



UPLOAD: 1 December 2017

Special JEMS Forum: The EMC² Festival, 24–26 March 2017, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

Sponsored by CoMA (Contemporary Music for All), Arts Council of England, and the University of Leicester

The EMC: Past, Present, Future
Virginia Anderson

Keynote Lecture

‘REMEMBERING the Experimental Music Catalogue’.... Doesn’t it sound like a memorial service? But this title is an affectionate tribute to the EMC, as we all call it fondly ourselves, from the membership of CoMA, for a rather special publishing initiative that will celebrate fifty years of existence in another year or so. The EMC—our strapline is ‘...experimental music since 1969...’—actually had its first stirrings in 1968, when the teenage composer Christopher Hobbs started copying scores on the primitive Xerox machine of the Royal Academy of Music at a sixpence a page, and sending them out to buyers throughout the world.¹



Virginia Anderson, keynote paper, 24 March 2017

To set the tone for this weekend, I will go through the past, present and future of the EMC, and explain what it is, using primarily the music you will hear, especially tomorrow and Sunday. I will begin by explaining experimental notation and about the social structure of the English experimental scene; about the EMC as part of a DIY publishing culture that has flourished in America and the UK throughout the twentieth century. I’ll explore the way that the EMC has changed, disappeared, reappeared, and changed again, driven by changes in the music, and the method of dissemination, particularly

¹ The term ‘experimental music’ means many things to many people. For the purposes of this lecture, and the purposes of the EMC and most of this weekend, ‘experimental music’ can be defined as follows. First, the term comes from a musical thinking first developed by John Cage, from about 1951, and from the compositions and performance that came out of that music. Cage originally used chance processes, in which random procedures determine the note-to-note progress of the music. Cage then developed indeterminacy, which is composition in which elements are left free for performers to make choices that normally would be the job of the composer. This musical thinking is very clearly explained in the first chapter of Michael Nyman’s book, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999 (orig. 1974)). Nyman not only wrote about indeterminacy, but also about free performance, and full free improvisation. When this book came out in the US in the mid-70s, students of new music (like myself) learnt for the first time about experimental music in London.

with the Internet. And all through this change, there are still conditions—musical, social, emotional—that tie the most recent releases to the first indeterminate experimental pieces.

The Experimental Music Catalogue: 1968–1972

Chris Hobbs founded the EMC as a way of getting scores ‘over a wide a field as possible’, as Gavin Bryars noted in his editorial in the 1975 Catalogue. ‘John Tilbury gave these pieces to Christopher who collated them with pieces given by others, as well as pieces obtained directly from composers.’² Hobbs placed adverts in *The Musical Times* offering scores by mail order. The readership of *The Musical Times* brought the EMC, and British experimental music, to the notice of a worldwide audience. At this early stage the EMC sold pieces and collections that are now thought of as classics of late 1960s experimental music. These include Cardew’s *Schooltime Compositions*, which will appear this weekend, the Scratch Orchestra *Nature Study Notes*, and music by American, German, Japanese, and English experimental composers, including Christian Wolff, Michael von Biel, Frederic Rzewski, Robert Ashley, Alvin Curran, and many others.

The EMC was from the first an unusual publisher. It did not, and does not, take over a composer’s rights as most publishers do. Composers were actually encouraged to add new pieces, withdraw the ones they no longer wanted, and also to maintain a body of music for research, not performance. The EMC still honours composers’ rights. For this reason reprinting original anthologies is a slow process, given that many of the composers no longer wish for their work to be published; indeed, we may not be able to contact them. Another unusual feature of the EMC is that it published music in a wide variety of techniques and formats, and in different types of notation.

Notation in the Experimental Music Catalogue

Of all the new techniques and experimental processes in experimental music, notation is particularly significant. Notation transmits information from a composer to the performer, and notation reveals how much or little freedom the performer will have. There are three basic types of music notation used in music by EMC composers. The first notational type is conventional, or common-practice notation—largely the notation we read when learning music or playing classical standards. However, experimental notation may incorporate indeterminate elements into common-practice notation, so that it must be read in a different way. For example, *Autumn 60*, by Cornelius Cardew (Ex. 1), is nominally the first true English indeterminate experimental piece.

The image shows a page of musical notation for Cornelius Cardew's *Autumn 60*. It features two systems of staves. The first system includes staves for Viola, Saxophone, and Trombone. Above the staves are performance instructions: 'pizz' (pizzicato), 'muffle', and 'f' (forte). The second system includes staves for Bass, Guitar, Saxophone, and Viola. Above these staves are further performance instructions: 'muffle', 'pizz', and 'f'. The notation includes various rhythmic values and dynamic markings, characteristic of experimental music notation.

