

# contact

Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

## Citation

Maconie, Robin. 1977-1978. 'Electronic Music Studios in Britain - 8: University of Surrey, Guildford'. *Contact*, 18. pp. 24-25. ISSN 0308-5066.

## Electronic Music Studios in Britain-8:

### University of Surrey, Guildford

SURREY UNIVERSITY Music Department's recording studio is first and foremost a training ground for student Tonmeisters (a German term meaning a person trained equally in the theory and practice of music and in the technical aspects of recording and record production). The Tonmeister concept first took root in 1946 in Germany, where a Tonmeister Institute was formed at the Hochschule für Musik at Detmold. The exiled Schoenberg, in a letter written that same year to the Chancellor of the University of Chicago, proposed that its music department should offer courses in which

Soundmen will be trained in music, acoustics, physics, mechanics and related fields to a degree enabling them to control and improve the sonority of recordings, radio broadcasting and of sound films ... The student ... will be trained to notice all the differences between his image [of how a score should sound] and the real playing; he will be able to name these differences and to tell how to correct them if the fault results from the playing. His training in the mechanical fields should help him to correct acoustic shortcomings, as, for example, missing basses, unclear harmony, shrill high notes, etc.

This can be done and it would mean a great advantage over present methods where engineers have no idea of music and musicians have no idea of the technique of mechanics.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1946 training for Tonmeisters has been established in Berlin, Dusseldorf, Stockholm and Warsaw. Though the basic philosophy is similar in these institutions, and at Surrey where the course began taking students in 1971, the style and weighting of training between musical and scientific teaching varies a good deal.

Surrey is a new, 60s style technological university, and music for this reason occupies a central place in the university's cultural life. Under the Head of Department, Professor Reginald Smith Brindle, a pattern of study has been developed which takes more than the customary passive regard for the role of mass communication in present-day musical affairs. In particular, the courses indicate an informed awareness of the positive influence of recording techniques and the recording medium on musical aesthetics and performance. There are two main study options: Course A, combining academic studies with a degree of specialisation in one or more practical disciplines (instrumental performance, conducting, composition), and Course B for Tonmeisters, run in collaboration with the Physics Department, which additionally incorporates training in mathematics, electronics and electro-acoustics and sound recording techniques. Course A students inevitably acquire a familiarity with the recording process through having their performance work regularly recorded, as well as by helping Tonmeisters informally in their own portfolio work, which ranges from recording orchestras, choirs and professional ensembles on location (using the Department's mobile recording studio) or at the University to realising pop music in the Department studio. Early and continuing experience of playing before a microphone and assessing one's own performance from tape has a markedly beneficial effect on every student's aural awareness and professional attitude.

In their third year of the four-year course (a year more than for Course A) Tonmeisters take work in various sectors of industry and broadcasting in Britain or abroad in consultation with section supervisor John Borwick, Senior Lecturer in Recording Techniques. The industrial year gives students an opportunity to practice basic techniques in a professional environment and gives industry a chance to measure the calibre of Surrey-trained Tonmeisters at first hand.

It should be stressed that the Tonmeister course is essentially academic, not glorified engineering, and that the academic side is growing in significance as music comes more and more to rely on technical judgement for its intended effect. Academic function is conditional, furthermore, on a fundamental professionalism of studio design and operation. Surrey is only one of many universities claiming the resource of a studio for teaching and compositional research, but few other departments of music can claim to provide an appropriately thorough course structure in the use and maintenance of electronic equipment on which the quality of musical output substantially depends. Hitherto Surrey has rightly concentrated on laying that professional foundation, and experimental work among Tonmeisters has mainly been directed to refinements of stereo recording (and within practical limits, of multi-track pop). Present teaching and individual student work already stretches studio facilities and time to the limit, so the aspiring composer of electronic music at Surrey, as anywhere else, cannot bank on unrestricted access to the studio in order simply to find out how the machines work. However, the keen student can learn a great deal from observing his fellow Tonmeisters in action and has every opportunity to do so.

