in the experimental aesthetic today. We have CoMA here with us, and it's fantastic to realise what collaboration is going on. Are there more people in....

VA: Well, there are a lot of people coming in from all sorts of aesthetics, and all sorts of areas and all sorts of countries. Just opening our Facebook page, all of a sudden we had loads of likes. And on a good day we get thousands of people looking at a post that we've done, especially if it's some famous person like Philip Glass. Yes, it does seem like there's been a bit of a Renaissance. There wasn't that much interest in the early stuff in the early 1980s—the kind of things where you like your grandfather but you don't like your father—it seems to skip a generation [laughter].

SW: Is CoMA a sort of new Scratch Orchestra?

VA: I think it does a lot more than that...

CH: [gesturing to audience members] You should ask them! [laughter] I think it's more disciplined than the Scratch Orchestra.

VA: Yes, they play actual dots and nobody's taking their clothes off! [laughter]

HS: And you rehearse.

SW: Was there nudity in the Scratch Orchestra? I don't know about this....

CH: You don't need to, Sarah...[laughter]

SW: [hastily] I'll move on, I'll move on! Could the Scratch ever reform, do you think? Would it be talking behind the scenes at the pub? Could it ever happen?

CH: No, the social conditions are so different.

HS: There have been Scratch performances recently. There was one a few weeks ago at Cafe Oto in London, and it was basically Scratch compositions.

SW: How well do those events recreate the atmosphere as you remember it?

HS: It's very nostalgic, really, It's like listening to Brahms. [laughter] Although actually it did have some of the character of the old Scratch. At one point it descended into anarchy. There was a piece involving water and the water went everywhere. [To JW] You were there.

JW: Yes, I managed to avoid the water...[laughter]. Yes, I think that one of the things that's happened is that pieces by Cardew were done in rather a random kind of way by the original Scratchers, who came from a variety of backgrounds. Some of us came from performing study backgrounds, and others came from somewhere else. They'd lose concentration, and begin to

chatter among themselves, throw marbles at the bass drum. It was a bit of a free-for-all and rather a therapeutic kind of activity. Whereas in recent years there have been performances of parts of Cornelius Cardew's *Great Learning*, *Treatise*, etc., done by people with performative backgrounds. They have been much truer to the spirit in which the pieces were created.

SW: That's very interesting.

CH: And I think that the interesting thing with *The Great Learning* is since we've put it out on pdf, with the agreement of the Cardew brothers, we've sold a lot of copies, probably about fifty copies in the last three years. It's a big seven-hour piece which takes an enormous amount of commitment to perform even one paragraph of it. So there is a lot of interest; I'm amazed at how many copies of it we've sold, actually.

VA: And also about this 'Scratch ethic' is the Draft Constitution was set up as the Draft Constitution of a Scratch Orchestra, not the Scratch Orchestra, so Philip Dadson used that to start a Scratch Orchestra in New Zealand. Now that was much more determinate, and much more disciplined and had a lot more world music elements and world music instruments. So it can be reproduced, but it's usually reproduced quite differently.

SW: Do you ever think you would have liked to have been in the Scratch Orchestra back in those days—before you were born? [laughter]

VA [laughing]**:** Thank you! Oh, when I started researching I used to have this little fantasy that somehow I could travel back to my fifteen-year-old self and somehow hitchhike my way to London from Los Angeles and get there and be a member of it. But, you know, that was just silly...[laughter]

HS: Over the years a lot of young people asked me, 'What was it like, the Scratch?' And they wished they could have been in it and said it has, for want of a better word, a kind of iconic thing about it.

SW: If you could go back in time, is there a particular Scratch event or concert or piece that you'd like to go back to?

HS: There was one concert I remember which was I think at the ICA and, I wonder if you remember it, Chris, there was a snow storm and somebody opened the door and snow came pouring into the stage. That was quite memorable.

CH: The Queen Elizabeth Hall one, the Journey concert, was quite memorable as well.

SW: What happened at the Journey concert?

CH: That was the Journey of the Isle of Wight Westward by Iceberg to Tokyo Bay, which was a concept invented by the performance artist George Brecht, who was resident in London at that time. He was the man who made *Water Yam*; some of you may know this box of small card events. It was a Research Project. Everyone did their own areas of research, which involved all sorts of things. John, you were in that. You were playing Mahler on the tuba.

JW: [laughs] Yeah, I'm afraid I was.