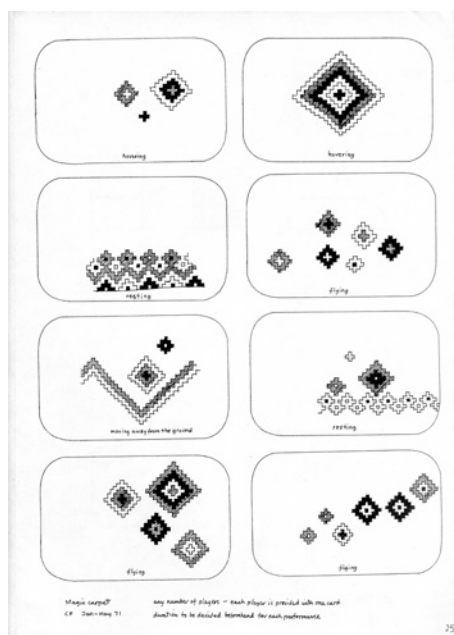
Ex. 1: Cornelius Cardew, *Autumn 60*, bb. 1–4, © Universal Edition 14171.

² Gavin Bryars, editorial, *Experimental Music Catalogue*, private publication, 1975.

The staves are recognisable as conventional notation. Time signatures, clefs, dynamics, note heads, emphasis and expression marks, instrumentation, even rehearsal numbers are all familiar to the musically literate reader. But *Autumn 60* is not read fully and smoothly like a Chopin nocturne. Instead, the performer chooses elements from the score to interpret according to instructions that Cardew provides. The second line in the system is left blank, with only time signatures, for the performer to realise their part. Richard Ascough's *Hania* (1971; Ex. 2), published in the EMC *Keyboard Anthology*, is also in common-practice notation, albeit with subtle indeterminate elements. There are, for example, no bar lines and no stems on the note heads. These omissions free the music from the rigidity of a metrical pulse, reinforcing the direction to be 'slow, calm and gentle'.



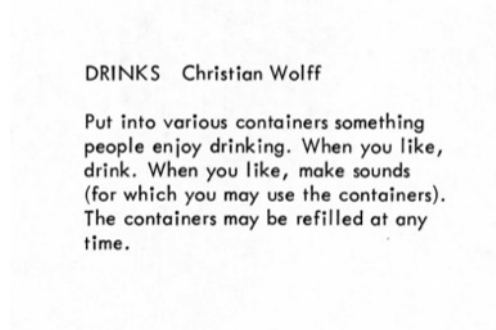
Ex. 2: Richard Ascough, *Hania* (1971), EMC *Keyboard Anthology*



Ex. 3: Carole Finer, *Magic Carpet* (1971), *Scratch Anthology of Compositions* (EMC)

The second type of notation employed by EMC composers is graphic notation. Graphic notation uses pictures to indicate what to play. Graphic music can include symbols that can be read, as in Cardew's *Treatise* (1963–67, Peters), a 193-page graphic score that uses pictures, lines, shapes, and, above all variants on musical symbols to provide a score. Graphic scores can be more purely visual, as in Carole Finer's *Magic Carpet* (Ex. 3, previous page) from the *EMC Scratch Anthology of Compositions*, which we will perform tomorrow night. These are cards that are to be handed out to musicians. It is the performer's job to interpret these graphic images, helped by the instructions and the directions on each card.

The third type of notation, one that the early EMC specialised in, is text notation. Some text notation is simply instructions, some just are poetic allusions that the performer must interpret somehow. Paragraph 7 of Cardew's seven-hour piece, *The Great Learning* (1968–71) is typical of an instruction piece consisting of two parts: a spoken text with explanatory instructions on how to perform them. Text pieces can ask for activities that are not common to traditional music performance.³ For example, Christian Wolff's *Drinks* (1968; Ex. 4) is a short text instruction score that asks the performers to fill up containers with drinks, to drink, to make sounds, and to repeat as desired. *Drinks* was published in Wolff's collection of text notation pieces, *Prose Pieces*, which the early EMC distributed, and was included in the *Scratch Anthology of Compositions*. In fact, Wolff was a kind of honorary English experimental composer, having played in the improvisation ensemble AMM, as well as the Scratch Orchestra.



Ex. 4: Christian Wolff, *Drinks* (1968), *Scratch Anthology of Compositions* (EMC)

The English experimental and minimal musical scene: groups

The American and English experimental and minimalist movements paralleled each other in philosophy and history. Cornelius Cardew could be considered the originator and leader of English experimental indeterminacy, just as Cage originated American experimental indeterminacy. Cardew met Cage and David Tudor while he was working as an assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen. Influenced by Cage's ideas, Cardew left Stockhausen and began writing indeterminate music in alternative notation. Cardew and Wolff were close in age and temperament; he was also close to the Fluxus group based in New York, especially La Monte Young, Yoko Ono, and George Brecht. English experimental music could be viewed as the naughty younger sibling of the American Experimental Tradition, as it was later, shorter, more intense, and perhaps cheekier.

³ For an easily accessible collection of prose pieces and other music, see Christopher Hobbs, Michael Parsons, John White, the Scratch Orchestra *Nature Study Notes*, on the EMC website 'Freebies' page: <<http://experimentalmusic.co.uk/wp/emc-catalogue-list/freebies/>>.

