

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Canterbury Christ Church University
Unit of Assessment: Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts (35)
Title of case study: Practice-based research in composition
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study outlines the impacts arising from practice-based research in composition undertaken within the UoA by Wright (Reader in Composition and Sonic Art). The examples provided below detail the impact of this research upon a) the performance practices of contemporary music ensembles and soloists; b) the programming practices of festivals and venues; c) the public understanding and appreciation of new forms of contemporary music. The key drivers to achieving impact have been the innovative use of technologies and performance practices beyond the traditional concert platform. The global reach of these impacts is demonstrated by the geographical spread and the internationally recognised quality of the participating ensembles, artists and festivals.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research consists of a series of compositions by Wright (2005 –), produced between 2008 and 2012, and realised in a series of internationally disseminated recordings, broadcasts, live performances and multimedia installations. The musical materials of this research reflect a desire to reach beyond the academic context and the traditional concert platform through an innovative synthesis of musical notation, improvisation and technology, presented in the public domain in innovative ways.</p> <p>The principal research insights relating to the identified impacts are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the creative potential of the use of turntablist techniques in contemporary composition and contemporary music performance practice, as in <i>Totem for Brussels</i> (2010); the use of multiple turntables can act as i) a radical sound source that extends the soundworld of the contemporary music ensemble and ii) a form of visual metronome that, via video link, can effectively communicate complex temporal relationships to an ensemble; • the use of the internet as a navigable 'venue' for interactive installations, as in <i>Totem for Gobi-New York</i> (2010); hyperlinking between zones of an interactive website allows audience members to create their own journey through a work, in a way that the traditional concert experience does not allow, and therefore updates the notion of the open-form work for a 21st century audience; • the development of the 'club installation' as a new form of presentation for contemporary composition (<i>Totem for Gobi-New York</i>); by engaging audiences within the context of an informal nightclub setting, issues such as the arrangement of seating, audience expectation and the use of dance floor-style PA systems create new aesthetic materials for the composer and new avenues of audience engagement for contemporary music festivals; • the development of innovative techniques of real-time and studio-based dialogue between open-form compositional structures, improvisation and sampling technology, as in <i>Trance Map</i> (2011); the appropriation of DJ-style mixing software within the free improvisation environment means that rhythmic accuracy is sharply increased, adding textural fluency and enhancing the reaction time of the digital performer, thus increasing the aesthetic experience for the listener; • the development of innovative techniques to achieve a dialogue between multichannel sonic art techniques and traditional non-western instruments and instrumental techniques, as in <i>Inside/Outside</i> (2012); the use of live spatialisation and spectral morphology extends the decay times, harmonic content and speaker location of the signal, heightening the expressive power of the traditional Vietnamese ensemble.

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3. References to the research

- Wright, M. (2010) *Totem for Gobi-New York*. First performance: Le Poisson Rouge, Greenwich Village, 19-22/4/2010. Commissioned by the MATA Festival, New York.
- Wright, M. (2010) *Totem for Den Haag*. First performance: Leuven, 23/10/10. Commissioned by Ensemble Klang, the Hague. Released on CD/Download package *Music at the Edge of Collapse*, consisting entirely of Wright's music.
- Wright, M. (2010) *Totem for Brussels*. First performance: Antwerp, 17/11/2010, in *TOTEM*, an evening-length event focusing on the work of Wright. Commissioned by B!ndman, Brussels.
- Wright, M. (2012) *Totem for Sydney*. First performance: Sydney, 1/12/2012. Commissioned by Ensemble Offspring, Sydney.
- Wright, M. and Parker, E. (2008-11) *Trance Map*. CD release, and live performances.
- Wright, M. (2012) *Inside/Outside*. Sound installation in collaboration with The Six Tones ensemble and choreographer Marie Falin, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2-11/11/12. Commissioned by The Six Tones with funds provided by the Swedish Arts Council and Lund University, Malmo.

