

# THE Unpopular Music SUPPLEMENT



For me the high spot of the festival was the picnic on the Downs. 30-40 musicians converging to a predetermined centre, surely the most organic an orchestra could be. After several minutes of solo playing, to be aware of a huge mass of music - and then to be immersed in it.

Brett Hornby

afternoon. picnic. out we march on to the Downs, where we all gather around a hawthorn tree. the form of the event is decided upon. we all move outwards from the tree for exactly 7½ min. then we walk back blowing. after 3 mins we reach the edge of the Downs on our side. sit down in the shade and look at our watches. time up. back we go.

sun bathers and lovers amazed. almighty jam around the hawthorn. endless. exhausted, we fall upon the grass. cider eggs and rice. we eat and blow and watch the children play. i remember its my birthday. time stops still again. sun begins to cool, we break up.

Steve Raybould

The supplement is made by people taking part in Unpopular Music - a festival of improvised music - in Bristol from May 26th to 31st 1978. Other places represented are Essex, Devon, Cornwall, Leeds, Surrey, Bath, Luton, Warminster, Bridgwater, Nottingham, Birmingham, Connecticut, Tamworth, London.

Dan Altmann  
Simon Annand  
Anthony Barnett  
Chris Benstead  
Matthew Beaghe  
Talcott Belbin  
Richard Beswick  
Jonathan Bigwood  
Max Boucher  
Peter Brandt  
Nicolas Brown  
Paul Buckton  
Ron Caines  
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Eddy Deleane  
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Philip Durrant  
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Steve Raybould  
Les Roadhouse  
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Leo Smith  
Dave Solomon  
Larry Stabbins  
Jan Steele  
Garry Todd  
Roger Turner  
Mike Vickery  
Phil Wachsmann  
John Woollard  
Tony Wren



# LEO SMITH

Lecture/workshop May 27th 1978.  
Transcribed and edited by Freddie Hill, Ron Caines and Will Menter.

LEO SMITH: The first thing I'm starting with is to give the music its proper name; and by proper name I mean a name that houses the history of the music, and that covers several continents. The name for all music based on improvisation is Creative Music - something that is being created by the musicians as it is played. The Creative Musician is one who has the ability to instantaneously organise sound, rhythm, silence, space as a perfect musical thought. Now some places have the title to it historically so to speak; say Africa, Asia, certain points in Europe, also in America, North, South and Central. (But the oldest tradition is from Africa and Asia.) So when I say Creative Music, if I don't make a reference to one particular area, I'm talking about all these musics. Any questions?

RON CAINES: Just one, Leo. You mention that the music is basically African and Asian - but it was in the continent of Europe, and because Europe was industrialised first it was probably wiped out. It has been obliterated by modern society.

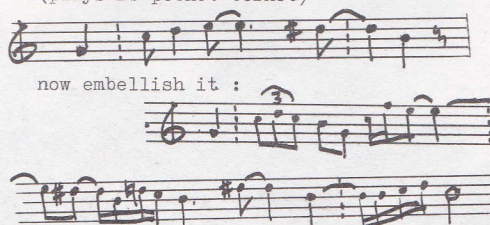
L.S. : I believe it's been there, but what I'm trying to say is that in the ancient culture of these areas (Asia and Africa) there was developed, much earlier than in Europe, improvised music. And some forms of notation were existent before the notation system we know. But the point is it's all one music - whether we talk about the physical or organic aspect of living things all creativity is One. And the music serves to demonstrate the idea of Oneness.

Now to define composition and improvisation. A composition is a piece of music that has been composed by one or more people, and been laid out in a notation system that is valid to the social and political situation of the time - all the mechanics of the composition are exact. The law of composition has not been disturbed at all if it is done by two or more composers who collaborate. There are a few problems with composition; one is, when it is heard it is removed three times from the initial inspiration. 1 - the composer is inspired; 2 - after the inspiration he must write it down in a fashionable notation system that he can utilise for performance; 3 - the performer and conductor (who are two sides of the same coin). For each performer/conductor/ensemble/soloist the music will vary but the mechanics will not vary. Another problem the composer has is that of maintaining his inspiration over the many months that it may take to write his composition down.

Now improvisation is the music that is created at the moment where that person organises simultaneously sound, rhythm, silence and space, and makes it into a meaningful musical statement. My point of view is this. If improvisation is scored but the improvised passages are dominant over the scored passages (in terms of time) then we would call it improvisation.

## Forms of improvisation.

1. Here we have melodic improvising of the embellishment type and it can be very simple. For instance : (plays Bb pocket cornet)



Now take the melody and embellish it using it as a base reference, but adding more sound and rhythm as you go along, so there becomes much more than is actually written. And we know that it can become very complex like in the early Miles Davis period where he would play ballads and they were much different to the original melody, because he was adding to it and taking away to make it a very complex piece.