CH: I was playing something on the Queen Elizabeth Hall organ. And there were a lot of activities.... I think that was where the 1001 activities.... Psi Ellison was one of the more vociferous members of the Orchestra and there was a lovely review of it in one of the upper-class newspapers which referred to a man in a leather cat suit hitting himself. Actually Psi was a

biker, he was in his leathers. Man in a leather cat suit, oh dear! [laughter] Those were the sorts of reviews it got.

HS: He was also wearing an upside-down man's costume. He was clambering up and down the Queen Elizabeth Hall like an upside down man, which was an amazing sight.

VA: That concert wasn't the journey of the Iceberg, that was Parts of the Body.

CH: Oh, yes. sorry. There were some memorable concerts in the Roundhouse, the old Roundhouse, as well.

SW: Well, we've been talking about how CoMA has its similarities to the Scratch Orchestra, and as you said, in perhaps a more disciplined way. Is CoMA still radical, if we look at the music scene at the moment in welcoming people of all abilities and all backgrounds. Is that still almost a radical, almost a political thing to do? Chris, what's your take on this?

CH: You'll have to ask Kieran.

Kieran O'Riordan: Hello! I'll actually refer you to the director of CoMA, who's Chris Surety, who's sitting here.

SW: Suddenly it strikes me that it is still a radical thing to do.

Chris Surety: Well, I think welcoming people into performance situations that have changed over the last twenty or thirty years. I think when we started in 1993 it felt very alone in lots of ways. We were doing something quite unusual, certainly in the field of contemporary music. And I think we still are in that respect, but in terms of opportunities for people to take part in all sorts of performance opportunities, whether they be contemporary or otherwise, I think there's been a sea-change. And I think the concept of lifelong learning and being part of things and taking part is really quite commonplace nowadays.

SW: Well I'm sure CoMA had a role in making it more commonplace. Certainly the things that the BBC orchestras do; now they all do outreach work and community work and such. They do it very well and are very committed to it. Why is it important to get as many people as possible involved with contemporary music, Chris, while the camera's on you?

CS: Well, where I come from, to me it's our living culture; it's absolutely an essential part of what it is to be a human being. And to, as so many people unfortunately do, try to ignore contemporary music and see it as something not relevant to themselves, I think they're missing out and I think it doesn't benefit contemporary music or composers. So I think it's essential for people to find ways of helping people to embrace contemporary music and find it has a real meaning for them. So our approach, basically, is to have a repertoire that to some extent reflects the diversity of music-making that is going on today but is technically accessible, so that people have an opportunity to actually take part and, in a sense through taking part, understand probably more thoroughly than just cursory listening about the nature of what's going on and come to love it, basically, love contemporary music. And I think we have had some success in that respect. I can't say we've had a revolution, but we've had a certain amount of success and we've got ensembles all around the country, etc.

SW: Thank you for that, Chris. How do the composers feel about the idea of making their music accessible—is it something that you're aware of? I know that all of you write a lot of piano music. Do you ever think, this is really for a specialist performer now and I don't think that somebody would be able to tackle it under Grade 8. Is it a concern to any of you?

HS: Yeah, I think it would tend to. I think going against the idea of expressing themselves and the experimental music tradition being like reaching out. So I tend to write pieces for performers, including myself if I'm playing, so it's all quite practical, really. Just for given concerts and.... Because I was thinking earlier, there is a chilly sound to the word 'contemporary music'. Like something forbidding. So to break away from that must be good.

SW: Chris, do you still like to write for performers who you know or do you act speculatively a piece that anybody might pick up and play?

CH: I always write for people I know, and most of the composers I know feel the same way. It's simply that it's easy to establish a dialogue and get a more sympathetic performance if you have the dialogue with the performer and say what you are interested in doing? So I've never, ever written an orchestral piece. I cannot envisage the idea of writing a piece that I send off to an orchestra and they somehow play it. I prefer to know the people. Or if I don't know the people I try to write in a language that would be accessible. It's interesting in being asked to write this piece for CoMA this year it seemed logical, though I hadn't written such a piece for forty years, to write a text piece. And in order to bring it a bit closer to the old text pieces I chose to write it in a computer font that resembled as much as possible a typewriter—I wrote it in Courier—so it does actually look as if it had been typewritten. It just seems to give it that slightly used look [laughter] that seemed to make it a bit more user-friendly than if it had been in Helvetica or something like that.

SW: I know the exact look you mean, yes.

