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Electronic Music Studios in Britain-7

WEST SQUARE, LONDON

TWO FACTORS have largely determined the way the West Square Studio has developed in the six years since it began in September 1971. One is to do with its place in the sphere of Adult Education, as a specialist centre at the South Bank Institute within the Inner London Education Authority. The other concerns a deliberate decision made early on to work primarily in the field of electronic music performance, to focus on live-electronics linking instrumental and electronic resources. Much of the activity at West Square from student workshop upwards reflects this orientation towards performer and performance.

From a practical point of view it means that the studio has been able to offer facilities to a relatively large number of people; much larger than would be possible if work was concentrated on individual composition and research: an important point, when it is realised that the very existence of the studio, the provision of equipment, teaching hours and technical assistance, depends on the number of people who want to use it. Not that opportunities for individual work do not exist. On the contrary, students are encouraged to use the studio at other than formal class times for their own or group project work, and over the last three years an increasing number of composers have produced new works at West Square.

Some research is carried on in designing and building devices both for the studio and for performance. This line of development began with the construction of a multiple and variable tape delay table principally for performing Stockhausen's *Solo* for melody instrument with feedback. After two years of struggling with the thorny problems of extended tape transport (up to 40 feet) and some quite disastrous early performances of *Solo*, this apparatus now functions acceptably well: in its way, it is a unique device for concert work. A mark II version in aluminium, again using Revox stereo replay heads but with improved preamps based on ICs, has been designed, and we plan to start building this in the autumn.

Early in 1974 John Dodd joined the studio as our first full-time technician, and this, perhaps more than any other single factor, has made possible the present scope of activity at West Square. Apart from what this appointment meant from a technical point of view, the day to day administration and looking after the use of the studio could be shared between myself and my assistant with the help of some part-time members of staff. The maintenance and repair of equipment which had been a growing problem up until then was now carried out in the studio and, above all, we could look forward to working on technical projects which we had had in mind for some time. The idea of developing a central patching system for the equipment in the studio was considered at this time but abandoned because of the need for mobility. If anything, our attention has turned in the opposite direction towards developing and refining the concept of a 'mobile' studio particularly for concert work.

West Square Electronic Music Studio has developed a strong link with the electronic music studio at the City Literary Institute, sharing facilities and equipment. Contact began in 1973 when we were asked to provide studio time for a group of their students until their own studio was ready. At this time I invited Philipp Wachsmann, who ran the City Lit. group, to start another class at West Square, and shortly afterwards we established an improvisation workshop which has attracted at different times many of the leading musicians in the free music field. This Improvisation Workshop has become an important feature of West Square. Under Philipp Wachsmann's direction, weekly workshop and rehearsal sessions are held for both student and professional groups working with the resources of the electronic studio. They prove invaluable, not only for the players themselves and the development of improvisation but for composers who wish to test and work out in a practical way new sound possibilities.

The building which houses the studio is old, late Victorian with the usual complement of narrow corridors and winding stairs. Considerable ingenuity has gone into adapting for working use that part of it which has been assigned as a studio. Two rooms, each capable of holding up to 15 people in reasonable comfort for lectures, somewhat fewer for practical use, have been set up for teaching and working. A largish open foyer has been made into a technical workshop, and another much larger room is used for part of the week, including all of Saturdays, for group rehearsals and recordings. During vacations when the studio is often very busy this room is available all the time.

The West Square Electronic Music Ensemble was set up as a performing group and comprises musicians and technicians with a common interest in working together to develop the skills and experience essential for the performance of the growing number of works for live-electronics. Working with leading

performers, emphasis is on the realisation of works which explore and extend new instrumental and vocal resources, acoustically and electronically. The Ensemble seeks to integrate and exploit the experience and practice both of the studio and of instrumental performance and to harness this total resource towards a new and particular music theatre: an acoustic theatre in which sound and sound projection are its structural essence.

The West Square Electronic Music Association was formed a little later and registered as a Charity in August 1975. It aims to encourage new composition and in offering the means for realisation and performance actively seeks to bring composer, performer and engineer together to work in an integrated yet flexible medium. The Association has had valuable assistance from the Greater London Arts Association and the Arts Council in commissioning a number of new works and promoting concerts at St. John's Smith Square and the Round House.

