

A: I'M REALLY NOT SURE WE'VE HIT THE RIGHT NOTE HERE.

B: WELL UP TILL NOW WE'VE BEEN WHISTLING IN THE DARK. IT WON'T BE LONG UNTIL WE HAVE TO FACE THE MUSIC.

A: PLAYING IT BY EAR IS ALL VERY WELL, BUT I THINK WE OUGHT TO TAKE THE BULL BY THE HORNS AND JAZZ IT UP A BIT. LET'S PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS.

B: YOU'RE CERTAINLY CHANGING YOUR TUNE - DON'T FORGET IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN DRUMMING UP MORE SUPPORT YOU MAY NOT BE IN TUNE WITH EVERYONE ELSE.

C: DON'T FORGET THE GRANT EITHER - HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER CALLS THE TUNE.

A: YOU MEAN WHERE THERE'S MUCK THERE'S BRASS!

B: YOUR TROUBLE IS YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BLOW YOUR OWN TRUMPET.



Bristol Musicians ©OP



Unpopular Music

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Thanks to Annie Menter for typing and to Kathy Menter for enduring ~~innumerable~~ meetings.

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This magazine has been produced to coincide with BMC's festival of improvised music 'Unpopular Music'. Some of the articles will serve as discussion papers for the two formal talks. The subjects of these are the state of improvised music in Britain and the politics of improvised music. We hope in fact that all the pieces included here will stimulate informal discussion at the festival.

We hope further that a second purpose has been realised - that of providing some documentation of our Co-op - in other words "the story so far".

Because not all the articles were originally conceived for this magazine there is some duplication and repetition of themes between the various pieces. However, rather than editing the articles into a coherent whole, we judged that this repetition itself would indicate our preoccupations in a way that the words in isolation couldn't.

Front Cover : Will Menter at home (photo Willy Guy)
Back Cover : Breton folk musicians

UNPOPULAR MUSIC IN BRISTOL?

This article, written by Ian Menter is an extended version of one appearing in Bristol Voice, May 1978 with the same title.

In the fourth issue of Bristol Voice back in August '75 there was a piece called "Bristol Jazz", written by my brother Will. Those were not only early days for the Voice but also for the Musicians' Co-op, and at that time our main musical activity was in the field perhaps best described as progressive jazz.

During the two and a half years that have elapsed the central area of activity has gradually shifted to what is generally known as improvised or free music. It is important to note here that the musical policy of the Co-op is determined by its membership at any given time, and its membership is open. It remains the Co-op's basic aim to give support to any musics that receive little or no exposure through the normal commercial or establishment channels. Improvised music is certainly one such music.

WHAT IS IMPROVISED MUSIC?

My dictionary defines "improvise" thus: "make or do on the spur of the moment, especially with makeshift materials; compose or perform according to spontaneous fancy without preparation".

These definitions are more or less appropriate for improvised music but they are not sufficient (and makeshift materials are used by a small minority of musicians only). "Spur of the moment" and "spontaneous fancy" apply in one sense but improvised music does have a history and in its contemporary state in Britain relates in quite conventional ways to specific musical traditions. In fact, most musics, at least in their periods of initial creation, have included elements of improvisation, from medieval music through Beethoven's piano concertos to Cage's graphic scores or Stockhausen's compositions, and from African drumming groups to British folk music and rock (but not "pop"). In the West the improvisatory element has often been suppressed as the music is ossified into a received form and thus "guaranteed".

It was the jazz tradition that, in the twentieth century, first gave improvisation a central prominence. In the U.S.A. contemporary improvisation is more or less inextricably associated with jazz, whereas in Europe, with only a derivative jazz tradition, improvisation as a musical form in itself can be seen as a recent development (in the last ten to fifteen years). It is neither jazz nor straight music nor is it rock music, although it draws on all three and other musics too.

As well as this factor of historical development each individual improvising musician has a unique biography which will have a determining influence on the music they produce. This however does not necessarily make it predictable.

So, "spur of the moment" and "spontaneous fancy" may seem to be correct descriptions of what appears to happen in improvised music, but they are in fact misleading.

UNPOPULAR MUSIC?

The audience for this music in this country is very small indeed - much smaller than in many continental countries. The reasons for this are complex and no doubt relate to national music traditions, the relative dominance of major companies in the art/entertainment industry, as well as to national ideologies about art.

The fact that our festival is called Unpopular Music has already irritated some of the musicians we have invited to attend, who feel such a title denigrates the form. For my own part I feel that the fact of its unpopularity in this country, which cannot be disputed, actually helps to protect the radical elements of the music and the musicians' integrity. The music is too young to be able to receive massive exposure without becoming incorporated and defused by the dominant culture.

If any of the popular music papers or major record companies were to adopt the music at this stage it might well become a form as meaningless, at worst, as Eurovision pop. At the moment, such recordings and journalism as does exist is largely in the hands of the musicians themselves.

It should be said that the case of American improvisors, such as Leo Smith, is rather different. While the actual music he plays in the States seems to have little more support than that of musicians in Britain, he is without doubt part of a popular tradition - jazz and blues - whereas British musicians are generally not.

IS IMPROVISED MUSIC SUBVERSIVE?

Some big claims are made for improvised music by its practitioners. Many of the musicians are socialists or anarchists or libertarians and there is increasing discussion, partly fostered by the Music for Socialism group, about improvising as a political activity.

To what extent can this largely non-vocal music be a force for social change? My personal view is that it could become a considerable force, but not necessarily that it will. There are two ways in which I believe improvising music may be a subversive activity.

Firstly, the music can be seen as a creative human response to the cultural hegemony of the late capitalist period in which we live. This view rejects most other kinds of contemporary music as passive cogs in the efficiently stultifying cultural machinery. Most music is very predictable. A record heard 10, 50 or 100 times is the same every time. Improvised music is not predictable. At its most challenging it shocks the senses but, at the same time, it reminds us all that our conditions of existence as individual members of a particular economic system are not predictable.

Alternatively, or additionally, improvised music may be seen as an exceptionally accessible form of music. There is a school of thought which says that anyone, once they have "removed their blinkers" or "loosed their ideological fetters", can do it. Technical ability on your instrument merely sets limits on your vocabulary - it does not affect your ability to play spontaneously, your ability to improvise. Thus, here is a form of music which offers everyone the opportunity to become a musician, i.e. a creator of music. The majority of people are primarily consumers of music, buying records, tapes, listening to broadcasts and even attending live performances. The possibility that the majority might become creators rather than consumers poses a considerable threat to the Leisure Industry, that amorphous collection of huge multinational conglomerates which offers essentially ephemeral or superficial experiences, the profit-making methods of which are based largely on the "star system". The threat to this industry is that music would become a community activity rather than a commodity for mass consumption.

As yet the improvised music scene does itself contain several contradictions - such things as the financial organisation of the music and the performer/audience relationship. These are problems which must be sorted out before there is any real likelihood that the full political impact of the music can be realised.

THE CO-OP - A HISTORY OF SOME OF THE SIGNIFICANT EVENTS & IDEAS.

Prehistory

I think it was Bob Downing who first voiced the idea, having returned to Bristol after a couple of years in Liverpool. Why not a Co-op? In a way the idea was obvious, but when there wasn't one it wasn't quite clear what it would be. Which space would it fill? Would it be an association of bands or individuals? Would it try to canvass the support of established musicians in Bristol or set itself up separately? Could it call itself Bristol Musicians Co-op without representing the whole scene? What would it do? Put on gigs? But for who? Just for members or other bands as well? How much of the bands administrative work could be done collectively? Would it try to make music or simply help music that was already there?

None of the questions were really answered but it was clear that there were plenty of things a Co-op could do and people probably had different reasons for being involved in it. Bob Downing, for instance, by voicing his admiration for AMM, indicated that he would like a structure for developing long term musical associations. For me, it was more a matter of getting the music out to the public, of showing that there was something serious going on. As an environment for creating any new music Bristol had proved to be basically unsympathetic. In general it seems that audiences hadn't actually heard enough music from the so-called 'jazz' 'Black Music' improvised music traditions to make the mental link with our music. Our music seemed to most people to be meaningless - which was not the situation we were happy with at the time. Retrospectively I see this as being to do with 'jazz' being a foreign music - so-called 'progressive rock' took away most of the young student audiences because here was a form of music that was mainly indigenous and could be appreciated at first hand rather than by occasional visits from overseas stars. Nevertheless we were inspired mainly (I think) by the British development of this foreign music - the various musicians who used to play at the Old Place and The Little Theatre Club, including Mike Westbrook, Chris McGregor, Surman, Osborne, SME, Tippet and by the Americans that they were inspired by, particularly John Coltrane and Pharoah Sanders.

There were two local bands that were important predecessors to the Co-op - Magma and Plasma, Magma was co-led by Mike Gray (guitar) and Danny Sheppard (tenor, sop) and also included Ted Brewster (bass guitar), Jim White (drums), Mike Whitehead (trombone), Ted Bayliss (trumpet) and Ian Menter (alto). The music was an original blend of early jazz-rock during that short time around 1970 when it seemed to some of us that it might be a progressive form of music. A genuine feeling of openness - before people had either obliterated their memories of 'Trane or mutated him into a commodity merchant or a God. Here was a band of jazz musicians who were excited at playing rock and at composing their own music. Gray was into developing his sound through foot-pedals, Sheppard the strongest soloist in the band was extending his very personal and powerful melodic playing in contrast to high harmonic squeaking climaxes: and collectively there was always a tension there that was never quite resolved, which made the music very satisfying.

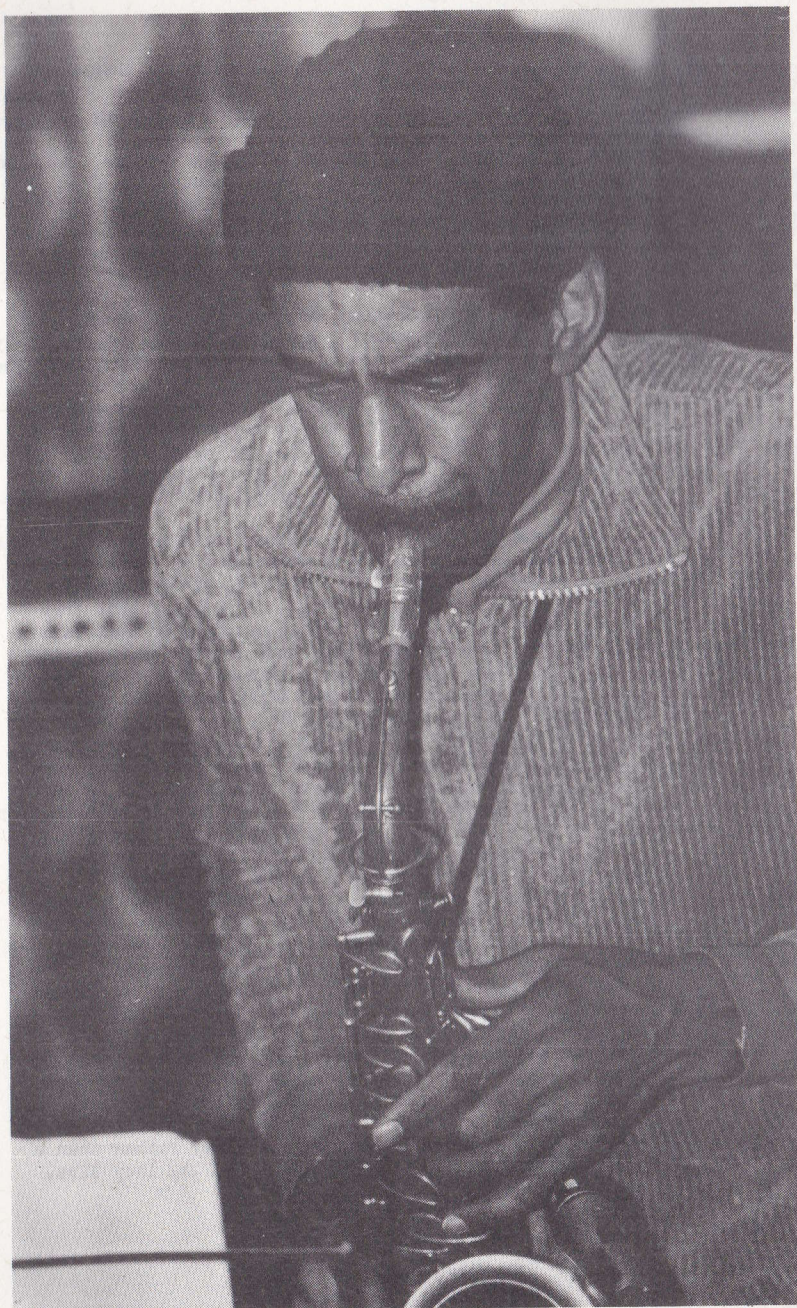
Plasma was Ian Menter (alto), Will Menter (tenor, trumpet), Dan Altmann (piano, perc, occasional trumpet (Alan Skidmore once asked 'What the fuck's an occasional trumpet?')) Ted Brewster (bass), Bob Helson (drums). Freer and

more loose than Magma, Plasma developed the form where you use themes and structures in the middle of improvisations and the shape develops organically and established the principle that whatever you do can be valid, using many small instruments and uninstruments.