HS: I was going to say about the CoMA piece I wrote, I was a bit worried about—well, worried is the wrong word—what style to write in. And I chose to write quite a traditional three-movement 'tonal' piece. Maybe I thought that that might be a bit outrageous, not knowing what style CoMA were anticipating. It may be most of CoMA pieces are quite experimental, in the sense of being way out; I don't know.

SW: John, does it still feel radical to you to do tonal music?

JW: Oh, no, I've taken a lot of critical flak over the years for writing pieces that refer to tonality and refer to other styles. I'm slightly influenced here by the fact that I've done a lot of music for the theatre. Writing theatre music you have to go for the jugular. You can't have a little introduction and led people up the garden path you've got this has got to be an exciting moment and this has got to be an amorous moment. And in the theatre usually music is the very last thing that is considered by the director. months will have been spent on costume, on set, etc., then at the very last moment, oh, I think we'd better have some music [laugh]. This means over the years I've cultivated an attitude of write something that can be sightread by a reasonably trained musician and to tailor the inspiration to that concept rather than the old avant-garde concept of you have this absolutely brilliant pianist who can play anything! [laughter] And so make them play anything! If it's something that could be played by a Grade-8 distinction person then it's too simple. I've tended to resist that feeling; I've tended to go along with this thing to make your idea as sight-readable as possible.

CH: I do find with my students at Coventry, we get them to write instrumental pieces but what they really want to do is write film music. The film music course that I run there is enormously popular and people who can't string two or three notes together in a conventionally score-based piece will blossom when faced with a scenario which is visually stimulating where they can transcend the boundaries of conventional instruments; for instance, by using Foley or by using

sound design in order to produce something. The downside of it is of course is that the models that they follow are very often very poor in conventional musical terms. I don't tend to sit down and listen to the works of James Horner, but he's very influential—or John Williams—but I still recognise the skill those composers employ writing their music. And as John says, the ability to go for the jugular and write what needs to be written as quickly as possible. And in film, as with theatre, the music is the last thing to happen, when the film is locked down. There's no more editing possible, otherwise it makes the composer's job impossible. You know you can't just take a half second out. It's got to be done to the locked down film. But I find that enormously stimulating as a teacher to dabble in those waters, even though I don't write film music myself.

HS: There is a connection with, not in writing film music, but in the experimental vision in that you're writing for particular occasions, for a particular performance, and you're writing very much for a real thing and not for expressing your soul, or whatever. It's very down-to-earth.

SW: That's really part of the experimental attitude that's right for a real situation that is going to happen, where they actually need a piece.

VA: That's the titular case with a piece that Chris wrote for me. It was called *Swiftly to Virginia*, because he wrote it very late and it was to me.

CH: And it was fast! [laughter]

VA: So there are things that are for specific people to play anywhere or they are for specific occasions. I was just thinking earlier about your Scratch presentation where you all went to the coast.

HS: Oh, the notorious seaside concert!

VA: It sounded lovely!

SW: Which seaside did you go to?

HS: We went to Dorset, a very remote beach in Dorset. My idea was that it was to take place in February, we were invited to take place in February, but the weather was ridiculously warm, so my plan was thwarted. [laughter]

CH: I think the use of music of being functional is the important thing here about the experimental tradition, that you are an artisan. So you are much more like a bricklayer than an artist. That we found with the Promenade Theatre Orchestra; every Sunday we would meet up and we had to play something. The music wasn't going to write itself so we had to write it. So you wrote a piece, brought it along, tried it out. If it worked you went on rehearsing it and then you performed it. If it didn't work, you put it aside and did another piece. It was the same sort of thing with the Scratch Orchestra, with Improvisation Rites, where you have to produce material that everybody could perform spontaneously at the beginning of a Scratch Orchestra meeting. I much prefer the idea of being a workman than being an artist in that sense, that building a wall is useful is much nicer than building a pergola, however nice it might be and whatever flowers you could drape on it. I think all of us are really wall builders in many ways.

SW: Well, this brings me on to the next thing I want to ask you about, really. All the huge changes we've seen since the Catalogue was founded in 1969, all the new technology in film music and all the things you went through in the early days to just get the music written out and photocopied and sent out. How useful has technology been to the three of you, John? Computers, synthesizers, self-publishing, YouTube?

JW: It's been inevitable and it's been wonderfully positive. Because nowadays with electronic means you try things out and in times past a poor suffering orchestra would try things out and grimace and say sorry, it doesn't work, whereas you can find out yourself if it doesn't work with the technology available today. I can remember only too vividly what it was like because I was a student in the days before photocopying was available and if I got interested in a piece that I saw in the library I had to write it out. I got to know some pieces very well that way.