Both movements were fascinated by improvisation and crossovers with visual arts. Free improvisation was an important feature of 1960s English experimental music, which was both an extension of, and a reaction to, jazz in England at that time. Early groups include Joseph Holbrooke, for which Gavin Bryars played bass, and AMM, founded by Keith Rowe, Eddie Prévoist, and Lou Gare, a group that expanded to include Cardew and Christopher Hobbs by the end of the 1960s. Free improvisation of this time was immediate—it lacked notation, instructions, or scores. However, improvisation, related as it is to performance of indeterminate notation, had a strong impact on the groups whose scores featured in the Experimental Music Catalogue. Cardew's experience with AMM impelled him to write for non-reading as well as reading musicians, including visual artists, poets, and the interested general public. The Scratch Orchestra, founded by Cardew and the composers Michael Parsons and Howard Skempton in 1969, is the best example of this mixed performance group. It is also perhaps the group that is most associated with the EMC. The SO played free improvisation, guided improvisation, and indeterminate compositions, and were published by the EMC in two documents, the *Scratch Anthology of Compositions* and *Nature Study Notes*, an early collection of Improvisation Rites, semi-compositions describing conditions for performance.⁴

Just as minimalism arose simultaneously with late indeterminacy in America, a very specifically English type of minimalism arose in the late 1960s along with free improvisation and text music. The foremost composer of this English minimalism—indeed, the founder of English minimalism—is John White. White developed what he called Machines and Systems, compositions based on random or numerical repetitive processes. White founded a quartet of virtuoso players, including Christopher Hobbs, Hugh Shrapnel and Alec Hill, called the Promenade Theatre Orchestra, or the PTO, who played primarily on toy pianos and reed organs.⁵ Unlike the Scratch Orchestra, almost all the systems pieces and many of the Machine pieces require trained, reading musicians; like the Scratch Orchestra, the PTO and later groups featured strongly in the EMC publications. The modern EMC distributes Anthologies by Hobbs, Hill, and Shrapnel, plus the *Hobbs-White Percussion Anthology*, devoted to a systems duo that succeeded the breakup of the PTO.

The Experimental Music Catalogue: 1972–1980

By the fourth edition of the Catalogue, Hobbs had trouble keeping up with the popularity of the Catalogue and the demands on his time to run it. Cardew suggested that Nyman, Hobbs, and Bryars meet, and run the EMC on 'an expanded footing'. This committee organised the EMC by bundling collections of individual pieces into the *Anthology* format. The Anthology format offered a range of music by different composers using related styles or instrumentation, which was particularly convenient for libraries and foreign customers.

Gavin Bryars (whose *Marvellous Aphorisms are Scattered Richly Throughout these Pages* and other pieces appear in the *Verbal Anthology*) specialised at the time in 'private music', in which the musical process or meaning is hidden. When he joined the board of the EMC, Bryars had just set up an exhibition of research materials called *The Sinking of the Titanic* at Portsmouth College

⁴ The presentation included a clip from a Welsh newscast about the Scratch Orchestra Village Concerts tour of Anglesey in 1970, in which members perform an Improvisation Rite, *MC9* by Michael Chant, that asks that 17 people play on a piano simultaneously. *MC9* was published in *Nature Study Notes*.

⁵ All three surviving members of the Promenade Theatre Orchestra—John White, Christopher Hobbs, and Hugh Shrapnel—performed at the EMC² weekend, though sadly they were unable to perform as the PTO. The presentation included *Large Change Machine* by the late Alec Hill, the fourth member.

of Art, where he taught Complementary Studies (in his case, music courses for the arts students). In the next year *Sinking of the Titanic* would be premiered in London. Bryars was also about to work on a piece that came out of a film, called *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*. These two pieces, published by the EMC and recorded on Brian Eno's Obscure record series, are perhaps the best-known works of the 1970s by Bryars. Michael Nyman, now a noted composer, was then a critic for the *Spectator* and other publications, performed with the Scratch Orchestra and other groups, and was working on *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*. His *Bell Set No. 1* appeared in the *Rhythmic Anthology*.

At Portsmouth, Bryars helped to establish The Portsmouth Sinfonia, a group made up of students and staff from the College, which achieved notoriety in their time by performing famous classical pieces...badly. The Sinfonia was an exercise in musical indeterminacy. Most of the Portsmouth Sinfonia members were not readers, and "read" the common-practice notation as if it were graphic notation. The conductor, John Farley, was chosen because with his long hair he looked like a conductor. Experienced musicians played instruments with which they were unfamiliar. Michael Nyman grabbed a euphonium for a concert; Gavin Bryars took various parts. The Portsmouth Sinfonia became, to all intents and purposes, the world's worst orchestra.⁶ The EMC published the *Portsmouth Anthology* of simple tonal pieces and systems minimalism, including those by Ivan Hume-Carter, Michael Parsons, Robin Mortimore, and Sue Astle.

Anthologies from the 1972 and 1975 Catalogues

The two Catalogues provide a large list of collections in the Anthology format, as well as individual pieces. The 1972 Catalogue booklet lists composers in alphabetical order, followed by their scores, either sold singly, as part of Anthologies, or in both formats.⁷ The first page lists the mailing address and telephone number in Ladbroke Grove, London. This was Bryars' home address, and the EMC address until it closed in 1980. It opens with the statement of policy about composer control of their work, their right to remove pieces from sale and either to put them into an archive for research, or to 'over-ride the editors and decide to destroy all old pieces'.⁸ This freedom was only limited by another statement: 'All new composers will be checked to see if their pieces are not sellable by other publishers and that they fit the concept of renewable publication'. This clause protected the EMC as much as the composers, as it prevented the temporary use of the EMC as a stepping-stone to more traditional publishers. Conditions of sale included postage (domestic order, 10p; European orders, 20p; rest of the

⁶ The presentation included clips from the Portsmouth Sinfonia's 1974 concert, 'Hallelujah! The Portsmouth Sinfonia Live at the Royal Albert Hall'.

