

‘In the Torture Chamber’: Improvisation, recording, production and the collective imagination in artistic research

This session presents and discusses one improvised track from a set of 14 recorded in Coventry Cathedral in July 2021. These form a meta-narrative of Gaston Leroux’s novel *Le Phantôm de l’Opéra* (1910) which will be called *Les ombres du Phantôm*; implying shadows of ideas/themes/characters in the book. This track - *In the Torture Chamber* was recorded twice as a five-person collaboration and exploratory engagement between an improvising trio, an experimental recordist and a retrospective audio manipulator.

The question that animated this work was to explore how individual imaginations could shape one syncretic and collective imagination across time - an imagination that committed to advanced technical planning, employed spontaneous musical improvisation, and concluded with carefully crafted digital re-imagination to render the final artefact - a hybrid of the two performances.

Other questions that animated this research included finding an appropriate language that would form a meta-narrative of the book and how the organ (in a church) can interact and be extended by electronic manipulation. The process of engagement between the contributors formed a critical evaluation of the method, where processes on the day extended into discussions after, and the determination of the end product. Working in this way provided insight onto the practice of each individual, allowing both evolution and retrospective calibration to take place.

In this presentation each participant will speak for two minutes about what they imagined and what insights came from this practice in the space at this time, how they thought sound might be used, and what they understood from the end product for future practice.

- Professor Robert Sholl (organ) will first introduce how this track relates to and moves beyond Leroux’s story, and he will detail a psychoanalytical perspective (Hogle 2002; Žižek 2007 and 2016), and how this was imagined and crafted through the cathedral organ.
- Dr Anna McCready (soprano) will explain her approach to the psychology of the situation and experience, and her use of extreme vocal techniques in this collaboration (Anhalt, 1984).
- Andy Visser (saxophones and bass clarinet) will discuss his choice of timbres, textures and extended performance techniques.
- Dr Mike Exarchos will detail the numerous parallel approaches used to capture the idiosyncrasies of the performances and the cathedral’s acoustic.
- Professor Justin Paterson will describe how the production aesthetic was conceived and then realised by digital-audio-manipulation tools and advanced techniques.

The presentation will conclude with playback of the unique and disturbing final artefact.



Prof. Robert Sholl

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Robert Sholl teaches at The Royal Academy of Music and the University of West London. He has written extensively on twentieth-century music, including *Messiaen Studies*, and *James MacMillan Studies*, ed. with George Parsons (both Cambridge University Press, 2007 and 2021), *Contemporary Music and Spirituality* ed. with Sander van Maas (Routledge, 2017), and *The Feldenkrais Method in Creative Practice* (Bloomsbury, 2021), and on musical improvisation to film (published in Princeton's journal *Perspectives of New Music*); he is the editor of *Olivier*

Messiaen in Context (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), and is currently completing a biography of Messiaen for Reaktion's 'Critical Lives' series. Robert studied in Melbourne, then in Paris (with Olivier Latry, and at the Sorbonne, Paris IV), and finally in London (at King's College). In 2016-17 he played all of Messiaen's organ works at Arundel Cathedral, and he has given recitals at the St John's Smith Square, St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and twice at the Madeleine and at Notre-Dame de Paris.

Dr Anna McCready

Independent scholar

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Anna McCready studied viola and voice at the Royal College of Music. She went on to complete a Masters and PhD in Historical Musicology at King's, London, and a Teaching Fellowship at the University of Southampton. She has since taught academic studies at the RCM for more than ten years, and the history of vocal pedagogy at Trinity/Laban for four years. She is currently expanding her research interest in vocal history by exploring early twentieth-century vocal recordings. Anna has contributed a chapter to *Contemporary Music and Spirituality* (Routledge, 2017). Taught singing by Jennifer Smith, Anna has given recitals in London churches including St Bride's Fleet St, and St George's Hanover Square. Her repertoire includes late-nineteenth century French *chanson*, early-nineteenth century *bel canto* and Baroque *airs de cour*.



Dr Andy Visser

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Andy trained at Dartington College of Art and the Royal College of Music, London in the 1990s. He has been working with bands and ensembles since then as a saxophonist, keyboard and synthesiser player and musical director.

Andy is also involved with all things sound and, when not playing or writing, works as a professional sound designer and University researcher and educator.

Andy has been credited for music with BBC, ITV, Royal Opera House, English Theatre, Sony, Nokia, Dolby and Samsung.

As a founder member of the Radio Science Orchestra, Andy has also collaborated with Bruce Woolley (Video Killed the Radio Star) for over 25 years and they are currently involved in creating a live immersive music show together.

Andy recently formed the duo, Goldbeard, to take his ambient electronic piano compositions on the road. He is also due to release a new album 'A Nice Day Out' with thevhfband.uk in 2022.



Dr Mike Exarchos

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Michail Exarchos (a.k.a. Stereo Mike) is a hip-hop musicologist and award-winning rap artist (MTV Best Greek Act, 2008), with nominations for seven national video music awards and an MTV Europe Music Award. He is the Creative Director for music innovation company RT60 Ltd. Mike's research focuses on the intersection between vintage engineering technique and sample-based hip-hop production, and the research incorporates his fourth

solo album as Stereo Mike. The combined literary and musical output is forthcoming from Routledge/Focal Press in the form of his book, 'Reimagining sample-based Hip Hop: Making records within records'. Mike's writing has been published by Bloomsbury Academic, Routledge, Cambridge Scholars, Popular Music journal, the Journal of Popular Music Studies, and the Journal of Popular Music Education. His self-produced album 'Xli3h' has been included in the 30 Best Greek hip-hop albums of all time.



Justin Paterson

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Justin is Professor of Music Production at London College of Music, University of West London (UWL). His research has ranged from transient enhancement in multi-mic recordings through various papers on the musicology of record production, to two AHRC-funded projects developing interactive music playback with Warner Music Group. As part of the 'HAPPIE' consortium, he led the UWL team on a £1m Innovate-UK-funded project - to develop a novel music-production interface in mixed reality with tactile force-feedback.

Commercial research bid partners have included: BBC, Abbey Road Studios, Ninja Tune, Sony Interactive Entertainment, MelodyVR, Science Museum, Skywalker Sound, Ecco VR, 1.618 Digital, Blue Studios, Swedish Museum of Performing Arts.

Justin is co-chair of the Innovation in Music conference series - and with Routledge - is co-editor of both the associated books, and also *3D Audio*. He is a consultant to RT Sixty Ltd for the apps iDrumTune and Drummer ITP.