SW: Yes, that was quite a positive exercise in some ways, being forced to...

JW: Yes, it was good, but time consuming!

CH: I got to know the work of Satie that way. At that time a lot of his music was out of print. Copies could be found in the Central Music Library in Westminster. The only way to get a copy was to take the thing home and write it out. I still have two or three sixty-four page manuscript books in blue ink of Satie's piano music because I just had to write it out and that was the only way to do it. It's a marvellous exercise, of course; you learn so much! I tell students to do that nowadays and they just don't listen to me....[laughter] Write out a passage of the *Rite of Spring* by hand! You'll experience what Stravinsky had to do to write the damn thing.

SW: Scanning just wouldn't do have the same effect....

CH: No.

SW: What about you, Hugh, are you a user of technology?

HS: Not really; I'm terrified of technology. I can't repair a plug at home....

SW: But you do use Sibelius.

HS: I use Sibelius. I slightly shamefacedly use Sibelius because a lot of composers I know are still writing out by hand. But I do use Sibelius. It's nice to play things back and as John said, hear what the terrible mistakes and and absurd harmonies I've put in.

SW: I'm sure there are none!

HS: So yeah, it's useful. Absolutely. And for generating parts.

SW: And that's new technology; what about the old technology? You have a lot of affection for old technology. I remember the Casio keyboards in Live Batts!! Chris, do you still have a thing for those machines?

CH: Oh, enormously! That's why all that enormous series of Sudoku pieces that I wrote between 2007 or '08 and 2012. There are a hundred and thirty-six of them and practically all of them are written on GarageBand software which is lovely because you can get it to do all sorts of things that it doesn't know it can do. If you put an African choir into a drum track you get an amazing sound which you can't really get from Logic. I find Logic very nice; it's very sophisticated and very suave, but I've always preferred very cheap technology, hence battery-operated keyboards are more interesting. The Promenade Theatre Orchestra used toy pianos and reed organs while Steve Reich was using Farfisas and amplification and taking his work around in big trunks labelled 'Steve Reich Ensemble'. And we'd turn up and we'd have a toy piano and a reed organ [laughter]. And so that kind of cheap technology was always rather seductive.

HS: I recently got out my reed organ from the Promenade Theatre Orchestra days and tried it out and there was this great blue flash! [laughter] It had outlived its day.

SW: Perhaps you could have it mended.

HS: Well, I'd have to find a mender.

SW: Perhaps as Chris was saying, the attraction of some of the old technology is that it can be...is 'corrupted' the right word?

CH: Yes. The same thing happens with dirty electronics, which John Richards was playing last night. He is an exponent of at this university of subverting cheap technology. The pseudophones that we heard last night are actually very expressive instruments: a tin can, a capacitor and a tube, which when you touch the tube the physical hands on the tube is what produces the variations in pitch and tone. The harder you squeeze it the higher the tone will get. All of this technology is very, very cheap. John runs, or did run, an ensemble which required the students to be able to make a musical instrument for less than £3. That's all you have available to you. I think that is wonderful; that is something which is happening here. So that we're surrounded by the most expensive Genelec speakers but there's still this notion that you've got to solder your own jack plug and stick something into some very cheap bit of technology. The base of that obviously is because of Japanese technology, toys are always built far beyond their logical use. That is to say they're capable of much, much more than the toy makers actually make them do. The circuitry is much too sophisticated; it's over-engineered, in other words. So if you get under the bonnet, you can actually subvert the engineering. That seems to be a very experimental approach to things; certainly something that is very much part of the old Scratch Orchestra thing of bringing along a wind-up gramophone.

HS: One of the features of the Scratch was that there was no technology; it was very primitive. It was all hand-made instruments....

CH: Nothing plugged in...

HS: Nothing plugged in.

SW: And now EMC has a web site, so you've taken advantage of that technology. How much has that helped you? Made your life harder?

VA: Actually that's the one kind of experimental thing I've done, to use a free supermarket web site, web pages, and just hand-code stuff and put it up. It's always been run on the cheap. We do now pay for web space but it's basic, low-end...Wordpress, very, very basic. I've had people come in and say we could do this, we could make this all great, have a floating-in thing and all this video stuff...I'm kind of going, 'well...yeah...uh...and how much is that going to cost?'

HS: It would be out of character, wouldn't it?