The first synthesis of the two bands came in 1972 when I wrote some music for a mixed-media show called "Brainbow" which I suppose was some sort of predecessor to Danny Sheppard's big band 'Bullit' which started in 1974. Bullit was really the classic band of the period because being an 11-piece band it stimulated a social and musical interaction between musicians of different styles and aesthetics that was very productive (see article by Willie Guy).

Out of these bands and open improvisation sessions at the Lansdown and Arts Centre, all of which I feel were really spawned by that extraordinarily expansive period for creativity in the western world, the late 60s, came the relationships that were to form the basis for the Co-op. In fact in some ways the Co-op was simply a formalisation of things that were happening anyway. People sometimes assume that Co-ops are formed to make it easier to get grants, but in my experience this is rarely the case. In the States for instance the AACM had been going for 10 years before they got a grant and in our case we didn't even consider applying until a year after we started.

It was Jane Wells at the Arnolfini who was responsible for providing the opportunity to start the Co-op in January 1975, when she offered a series of lunchtime gigs and so a meeting was called and the Co-op was formed. (Surprisingly there was no argument over the name.) The idea right from the start was to include all unpopular music and all unpopular musicians but it was clear that members' tastes varied from very narrow to very wide. This was seen as an advantage - an opportunity to expand our own musical tastes as well as those of our audiences. It has turned out that all the members who have stayed with the Co-op from the start have been involved with improvisation (but not exclusively). In fact it has been interesting that often when musicians have left the Co-op their music has become more unimprovisational at the same time, so there seems to be some way in which the actual structure of the Co-op is linked with the nature of improvisation, but I'm not clear what it is. It's not just a matter of music being collective because there are lots of other musics which are. On the face of it a co-operative organisation would seem valuable for any music because it gives musicians more control over their music and their lives, and who doesn't want that? But perhaps at the expense of your personal instrumental practice time (which also gives you more control over your music!). Or even at the expense of developing one's own "career"? Some Co-op members might be making more and better music if their energies had been put into their personal projects rather than the Co-op. But this seems to produce a different music. So far the Bristol Co-op's "road to music" has been to take the music very seriously, but not to live only for music. The strength of the Co-operative idea should be that it enables you to make sense of your whole life rather than distorting other parts of your life "for the sake" of music. This is based on the romantic idea that music is the expression of the whole person in society rather than a technical gift given to a few people independently of the way they live.



John Tchicai at the Bathurst Tavern : November 1976
(photo Willy Guy)

Another reason could be that in many musical circles it is very unhip to talk about it and the Co-op denies this. One present Co-op member still feels the need to comment every now and then that music is more important than meetings. Of course it is.....

So the backbone of the Co-op is free improvised music (less and less jazz-derived as time goes on) but there have been other musics too. For these the Co-op has served more short term needs. For instance several young rock groups have done their first gigs for the Co-op and after a few months involvement have gone on (graduated?) to the conventional pub/club/dance circuit. A traditional jazz rehearsal band has done gigs as has the Hotwells Music Workshop which is a collection of amateur classical musicians.

Relationship of the Co-op to the market place

(In Cambridge the Co-op was on Bridge Street about half a mile from the market place just by Magdalene Bridge - you could either go straight up Sidney Street and then turn right into Market Street or you could turn right into Market Street or you could turn right into St. John's Street by the Round Church and go into Trinity Street and turn left into Market Street - or else take a short cut through Rose Crescent.)

Old habits die hard - especially when they are grounded in economic fact - and in spite of having produced convincing arguments against allowing the market to affect our music we have still found we like playing to people and have found ourselves taking various actions not on musical grounds. Occasional 'star names' from London have been imported to play with the local lads - with varying success. Audiences normally come and the idea was that they'd turn up next time when there was no star attraction - but they never did. There normally wasn't enough money to pay the star and the local musicians, so the latter ended up playing for nothing - the justification being that they would benefit from the experience of playing with these 'stars'. But you don't learn much in one night, and we've now stopped putting on those gigs unless there are very good musical reasons for doing so and all the musicians can be paid properly. Visits by John Tchicai and Derek Bailey are examples of successful ventures of this kind.

Fairly early on the principle was established that musicians from outside Bristol should only be given gigs if they can offer some return gig in their city, but in practice this has been hard to apply. Most other Co-ops are younger than us and haven't really developed the facilities to put on gigs by other people so it seemed too isolationist a policy to insist on this principle.

Venues have been a problem. Because we came out of the jazz thing we started off renting pub rooms to play in. But as time passed the music was moving away from jazz, we started reducing our alcohol consumption and we found ourselves developing ideological objections to pub landlords. So on being thrown out of the Bristol Flyer we moved to the Arts Centre (cellar bar) which other members had ideological objections to, (Red Balune managed to get themselves bannned from there by upsetting the management and visiting art lovers.) Now the policy is to choose the venue to suit the music and we are presently using Arts Centres, pubs, church halls, schools and outside.

About 18 months ago we made it our main priority to find a permanent

home for the Co-op as the London Collective has done. We were fairly well advanced on one premises when the deal fell through and since this was at a time of declining activity for the Co-op we left this project in suspension. But it is still a long term aim to do this.

Of course you're never really out of the market place and in this society one doesn't want to be, because being out of the market place has almost become synonymous with being out of the community - which is to say playing to no-one. So much of our culture has become merely (or perhaps I should say principally) the selling of commodities that it is sometimes difficult to remember what culture and artistic communication is really about. This is a problem which the Co-op hasn't really tackled yet, but to my mind it is the most fundamental problem facing all musicians. Not 'How does one operate outside the market?' (because that is only possible by changing the whole society) but 'How does one base one's music primarily on personal and community relationships rather than on market relationships?' It's not a new problem and I think there have been some musicians who have gone some way to making their own solutions to it (Lol Coxhill, John Stevens, the Hackney and Islington Song Workshop). I see the history of the Co-op so far as a first stage (prelude) to this - a necessary one. What we have done is to provide a framework for musicians to explore the nature of their own individual and collective musicalities - we've given ourselves the chance to pursue particular lines of music as far as we care to develop them. And it must be stated clearly that this is a tremendous liberation and that an imaginative leap is required even to accord oneself the self respect necessary to do this. But the really difficult point comes next. How to construct a bridge between this music and society - how to make it useful - how to use the experience gained in the Coop in relationship to the outside world?

I find these problems very difficult to talk about. They've traditionally been the province of the individual artist to rationalise for himself, and perhaps the usual solution is explained in terms of a dichotomy between 'Art' and 'Popularity' or 'sincerity' and 'communication'. But there must be another way and again I don't have room to explore it here, the main thing being to suggest that there are stages involved in the life of the Co-op and that the next stage might be very different from the last.

Stages have already been visible. The initial liberation gave rise to a hive of activity. Everyone became a leader. People found they did actually have ideas for doing things a little bit differently - for writing, or organising, or disorganising - and during the first two years of the Co-op there were many short-lived inter-related bands. A lot of coming and going and stylistic changes. In the last year however there has been increasing specialisation and stability. Areas have been defined and occupied by different groups. Most of us are actually concentrating our efforts in a smaller number of playing situations. Musical intentions have become clearer and the possibilities and limits of interaction and collectivity have been perceived (but not yet fixed).

I see this festival as being the culmination of this first stage and hope that after it we'll be able to see more clearly how to move on to the second stage which will, I hope, be more to do with establishing strong links with other places outside Bristol and with other activities within Bristol.

Bands and the Co-op

Rather than being a collection of individuals or a guild of band leaders the Co-op has always been associated with particular bands. Many people find talking boring and it seems it's difficult to arrive at the necessary commitment for attending meetings regularly without having a social or musical relationship with some of the other members outside the actual Co-op meetings. Playing with people in bands seems the commonest way to do this. Bullit's importance has already been mentioned. Of this the two Menters, Mulligan, Langford, Woolard and Franklin were members. Other important bands have been Fragments (organised by John Eaves), Wind and Fingers and later on Trilectic (I. Menter, Helson, Williams), Both Hands Free (W. Menter, Mulligan, Langford, Helson) and Both Hands Free (W. Menter, Helson, Langford). Conversely it has seemed much easier to form bands exclusively from members of the Co-op rather than to do a mix of Co-op and non-Co-op. Trilectic and Both Hands Free were all Co-op. You have the advantage of knowing that members will take a creative attitude to the music and you can count on a certain amount of commitment. In fact most of the recent bands have been formed as much on the basis of commitment as on musical ideas. It has become clear that there are certain things you can only do with a certain level of commitment and there are other things that you can manage at a lower level. So what has happened is that the people who are prepared to rehearse twice a week and put time into talking and hustling go in one band, the people who want to rehearse only once a week or for specific gigs go in another, and those who want to play only for audiences go in another. And the person who is prepared to devote all his free time to playing goes in all of them. But there are musical differences too and it is partly the contradiction between musical ideas and levels of commitment that has provided the dynamic within bands (see Bridges in Bristol). This is the result of working in a non-metropolitan situation without a large body of musicians to draw upon and in Bristol the person who is economically and socially stable as well as being really serious about the music is a rarity.

So I believe it reasonable to say that in a smaller city there is likely



'Wind and Fingers' : February 1975
(l. to r.) Will Menter, Mark Langford, Mike Whitehead, Ian Menter,
Steve Mulligan, John B. Woolard, Bob Helson. (photo Annie Menter)

to be more stylistic difference within a band. And of course some people like that sort of thing and others don't. Also when it's not a bread and butter situation there are likely to be more groups without proper leaders. And of course some people like that sort of thing and others don't.....

Workshops

(Ron Jones has a very nice one in Batheaston. It's long and narrow and right on the A4. He used to let me go and cut up chipboard there.)

Are a strength at the moment. Actually the first Co-op session ever was an all day Sunday workshop at the Arnolfini. Their function varies - that one was a getting to know each other session. There was a series at Lock-leaze School which was for the kids and then one at the Dockland Settlement which it was hoped would bring new members in by giving them a chance to actually play. An improvisation workshop is now run by Mark Langford and Bob Helson at Durdham Park School which seems to do what the Dockland one should have done and also gives people who are already members a chance to get into new areas. Workshops should be an important part of the next stage.