⁷ Composers listed in the 1972 Catalogue include Richard Ascough, Robert Ashley, George Brecht (whose *Fluxbox Water Yam* was distributed by the EMC), Greg Bright, Gavin Bryars, Cornelius Cardew, Michael Chant, Michael Chant/Hugh Shrapnel, Ed Fulton, Phil Gebbett, Jon Gibson, Bryn Harris (a separate anthology of pieces by this Scratch Orchestra member), Christopher Hobbs, Ivan Hume-Carter, David Jackman, Terry Jennings, Chris May, Michael Nyman, Michael Parsons, Tom Phillips, Eddie Prévost, Richard Reason, Hugh Shrapnel, Shrapnel/Chant, Howard Skempton, John White, and Christian Wolff (*Prose Pieces*). Women whose work was carried by the EMC are not listed in the 1972 composer list because, like some male members of the Scratch Orchestra and Portsmouth Sinfonia, their work only appears in *Nature Study Notes*, *Scratch Anthology of Compositions*, and *Portsmouth Anthology*. They (including Sue Astle, Suzette Ann Worden, Pamela Niblett, Carole Finer, Diane Jackman, and Catherine Williams) appear in the listings for the *Scratch* and *Portsmouth* Anthologies, but not in the listing for *Nature Study Notes*.

⁸ Experimental Music Catalogue, September 1972, n. p.

world, 30p); cheques to be made in pounds sterling, with 25p to cover bank charges for conversions of foreign cheques.⁹



Ex. 5: Cover of 1972 Experimental Music Catalogue

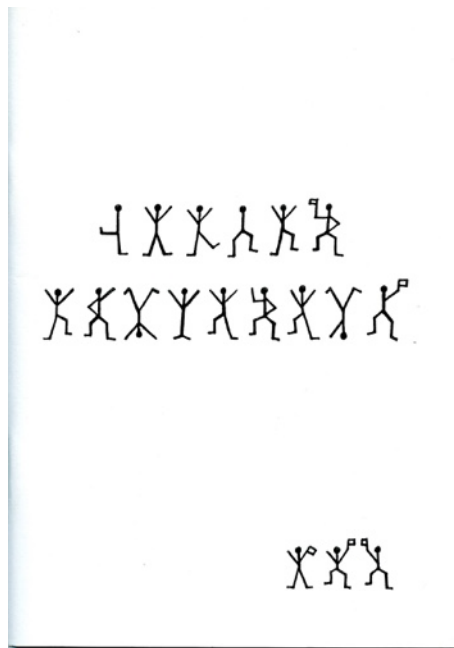
There follows the list of Anthologies: *Keyboard Anthology*, *Nature Study Notes*, *Portsmouth Anthology*, *Rhythmic Anthology*, *Scratch Anthology [of Compositions]*, *String Anthology*, *Verbal Anthology*, *Visual Anthology*, and *Vocal Anthology*. Angela Bryars designed the cover art for many of these Anthologies, while other anthologies and collections (for example, Christian Wolff's *Prose Pieces*, the *Scratch Anthology of Compositions*, *Nature Study Notes*) were separately produced and sold by the EMC. The *Verbal Anthology* (Ex. 6, next page) provides a clear example of the influence of the new committee on the style and content of the EMC. The letters of the title on this Anthology are spelled out using the code from the Sherlock Holmes short story, 'The Adventure of the Dancing Men'.¹⁰ At the bottom are the letters, EMC, also in code. Section one of the 1972 Catalogue, which lists composers in alphabetical order, uses a series of plus signs to indicate whether a piece only appears in an Anthology or if it appears separately. Each piece is described briefly. For example, the score to Richard Ascough's *Rationalisation of Realisation*, a piece for organ, ten instruments, and an 'ad hoc group of singers and instrumentalists', is described as using 'mainly musical notation'.¹¹ Hobbs and Bryars had more items in this Catalogue than most other composers, reflecting their busy compositional output as much as their position on the EMC board (Hugh Shrapnel also had a large list of compositions); Nyman was represented only by *Bell Set No. 1*, as he was then primarily a critic, not a composer. Cardew's work includes three of his pre-political pieces (*The Great Learning*, *Schoolltime Compositions*, and *Schoolltime Special*), and two political pieces (*Soon* and 'The Proletariat seeks to transform the world', the latter from the

⁹ In the early 2000s, the EMC opened a PayPal account and ceased accepting payment in foreign currency, as the bank charges for conversion exceeded £10.

¹⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Dancing Men', *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, III, *The Strand Magazine*, 26/156 (1903), 603–617.

¹¹ *Rationalisation of Realisation* concluded the Scratch Orchestra Journey concert, 'Pilgrimage from Scattered Points on the Surface of the Body, to the Heart, the Brain, the Stomach and the Inner Ear', at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, 23 November 1970.