SW: And there'd be a danger in losing control of things as well; always having to get in touch with someone else as well—I need this, I need that, and can you help me....It's better to be able to do it yourself.

VA: That's the way that I've been doing it. It started out with dial-up.... I can get onto the back end of my site and fix something if I find a spelling error or I find that a whole page is dropping out I can fix it.

SW: In a moment we're going to open things up for you to ask questions if there's anything you'd like to ask our wonderful contributors today. But just before we do that, I'm just curious to know what projects you guys are working on right now. Let's just have a quick run-through to give a snapshot of experimental music now. Chris, what are you working on?

CH: I'm writing two pieces for soprano Sara Stowe. The first of them is for soprano and percussionist and I've written one of three pieces and I have to write the other ones very quickly because the first performance is in about a month and that is a setting of texts from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. The other piece will be later in the year which is for a couple of wind instruments, soprano, accordion—played by Howard Skempton, because it's based around a concert tour to celebrate Howard's seventieth birthday—and hurdy-gurdy. I'm still thinking about that and how to best write for accordion and hurdy-gurdy and wind instruments. The first thing is to find texts. I suspect they'll end up being medieval French, but I haven't actually chosen that yet [laughter].

SW: Wonderful, thank you. Hugh, what are you up to at the moment?

HS: For quite a few years I've been doing a series of pieces based loosely...the overall title being *Tales of South East London*. I've been writing that for many years. The first seven pieces were called *South of the River*, which I wrote about twenty years ago. In fact, one of the pieces I am doing in our concert is *Ladywell Station*....

SW: Yes, looking forward to that!

HS: So it's a whole series of pieces, some topical, and I've written one political piece because our local hospital, Lewisham Hospital, was going to be closed by the Secretary of 'Ill Health' [laughter]. But he was forced to give way. So it was called 'Hunt for Hunt'—very similar to an old hunting tune. That's part of the series, so all sorts of different kinds of pieces, but all to do with Southeast London.

SW: We gave that piece a code name, when Hugh and I performed 'Hunt Hunt', wasn't it?

HS: Yeah.

SW: We performed 'Hunt Hunt' on Resonance FM and I was really worried that, working for the BBC I have to appear to be unbiased at all times. I said, Hugh I think we're going to have to disguise this piece. And so we called it, *La Chasse*! [laughter].

HS: That's a nicer title!

SW: The secret's out now! Virginia, what are you working on now, on the catalogue?

VA: Well, the catalogue, we're just doing more of the same. Right now I'm working on a book on Southern Californian music. But the EMC is moving quite a lot to sound files and CDs—downloadable recordings, both archival and present-day new ones. So that's where we're going right now.

CH: We're talking about new technology; it's been so much easier to put something on Bandcamp. I'm still at the point of having to make a CD. If somebody orders a CD, I have to put it on the CD, I have to print out the cover, I have to buy the shell, which is increasingly difficult to do. I have to put it in the post, I have to send it off to people, it takes me time.

VA: It's like the first EMC.

CH: Yes, you will not realise how enormously time-consuming it is to send CDs by the single issue. But it's the only way to do it because demand is never going to be enough that we can order 1500 of them. It just doesn't work.

VA: John Walters, in reviewing one of Chris's pieces, said, 'The EMC CDs always look as if Chris makes them on his kitchen table'.

CH: Little does he know! [laughter]

VA: ...it's on his studio table.

CH: So technology's always been enormously useful in that.

SW: John, what are you doing?

JW: Well, my piano sonata output's been slowing down recently. I'm only up to 178. So I'm just trying to accelerate a bit with a few more [laughter].

VA: Yeah, get that 200th!

SW: Well, thank you so much. And if anyone would like to ask a question, we've got about eight minutes of time left if there are any burning questions. Yes?

Question 1: May I just first correct Virginia that in CoMA East Midlands whilst we do sometimes play a [?] we regularly play all sorts of other media. Including we have one of the composers in our group who does paintings and 3D sculptures and we improvise from it.

VA: I didn't say anything about what you were doing; I said you were more disciplined than the Scratch.

Q1: You did say we played the dots. When we tackle the EMC repertoire, one of the questions that does arise when we're trying to decide how to perform or how to interpret the score, which may be text or may be some other form is, should we be playing this allowing our characters as people to come through, or should we be fighting that to produce the element as you referred to where the music speaks—you used the phrase on its own, I can't remember. When you were performing in the past, and perhaps when you perform now, which side of that line do you try to go?