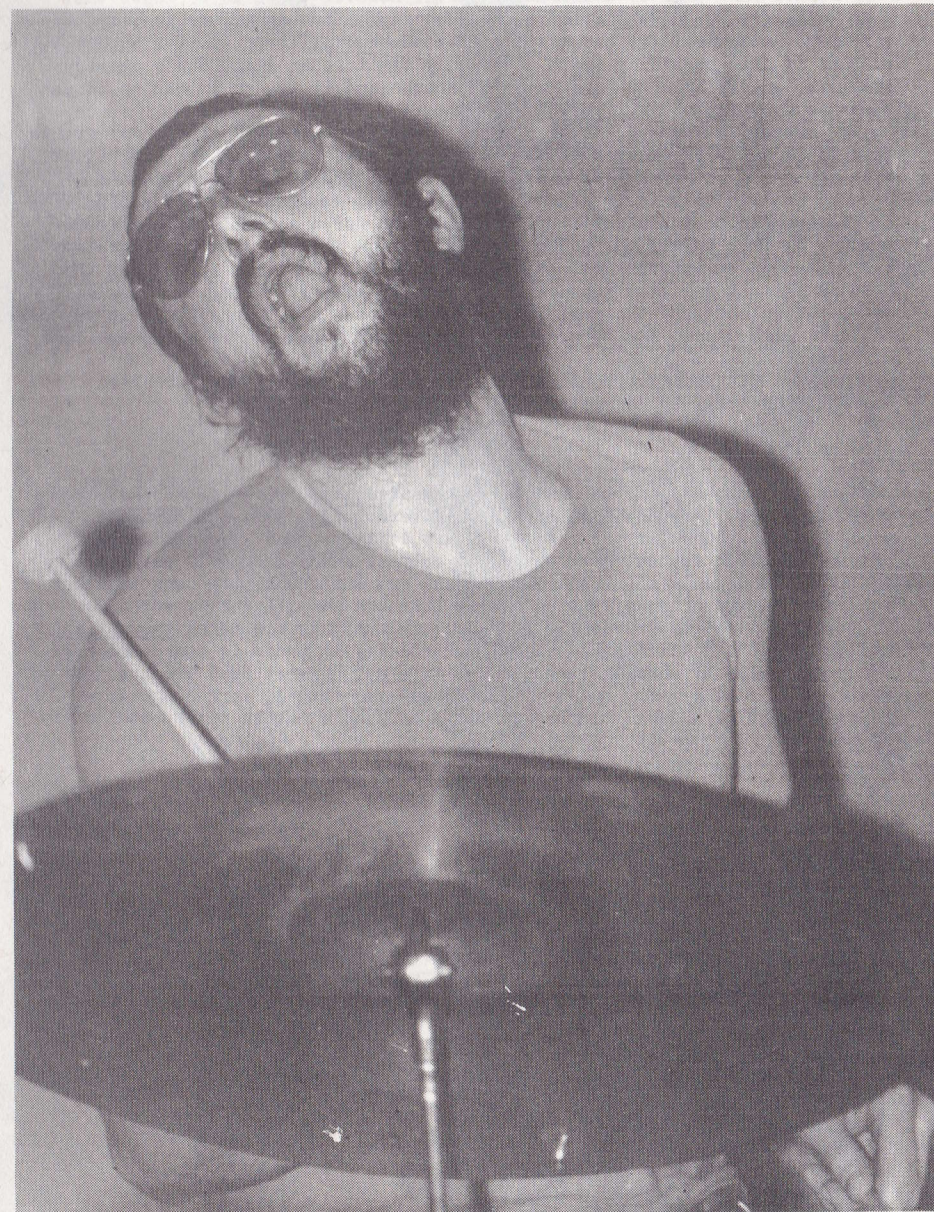
Grants

At first the main problem was how to apply. We knew of the existence of South West Arts, but that was about it. Tracking them down was difficult. Letters were written but not answered, phone calls were made, appointments were broken (due to the ill health of the particular officer we were trying to track down). Eventually we found out that it was no use just writing and asking for money - money was only given in certain ways - and only for 'professional' artists. We tried to explain that a grant would help us become professional but without it there was no way. At the time we had the impression that the music panel was anxious not to 'crowd out' the already established full time professionals by subsidising part time professionals. Perhaps it was the influence of the Musicians' Union but they seemed as much concerned with 'professional' status as with musical standards. (In fact they identified the two things.) Ironically a crucial factor in our legitimisation for SWA seemed to be the central Arts Council awarding me a composition grant for a piece commissioned by the Arnolfini (Wind and Fingers) and when we applied for a grant of £1542 for the Co-op in February 1976 we were surprised to be awarded £500.

In 1977 we applied for £1000 and were awarded £700. In 1978 we split our application up and asked for £850 for concerts, £1100 for the festival and £550 for weekly workshops. So far we've only heard about the concert grant for which we've been awarded £800.

The situation has definitely improved with South West Arts. They now have at least one person on the music panel who is familiar with our activity and is an active supporter of improvised music and this year they actually invited us to address them which suggests they are taking the music seriously.

Of course RAA meetings are private and you have to construct your image of them from sparse clues so it is difficult to assess whether our initial



John Stevens : Bathurst Tavern, November 1976
(photo Willy Guy)

feeling of hostility coming from them was actual or imagined. At that time they seemed like part of a different world. However there is no doubt that they are largely ignorant about improvised music. But ignorance is very different from hostility and must be treated very differently. The surest way to turn it into hostility is to mistakenly treat it as such. State subsidy should be susceptible to democratic pressures and it is our intention to use these in good faith.

One recurring theme of debate in the Co-op is whether we should let grants affect our activity or whether they should be used to fund those activities that are going on anyway. In general the latter policy has been adopted because we have felt it important that the Co-op shouldn't become exclusive - it must always be a platform for musicians and not a selective promotional agency. So this is why the Co-op has not adopted the £25 minimum suggested by the London Musicians' Collective. Again it's not a rigid policy and the fact is that in the last year we have slightly reduced the number of gigs we've put on and paid the musicians slightly more. But this is more in response to the way the music has developed (as explained elsewhere) than to the fact of subsidy.

Also the fact must be admitted that the grants we have had have been enormously helpful in maintaining our activity.

Closing thought

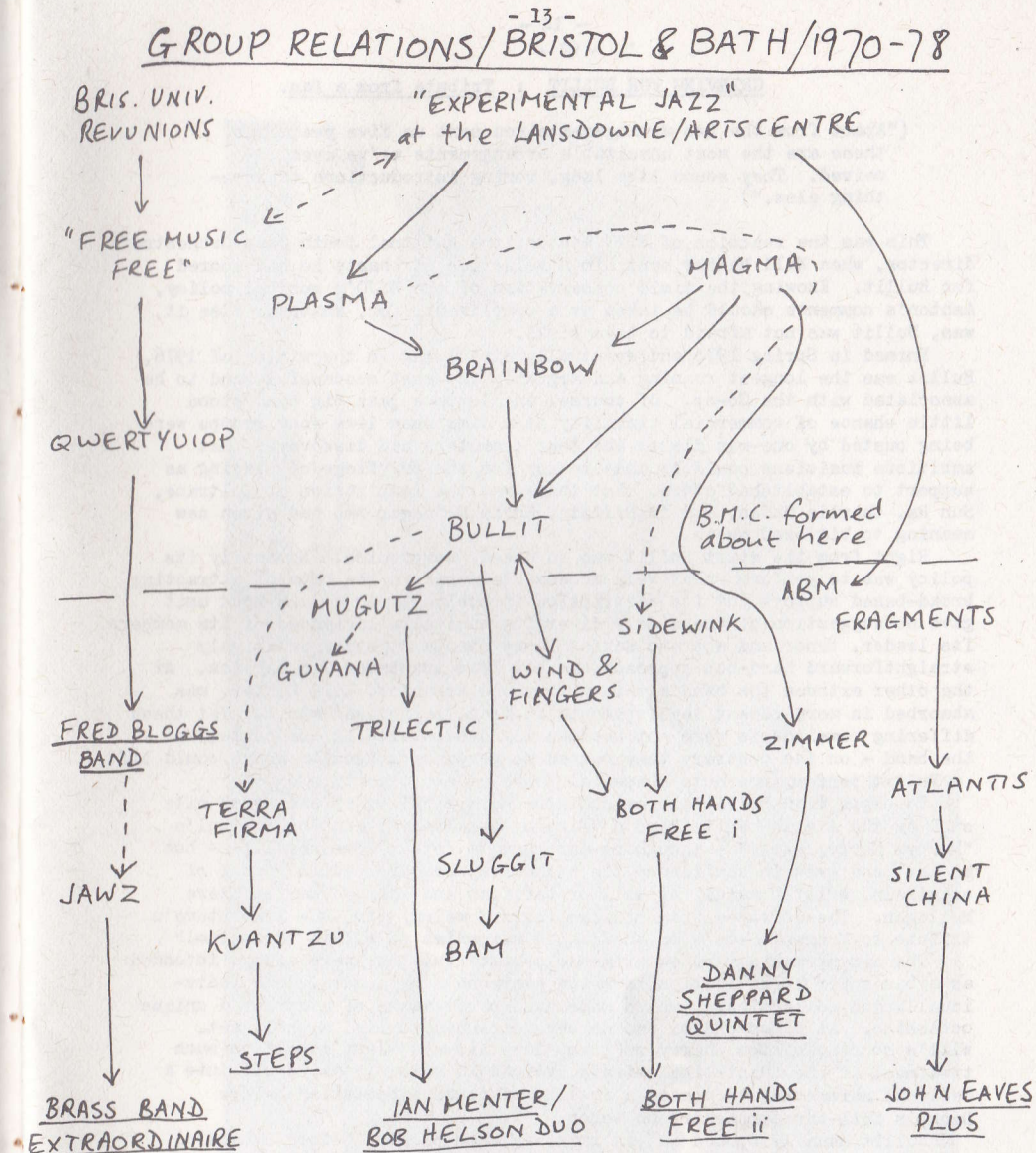
Several musicians in the past have suggested that improvisation as practised in Europe is a new form of music different from jazz and European concert music. But over the last few years it seems that more and more people have been listening to music not only as sound in itself but also in the way it's organised - how the musicians and audiences have come together and how this is reflected in the sounds that are made. In other words part of the meaning that has previously been felt in music is now being thought about and analysed. A genuine egalitarian collectivity in music is now considered a supreme value by many listeners. Does this not suggest that the new form of music is in fact growing out of collectives? And this in turn suggests a re-evaluation of musical history in terms of a more subtle interpretation of sound.

Footnote



Will Menter - May 1st 1978

GROUP RELATIONS/BRISTOL & BATH/1970-78



NOTES

1. Not all these groups are "Co-op bands".
2. Underlined groups are the ones still functioning.
3. — Strong links — — — Weak links
4. Dates are approximate.

GRIEVING FOR BULLIT : Tribute from a fan.

("Apart from the two arrangements you sent us five years ago, these are the most unsuitable arrangements we've ever received. They sound like long, boring introductions to something else.")

This was the reaction of Bill Ashton, the National Youth Jazz Orchestra's director, when Will Menter sent him a selection of charts he had scored for Bullit. Knowing the timid conservatism of the NYJO's musical policy, Ashton's comments should be taken as a compliment, for, whatever else it was, Bullit was not afraid to take risks.

Formed in Spring 1974 and eventually dissolving in the winter of 1976, Bullit was the longest running and arguably the most successful band to be associated with the Co-op. Of course, an 11-piece jazz big band stood little chance of commercial viability at a time when live rock groups were being ousted by one-man discos and tour promoters had discovered that ambitious musicians could be made to pay for the privilege of playing as support to established stars. But there was the inspiration of Coltrane, Sun Ra, Charlie Haden, and in Britain, Chris McGregor who had given new meaning to big band music.

Right from the start Bullit was an uneasy compromise. Nominally its policy was to perform relatively accessible music in the hope of attracting broad-based support but its description in publicity as a jazz-rock unit gave no suggestion of the widely diverging musical allegiances of its members. Its leader, tenor and soprano saxist Danny Sheppard, had a relatively straightforward hard-bop approach, as had lead trumpeter Ted Bayliss. At the other extreme the band's main writer and arranger, Will Menter, was absorbed in more recent developments in free, improvised music. Yet these differing commitments were not necessarily destructive in the context of the band - on the contrary they seemed to generate a tension which could lift a Bullit performance onto a special plane of excitement.

To begin with Bullit's book contained a sprinkling of jazz-rock hits such as the Average White Band's "Pick up the Pieces" and Joe Zawinul's "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy" - though re-arranged to inject some new life - but as the band grew in confidence the standards were dropped in favour of originals, written mainly by Will or baritone and soprano saxist Steve Mulligan. These ranged from straightforward melody pieces - like Steve's tribute to Mongezi Feza - to the jagged harmonies of Will's "Meconium."

The arrangements were sometimes elaborate but they were always intended as a basis for improvisation in which everyone took a turn, both individually and collectively, which made each performance of a number a unique occasion. At times one or two numbers expanded to fill a whole set. Will's scoring of Don Cherry's "Trans-love Airways" lent itself to such treatment as the chant-like refrain, voiced in unison, tailed off into a delicate shimmering to create a feeling of tense expectation before Danny's full-throated entry on tenor.

Bullit usually opened out in this way when playing before a handful of devotees and the relaxed atmosphere of what was almost a band practice could produce an exhilarating session. When exposed to larger, unfamiliar audiences the band seemed to waver and draw into itself and consequently never matched the critical acclaim given to Will Menter's 7-piece unit



Bob Helson and Danny Sheppard (photo Willy Guy)

'Wind and Fingers', which proved capable of rising to the big occasion at its ICA and Arncliffe gigs. Yet, ultimately, it was the demoralisation caused by playing repeatedly to only a handful of people that aggravated the tensions within Bullit and led to its final dissolution.

Small audiences need not destroy a band. A case in point is 'Both Hands Free', prepared for a long guerrilla campaign to establish its own uncompromising brand of music. The comparison is unfair for the cohesion and loyalty possible in a trio are harder to create in a much larger unit without a similar musical approach being shared by the members or else a dominant leader whose charisma transforms the band into an extension of his own personality. Neither of these conditions was true of Bullit.