Scratch Orchestra opera, *Sweet F. A.*)¹² Section 2 lists the Anthologies and their contents, while Section 3 provides ‘extras’: an LP of David Jackman’s Harmony Band (a so-called Scratch Orchestra “sub-group”) and a 16mm film by John Gosling of a section of George Brecht’s *Water Yam*, ‘available on hire only’.



Ex. 6: Cover of the EMC *Verbal Anthology* (1971); design by Angela Bryars

The 1975 Catalogue (Ex. 7, next page) is larger than the 1972 Catalogue. It is divided into sections, with a number of items that are ‘in preparation’. The first section, on conditions of sale, shows that the price of business has risen: the bank charge for foreign currency is 60p, and postage charges for non-domestic orders is not stated. The editorial that follows, written by Bryars, presents a short history of the EMC, describing Hobbs’s early work, the formation of the ‘three-man board’ and the establishment of the Anthologies. Bryars then explains how pieces are chosen and what they would like to see.

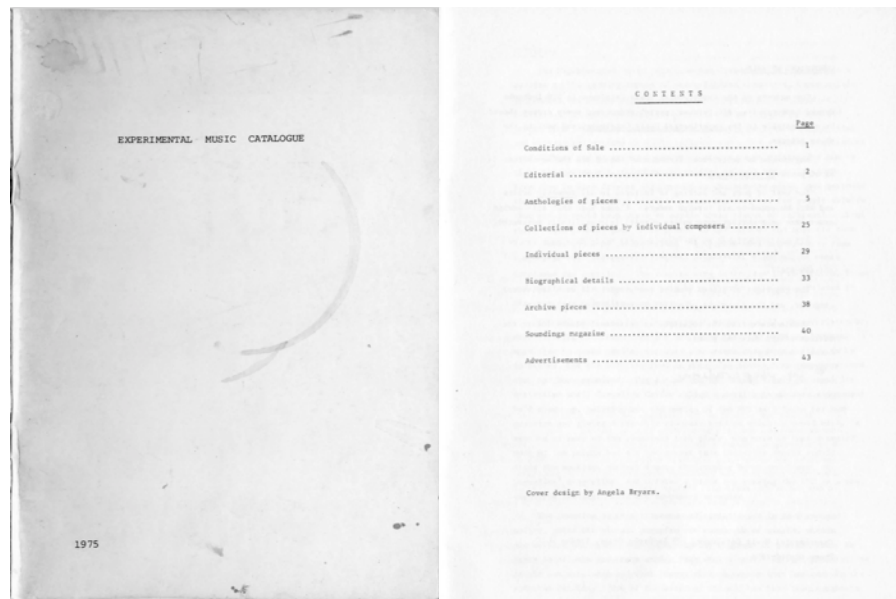
The editors meet, as need arises, to discuss new works that have been submitted and to prepare work for printing. Any work that the EMC handles is unlikely to be considered by other publishers and the composers themselves do not consider the EMC to be a ‘stepping stone’ to a conventional publisher. There are, therefore, certain types of work that we are unlikely ever to handle, large-scale orchestra work, for example, in which the hire of parts would be necessary. We do not actively solicit works as several that have been submitted seem to be eminently publishable by conventional means (the composer considers this to be viable for all time, would ideally like the piece to be engraved and so on) and those composers who do submit work tend to do so out of an examination of the kind of work we handle already. We are, however, aware of the dangers of the development of an EMC ‘style’ and are, consequently, interested in work that throws the machine off balance.¹³

This is, of course, both philosophical—desired works must be unusual, uncommercial, and the ideal composers not overly ambitious or careerist—and practical (while orchestral part rental can

¹² *Sweet F. A.* was a committee-written opera by members of the Scratch Orchestra after their turn toward Marxism-Leninism. Rod Eley (in ‘A History of the Scratch Orchestra, 1969–72’, in *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism*, ed. Cardew (London: Latimer, 1974), 30) wrote that *Sweet F. A.* was ‘our first composition for the “new” Orchestra...which depicted the struggle and triumphs of a group of revolutionaries over a crowd of hippy students’.

¹³ *Experimental Music Catalogue*, private publication, 1975.

be lucrative, it required storage, supervision of care and maintenance by the lessees). It is also a social, even political, stance. Bryars depicts the ideal EMC composer as someone who does not believe in the permanence of music (Great Works, Great Masters), but as a practical, ongoing act of thinking musically, a state in which the cost and permanence of engraved scores is at the very least impractical, and even anathema. Yet, Bryars' last statement indicates the reluctance of these composers to be thrown into a 'school' by limiting the EMC to certain styles.