2. Then you have rhythmic improvisation, which means that a particular rhythm such as a vamp, repetitious figure can be used as a springboard; and the solo-line over it creates the further density to it. That's a very old tradition like the concept of call and response. People say it's African but I don't think it holds to any one particular area.
3. The next is chordal improvisation where you have a harmonic scheme that you improvise over and develop your idea. And that's a recurring aspect although it doesn't have to be. It recurs as each chorus takes place, as in bebop music, where the recurring scheme is the prime element of that period.
4. Finally we come to free or open improvisation where all the ideas we have just been talking about - thematic, melodic, melismatic, chordal - are done through the same means. They are all developed simultaneously; you either see or hear what you play. And whatever technique you have that's personal to your own way of playing, takes into account whatever you have to say musically.

There are two styles or areas of improvisation. One is the idea - musical sentences, paragraphs, chapters, volumes - until a whole solo takes place. Then you have an aspect which takes place in the contemporary classical tradition where the noise factor is the common bond and makes for improvisation of that music, whereas in Creative Music you find very little noise in comparison. One idea of creativity is the composite of all these elements into one.

WILL MENTER: Exactly what is meant by the noise factor?

L.S. : This means the sensation of rapid sounds that takes place in certain gradations. In his book "The Sensation of Sound" the author talks about noise as opposed to ordinary sound, and almost always noise factors are rapid; like emptying a bag of nails on the floor, or a tree falling on a car.

W.M. : I'm not sure to which areas of music they are related.

L.S. : Composition. Like for example the things that the Cage school did; at certain periods they used a lot of noise factors. The type of thing Stockhausen does with different electronic devices. Some of the sounds he makes long, but the sensation of them he makes rapid.

ANTHONY BARNETT: I think it's very important, because I feel there's a conflict between musicians who have come to improvisation through a classical background and those from, say, more of a jazz background; and the noise factor which you're talking about might be relevant.

L.S. : I think it is relevant.

When you say jazz I'm glad you spoke of that. I'd like to say that jazz represents just one period of Creative Music and all the music that's taken place in America should not, is not, must not be called jazz. Because that only takes in the music from 1914 up to around 1933.

A.B. : Brian Rust! But it's become customary to include Charlie Parker, Ornette Coleman, Miles Davis, Cecil Taylor as part of jazz; it's very hard to fight against it.

L.S. : Well, there's a movement among Creative musicians in the U.S.A. and older musicians too, to disclaim that particular title and a good majority of the players call their music Creative Music. Suppose they called all classical musicians Baroque musicians? It would be the same analogy.

Often when people talk to me, especially in Europe, they mention jazz and improvised music as if this is one music and that is another music. They are not separated at all, they all form part of the same history of Creative Music and follow the same title. For example in America people refer to Creative Music as the whole body and Black Music to refer to a particular type of music.

Fletcher Henderson never called his music jazz; Ellington never used the title - in fact he was one of the first people interested in calling it by its race-name (he wanted to call it Negro Music).

W.M. : There seem to be a number of musicians who use the term Great Black Music.

L.S. : That's mainly the Art Ensemble of Chicago and a few others who are probably influenced by them, but by and large it's called Creative Music.

FREDDIE HILL: But is there any chance of our making Black Music?







# discussion 1

There follows a very selective account of the discussion on "The state of improvised music in Britain". The meeting lasted about three hours and about 20 people took part. The selecting has been done by Ron Caines and Will Menter.

The discussion started with short descriptions of the Collectives/Co-op represented which were Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, London. It seemed that most of the problems were shared by all, but emphasis varied. In Leeds, for instance, Paul Buckton said that the main problem is finding a venue, whereas in London this problem has been solved by renting permanent premises.

The two main benefits of collectives were agreed as being firstly the opportunities for musical development, for meeting and playing with other musicians, and secondly the chance to organise concerts and events more efficiently and easily. In Bristol the former was suggested as being more important for the first stage, and the latter for the second stage. Leeds and Birmingham were too young to have considered stages and in London the situation is much more complex. There, because there are over 150 members, there is no identifiable unity and in some ways this makes the LoMC a more difficult structure for musicians to use. BiMC, BrMC and LeMC all have under 20 active members.

## Grants.

BrMC has been awarded a total of £3000 over three years by South West Arts and the Arts Council. BiMC has been awarded £500 by West Midlands Arts. LoMC have had the rent for their premises paid. LeMC have received a small grant from the Northern Jazz Centre Society but none yet from Yorkshire Arts.

Some concern was expressed about tactics to use when dealing with the Arts Council. It was agreed that the only feasible long term strategy is to argue coherently and sincerely about the nature and importance of the music. It was feared that in some cases the suspicions of committee members might be confirmed rather than allayed by this approach, particularly

.....it was extremely useful to hear how other groups are doing - especially with respect to problems and their solutions. It would be a good idea to standardise grant applications with respect to artists' fees, JCS applications and administrative costs.....

John McMillan

on the matters of "professionalism" and "standards of excellence". However, it was pointed out that there are very sound reasons for many improvisors not being "professional" and that these ought to be accepted by the Arts Council. Also that any criteria by which "standards of excellence" are judged can be challenged, and ought to be. It was noted that Paul Burwell has already entered into a "professionalism" discussion with the Arts Council.