CH: Well, I've always tended to the Apollonian rather than the Dionysiac; that is to say that I've tried to be cool in performance rather than expressionist in performance. But that's just me! Other people perform in an entirely different way. In answer to your question, you must take whatever from the music that is useful to you. The music cannot exist without you, therefore it has to go through your personality. Otherwise, the music is simply dead. And that's true of any music, from any period of music history; not just the text music, it's true of Beethoven, Schubert or Machaut, or Boulez or Brian Ferneyhough. It's inevitably going to reflect the personality of the person who is playing it, because the person who is playing it is a human being.

Q1: Could you possibly give a little more clarification, because you imply that personality is something on a line and you can add 0%–100%.

CH: No, certainly not.

Q1: ...because that is very complex so you can apply different aspects to a personality.

CH: Of course you can, of course you can. That depends entirely on the medium of the notation, and the kind of thinking behind the piece.

VA: Also what kind of ensemble it is. Is your self-expression going to mess somebody else up? You have to figure out how to work with others. I was in Paragraph 6 of Cardew's *Great Learning* one time. There was a great all-star line up; loads of people around, and a girl sat right in front of me with all of her kitchen equipment—pots and pans and stuff— and this was a very delicate piece, that you had to wait for little holes, little rests to make your noise. And she went bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, for about twenty minutes.

Q1: Many people will remember Dave Smith's remark, Develop a sense of social responsibility and that's exactly it.

All: That's good, exactly....

HS: There was a balance there, I guess.

SW: Yes, an intelligent making of decisions. Perhaps your personality comes through in the little decisions you make; you may not even be aware of when you perform a piece. Yes?

Tim Bausch: Just to add on to that. There are a lot of thing at the initial interpretation stage and actually I'll be talking a lot about that in my talk at 5, so. Yeah, I think a lot of it has to do with how the composer addresses the performer to interpret what the music is and then at that point there's a whole series of processes that happen.

SW: Any more questions?

Mick Peake: Just to refer to how the CoMA I don't think is identical to the Scratch Orchestra. It does things that are very similar. But I think Chris would back me up when I came to CoMA as an amateur pianist—a poor amateur pianist—interested in Stockhausen and Maderna and I came from a very strong modernist background. I wanted to play their music, which I couldn't ever play in a force, so that's why I wanted to work with composers and break down that barrier between the amateur and the professional and wished to understand their world and then I've become much more interested in it. I think CoMA was really about not a single aesthetic, is that fair?

Chris Surety: That's absolutely fair.

MP: And I'd be interested to know among the composers here if you actually like the modernist genre at all—will you sit at home and listen to it? Perhaps you don't like it....

SW: I think we get that a lot: do you actually like this? What do you say?

CH: Well, for a start I think we're running out of time. Perhaps it could extend to after the piano concert.

SW: A couple more minutes.

CH: What you raise is very interesting discussion, but I think it is one that we should have after the concert rather than before it. But we'll certainly have it.

SW: Are there any more questions, we have two minutes. Time for a quick question—the lady here....

Q4: Well, I was going to ask, leading on from what you were saying, bringing people into experimental music, do you expect them to have done some formal lessons or can you just come into it, and if you come into it from nothing—from 'Scratch'—would you then expect them to learn musical skills, techniques? Is it parallel or together with....

CH: Depends on which music you're going to be studying. In one piece you might learn...I've got to learn how to control my breathing, or I've got to learn to speak loudly because it's a text I've got to deliver to the audience, so I've must develop my vocal control. So it's very much on an ad hoc basis, it seems to me. It depends on what the music is. And the advantage is that anybody should be advised to make music, everybody should be encouraged to make music. Everybody has his or her limitations and you work within those, obviously. The more interested you become in a particular area, the more you'll probably research and extend your technique,

whatever that might be. And technique, as I say, might not be anything to do with conventional reading music; it might be simply how to walk in a straight line, depending upon what the piece says. There's a piece by La Monte Young that says 'Draw a straight line and follow it'. Okay, for that piece I've got to learn how to draw a straight line. So how long is my ruler going to be? After twelve inches I run out, how do I make a straight line? So you know those are the things you're thinking about in making that piece.

SW: Thank you, that's a very interesting question! Well, I suppose we'd better wrap; the tables need to be moved. Thank you so much to my wonderful panel: John White, Virginia Anderson, Hugh Shrapnel, and Chris Hobbs, and thank you! [applause].