Ex. 7: Draft proof, 1975 Experimental Music Catalogue. (L: cover; R: table of contents)

The remainder of the editorial points to additions the content of the Catalogue, including new Anthologies (the *Logos Anthology*, for example: six pieces by Gottfried Willem-Raes and the Logos Foundation of Belgium). Bryars also discusses the addition of prose (text) anthologies of writings on the music. This first foray into text publication was titled the *Experimental Music—An Anthology of Criticism*, edited by Bryars and Nyman, which was to include writings on experimental music from the previous years (1970–74). The contents included Cardew's polemical article, 'Stockhausen Serves Imperialism'; articles by Bryars on the Portsmouth Sinfonia and on Sinfonia composers Robin Mortimore and James Lampard; two articles by Brian Dennis on John White and Cardew's *The Great Learning* (both published originally in *The Musical Times*); several of Nyman's critical essays; a interview with Nyman by Keith Potter; an article on systems music by Hobbs; and other essays. The other anthology was *Erik Satie's Vexations*, edited by Bryars, Hobbs, and Nyman, with contributions by a range of performers associated with Satie's notorious piece (a short solo piano piece that is commonly played 840 times), including Phillip Corner, David Toop, Christian Wolff, and an essay on *Vexations* by Patrick Gowers. Although offered in the 1975 Catalogue, neither Anthology was ever completed or sold.¹⁴

The 1975 Catalogue offered greater description of each piece in each anthology, individual pieces by composers, plus biographies of each composer. There followed a list of pieces which were "archive": pieces that composers had not withdrawn, but were for research and not

¹⁴ The materials for the *Anthology of Criticism* were mostly compiled, but never completed for publication. The *Vexations* project eventually was incorporated into Gavin Bryars, 'Vexations and its Performers', *Contact* magazine, 1983. Gowers eventually wrote about Satie for the 1980 edition of *Grove Dictionary*.

performance. An intriguing development in the 1975 Catalogue was the addition of pieces by composers from the West Coast. Bryars had visited California in 1973 and met composers such as Ingram Marshall, Harold Budd, Daniel Lentz, Barney Childs, Michael Byron, and Peter Garland, who had launched *Soundings*, an independent collection of scores, articles, and other material which, unlike the EMC, was published in issues as a periodical. There followed a kind of loose exchange between the West Coast and England. Bryars and Skempton appeared in *Soundings*; the EMC distributed *Soundings*, beginning with a section of the 1975 Catalogue. Bryars also brought West Coast sounds to English minimalism when he advised Brian Eno in the content of the latter's Obscure Records. Adams' *American Standard* appears as one of the individual pieces in the 1975 Catalogue; it also appears on the Obscure Records album *Ensemble Pieces* with Hobbs' PTO pieces *Aran* and *McCrimmon Will Never Return*, and Bryars' *1, 2, 1-2-3-4*.¹⁵ Obscure Records released an album of music by Harold Budd. Thus the variegated strands of American and English alternative new music wove together in the EMC and Obscure in the 1970s. By the early 1980s these threads unravelled, when Obscure and the EMC were closed.

The Interim: The early 1980s–1999

Bryars and Nyman closed the EMC in the early 1980s. The company was wound down. However, during this interim, much happened in the musical life of former EMC composers. The EMC board members moved on. While he was still nominally a critic, Nyman formed the Campiello Band in the late 1970s, for a production of the eighteenth-century comedy by Goldoni, *Il Campiello*. This was renamed the Michael Nyman Band, which is still thriving. In the 1980s Nyman was perhaps best known for his work with the filmmaker Peter Greenaway, especially the 1983 film *The Draughtsman's Contract*, and for his opera, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, based on the book by Oliver Sacks. Bryars also formed his own eponymous band around this time, and he also wrote operas. Bryars' most noted early collaborator was the opera dramaturge Robert Wilson, who produced Bryars' *Medea* and the British section of *the CIVIL warS*, an abortive opera in six parts made for the Los Angeles Olympics, with composers including David Byrne, Philip Glass, and Jo Kondo. Hobbs wrote music for theatre, for solo piano and for chamber ensembles, including the Hartzell Hilton Band, a group he co-founded. This ensemble of E♭ clarinets, violas, mallet instruments, and piano commissioned pieces by many of these composers, including Parsons, White, and Hobbs, plus Barney Childs and an arrangement of a work by Hugh Shrapnel.

The most tragic event of the 1980s was perhaps Cardew's death by a hit-and-run driver in 1981. Cardew had moved into political music and activism. His works in the 1975 Catalogue—*Piano Album 1973* and 'The East is Red' in the *String Supplement*—were two examples of his early Maoist work, as he had disavowed his earlier experimental works.¹⁶ However, Cardew's death brought a reassessment of all his work, including his pre-political piece, *The Great Learning*, which the EMC still distributes for the Cardew estate. Hugh Shrapnel, who worked closely with Cardew in the 1970s, has continued to write pieces that are sometimes political, but often celebrate domestic life, and often contain a note of nostalgia. Howard Skempton moved his compositions to Faber and then to Oxford University Press; his work became internationally successful, especially on the premiere of his orchestral piece *Lento* in 1990. Skempton's music of the 1970s

¹⁵ This was played as part of the final day's concerts at the EMC² Festival.