Since joining the Surrey Music Department in 1975 I have made some progress in enhancing student awareness of the historical and aesthetic significance of recording media in the development of 20th century music, along the lines of Adrian Scharf's very successful visual-arts thesis *Art and Photography*.<sup>2</sup> Informal recording groups for pop session work and intuitive music have also been set up on a week-by-week basis, giving performers a chance to work under studio pressure and Tonmeisters a chance to contribute creatively on an equal footing, and results so far are encouraging. An innovation in the formal curriculum this year has been to set final-year Tonmeisters an orchestration exercise consisting of taking a section of mono-recorded short-wave radio random tuning and transforming it under supervision into stereo electronic music. *Limina*, the first fruits of this endeavour, has emerged as a raw, vigorously expressionist 20-minute study whose five sections, though sharing a common vitality, clearly reveal five individual personalities creatively at work.

The Music Department studio and control room are situated in the basement and ground floor of the University Great Hall. Performances in the Great Hall are recorded via six tie-lines direct to the control room and monitored by closed circuit television. The studio measures approximately 32ft x 24ft and is about 16ft in height, overlooked by the adjacent control room set at a higher ground level which measures approximately 16ft x

16ft x 8ft high.

As has been stated, the Music Department studio at Surrey is primarily committed to producing competent Tonmeisters and its development as a composing facility remains a long-term objective. The department's holdings of student tape portfolios, including a proportion of original compositions, are considerable, but much of this material is of limited intent and interest and in most instances superseded by subsequent production work done outside the University. Unlike other departments, Surrey prefers not to be drawn into competition in numbers of works produced or visiting composers

entertained, regarding the field of electronic, concrete and computer music as one in which much essential groundwork has still to be done, both artistically and technically.

#### NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup>Ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, *Arnold Schoenberg Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1964; paperback edition 1974), Letter 210, pp. 240-241.  
<sup>2</sup>Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books ('Pelican' series), 1974.

University of Surrey Recording Studio  
Department of Music  
University of Surrey  
Guildford  
Surrey  
GU2 5XH

Tel. Guildford (0483) 71281

#### *Current Personnel*

Senior Lecturer in Recording Techniques: John Borwick  
Technician: Rob Blee  
Assistant Technician: to be appointed

#### *A selection of works composed in the studio*

Address enquiries for performance or educational use to the address above.

- Reginald Smith Brindle      \**Worlds without end* (1973; male and female reciters, chorus, orchestra and electronic tapes; tapes realised at Surrey using EMS equipment belonging to the composer)
- Robin Maconie      *Limina* (1975; modified soundtrack; prototype version realised in stereo in 1977 by David Clarke, Terry Davies, Richard Longley, Steve Smith and Tony Spath)
- Duel* (1976; intuitive music; realised October 19, 1976 in the Music Department Studio by Chris Burn (harpsichord), John Butcher (tenor saxophone), Martin Butler (violin, drumheads and small cymbal), Bruce Jacobson (soprano saxophone), Robin Maconie (bass drum) and Rob Priestley (piano) with Dave Mitcham (sound technician); recorded in quad, available in stereo)

\*Published by Peters Edition Limited

#### *List of main studio equipment as at July 1977*

16-in 4-out Neve desk with eight monitor channels, foldback and standard EMT stereo plate reverberation  
Calrec custom-built 8-in 2-out portable desk  
Quad tuners and amplifiers, including trolley-mounted units  
HH Unit PA system with HH amplifiers  
Tannoy Arden, Tannoy Berkeley, Quad electrostatic, JBL studio monitors  
Eight Dolby-A noise reduction units  
Scully four-track 1/2" tape machine  
Studer A80 two-track tape recorder with varispeed  
Studer B62 stereo tape recorder  
Ferrograph Studio 8 stereo tape recorder  
Revox A77 stereo half-track tape recorder (high speed; 38, 19 cm/sec)  
Revox A77 stereo quarter-track tape recorder (19, 9.5 cm/sec)  
Two Revox A700 stereo tape recorders (three speeds and varispeed)  
Nagra stereo portable tape recorder

Two Neal stereo cassette decks  
Fons, Garrard, Goldring turntables, including trolley-mounted units  
AKG, Beyer, Calrec, Neumann, Sennheiser, Shure, STC microphones  
EMI 815, 816 tape in normal use  
Mobile studio: Ford three-ton Transit van, Calrec desk, CCTV, units selected from above

This is the eighth 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 Glasgow (*Contact 19*).