Danny Sheppard was one of those rarities - a provincial star; though seldom moving from his home base in Bath, he had won a sizeable reputation among his fellow musicians far beyond. It had been his idea to assemble a big band but he had no wish to be a dictator. His strength was as a soloist rather than as a musical director and his response to dissent was to abdicate the leadership.

The unity of Bullit was undermined in various ways. It did not help that members were not at the same stage in their musical careers. Danny and Ted were seasoned veterans with their own distinctive personal styles but the younger musicians were still searching and experimenting. This magnified the more fundamental problem of different approaches which was as liable to surface on-stage as off. A gutsy blues solo could be followed by one that wandered right away from the given key and time signature and then something like a tug-of-war was liable to develop as an attempt was made to re-assemble the original changes.

This conflict extended into the writing too. Will's adventurous arrangements sometimes puzzled those with a more direct attitude and consequently these numbers needed more time to rehearse than was generally available. Again the complex logistics of big band organisation did not help. But - as with contrasting soloing styles - disagreements over arrangements could be beneficial. Almost in disgust, Will produced a couple of charts reminiscent of Mike Gibbs but was pleased with the final result and "Greentwist - the Ideal Garden Twine" became one of Bullit's most reliable standards.

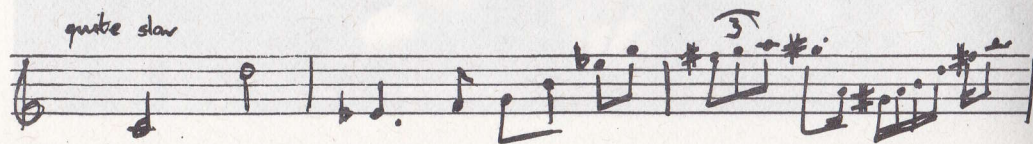
But the real problem was not in the music but in Bullit's failure to attract a steady following. This was partly due to difficulties in finding suitable venues but ultimately it remains a mystery. I shared the feelings of some Spanish fans who came to the last gigs in the chilly and depressing Green Room Club. They simply could not understand why one of the most original and exciting big bands in Britain was playing to perhaps a dozen fans.

Bullit's achievements were limited but its potential was enormous and it is a real tragedy that the unique combination of shouting ensembles and powerful soloing are no more to be heard. Perhaps it's not out of the question that Bullit might reform - but then, so might the Beatles.

Willy Guy - April 1978

DLB 1

quite slow



Handwritten musical notation on page 17, featuring several staves with various annotations and musical symbols.

- Staff 1:** Labeled "ALTO SAX" and "ECHO SOUNDER". It begins with a circled 'S' and a key signature change to Bb. The notation includes a 3/4 time signature and various note values.
- Staff 2:** Continues the melody with various note values and accidentals.
- Staff 3:** Labeled with a boxed 'B' and 'C'. It features a sequence of notes with a 'b' (flat) and a 'C' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 4:** Labeled with a boxed 'C' and 'D'. It continues the melody with various note values and accidentals.
- Staff 5:** Labeled "SOLOS" and "4". It features a sequence of notes with a '4' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 6:** Labeled "22" and "Brainstrain". It features a sequence of notes with a '22' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 7:** Labeled "Will Menter". It features a sequence of notes with a 'Will Menter' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 8:** Labeled "4 any key". It features a sequence of notes with a '4' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 9:** Labeled "x4 changing key each time". It features a sequence of notes with a 'x4' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 10:** Labeled "B nbs: rhythm:". It features a sequence of notes with a 'B' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 11:** Labeled "2 #0". It features a sequence of notes with a '2' (Clef) symbol.
- Staff 12:** Labeled "rhythm:". It features a sequence of notes with a 'rhythm' (Clef) symbol.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF A MUSICAL WEEKEND

by Ian Menter

This auto-review covers a weekend including three musical events - the Bristol Musicians' Co-operative's boat trip from Bath to Bristol (Sat. August 21st 10.30 am to 5pm), a performance by Bullit at the Bristol Flyer (Sat. at 8pm) and a non-performance by Bullit at the Ashton Court Free Community Festival in Bristol (Sun. August 22nd 1 to 2pm).

Angus crying - Saturday am. quiet of Montpelier
bacon frying
ring Kim, Bill coming
Anna sobbing, Jen rowing
Harriet quiet.

Van shaking sides rattling joints squeaking
station sounds in a diesel region.
Two spare tickets - Who's coming?
Train or van?
Crowds gathering people hurrying
We're going(oh, sun shining)

The Boat Trip

About 50 members and friends of BMC left Bath aboard the narrow boat Redshank, heading downstream on the River Avon towards Bristol, 12 miles away.

Bob Helson set up his drums in the front section of the boat and much of the music was played in this vicinity. The quietly chugging diesel engine was right at the back. The first notes were played by Angus Menter who started hitting the drums with an even pulse of about half a second duration. Later in the day he was joined by Benjamin Downing in a percussion duet.

Amongst the adult musicians there was an underlying conflict about what to play. Steve Mulligan suggested that people who knew songs should play them. In this strain tunes like 'Blue Monk', 'Summertime' and 'Night in Tunisia' were heard. The best moment was in the afternoon when, with Steve Mulligan's baritone saxophone playing the bass part, Ted Bayliss got out his big band trumpet to blast out 'St. Thomas'.

Another strain was that we shouldn't talk about what to play but just play. Thus, when saxophones and drums stopped playing 'Summertime' at the front of the boat the strains of Bob Ormerod blowing harmonica and shouting the blues amidstships was revealed. Later he was accompanied on second harmonica by Bob Downing. These two also played quite a lot of saxophone during the day.

The third idea was that this was the ideal context for free music - a captive audience, proximity to nature, only ducks, cows and fish to upset

In the end it was the environment rather than any ideology that created the best music of the trip. And it is perhaps significant that this environment was urban rather than rural. Coming into Bristol we passed under several bridges. Of course the acoustic effect of these



Ian and Angus Menter (photo Willy Guy)

was enormous. Bob Helson realised this - every time we went through a bridge he departed from whatever rhythm he was playing and went wild. As soon as the boat emerged on the other side he got straight back into the beat of whatever everyone else was playing.

Nick, the bargee, realised the accoustic effect too, and with a touch of inspiration he stopped the boat right under the middle of the enormous bridge carrying the main line to Paddington and all points east of Bristol. Steve Mulligan and Bob Helson exploited the situation admirably. Their music permeated the whole boat from the quietest harmonic of Bob's cymbals to the strongest blast of Steve's baritone.

As the boat entered the heart of Bristol such ageless masterpieces as 'The Sound of Music', 'Puppet on a String' and the 'Music While You Work' theme were offered up to the walls of the Courage brewery and the one or two Bristolians wandering around.



Ted Bayliss
with his niece
(photo
Willy Guy)

Fish fingers, buns and bread for an exausted tea.

Bullit at the Flyer

The Bullit register, had it been called at about 8.30, would have read:

Danny Sheppard (tenor and soprano saxes) - present
Steve Mulligan (sopranino, alto and baritone saxes) - present
Will Menter (soprano and tenor saxes) - absent (ill)
Ian Menter (alto sax) - present (but not for long)
Mike Whitehead (trombone) - absent (whereabouts unknown)
Pete Ward (trombone) - absent (on holiday)
Ted Bayliss, Dave Organ (trumpets and flugelhorn) - present
Mark Langford (electric piano) - present (just back from holiday)
A Bass Player (bass guitar) - present (a mercenary hired for the evening, as Bullit has 'The Bass Player Problem at the moment.)
Bob Helson (drums) - present (of course)

We start with Will's tune 'You Make The World Go Round'. Harry the Landlord comes up and makes signs about The Noise. We're already under notice from him for our regular Wednesday sessions because we're driving customers out of the downstairs bars.

I take the second solo and try to bring the volume down but the rhythm section don't seem to get the message. The bass player is good in terms of rhythm and harmony but it's all at one level. So I give up trying to bring it down and blow loud like the others.

Second is another of Will's, 'Greentwist (the Ideal Garden Twine)'. When we have finished this, a barmaid from downstairs comes up with a message for me to phone my wife. This I do - Kathy wants me to go home because she's scared stiff alone in our new house. I go back upstairs to find Harry speaking to the whole band about the Noise.

I walk home contemplating the conflicting pressures on a married-with-children, 'amateur' 'avant-garde' musician and am thankful that at least I'm on holiday from school at the moment.

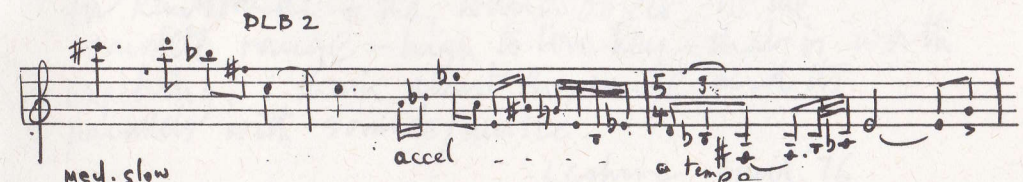
The Ashton Court Non-Performance

Bullit should normally be eleven strong. On Saturday night we calculated only six were likely to make it to Ashton Court at one o'clock Sunday lunchtime. We therefore decided to cancel the gig.

The aging hippies who were there at one o'clock heard Co-op member Dave Seaward play two numbers, after taking 45 mins to set up all his equipment, before being hustled off.

Thankfully we got a lift home Sunday evening: grotty feeling, review thinking, kids puking, head aching, 'flu coming.

August '76.



EAVESDROPPING

(Based on real conversations overheard by Will Menter at Co-op gigs)
June 1977.

1. WANKERS

Arthur : These musicians are a load of wankers; they're not interested in their audience.
Brian : Why should they be?
Arthur : Well, that's what music's about - communicating with your audience.
Brian : They are communicating.
Arthur : They aren't.
Brian : They are.
Arthur : They aren't.
Brian : They are.
Arthur : They bloody aren't.
Brian : They're communicating to you that they aren't interested in their audience.
Arthur : Oh, very clever.
Brian : Anyway it seems that the audience aren't interested in them.

(An example of negative dialectic group contradiction leading to a new isolated and alienated monism on an exceptionally low level - ed.)

Arthur : More like diarrhoea. (laughs) ... gives you dire ears anyway. (guffaws)

2. FUNNY

Cyril : Funny really, this business about drink.
Donald : What do you mean?
Cyril : Well, no one ever drinks at co-op gigs.
Donald : I'll tell you why.
Cyril : Why?
Donald : I'll tell you why simple really it's always too crowded to get to the bar see?

3. POINT

Ernest : What is jazz anyway?
Francis : I suppose everyone's got their own definition.
Ernest : But it's got to have roots hasn't it?
Francis : Roots?
Ernest : Roots. You know tradition.
Francis : Oh, I see You mean its got to sound like something else.
Ernest : No.
(pause)
Francis : I feel like a drink. Do you think we've got time between conversations?
Ernest : No.

Francis : Oh.
Ernest : The bar's too fucking crowded anyway - it's covered with loudspeakers.
Francis : Proves my point.
Ernest : Pardon?
Francis : I say it proves my point. No respect for the audience. You can't even get yourself a drink without squeezing past the speakers and getting your ears blasted out.
Ernest : It's shocking.
Brian : Perhaps they think their music's more important than drinking.
Arthur : Well, that's alright, but why play in a bar?
Ernest : He's got a point you know.
Francis : They must be after the money. Well, they're not getting mine. I believe in Art for Art's sake. As soon as you start getting paid for it you're selling out..... prostituting your art.
Ernest : They used to have more roots in it. Bullit had a good chunk of the Blues in it.
Brian : Oh you've been here before then?
Francis : Oh you mean black roots do you?
Ernest : They've gone arty farty that's the trouble.
Cyril : That's what Arts Council grants do for you.
Francis : How can you expect them to have Black roots when they're all English, white and middle-class?
Ernest : The Blues are universal.
Francis : They might have been once, but now they've just been turned into a commodity like any other popular music.
Ernest : Yes, but there is still the real Blues.
Francis : But if these musicians played more Blues they'd be devaluing the 'real' Blues, not enhancing it.
Arthur : Perhaps they shouldn't play at all then.
Francis : I think it's escapism to expect everyone to display black roots. You're making the Blacks into a heroic race with a monopoly on soul and tradition. It's a copout. Why not look for a root in your own community?
Ernest : Community!
Donald : How can music be a commodity?
(it becomes a commodity when its existence is governed not by its value as personal expression and communication, but by its salability to a mass audience. - ed.) *who does this guy think he is?*
This Co-op must be a commodity. It's got no communicative value, and they get an Arts Council grant.
Brian : But it does communicate to some people. Look, those two people over there are listening.
Arthur : No they're not, they're asleep.
Brian : Community doesn't have to be linked to locality. Musicians are as much a community as Bristolians.
(Brian has finally revealed himself as a sociologist. - ed.)
Ernest : That's why I feel more a part of the Black community than the Bristol one.