Evidence of quality includes the caliber and geographical spread of commissioning organisations (MATA Festival, Transit, Hcmf) and ensembles (Ensemble Klang, B!ndman Ensemble, Ensemble Offspring, The Six Tones), and the extent of positive critical reaction. For example, Wright's work and in particular *The Totem Project* (made up of the first four items referenced above), was the focus of a 2-hour Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio show (Broadcast 01/12/12), and *Inside/Outside* was discussed on National Vietnamese TV *OPEN VN* (19/11/12). *Totem for Gobi-New York* was reviewed positively in the New York Times (21/04/10), and *Trance Map* received a four star review in The Financial Times (25/04/11). Wright has been invited to present his work in live performance at internationally leading festivals including the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (*Trance Map*, 19/11/11).

4. Details of the impact

Wright's research has impacted upon the performance practices of contemporary music ensembles and soloists through i) the use of turntablist techniques, and ii) the development of innovative techniques of real-time and studio-based dialogue between open-form compositional structures, improvisation and sampling technology.

Wright's research into turntablism within contemporary composition was cited by Eric Sleichim, Artistic Director of the Brussels-based B!ndman ensemble, in an interview The Beauty of the Mechanical (November 2011). He states: "[...] at a certain moment, I saw a work by Matthew Wright, Contact Theatre, and that used real turntables. [...] when I heard Matt's work, I was suddenly tempted for the first time to start using professional turntables. [...] In Matt Wright's hands the turntable became a real tool, something to work with. There is a sort of abstraction of emotion when you are working with that instrument. [...] And that appealed to me enormously in that work." Since working with Wright, turntables are now a standard feature of the ensemble's instrumental line up, and the ensemble has performed Wright's works (including Totem for Brussels) 26 times to approximately 1,500 people, thus significantly contributing to their repertoire and professional practice. Similarly Totem for Gobi-New York was commissioned by the MATA festival in New York due to Wright's innovative research into applications of turntablism. On commissioning the work, MATA's Artistic Director, Chris McIntyre stated: "We are well aware of your work with turntables [...] Our panelists were impressed by the originality of your concepts and for the unique audience

experience they engender.”

Wright’s research into techniques of **real-time and studio-based dialogue** between open-form compositional structures, improvisation and sampling technology during the Trance Map project led world-leading saxophonist Evan Parker to state that “Matt’s facility with the various DSP programmes used totally blurs the distinction between playing, mixing and editing” and led to the development of a new performance practice between them. The research led Wright and Parker to be engaged as UK representatives on the artistic staff of ‘Labo’, a week-long series of workshops organized by the Champ d’Action contemporary music ensemble for young performing artists from across Europe (Antwerp, February 2013). Wright’s research has further impacted on the training of the next generation of composers and performers through invitations to speak about his work within the assessment period at The Peabody Institute, Baltimore; The Royal Conservatory of The Netherlands; The Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium; The Polish Academy of Music, Krakow; The Royal Academy of Music; The Royal College of Music; Trinity College of Music; Goldsmiths College; The University of East Anglia.

Wright’s research has impacted upon **the programming practices of festivals and venues** through i) the use of the **internet as a navigable ‘venue’** for interactive installations, ii) the development of the **‘club installation’** as a new form of presentation for contemporary composition and iii) the development of innovative techniques to achieve a **dialogue between multichannel sonic art techniques and traditional non-western instruments** and instrumental techniques.

The **‘club installation’** and use of the **internet as a navigable ‘venue’** (each a means by which new work is presented beyond the traditional concert format) have proved notable sources of impact. Totem for Gobi-New York, built around a navigable website projection, was installed within Le Poisson Rouge, one of the foremost contemporary nightclubs in New York, and received widespread recognition. Steven Smith wrote in the New York Times (“Music With and Without Musicians” (21/04/10)) that “Inspired by a trek through the Gobi Desert, Mr. Wright used a turntable, a laptop computer and other effects to blend the recorded chanting and growling of Mongolian singers, peeling and scraping bell sounds, vinyl crackle and electronic rumble, all played through speakers positioned around the room. Even with synthetic sounds in the mix, the piece evoked a wind-swept, spirit-haunted expanse, an effect bolstered by Gobi images projected and altered on two video screens.” The Chamber Music Today website (20/04/10) stated “The work is a fluid and immersive environment [...] [an] imaginative musical meditation about the future of the natural world, faced with the challenges of human population and global development.”

