

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Hull</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D35: Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Music Production, Collaborative Creativity and Technology</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Dr Slater researches processes of musical creativity that involve technology. Music from two distinct projects reaches a public beyond academia via radio broadcasts, DJ and club culture, the commercial mechanisms of the music industry and more localised community pedagogy. His work contributes to an international audio culture that draws upon jazz, dance, electronica and orchestral music. Such resources provide rich material for education projects that offer young musicians and sound engineers an insight into the technical, social and musical processes of music production, composition and performance. Broadcast and pedagogy represent the two main routes through which his work has a wider impact. This case study documents impact on quality of life, cultural life and on pedagogy.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Both music projects underpinning this research – Middlewood Sessions (2004-2012) and Nightports (2011 onwards) – explore the processes at play during collaborative creative endeavours. In particular, the research focuses on the increasingly prevalent context of the domestic project studio, which can be thought of as representing a proliferation of creative practices caused by the rapid growth of increasingly powerful technologies of decreasing cost. Access to these technologies challenges some fundamental preconceptions about musical creativity: who can do it, what can be made, where it can take place and why people do it. There are two simultaneous strands that constitute the findings of these projects: practical activity giving rise to musical artefacts and theoretic-empirical constructs to account for the nuanced operations of musical creativity as it takes place with music technologies.</p> <p>The practical projects set out to understand the relationship between technology and collaborative musical creativity by enacting it. Between 2009 and 2012, Middlewood Sessions (led by Dr Slater in collaboration with another producer, 25 musicians, a sound engineer and a visual artist) recorded a full-length album, which was released in February 2012 building on earlier releases. Since February 2011, Nightports (a collaboration between Dr Slater, another producer and a vocalist) have recorded and released three EPs featuring material originally derived from a self-imposed restriction: only sounds from a single vocalist can be used, though these may be subject to unlimited processes of manipulation. The music of both projects offers a summary of the interaction of technological, social and musical processes in the project studio, which constitutes a contribution to the audio culture from which the aesthetic circumscriptions were derived: jazz/dance/orchestral music and glitch/electronica respectively.</p> <p>The attached research projects were designed to capture the complex accrual of actions, interactions, attitudes and events that animate the grand arc of collaborative musical creativity. Interviews, diaries, participant observation reports, ethnographic-style reports of performances, textual and sonic artefacts, video footage, press reviews and radio interview transcripts constitute a corpus of data offering insight into the processes of the musical collaborations as played out in the project studio environment. No such data set previously existed. Alongside the publicly accessible musical artefacts, research outputs (for the academic community) to date include peer-reviewed conference papers, invited research seminars and a journal article. The research project has given rise to findings that allow nuanced descriptions of creative processes within a particular context (the project studio); these findings, along with the musical material, form the basis of the wider impact of the research. The products of the project are the artefacts DJs broadcast and young musicians can play – both valuable opportunities to enhance a wider understanding of music production processes and to contribute to music culture.</p>

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

References to Middlewood Sessions and Nightports are synonymous with Dr Slater in his role as creative director for both projects. All sound recordings and transcripts of conference papers/seminars can be supplied upon request.

1. Middlewood Sessions, 2012. *The Middlewood Sessions*. Middlewood Records MWS1101 (digital) [REF2].
2. Nightports, 2012. *Ports EP*. Middlewood Records MWR1201 (digital).
3. Nightports, 2013. *Nightports Acoustic*. Independent (digital and CD).
4. Slater, M. and Martin, A., 2012. A conceptual foundation for understanding musico-technological creativity. *Journal of Music, Technology and Education*, 5(1), pp. 59-76 [REF2].
5. Slater, M., 2012. The domestic project studio as a place for learning: informality, experimentalism and demonstrative exchange. Paper presented at the *International Festival of Innovations in Music Production and Composition*, Leeds College of Music.
6. Slater, M., 2012. A case study of collaborative music-making the project studio. Invited paper presented as part of the *Research Seminar Series at the University of Leeds, School of Music*.

*Evidence of Quality*

For artefacts in the popular music domain, evidence of quality exists in different forms from those in the academic domain. Indicators of quality may include reviews, sales figures, awards and commercial affiliations. These emblems of esteem can be interpreted as an endowment of quality by key figures in the industry or by the general listening public.

- Middlewood Sessions, *The Middlewood Sessions* (album) – Jazz Album of the Month in April 2012 and nominated for Jazz Album of the Year 2012; Wicked Jazz Sounds, Radio NL 6, Netherlands (equivalent in scope to BBC 6 Music in the UK)
- Middlewood Sessions, *The Middlewood Sessions* (album) – no. 14 in Albums of 2012 on Rte Pulse, Ireland; public vote
- Middlewood Sessions, *The Middlewood Sessions* – reviews in *Now Then Magazine* and online at *Birth of the Dew* (see section 5)

Nightports, 'Skywide' from *Nightports Acoustic* (EP) – released on the Mercedes-Benz *Mixed Tape* No. 53 (September 2013); c.100,000 downloads

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Music research with a practical element produces an artefact – the music – that can be experienced in several ways. It can be broadcast (implying a wide audience) and it can be played (implying a purposeful mode of engagement). The impact of this research project traverses both of these two conduits, each of which has distinctive characteristics in terms of reach and significance. One can reach a wide audience, numbering in the thousands, but detailed feedback about any effects on that audience is difficult to obtain. The other has a smaller, more localised audience, but produces rich feedback about the significance of that contact for each individual. Despite these varying qualities, when taken together, the impact of this research is an enhanced awareness of music production processes – how contemporary popular music is made – which is achieved through demonstration and explanation.