Francis : But how can you when you don't share their experience?
 Ernest : That's not what music's all about.
 Francis : What then?
 Ernest : Roots.
 Geraldine : Excuse me, you've been talking all evening. Why don't you shut up and give the music a chance? It's you that loses out if you don't hear it, not the musicians.

4. TROMBONE

Harold : Did you enjoy it?
 Simon : Well yes, I suppose so.
 Harold : Oh, you didn't like the trombone solos then?
 Simon : Yes I liked them. I thought he was very good.
 Harold : So it was the folk group?
 Simon : No, I liked them too.
 Harold : Well, what then?
 Simon : It was more the programming. It didn't seem a very good idea to put them together.
 Harold : But you liked them both?
 Simon : Yes, I did. But other people might not have.
 Harold : Pardon?
 Simon : Presentation you see. You've got to think of it in terms of what people like and expect.
 Harold : But you liked it.
 Simon : Yes.
 Harold : Well what are you complaining about?
 Simon : It's the place too. Two separate areas makes it difficult for people to get into.
 Harold : But if you sit in the inside space you can get into it.
 Simon : Yes but the other people.
 Harold : How boring.

5. MIGHT

Joseph : I suppose if no-one hears it, it's a complete waste of time. I mean its not like painting when someone might look at it in fifty years time and see what it's all about.
 Keith :mummm I suppose so

DON'T LOOK BACK - a collective composition. Each participant was asked to write one line, but was only shown the previous line and not the whole composition. Will Menter, Freddie Hill, Ron Caines, Ian Menter, Bob Helson, Mark Langford, Ingrid Emsden, Max Boucher, Phil Durrant took part.



BRIDGES IN BRISTOL

A review of four performances by Both Hands Free at Bristol Arts Centre in March '77, by Willie Guy and Ian Menter.

The problematic relationship between performers and their audience is at its most acute in free music. Puzzled and angry listeners, confronted with sounds quite unlike the tight, structured patterns we have all been trained to regard as music, can provoke the stereotyped response of back-turning from the musicians: "The music speaks for itself - take it or leave it." But long-term isolation is hard to take and musicians who find it too painful eventually broaden the scope of their playing - compromise the music - giving up some degree of freedom by moving into a music with a larger following, like free rock. Such moves are usually rationalised in one of a variety of possible ways.

The only sensible and logical way of resolving the problem of the potential musical recluse is to realise that part of developing new forms of music is to recognise the educational aspect of what you are doing in taking on a lifetime of conditioning. You can't just play and expect to be appreciated - you have to teach what you are playing, seeing every single performance as an attempt to communicate ideas, and not simply on a musical level.

This was one of the aims in presenting four consecutive gigs at weekly intervals by the Bristol Musicians' Co-operative's most uncompromising group, Both Hands Free, where there was a positive attempt by the musicians to involve the audience by explaining something of what they were doing. Another main idea behind the series was to give the group the opportunity to develop their music over a number of closely-spaced public performances.

Both Hands Free was formed in 1976 as a direct offshoot of Wind and Fingers, the seven-piece band assembled by Will Menter to play his composition of the same name, commissioned by the Arts Council. The four musicians of Both Hands Free - Bob Helson (drums and percussion), Mark Langford (electric piano and tenor sax), Will Menter (soprano and tenor saxes) and Steve Mulligan (sopranino, alto and baritone saxes) - are perhaps the most dedicated musicians in Wind and Fingers and as a corollary to this commitment, their music is extreme in its demands on both musicians and listeners.

'Wind and Fingers' had an overall structure and was heavily scored in places but when these four started playing together they wanted to explore totally improvised music. It's not easy to define the tension that gives spirit to the music but much of it seems to be generated by the different musicians' ideas about free improvisation - what sort of process it is which makes you play a particular thing at a particular time - whether it relates to your past playing or to your experiences of the day or whether it comes "as if from nowhere". Mark makes no concessions, giving the impression that the notes he plays are just what happens at the time. Will seems much more conscious of the importance of previous musical experiences and tradition, and Steve too - Steve likes a good song and you can always sense his affection for melody in his playing, while on the other hand you could easily believe that Mark has never heard a tune in his life. Bob, however, contains these contrasting attitudes within



Bob Helson (photo Willy Guy)

Mark Langford (photo Willy Guy)



himself. When he does talk about the music - which isn't often - he decries music with any kind of familiarity, yet his background is that of the typical British modern jazz drummer. But instead of turning his back on conventional skills and techniques, he incorporates them into a broader armoury of percussive sound.

Although Both Hands Free started with completely improvised music they've recently come to build many of their improvisations around basic structures. These often take the form of simple rules about when people are to play and when not - in a way like children's games - as in Threes, where one or other of the four players drops out entirely for a time - an "anti-solo". This idea of breaking down the jazz solo recurs in "Last One In", which is based on the more flexible concept of relative dominance. Instead of soloing each musician in turn takes the least dominant role. Other structures are more conventional. A device familiar in classical tone-poems is used in a piece inspired by Klee painting, "A Boat Passes the Botanical Gardens", where each instrument represents a different element of the scene: piano/river, baritone/boat, soprano/birds and small animals, percussion/insects and grasses.

While structuring has been a natural development in the music it has had the effect of making it more accessible, especially since on this series of gigs Will did a lot of introductions to the pieces, titling them and explaining their structure to the audience. This was not without its drawbacks. Inevitably such formal presentation must effect the music deeply, and whenever the structures were not announced, the Kafkaesque experience of trying to puzzle them out could be like undergoing I.Q. tests without answers.

On the whole, though, the structures did a valuable bridging job in giving the listeners some guidelines to cling to. Bob's score for "Amplitudes" - where only the volumes were specified - was passed around with interest. Later the barmaid was encouraged to join in "Not until Another". She'd been ripping the imitation wood-grain surface from the bar, trying to anticipate the loud passage to mask the tearing noise. A cheerful discussion among the audience about the structure of the piece - after playing a note, no-one was to play a second until someone else had - persuaded her to follow the same rule, turning the sharp tugs at the much hated plastic into a musical contribution.

Humour formed another bridge. Jokes among the audience for instance or the barmaid's comment flung at a frowning listener: "Well, they can't ask you to sing along with it, can they? You're spared that burden!"

But the musicians' humour, as with structures, was not a conscious device to increase audience involvement but in this case an instinctive response to the overpoweringly serious atmosphere that tends to build up during a free music session. Bowing the cymbal mounted on top of his frame, Bob was unable to complete his up-stroke because of the cellar's low ceiling. Immediately he was into a Harpo Marx routine, tunnelling his way out to freedom through the roof with his tattered bow - and the band played on.

Again, during his solo set (on synthesiser, stereo tape and percussion) as one of the supporting attractions to Both Hands Free, Bob fashioned a conversation between two speakers - one playing in the connecting bar area - and one in the playing area - that was at times witty and yet which also expressed the more melancholy side of his nature: a kind of musical autobiography.

Will, too, uses humour a lot. In the last "extra" of the month, his contribution was "Six Easy Pieces", scored for violin, flute, viola, soprano, sopranino, clavinet and percussion. Unknown to the other musicians, he had written instructions for Bob to knock over a music stand, and when the conductor - not in the know either - bent to pick it up, other stands went flying and in the end there were about four scattered over the floor.

Though structures and jokes helped the audience to relate to what was happening musically, the old cliché remains true; you have to work at listening to free music. An indication of this is the way in which all kinds of "irrelevant" details become important - things you wouldn't notice listening to a modern jazz group or a chamber orchestra. The insoluble riddle of smoke coming out of the end of Will's soprano - he doesn't smoke; stray comments overheard become a very relevant part of the total experience - "Seven people playing one clarinet" or "Shall we go and see Fleetwood Mac?"

It's hard to evaluate the success of the series as an exercise in communication. Some gigs were well attended, others poorly, and audience reaction varied. When Will's writing came nearest to straight music, in "Six Easy Pieces", someone shouted out "Where are the roots?" He hadn't heard a blue note all night and it upset him.

The musical development was much clearer to see. The band's confidence increased over the weeks, particularly in terms of the amount of space they left. The later in the series, the less nervous the musicians were about leaving considerable silences, while at first they tended to be "busy" all the time. Also their concentration was much more sustained, the pieces became longer and the musicians' involvement more complete.

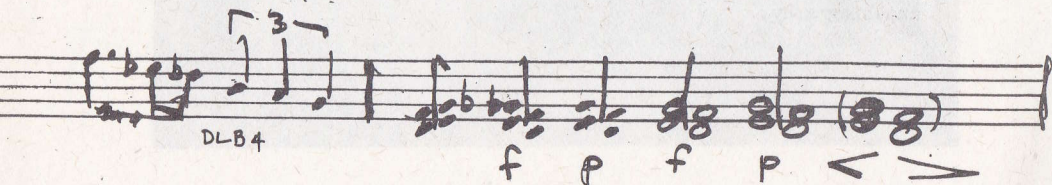
Another development was the greater breadth of sound during the last two gigs. Bob added an African xylophone to his armoury, Steve became much freer of conventional ways of playing the alto and, on the third gig, the band began using their voices as instruments for the first time. Then, between the last two gigs, the Howard Riley Unit played in Bristol. Bob, Mark and Will were there and particularly enjoyed the playing of Phil Wachsmann (violin) and Roy Ashbury (percussion), whom they were hearing for the first time. This experience seemed to add to their inspiration and Will in particular played a tremendous amount of percussion on the last gig, leaving his saxes aside for long periods.

Conclusion (February '78)

There are two elements in improvised music that can lead to its mystification.

The first is common to all Western "art" music and involves instrumental (or compositional) technique. The greater the virtuosity of an individual musician on his or her instrument or instruments the more likely it is that the audience relates as listeners (consumers) rather than as participants (creators) to the performance. Still, because of their familiarity with the traditions of Western music (both classical and rock), most "non-musicians" are able to cope with this, although there are ways in which musicians can seek (and have sought) to break this potential barrier down.

Improvised music is not intrinsically esoteric or obscure and herein lies its power and hence its threat to the status quo of the world of art



and entertainment (including radio and TV), and more immediately its threat to the record and tape market.

Postscript

Just a month or two after the series reviewed above Steve Mulligan left Both Hands Free to put all his energy into an existing Bristol-based "fusion" band, Steps, with talk of recording contracts and continental tours. His departure certainly reduced some of the tension in Both Hands Free's music. To some extent though, that tension, which was quite a creative force, has been replaced by a new kind of dynamic - a reinforced progressiveness.

Under the influence of this new mood, the remaining trio recorded an album called "Both Hands Free", which is now available on Dave Panton's label (DPLP005) and is available from Will Menter, 1 Park Cottages, Barrow Court Lane, Barrow Gurney, Avon. (Phone enquiries - 027583 3700) (Flax Bourton)



Will Menter (photo Willy Guy)



Steve Mulligan (photo Willy Guy)

OBSERVATIONS — JOHN EAVES.

Straight away I briefly need to clarify to the reader my stance in relation to music/sound.

As a painter by inclination and training the practise of trying to make music came very late (36); no school experience of playing any instrument, just listening. This in itself is, I suggest, very unusual. Far more common is the gravitation towards the visual arts in one's 30's or 40's (or much later) because an assumption is made that you can find yourself in painting without the academic preliminaries that would be required with a musical performance. Lacking that very pre-requisite in music I nevertheless wanted to experience the sensation, to investigate the possibilities of improvisation.

With all my imperfections, reservations and inadequacies I listed joining Luke Westbrook's Jazz Lounge at Dartington in the mid-60's and this, I feel, was primarily responsible for my gaining sufficient confidence & desire to continue with the Bristol Musicians Loop. The whole framework has given me the opportunity to try various experimental visual/sound projects and without this context I doubt whether I would have been in a position to meet enough responsive musicians to realise these ideas.

I make written notes occasionally in connection with lectures, exhibitions etc and I have set out some random extracts which relate to my feelings & attitudes towards vision & sound.

Everyone lives by association of one sort or another. I would like paintings to be associative in different ways for different people; a title like Blue Solo can refer to an intense blue line standing a little out of context or an isolated jazz fragment by Thelonius Monk. Precisely, it may simply be a diagrammatic reminder of the Piccadilly Line. Take your choice.

Notes for Exhibition at Bristol City Art Gallery
1970.