¹⁶ Cardew apparently rethought this position after Mao's death.

and '80s took two forms: the first very sparse minimalism; the second type of sweet occasional music.¹⁷

Concert venues were mostly small and alternative, often associated with higher education. The British Music Information Centre retained a collection of EMC music in its library. The BMIC also had a small concert facility almost like a parlour, with a piano and room for no more than about thirty people. And this was a major venue for the postminimalist, post EMC performance by Bryars, Hobbs, White, Skempton, Parsons, Dave Smith, and others. The London Musicians Collective (LMC) was primarily devoted to free jazz and other free improvisation, but Michael Parsons directed workshops and premiered his opera, *Expedition to the North Pole*, there. Hobbs worked at London Drama Centre, as did White. Both wrote prolifically for the theatre: Hobbs through the early 1990s; White to the present. Hobbs wrote more of what Parsons calls empirical music, through-composed; a ironic re-visitation of older styles, as did White and Smith. This resulted in a specific approach by all three composers to piano music. White has written a series of piano sonatas throughout his compositional life—most very short. Hobbs, on the other hand, wrote piano sonatinas—most, despite the diminutive, rather longer than White's sonatas. Smith has developed the 'piano concert': a genre of single and multiple movements or pieces grouped together to fill a typical concert. Smith favours glorious puns and anagrams in his titles, like 'Nails' from his 'Hard As' series, part of his 10th Piano Concert.¹⁸

The English experimentalist avoidance of the monumental, of music for all time, that Bryars mentioned in his editorial in the 1975 Catalogue, continued after the end of the EMC. At a time when university studios were investing up to £100,000 in early digital synthesizers such as the Fairlight, many of the former EMC composer were attracted to cheap digital keyboards and other electronics, none more so than White, who wrote electric symphonies and in the late 1980s co-founded (with Hobbs) Live Batts!!, an electronic duo performing entirely battery-operated synths and amps. The avoidance of the monumental also can be seen in the amount of wordplay, puns, and jokes. Most of these games are primarily titular, such as Smith's anagrams, or the groups that White founded (Garden Furniture Music, a pun on Satie's *musique d'ameublement*, and the Farewell Symphony Orchestra), but they also appear in the music (White included novelty stops, such as tweeting birds and dog barks in a number of his electronic pieces) and in generative texts. An example of this last is *Pagina Tres Puella*, in which White translated the captions to the Sun's Page Three Girls into Latin and set them to an electronic accompaniment. Similarly, Hobbs wrote systems pieces based on soap opera synopses and crank letters to the Mt Wilson Observatory.

In higher education, one of the most important locations for experimental and minimal music in Britain from the first era of the EMC through the interim (1971 to about 1997) was in Leicester. Bryars had founded the music programme at Leicester Polytechnic, now De Montfort University, in about 1971. One of the first important events there was when Bryars and Hobbs performed Satie's *Vexations*. Bryars' and Hobbs' notes on the experience appears in Bryars' article '*Vexations* and its Performers'.¹⁹ The music programme at Leicester Polytechnic was almost like the EMC, with a similar alternative history and a sympathetic curriculum. Bryars

¹⁷ *Call*, which was played at the EMC² Festival, has elements of both types.

¹⁸ Dave Smith, 10th Piano Concert (*75 one-minute pieces*) 2005–2012. For information on Smith, including a list of works, see the EMC page, 'Dave Smith', <<http://experimentalmusic.co.uk/wp/emc-composers/dave-smith/>>.

¹⁹ Gavin Bryars, '*Vexations* and Its Performers', *Contact* 26 (1983), 12–20. Reprinted in the *Journal of Experimental Music Studies* Reprint Series, <http://www.experimentalmusic.co.uk/emc/Jems_files/Bryarsatievexations.pdf>.

attracted important exponents of experimental, systems, and free improvisatory music to teach, including Hobbs, White, Smith, plus the clarinetist Ian Mitchell, the jazz theorist Conrad Cork, saxophonist Evan Parker and trombonist Paul Rutherford. Concerts included Ronald Smith on Alkan, Ladislav Kupkovič (a Czechoslovakian composer based in Germany who had moved from total serialism to a neo-Schubertian style), the Balenescu Quartet (performing a concert of music by Terry Riley), and others. All students were required to join the percussion ensemble, run by Dave Smith, who arranged most of the music. Instead of a typical studio band, the Bley Band was the department jazz ensemble, playing music by the band leader Carla Bley. Bley, impressed by the students' work and dedication, sent pencil manuscripts to Smith for arrangement and booked them to open for her at the Camden Jazz Festival. The students also performed Reich's *Music for Eighteen Musicians*, also arranged by Smith, several times. Reich had not yet published a score when Smith first arranged it. However, Reich, impressed by his work, approved Smith's version, which remained the only authorized version outside his ensemble for many years.

White coined a term, 'The Leicester School', for the work by composers who worked in Leicester Polytechnic. This term is very much satirical, as none of these composers wanted to be members of movements, legacies, or subscribe to manifestos. But this term describe the location very well, where the best-known group of experimental, postminimal, and improvisational musicians gathered and made the kind of scene that rivalled Downtown New York, SUNY Buffalo, the University of Illinois, Mills College, CalArts, and other major new music scenes, in and out of higher education establishments. In fact, had Leicester Polytechnic offered postgraduate degrees in the 1980s, I would quickly have enrolled as a PhD student. Unfortunately, when Leicester Polytechnic became the new university, De Montfort, in 1992, and offered postgraduate degrees, the music programme quickly became a different department.