Wright’s sound design for the Inside / Outside project created a distinctive **dialogue between acoustic Vietnamese instruments and a multichannel sonic art installation**. Le Huong wrote in the Viet Nam News (“Artists explore gender identity” (08/11/12)) “When the audience move through the space, reflections from the glass create a perception of being both inside and outside the boxes, and there is a constant shifting of instrumental and electronic sounds [...] Next to the glass boxes there are headphones through which audience members can listen to the music being played in each individual box. Through these layers of sound, the audience can explore yet another facet of how inside and outside is created.”

The international reach of Wright’s work, and its dissemination through both traditional and non-traditional modes of musical presentation have allowed it to achieve a substantive impact upon **the**

public understanding and appreciation of new forms of contemporary music. *Totem for Den Haag, for example, was commissioned by Ensemble Klang and was chosen by the artistic directors of three European music festivals to represent the UK in an initiative between the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, The Transit Festival (Leuven, Belgium) and The November Music Festival (Den Bosch, Holland). It was subsequently presented at the Transit Festival (23/10/10), at The November Music Festival (13/11/10) and to a sold out audience at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (27/11/10). In addition, that work was chosen by artistic director Tino Haenan to open the Listen to This concert series at the prestigious Muziekgebouw aan't IJ in Amsterdam (16/09/11). Before commissioning Totem for Sydney, the Australian Ensemble Offspring chose an earlier work of Wright's (Breakdown, 2006) to represent the UK within a concert of radical new works at the Sydney Opera House (30/03/12). Following this connection to Australia, Wright's research became the subject of a two-hour radio show broadcast on ABC Classic FM (Off the Record 01/12/12).*

In total, Wright's practice-based compositional research undertaken within the UoA has led to 135 live performances of his work between 01/01/08 and 31/07/13, reaching an estimated live audience of 7,500. His CD created with Ensemble Klang, 'Music at The Edge of Collapse' has sold approximately 150 copies, contributing approximately 2,250EUR of sales to Ensemble Klang, whilst the works have been streamed from the website approximately 4,000 times. In relation to that album, the Instant Jazz Website (17/01/2011) claimed that "the recently released collaboration [of Ensemble Klang] with Matthew Wright ([Music At The Edge Of Collapse](#))[...] combines contemporary sound art with electronics into something wholly modern. It may not be jazz, but these artists are creating cutting edge music that ensures a unique aural experience, introducing new ways of dealing with composing/playing, fusing the familiar with the aesthetically challenging and taking the listener straight into the future. It's an entirely different excitement and something we really recommend to adventurous listeners!"

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. New York Times review: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/22/arts/music/22mata.html>
2. Chamber Music Today review: <http://chambermusictoday.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/mata-young-composers-now-festival-ears.html>
3. Eric Sleichim interview: <http://www.blindman.be/en/productions/show/108>
4. Financial Times Review: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/2bb6a052-9bad-11e0-98f2-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2fBO8wG3y>
5. All About Jazz review: <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=39679>
6. Vietnam Today review: <http://english.vietnamnet.vn/fms/art-entertainment/52122/artists-explore-gender-identity.html>
7. Artistic Director of Ensemble Klang (Den Haag) (**contact I.D. 1**)
8. Presenter of ABC Classic FM 'Off the Record' (Sydney) (**contact I.D. 2**)
9. ex-Artistic Director of the MATA Festival (New York) (**contact I.D. 3**)
10. Artistic Director of the Six Tones (Lund University, Malmo) (**contact I.D. 4**)