Experiment is the thing. Improvisation brings the surprises and painting is all about improvisation; remaining in touch with reality, but expanding upon it.

Feb 1975.

I live in Bath which is a city of visual rhythms. Why not in music the rhythm of 'breathing'?

Feb 1975.

Improvisation is a word I like and seems the best description I can find for what happens in my paintings. If the improvisation, usually deriving from some landscape or structure idea, is keen and sharp then there is a chance that the painting approaches being a success.

Notes for Festival Gallery, Bath. Exhibition 1976

To penetrate the darks, use a low key; this is difficult now. Consider the overlit situation we all live in; day is day and night is day. Ask anyone to paint in the light quality that sufficed for Rembrandt & they would object. It's the complete range - high to low key - that is worth exploring. I think about this range and its parallels with sounds/music.

Lecture April '76

Take a message. Frozen telegram.
To the Editor in chief.
Decipher the message home
at terrific speed.

BRIGHT MOMENTS

Wind up the windphone, Bloomtorch.
What machine are you talking about?
Sleepwalker. Megaton Sax made a detour.

Charlie Parker plays his last saxophone solo.
Entitled the last five minutes on earth.
(The critics found it definitive).

First instructions to twelve years old Bird.
A neck cord is supplied with every saxophone.
Put this around your neck first.
Push down the mouthpipe with a revolving motion.

Impulse acts on muscle fibre.....
Oiled arms flexed, on runners.
Balanced action blues peal with the sun
You got it milky city.

The sheen of the sound
Cuts, burns, bleeds...wounds.
Lever gently.
The curve of gold.

Voices under the fingers
sun and moon vibrations
in dark city streets
inside the drone zone.

Music descends to stay alive.
Monovarious Monk with
Erroneous **Mingas** at midnight.
Count it in Bird.

Ron Caines April '78



Archie Shepp at Bracknell : July 1977 (photo Willy Guy)

This article is Rob Hunter's response to BMC's "second series" of improvised music concerts at St. George's Hall, Bristol in February and March 1978. The musicians playing were Derek Bailey with six Co-op members, Both Hands Free, John Russell and Roger Smith, Larry Stabbins, and two groups from the Co-op's free music workshop including Bob Helson, Mark Langford, Bob Downing, Steve Garrett and Ian Menter.

IMPROVISED MUSIC — RETREAT OF THE AVANT-GARDE?

Bristol Musicians Co-operative presented its "Second Series" of improvised music in four weekly gigs recently, and in this article I want to consider the political implications of the music. I was asked specifically to give an outsider's view of it so that a critical perspective, political in its slant, could emerge. So let me say at the outset that the politics are socialist, the critical method marxist, and that I'm truly an 'outsider' as far as improvised music is concerned.

I have no knowledge of its traditions or current movements, nor am I an apologist for any other particular type of music.

That is worth bearing in mind because this article will be sharply critical — some will say contemptuously dismissive — of the music presented in "Second Series". This isn't a balanced review weighing up the merits and demerits of the various performers; it is meant to be one side of what should be a debate on the politics and aesthetics of improvised music. So I make no apology for being partial, exaggerated, and blatantly unfair in my criticism.

Let me outline my reactions to the performances.

First, I didn't 'like' the music. Or rather, I couldn't find a structural basis where I could respond by either liking or disliking. Perhaps the fault was mine in that I wasn't attuned to discover the underlying musical form; perhaps the whole point was the absence of any such form. I wasn't troubled by the seeming assault on musicality itself, if such it was. Although that raises a number of questions which I'll come back to. Second, I was struck by the glaring contradiction between what was being played and the conditions in which it was performed and listened to. Anarchic, jangling sounds on one hand — and on the other the observance of performers/audience separation by darkening the audience and lighting the performers, and the obsequies of polite applause. If we were there to celebrate musical iconoclasm we set about it with a joyless restraint worthy of a strait-laced bourgeois taking high tea on a Sunday. Third, the evident musical ability of the performers raised questions about the nature of their musical commitment. Why put a demonstrable ability to formalise sound in melodic and rhythmic constructs — i.e. make music — to the service of its very opposite, yet still lay claim to the title 'musician'?

Now, if improvised music is not simply an innovatory form of free jazz but a radical break from all of the dominant forms of Western music then it is very much a politico-aesthetic question whether it is a) a creative flux in which there is a directed search for a new musical form, or b) an attack on the very notions of musicality and specialised musical skills. Of course, there may well be a conjunction of both aspects, but if the latter predominates — as I believe it does — then

it necessarily alters the traditional relationship between performer and audience, practitioner and listener. In fact these categories cease to exist if what is being played and listened to no longer mediates them effectively. In capitalist social relations the commodity (reified) character of the work of art mediates these categories by mystifying the communicative act which is the essence of every art form. Nevertheless, the categories of artist and audience are maintained in effective, albeit alienated, relationships.

But suppose you bring the categories — artist, work of art, audience — into a formal relationship to destroy the communicative act itself? Such destruction can make a negative statement, and a powerful one, on that aspect of bourgeois ideology which postulates the work of art as a transcendent absolute, existing in and for itself. Like Dada did for the plastic arts, improvised sound can do for music — fuck art! fuck music! Fine — but it has to be a moment of pure protest which dissolves itself. Maintain the categorical relations which brought it into being and you are trapped in a formal exercise of self-contradiction which very quickly becomes a subcultural category of elitist art. Every radical artist should know by now that to deliver an aesthetic shock to the bourgeoisie is not enough. For a time, yes, you will provoke the reaction: "Is this Art? Is this Music? Good Lord, they can't play their instruments!" But not for long: meaningless is the stock-in-trade of art under capitalism. A prime function of the artist in capitalist society is to embody in work and behaviour a revolt against bourgeois values which cannot be tolerated in other areas of society. A wide latitude of artistic outrage is permitted, and the more the serpent eats its own tail the better.

As far as improvised music is concerned, the greater its distance from the dominant musical forms the less of a threat it poses to them. And this despite the hostility it may evoke from arts institutions when matters of funding and grant applications are considered. Now, I know that Bristol Musicians Co-op receives funds from South West Arts Association, and I know that the mandarins of that institution, like the Arts Council, award funds supposedly on artistic criteria which the Co-op's work in improvised music might not satisfy. For there is a liberal-left strain in bourgeois ideology which persists in the pursuit of some abstract 'value' and 'meaning' in art — a pursuit which has been overtaken by capitalist commodity relations in arts production which would render art quite meaningless. But that same strain has an unholy respect for 'creative pursuits' of all kinds. If it cannot fund improvised music according to one criterion it will fund it according to another. Some sort of creative therapy or community workshop thing might do. It would be quite harmless and you might even get Job Creation money in neo-Keynesian fashion. If people can be paid for digging holes then why not for playing in a scratch orchestra?

A deliberate assault on form and meaning in art is now no answer to meaninglessness, which is the accelerating trend of

artistic practices and objects under capitalism, no matter how supercharged the ideological content of art. As a palliative function of leisure time, signifying not so much the dynamics of social reality but rather a means of class differentiation in cultural terms - style, fashion, social group mores and manners - artistic practices proliferate in a bland welter of seeming productive diversity and consumer choice. The media of art have truly usurped its message.

Any art that would be revolutionary has to run hard on the heels of its enemy, close enough to be tainted with its stink and to throw a spanner in its works. Radical aesthetics haven't kept pace with capitalist technologies in the production and dissemination of art, nor with the social relations which follow from them. A glance at the recent history of rock music - the almost total co-option of what are imagined to be countercultural forms by capitalist production relations - reveals, among other things, a failure of musical aesthetics to engage actively with the technologies of the disc and cassette tape industries. Developments in laser technology, holography, radio electronics, video cassette recording, are outstripping the politico-aesthetic perspectives which are needed if the technologies of arts production and their effects on bourgeois aesthetics are to be radically altered.

If these general points seem a long way from consideration of improvised music as performed in "Second Series" it is because the music itself and the structure of its performance and reception seemed to me to be miles away from the politically significant areas of artistic expression. Of course, if the fact of its happening is meant to be its own justification then it fits in nicely with the bourgeois formulation l'art pour l'art, or perhaps anti-art for — ? But in that case it doesn't lay claim to political pretensions. If it does, what are the general considerations for its effectiveness?

If improvised music is a revolt of form and style which posits itself as a radical alternative to mainstream forms, shunning critical involvement with these forms, then it is like a musical ultra-left condemned to impotence and limited sectarian controversies, bolstering its *raison d'être* among a clique of self-congratulatory aficionados. If it is an assault on musical 'art' itself then it cancels itself out. No basis exists for the coming together of performers and audience. To retain such formal distinctions, along with the absurdity of paid performers and a paying - for what? - audience, is an exercise in self-deluding negativity.

Improvised music, by its very nature, powerfully suggests that anyone can play it, with little or no skill, without the constraints and discipline which form - any form - imposes. Is that the whole point? To abolish the division of labour in musical art by making the categories of creative performer and passive listener redundant? Then you cannot structure musical gigs which maintain these categories. And if improvised music is premised on the notion that you can demystify formal ability in music by undifferentiated levels of musical skills



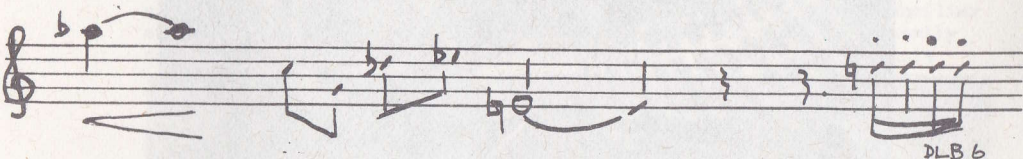
Derek Bailey : February 1978 (photo Willy Guy)

it confuses general human creativity with the particular modes in which creative skills are refined and developed. A spot-welder, a brain surgeon, would surely not demystify his activity by suggesting that the skills themselves were of no account and to be abolished altogether. Differentiation of human skills and ability, and then divisions of function, of labour - are natural concomitants of every complexly developed social organism. It is capitalism's relations of production, exerted through the private ownership of property, which impose inequities on these natural differentiations, giving them the fetishist character of exchange commodities. Mystification springs from these relations, not from the specialised character of the skills themselves.

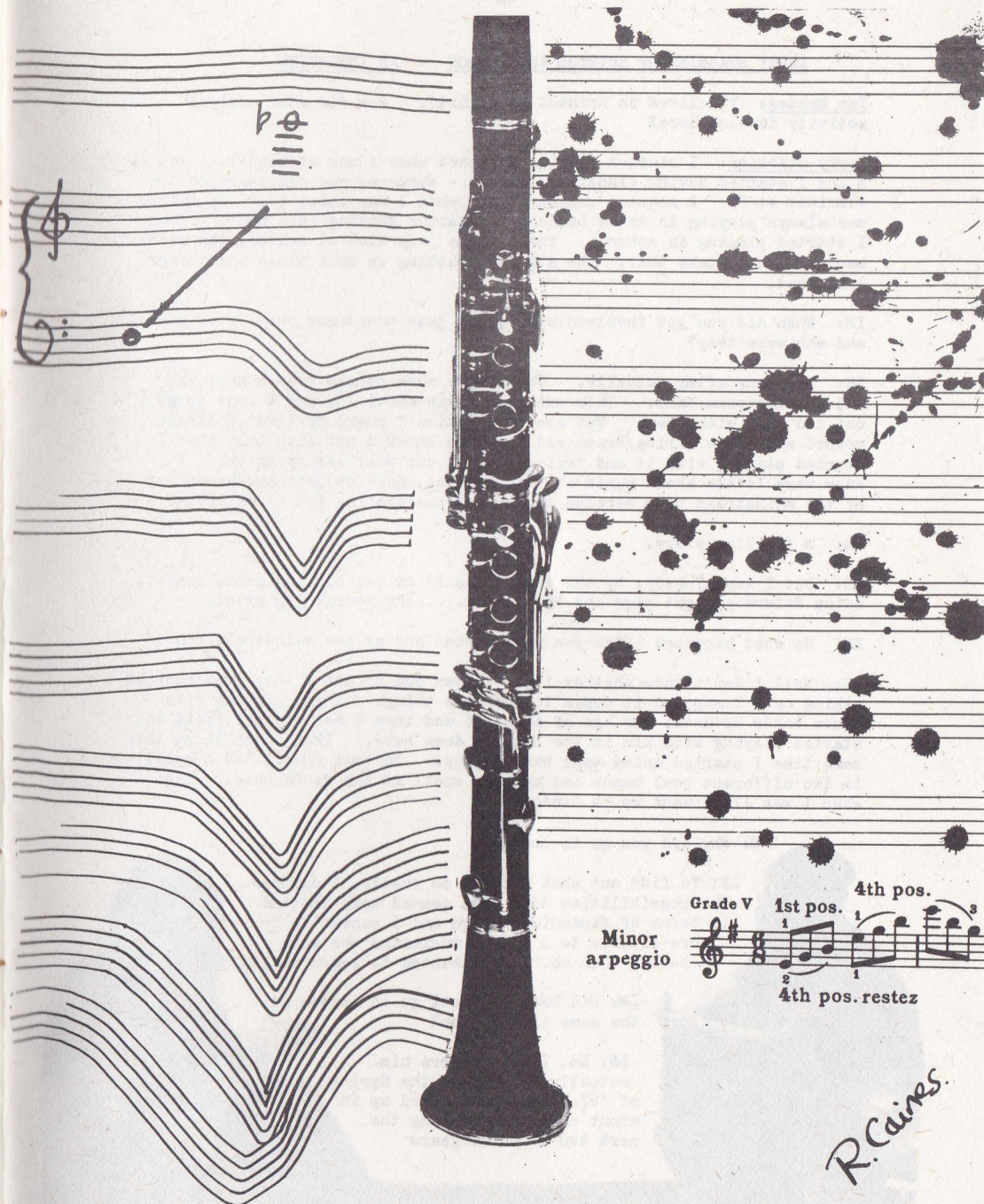
I am suggesting that the logic of improvised music, regardless of its practitioners' intentions, signifies a regression into a false primitivism. False, because the seeming simplicity and imagined unity of pre-capitalist social organisms conceals the highly adaptive mechanisms, functioning through the specialised skills of individuals, which led to their growth and development. But it is not the first time that capitalist depredations in the arts have driven artists, in despairing response, to feed upon themselves and their own activity. But the irony of that response is that its aesthetic consigns it, in practice, to a subcultural elite where it remains just another alternative within a burgeoning range of consumer options - in perfect accord with the bourgeois ideology of art.