The EMC Resurrection

The 1990s brought several changes that made the Experimental Music Catalogue's revival possible. In the second half of the decade, the new administration forced the closure of the music performance programme at De Montfort, with the loss of almost all the staff. Bryars retired. After a few years winding down and rebuilding (Catherine Laws, Hobbs and I kept some courses going in the interim), the present music technology department, which is now very different in style and philosophy, was launched in around 1999–2000. Shortly afterward, the BMIC and other venues for experimental and postminimalist performance closed, leaving these composers and performers with few outlets for collaboration and interaction. At the same time, however, the growth of the Internet, of cheap means of creating and distributing CDs, mp3s, and later, streaming media, meant that collaboration, sharing, and other forms of virtual interaction were suddenly possible. The Internet also provided a new means of distributing and advertising experimental music. In 1997, Hobbs and I got a lottery grant for the residency of a group, Assembly, in the East Midlands. We put out a cassette *...work it out for yourself...*²⁰ After Assembly, we were left with a Treasurers bank account. As part of a free email account from Waitrose supermarket, I was also given free web space. So, in the tradition of musical comedies

²⁰ Assembly, *...work it out for yourself...*, cassette, Self Assembled Tapes, 1998. <<https://www.discogs.com/label/75325-Self-Assembled-Tapes>>.

such as *Babes in Arms*, let's put on a show! A rather cheap-and-cheerful show: the primitive EMC pages from the first few years can be found on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.²¹

Hobbs and I asked for, and got the blessing and approval from Bryars and Nyman to relaunch the EMC. We had two goals for the new EMC: to republish as much music as we could get permission to do and to bring out music that had been written since the closure. The overall operation is much like the first generation of the EMC: composers are free to ask that their work only be circulated for research (Bryars did this with his pieces in the *Verbal Anthology* when it was re-released), or removed entirely. Composers receive a royalty percentage from the first sale onward, not after publishing costs are covered. It is a not-for-profit project; any extra income is returned to the operation of the EMC. The EMC style started with a handmade aesthetic not unlike the typed and photocopied original catalogue: we used the free supermarket site (we only went to a paid for one in 2011), and I hand-coded the pages in HTML—and later rather poor css—on text documents. We also employ 'EMC talk': this is friendly music, and the language of the site attempts to reflect it. Our logo (2001), designed by Bruce Coates, is based loosely on some graphics from a section of Cardew's *Treatise*. The indeterminacy, philosophy and exploration found in *Treatise*, is the wellspring of the theory and ethos of the EMC. I launched, and Hobbs named, a peer-review academic journal, *JEMS*, the *Journal of Experimental Music Studies*, which is now distributed on EBSCO Host and listed in RILM Abstracts of Music Literature. *JEMS* publishes new articles on experimental, minimal and postminimal music; it also reprints important articles from *Contact* and other journals of the past. And the EMC started distributing recordings, beginning with the Assembly cassette and remaining copies of the LP of Cardew's memorial concert, which had gone out of print, and had become almost unobtainable.²² The new facility for creating CDs, mp3s, and other digital formats allowed the EMC to release its own CDs, such as Chris Hobbs' *Sudoku Music*, an album of systems pieces in which the process is based on Mega Sudoku puzzles in the newspapers.²³

With the rise of social media and user-friendly blogging software, the EMC has now progressed into a format that makes it easy to update news and materials, and to send pieces and recordings around the world cheaply and swiftly. More scores are available in PDF format. The EMC web site is primarily set up on Wordpress.org pages and blog posts, with a Bandcamp page for streaming and downloads of sound files, a YouTube channel, and a Facebook page. Bandcamp, YouTube, and Facebook allow the dissemination not only of EMC music for sale, but also of archival material (concert recordings, for example) and other items of interest without charge. Thus the Experimental Music Catalogue is expanding from a role as a not-for-profit publisher to a nearly open source of new music information and a forum for its discussion. This has so far been accomplished without any support from government or private arts subsidies. It is, therefore, retaining its status as an alternative to the 'official' new music establishment. Also, while the sound and style of the music has changed over the decades, EMC music retains much of the philosophical grounding of its original experimental offerings.

The EMC Future

The future? What happens this weekend is the future: the first serious retrospective of the wider British experimental ethos in all its variety: its music for amateurs, for virtuosi, for improvisers,

²¹ A typical page from 2001 can be seen at <<https://web.archive.org/web/20011205165729/http://www.users.waitrose.com:80/~chobbs/>>.

²² Cornelius Cardew, *Cornelius Cardew Memorial Concert*, 2 LPs, Impetus Records, 28204, 1985.

²³ Christopher Hobbs, *Sudoku Music*, CD, Experimental Music Catalogue, EMC-104, 2005.

for common-practice, graphic and text notation.... This weekend can be seen to be a landmark historical event. Where else are we going to see all surviving members of the Promenade Theatre Orchestra (John White, Chris Hobbs, Hugh Shrapnel)? where pieces by Michael Nyman, Gavin Bryars, Michael Parsons, Howard Skempton, members of the Scratch Orchestra, Cornelius Cardew, local free improvisation are all on the same concerts? This is equivalent in post-1950 musical landmarks as if Americans got the New York School, Fluxus, Reich, Glass, Monk, Budd, Lentz, and other American experimental, minimal, and postminimal music together in one place for one weekend, with appearances and new pieces by the surviving members. So I'm thrilled. I hope you will be thrilled, too.