Broadcast

The music of Middlewood Sessions and Nightports has been broadcast around the world on specialist radio shows of varying types (FM, cable, digital, satellite, online-only) characteristic of contemporary patterns of music consumption. A selection includes: East Village Radio (New York), Bogaloo Radio (Vienna), Tru Thoughts (London), BLN.FM (Berlin), Basso Radio (Helsinki), KBCS 91.3 FM (Seattle), BBC Radio 1 and 6 Music (UK), and Sequence FM (France). Inclusion in the playlists of radio shows based in particular locales indicates a geographic reach that, although de-localised by online music platforms, represents communities far beyond the original context of production. Similarly, affiliation with multinational companies such as Mercedes-Benz via the *Mixed Tape* compilation carries the music far beyond its origins of making.

Broadcasts also provide opportunities for interviews in which the processes of making, as explored

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throughout the research project, can be explained to a wider listenership. In April 2012, Dutch national radio show Wicked Jazz Sounds featured an interview with Dr Slater about the processes of making the album (following the nomination for Jazz Album of the Month), reaching a listenership of c.11,000. Dr Slater also featured in an extended 20-minute interview on R   Pulse, a specialist online and FM radio station based in Dublin, which explored issues of musicianship, sociality, technical aspects of music production and the complexities of the contemporary music industry. This interview reached an audience of c.13,000 across digital and FM broadcasts, representing around 7.8% of the national listenership in Ireland.

Pedagogy

In November 2010, Dr Slater collaborated with Music in the Round (MITR) to provide a weekend-long workshop for string players and sound engineers. MITR promote a world-class series of concerts from their home in the Crucible Studio (Sheffield) and run innovative community education programmes. The remit of the collaboration was to give young players and technicians a realistic insight into a recording session, while enriching MITR's ongoing programme of community education. The weekend began with a series of improvisations and practical explorations, which led onto a day of recording followed by a public performance in the Crucible Studio. There were 20 participants aged 14-23 who came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds (16 musicians and 4 aspiring sound engineers), plus 3 professional instrumentalists and one technical specialist assisting.

This project links with the research described in section 2 in two ways. First, the musical material of the Middlewood Sessions project formed the basis of the improvisations and performance. Unpicking the components of the music gave participants insight into the detailed structuring principles of popular music. The public performance provided an opportunity to learn more about the norms and expectations of popular music performance. Second, the improvisation tasks were based on the processes of collaborative creativity that characterised the creation of the Middlewood Sessions album (and that were expounded for an academic audience in references 5 and 6, section 3). More than simply replicating the music, participants played out some of the strategies of generation, ideation, elaboration and refinement that were developed during the making of the album.

Music production processes are often designed to disguise traces of their presence. As such, the recording studio environment is often shrouded in mystery. Participants in this project gained valuable insight into what it is like to perform in relation with technology; technical participants gained a detailed understanding of particular technologies and the social aspects of running a recording session. The weekend enacted the technical, social and musical dimensions at the core of the underpinning research project. Detailed feedback was collected by MITR following the weekend; extracts included in section 5.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)Reviews

1. Now Then Magazine, [www.nowthenmagazine.com/issue-48/albums](http://www.nowthenmagazine.com/issue-48/albums)
2. Birth of the Dew, [www.birthofthedew.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/the-middlewood-sessions-2012](http://www.birthofthedew.wordpress.com/2012/02/22/the-middlewood-sessions-2012)

Individuals & Organisations

3. Music in the Round, Education and Outreach manager
4. Radio 6 Soul & Jazz, DJ and radio show manager
5. R   Pulse DJ
6. Neuland Herzer for Mercedes-Benz Mixed Tape

Audio & Documents

7. Music in the Round full report – confidential document available upon request; extracts:
  - ‘The recording has been a real privilege. It has been a really good insight into how these things are put together – you don't normally see that’ (Holly, 23, violin)
  - ‘I'd not used headphones before and hearing the mix in your earpiece along with the click track was really new’ (Brione, 14, cello)

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- 'We have been looking at how we record the group, what type of sound we want and how to fit it into the pre-recorded mix. We looked at all the mic settings we can use. It has also been hands-on setting up the microphones, setting up the musicians with headphones and checking the balance for the live performance. I've always wanted to do the recording side of it too' (Annie, 21, sound engineer)
- 'I feel that there is definitely a gap in provision for this type of event. Young musicians rarely get an opportunity to experience such an intensive and rewarding recording session in any setting. The skills I learnt from this weekend are invaluable and will benefit me for a long time to come. It was so enjoyable to work with such a friendly and talented group of people and it was an experience that I would love to be part of again' (Kate, 18, violin)

Audio for both radio interviews (Radio NL 6, Netherlands; R   Pulse, Ireland) available upon request.