ROBERT HUNTER

Bristol, 26 March 1978



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LARRY STABBINS OF BRISTOL AND LONDON - AN INTERVIEW

Ian Menter: You lived in Bristol as a child. How did your musical activity develop here?

Larry Stabbins: I started playing clarinet when I was at school, I was about 8 and I started having classical lessons - whatever you can learn on clarinet at 8. I started playing tenor when I was about 12. My father was always playing in dance bands so I started getting into that. Then I started playing in school. There was a jazz club at school, the maths master used to take that. He started teaching us Monk tunes and things like that.

IM: When did you get involved with other jazz musicians outside of school and who were they?

LS: Not long after actually. There were some people from school who had a mainstream band. This was when I was about 13, and I used to go out and play with them. But about that time I heard my first Coltrane record which was Africa/Brass and I was so knocked out with that that I started playing with it and trying to find out what was going on. I knew very little about music at that age but ended up getting thrown out of the mainstream band because my playing was getting too adventurous.

IM: A familiar story.

LS: But I was already, by the time I was 13 or 14, playing dance bands, doing Saturday night gigs and things the normal gig grind.

IM: So what happened after you were thrown out of the mainstream band?

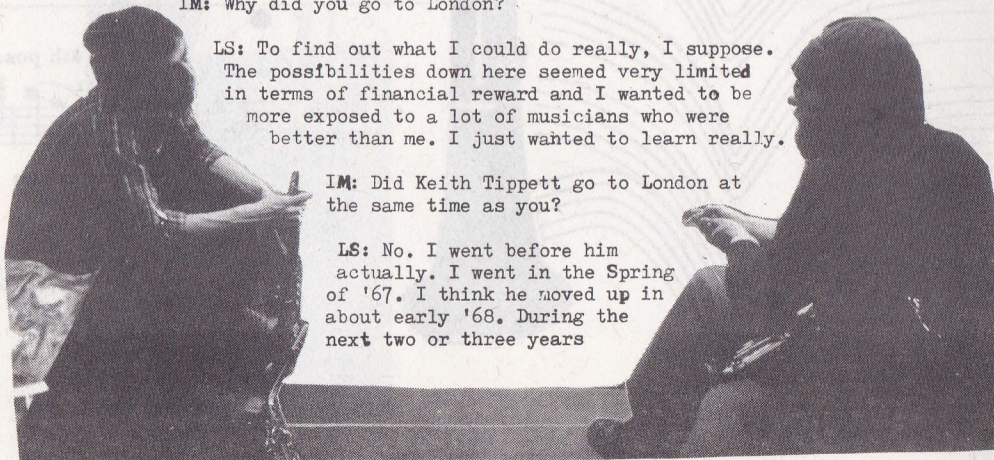
LS: Well I don't know whether I got thrown out or not - they just stopped asking me - I suppose it comes to the same thing. I was playing with dance bands up until the age of about 16 and then I met Kieth Tippett and started playing with him in the Dug Out down here. Then round about the same time I started doing soul band things. In that year I had a spell in two different soul bands and another spell at the Mecca here. Then when I was 17½ I went up to London.

IM: Why did you go to London?

LS: To find out what I could do really, I suppose. The possibilities down here seemed very limited in terms of financial reward and I wanted to be more exposed to a lot of musicians who were better than me. I just wanted to learn really.

IM: Did Keith Tippett go to London at the same time as you?

LS: No. I went before him actually. I went in the Spring of '67. I think he moved up in about early '68. During the next two or three years



I was spending six months in London and then coming back here - six months on the dole and then going back to London again.

IM: And how did your musical activity develop in London? Who did you play with and how were your ideas about music changing?

LS: Well, when I got there, there was a saxophone player in the first band I was in, who introduced me to lots of people who I'd never heard of at all when I was down here - this was '67 - he started me playing New York Contemporary Five records and the later Archie Shepp things, Marion Brown - all the American thing that was happening at that time. Ayler and all those sort of things which I hadn't heard about at all down here. I spent quite a bit of time just absorbing that. In fact I wasn't playing any jazz at all at that point.

IM: What were you playing?

LS: Just soul music in soul bands, hammering up and down the M1, until about 1970, I came back down here and I was down here for about a year working in the Rank and around that time I started playing with Kieth again. He formed Centipede and I immediately got thrown back into playing a lot more jazz again. I'd been playing a bit in pick-up bands but not doing any gigs. I'd had a trio in one of my spells here trying to do Ayler tunes but I wasn't really doing very much musically, I was mainly trying to earn a living..... and floundering.

IM: I don't know many other musicians who are so committed to free music and yet also ready for the sake of food and rooves and things to do hack work. Do you think you are an exception?

LS: No. I would like not to do hack work. Hopefully, eventually I won't have to. But I think you'll find if you talk to most of the established English improvisors you'll find most of them have done an awful lot of hack work of one kind or another. They've done all sorts of commercial gigs. It doesn't bother me. It's a lot more usual in America I think, for musicians to do commercial work. It's not a performance, it's just a gig - you might as well be working in a factory really, at least that's the way I look at it now.

IM: I had the impression that a greater number relied on dole for their standby income - that is nowadays - that may not always have been the case.

LS: I don't know, it's all music to me. I would rather be playing a commercial gig. I've learnt the technique of doing all these things - there's no strain anymore - I can just go on and do it. It doesn't really demand a great deal of sacrifice. I know an awful lot of people who can't do it, who find it very painful. I have in the past. I think it's good for you actually. I do believe in actually being a professional musician. It used to be very unfashionable to be professional playing this sort of music and I don't go along with it at all. I do believe in that side of it, I mean the technical side of it. I



mean I believe in being able to play your instrument. I think going through all those scenes is very good for you technically - getting around your instrument - and brainwise as well, because it does make you decide what you want to do.

That's another thing about going to London actually. Once you actually make a decision to go up there it's very good for making you decide exactly what you want, because you can't take it easy. If you want to do something you've got to go out and do it. You can't just drift along with whatever's going on.

IM: Were you involved in the inception of the Collective in London?

LS: Not really, no. It had been going for about a year before I started to get involved with it.



Larry Stabbins (photo Willy Guy)

IM: Is that because you weren't involved in that kind of music until that point in time?

LS: No, I'd been playing quite freely for a long time. Part of the reason was that I wasn't in the scene very much because I had actually stopped playing for a bit. At the time the Collective started I was only just beginning to get back into playing again. I was off the scene for a year, maybe two years. I'd been playing very rarely.

IM: You bought this house in Bristol about a year ago. What were you doing in London previous to that?

LS: I'd been working in a night club for 18 months, doing a few pop sessions in the daytime. But also I'd been playing with Roy Ashbury quite a bit and doing all sorts of things. It was only really towards the end of that time that I'd started to cut down on the commercial work that I was doing. It's only in the last 18 months that I've started doing that. During that time we did the record. I was still working with Keith a bit, and quite a lot more straight ahead jazz things or more straight ahead than the improvised music.

IM: Like the Elton Dean band and others?

LS: No, I wasn't really playing with them then ... all sorts of things. Actually the ironic thing is that it's only in the last year or so since I moved down here that I've really started playing more of the music that I want to play - almost exclusively in the last year, even though it's been almost all in other places. I've done what, two gigs down here.

IM: Yes, which is about the same, I suppose, as most of us down here. Do you think it has something to do with your move from London, the fact that you've done more of the kind of work that you've wanted to?

LS: It has. Part of the reason for moving down was that a lot of the pressure is off. You don't get people ringing up asking you to do pop sessions or whatever. I've found a lot more time - because I'm a lot more by myself down here, most of my mates are still in London. So there's a lot of time just to sit down and think here. Once you've actually decided where you're going and what you want to do, there's a lot more time to actually practice and decide what direction you're going in, or at least that's the way I've found it.

IM: Can you say what conclusions you've come to about what direction you're going in?

LS: Not really - I think you've just got to listen to me play really.

IM: Fair enough. How do you judge our activities in Bristol as a musicians' co-op? How does it compare with the London scene generally and perhaps the Collective specifically?



LS: That's a hard one. For a start the London Collective does not reflect the whole of the improvised scene in London let alone the music scene. It's just part of the improvised music scene. It probably includes most of the young players - the second generation ones - I suppose it includes all of them. I don't really know the answer to that. There's obviously more activity because there's more people but a lot of the Collective work in the last year has been concerned with the buildingI'll have to think about that.

IM: It is rather a vague question. Did you know of the existence of the Bristol Co-op before you moved back to Bristol?

LS: Oh yes - it's generally known - most of the people in London know about the Co-op down here because it's been going for a long time. I think people regard Bristol as one of the places where there's a bit more happening than most other provincial cities - a lot more in fact. Compared with the other Co-ops it's a much more active scene, from what I've seen of the other Co-ops.

IM: In future how do you expect to be apportioning your time and where do you expect to be playing most?

LS: On the continent hopefully.

IM: Going over for weeks at a time and then returning?

LS: I would like to. The audience is better, you get treated better and you earn more money. From a musical point of view the music didn't come into it a lot, moving down here really. It's just so much a nicer place to live, and hopefully if your brain's in a better condition it improves the music. That was the biggest musical consideration about moving down here.

IM: In a sense would you see London as just a temporary period - a necessary stage in your development as a professional musician.

LS: I think it was very necessary, yes.

IM: Have you always been a Bristolian at heart?