West Square Electronic Music Studio
West Square Annexe
South Bank Institute
St. George's Road
London SE1

Current Personnel

Director: Barry Anderson (full-time Head of Music Department)
Lecturers: Philipp Wachsmann (part-time tutor: Electronic and
Improvisation Workshops)
Christopher Francis (part-time tutor: Technical Workshop)
Technician: Lawrence Dipple (full-time)
Design Group: David Baxter/Ian Chisholm/Lawrence Dipple/Christopher Francis

A selection of works composed in the studio

Address enquiries for performance or educational use to the address above. We shall refer to the composer where necessary.

- Barry Anderson *Piano Pieces 1, 2 and 3* (1973; with tape mix and sine tone ring modulation)
first performance: St. John's Smith Square, London, June 11, 1975
Topograph (1973; three percussion groups, filtering and ring modulation)
The Sun-Tamer (1974; Polynesian creation myths for storyteller, modulated piano, percussion and tape)
first performance: Morley College Family Concert, April 1974
**Mask* (1976; solo flute, electronic modulation, percussion, speaker and five tape channels)
first performance: St. John's Smith Square, London, May 9, 1976
**En face de . . . II* (1977; soprano and double bass with tape delay, electronic modulation and four-track tape)
first performance: Round House, London, June 20, 1977
- and with
Marcio Mattos three realisations of Stockhausen's *Solo* for melody instrument with feedback:
No. 1 for flute (Christopher Taylor)
St. John's Smith Square, London, June 11, 1975
No. 2 for double bass (Barry Guy)
St. John's Smith Square, London, May 9, 1976
No. 3 for voice (Jane Manning)
Round House, London, June 20, 1977
- Barry Guy **Eos X* (1977; amplified double bass, tape delay and four-track tape)
first performance: Round House, London, June 20, 1977
- Marcio Mattos *Mirrors* (1975; string grouping with tape delay and live electronics)
first performance: Battersea Arts Centre, London, July 5, 1975

Stephen Montague

****Strummin** (1974-75; piano and tape)

first performance: Vienna, Austria, October 6, 1975

****Inundations I** (1975; three pianos, twelve pianists, electronics and tape)

first performance: Intermuse Festival, University of South Florida, USA, January 7, 1976

****Inundations II 'Willow'** (1976; soprano, piano and tape)

first performance: Como Festival, Italy, September 25, 1976

****Crisyede** (1976; voice, ocarina, slides and tape)

first performance: Festival of Metz, France, November 26, 1976

****Fluxus** (1976; live electronics, 16mm film and tape)

first performance: ICA, London, December 12, 1976

***Passim** (1977; piano, percussion, electronics and tape)

first performance: Round House, London, June 20, 1977

Haydn Reeder

Coalescence (1975; piano, synthesizer and tape)

first performance: Canberra School of Music, Australia, August 1975

Paul Rutherford

Echo I (1975; double bass and tape)

first performance: Purcell Room, London, October 30, 1975

*commissioned by the West Square Electronic Music Association with funds provided by the Arts Council of Great Britain

**published by Edition Modern (Munich)

List of main studio equipment as at June 1977

ITAM 10-in 4-out mixer

Three Sony MX12 portable mixers

Quad amplifiers

Tannoy HPD85 loudspeakers

Two VCS3 synthesizers

DK2 keyboard

EMS touch keyboard and sequencer

EMS pitch to voltage converter

WSQ sine/square-wave generator bank (ten modules; voltage control/phase lock)

EMS Random voltage generator

EMS eight-octave filter bank

WSQ two-channel multi filter bank

Twelve-channel tape delay feedback machine (developed initially for Stockhausen's *Solo*)

Scopex 4D 10A oscilloscope

Two Revox G36 stereo tape recorders (high speed)

Six Revox A77 stereo tape recorders (three high speed; three low; three with variable speed control and two with Dolby B noise reduction)

One Teac A3340 four-track tape recorder

Various dynamic, capacitor and contact microphones: AKGD224E/D202ES and Calrec 1000 series, plus comprehensive range of devices and accessories for studio and live performance use, headphones and test equipment

Acoustic instruments include: piano, marimba, vibraphone, crotales, cymbals, pedal timpani

This is the seventh of a series of articles designed to acquaint composers, technicians and other studio users as well as our general readers with current activities in electronic music studios. At present the series will be confined to those in Britain. Studio directors are invited to submit *brief* articles, following the layout displayed above, for inclusion in future issues. It must be stressed that only brief articles will be considered for publication and that, since we normally only have space enough for one studio per issue, a waiting list may develop. The next studio to be featured will be that at the University of Surrey (*Contact 18*).