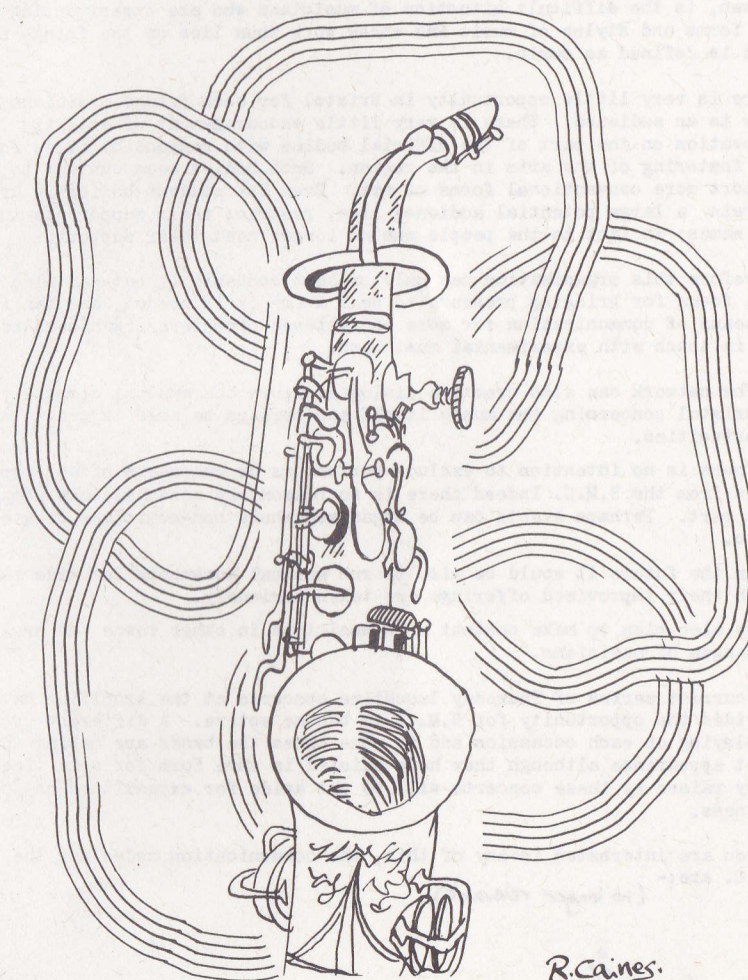
LS: No, not really. I could quite easily have stayed in London. I don't really think geography is very important. I don't think it really matters very much whether you live in Bristol or London. I just prefer to live in a more rural setting - I mean it's not very rural, but it's more rural than Fulham - I would rather live somewhere like this. It's as simple as that really. Harry Miller's just moved to Amsterdam, Radu Malfatti lives in Zurich now, Chris McGregor lives in the South of France and Roy (Ashbury) in Essex, Ian Brighton in Braintree and the communications are so fast now it doesn't matter so much.

IM: But they are all people who've been in London at some time....

LS: But I don't say I'm going to live here for ever. I'll probably always come back here but I doubt if I'll stay here for the rest of my life. In fact I'm certain I won't. Travelling is so fast now. It's so easy to get to London now I don't see that it matters that much. Does that answer your question?

IM: I think so.....

(Recorded April 13th 1978. Bristol)



DOCUMENTS

The following statement was published after the first Co-op meeting in

BRISTOL MUSICIANS CO-OPERATIVE.

The Bristol Musicians Co-operative is a recently initiated institution. It is an informal organisation without any fixed constitution or declared aims, and so what follows is an indication of possibilities and suggestions from some of the people already involved rather than any kind of fixed policy.

The Co-op is visualised as a loose network of musicians enabling them to contact other musicians. The specific need, in response to which it has arisen, is the difficult situation of musicians who are experimenting with new forms and styles of music and whose work thus lies on the fringe of what is defined as music.

There is very little opportunity in Bristol for such fringe musicians to play to an audience. There is very little encouragement of artistic innovation on the part of the official bodies with responsibilities for the fostering of the arts in the region. Such bodies seem content to support more conventional forms of art. Even the student bodies in Bristol wherein a large potential audience lies, restrict their support to the big names; in fact to the people who no longer need their support.

Therefore this organisation can only present concerts but can also be a focus for bringing pressure to bear where it is needed, and can further by means of communication for more enlightened promoters/organisers to get in touch with experimental musicians.

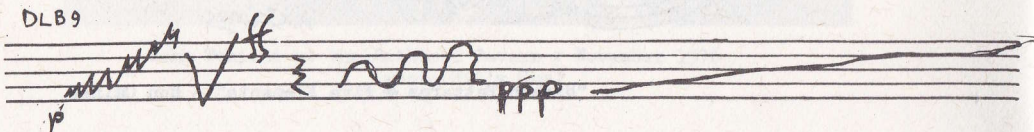
1. The network can also create a dialogue within the musical community of Bristol concerning the music itself and perhaps be able to create new opportunities.
2. There is no intention to exclude performers or composers of any type of music from the B.M.C. Indeed there is no reason why non-musicians should not take part. Perhaps events can be organised where non-musicians create music.
3. In the future it would be nice to run musical workshops for kids in which their improvised offerings are taken seriously.
4. We also plan to make contact with musicians in other towns and organise exchanges of musicians.

The current series of Thursday lunchtime concerts at the Arnolfini have provided the opportunity for B.M.C. to become active. A different group is playing on each occasion and in some cases the bands are making their first appearance although they have existed in some form for some time. Money raised by these concerts will be put aside for expenditure on Co-op business.

If you are interested in any of this, the communication nodes for the B.M.C. are:-

(no longer relevant)

DLB9



MUSIC AND COLONIALISM- BRISTOL MUSICIAN'S COOPERATIVE *

Ian & Will Menter

If the plight of creative musicians in London is bad, the situation for their counterparts in the provinces is dire. As the national culture becomes more homogenous the eyes and ears of more and more people are turned towards the capital city, and away from the work of artists in their own community. Of course this can all be explained in terms of the rationalisation of the cultural market place.

However for the individual artist in a city such as Bristol, what this situation means is a straightforward choice - either you stay where your roots are and carry on your artistic practice, in whatever restricted form you can, or you head for the big city in the hope of finding fame and fortune. Of course it would be stupid to suggest that this is to be found in any great measure even in London, but there is little doubt that considerably more opportunities can be created there.

A telling example of this difference is the contrast between the activities of the Arts Council and the regional arts associations. Applications from Bristol musicians to South West Arts have been met with complete silence over a period of months, followed by refusal on the grounds of 'non-professionalism'. Grants can only be made to professional musicians. But of course it is well known that it is almost impossible to be a professional musician in the provinces, at least in a creative field. Thus thousands of pounds are spent by SWA each year on bringing London musicians to this region - presumably to educate the

natives. Colonialism takes on a new turn! Call it what you like - Marcuse's 'operational logic', Welfare State politics, 'Catch 22'. What it is, is a refusal to act deliberately against market forces, a resignation to merely modify them, which in fact has the effect of reinforcing them. It is assumed that provincial musicians aren't professional because they aren't good enough. If they were good enough they'd go to London, wouldn't they?...

This situation could be considered typical of all art in this country - an extreme centralisation around the metropolis; but jazz is a special case in two respects. Firstly, the jazz tradition comes essentially from the USA, and this means that historically the jazz musician, in a place such as Bristol, is experiencing a colony within a colony. Secondly, it is only because of the global nature of the market place that English people have been able at all to become familiar with jazz and to express themselves through this medium. Jazz records, along with American popular music, were the first to be marketed on a global scale. Jazz, as a commodity, was produced in America by an exploited class and consumed all over the world. Jazz, as a cultural creation, thus became the first highly geographically and historically specific culture to become a truly worldwide cultural expression. And it is no accident that it came from the USA during a period when that country was becoming the world's strongest imperial power. It is also no accident that it was the expression of an oppressed minority in that country. (It could be argued that jazz was marketed more by enthusiasts than by capitalists, but if so this was only possible because of the capitalists' marketing networks.)

As experience all over the world becomes more and more similar, in that the major element in it becomes US oppression, the mode of expression developed by those

* This article was first published in MUSICS 3 - August/September '75

closest to the 'American way of oppression', - black Americans - becomes more and more relevant.

It becomes essential to fight the forces attempting to make jazz into a centrally produced commodity by both fighting for its decentralisation and by denying that it can be treated as a commodity at all.

Why should we have to move to London to pursue our music? We have an adequate number of very committed and talented musicians in our midst. What has to be done is to convince the people and institutions (councils, student unions, community centres etc.) of this. Of course the task is considerable and Bristol Musicians Cooperative has been formed to pursue it.

The following is an extract from a long document about the Co-op submitted to the Charities Commission in January 1977. The application was rejected on the grounds that the Co-op was not dedicated to serving the public!

OBJECTIVES

1. The Coop exists to encourage, assist and promote the production and performance of music for which there is little or no other outlet in Bristol and the West Country.
2. The Coop acts as a point of contact for all people involved with such music and encourages the exchange of ideas and the formation of new musical associations.
3. The Coop endeavours to form links with other people and organisations anywhere where this will be of mutual benefit. In particular, the Coop seeks close contact with other people and organisations with similar objectives.
4. The Coop will promote performances for musicians from outside the West Country who otherwise might never be heard there, and will seek performances for its own musicians outside the West Country.
5. The Coop will attempt to increase the outlets for music with no commercial basis by applying pressure to commercial promoters, publicans, etc. to broaden their activities.
6. The Coop will work to keep alive the idea that music is, above all, an important form of personal expression and communication, and that a healthy musical culture is a diverse and varied one.

Our plea is not for a geographical isolation. It is simply that the forces of capital and the market must be attacked with coherence and solidarity in order to preserve the possibility of genuine community cultures developing. Colonialism must be recognised and opposed in all its diverse forms. Our argument is certainly not aimed at London musicians, but at the national and regional cultural institutions and at our potential audience. We hope to develop active artistic dialogue with other co-op type movements both in London and elsewhere; indeed with any active musical community.

The following article by Will Menter was included in the 'Music for Socialism' supplement in Music no.13 August '77 following the MFS festival at Battersea in May.

I sometimes wonder if the 'idiocy of rural life' extends to cities of half a million people such as Bristol, especially when confronted with such a concentration of productive energy as at Battersea. The phrase itself is metropolitan in origin and has been historically disproved or at least qualified beyond recognition since Marx first used it in 1848. And yet we find in the field of 'Culture' (with all the implications of the capital C), which must include 'Music' and 'Theoretical Marxism', the metropolis is still understood as the scene for important developments. In as much as Culture is received and consumed, rather than culture being socially created, it is received from or through the metropolis. So in one way the contradiction facing the provincial musician can be seen as a geographical one - a question of centres of population.

I expect some members of Bristol Musicians' Co-operative still see it like this - it was certainly a prominent argument during our formation 2½ years ago. We had a nationalistic resentment of people coming down from the metropolis to give us our dose of Culture - 'educating the natives' I think was the phrase we used. The situation now seems much more complicated. London is not only the centre for commercial, profit-making music, but also the centre of oppositional music. It is clear that the geographical analysis must be replaced by a class analysis. In as much as Culture is received and consumed, it is received from capital, and the capital is situated in the metropolis. The other complication is in the category 'received Culture', for if we took it away we would certainly take much of the richness out of many people's lives. Music as a commodity is something we are stuck with for the time being. We can't just ignore it or even fight directly against it. Its strength is more than economic, it is built into the emotional responses and habits of all of us, which is the same as saying it isn't just a commodity, it is also meaningful communication.

So where does this leave us?

The strength of Music for Socialism at the moment, I believe, lies in its broadness. For the first time there is a prospect of discussion and co-operation between different fields of music. I gather, from the Battersea experience, that there are musicians in almost every area of music who consider their music socialist. From the discussion it seemed that many people were unaware of this. This is understandable, because in forming one's own music one has to make many critical judgements about value, and it is much too easy to forget them once they are made, and to assume that one's own music is somehow better than others. In other words, practical decisions have to be made by musicians, but this is no reason to close the theoretical debates on which they are based. As a rural idiot, I would like to make a plea for as much as possible of the debate to be recorded in print. There is no doubt that outside London we are isolated from the debate, and in the field of music we have no substantial body of critical work to build on. We have no equivalent of Raymond Williams or John Berger for instance.

The unifying issue for me is the question of the relationship of the music and musicians to the audience. We now have many musics which have been able to grow up only because of the capitalists' exploitation of world markets, and commercial advances in technology. We can no longer define folk music as music which was created by a particular community. New relationships between individuals and classes have made possible new routes

for the development of music, and these can't be dismissed simply because they don't conform to the old patterns. We have many communities other than those identified by a particular geographical location. We have a complex class structure. There are many different ways that music can serve the working class. There are many different socialisms. The answer to the question 'Does this music serve the working class?' is not a simple one, and we mustn't be tempted to answer it too soon.

This statement was published in September 1977:

Since the Co-op was formed about 3 years ago, it has gone through various different phases and changes, putting on gigs and running workshops at many different places. During that time we have gradually acquired an image of elitist avant-garders, putting on 'Art' and not 'entertainment', playing for ourselves and not for the audience, and so on.

BUT THIS IS NOT WHAT THE CO-OP IS REALLY ABOUT.

The Co-op is an open organisation whose direction is defined by its members at any given time. It is open to musicians, non-musicians and learner-musicians who, for whatever reason, can't or don't want to work through the normal commercial channels, and who want greater control over all aspects of their music. If the Co-op is not what you think it should be, it is up to you and your friends to come along and make it into that. We are essentially a co-operative self-help group, so don't come along if you just want a gig — we're not a free promotion service, and we have enough work to do putting on the music of active Co-op members. But if you want gigs (or just want to play with others) and also want to take part in all the background activity and work that is essential for music-making, come along to our next meeting, whatever your music is. The Co-op stands against the division of labour and against categorisation.