Richard Beswick pointed out that it was a non-starter to expect improvised music to pay its way since everything else from string quartets to opera is subsidised. He also said that improvisors should increase their expectations since, for example, some fringe theatres are getting £90,000.

Phil Wachsmann explained that the structure of LoMC makes it difficult for them to put on outside groups since they have no overall concert grant. He suggested that they should apply for a grant specifically for this purpose and also have an administrator to help outside groups put on their own concerts.

## Publicity.

Richard Beswick said that as long as publicity budgets remained small, the music would remain "unpopular" and that any available opportunity should be used and created. This was generally agreed, but some people feared that editorial content can sometimes work against the interests of the music in that it tends to emphasise individual personalities. An example given was the way Time Out handled a recent interview with Paul Burwell.

It was revealed that all institutions such as the press, the BBC, the Arts Council have a card index of excuses and a suggestion was made that we should prepare our own to counter them.

## A network for improvisors.

Ian Croal of the Northern Jazz Centre Society had written to the festival suggesting a fairly formal structure whereby tours could be organised for improvising musicians. Most people felt that the idea was doubtful in terms of feasibility in the form that it was suggested but certain aspects of it could be started now in order to work towards a more substantial structure. There should be much more exchange of musicians and information between Co-ops but at this stage a formal network might cause problems of exclusiveness in the same way as the Contemporary Music Network.

Ian Menter expressed his disappointment that no communication had been received from the Music Net project, since they had been informed that this would be one of the concerns of the festival.

Philip Wachsmann : "It's a mistake to polarise the situation at the moment. The situation is changing. Although the music may be unfamiliar to audiences at the moment, keep doing it as you believe in it."

## SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR IMPROVISORS

(These were drawn up at the pre-workshop group discussion on the Monday morning. One person's set of answers are included on the back page of this supplement.)

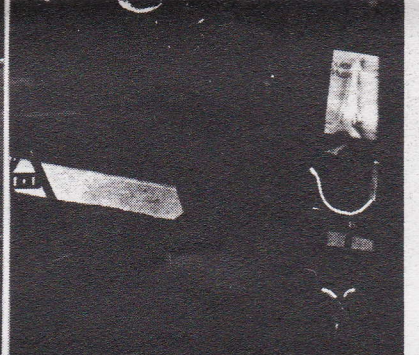
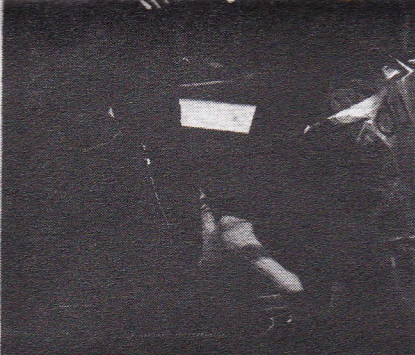
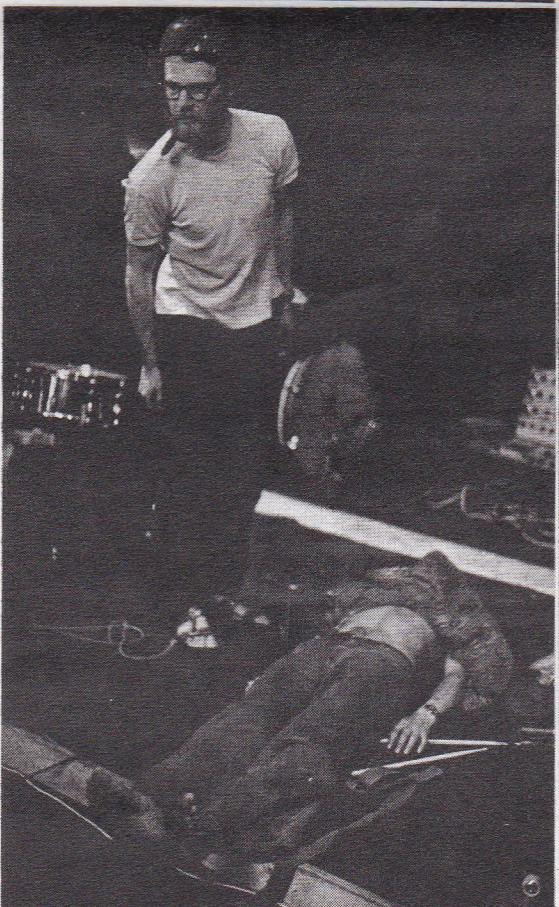
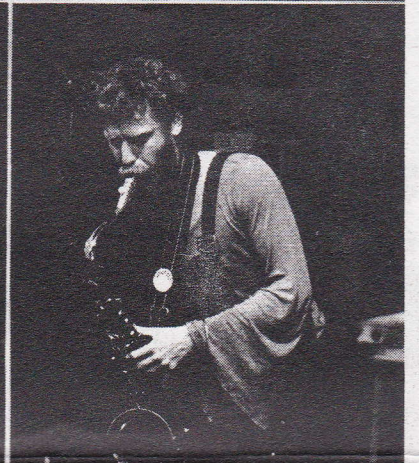
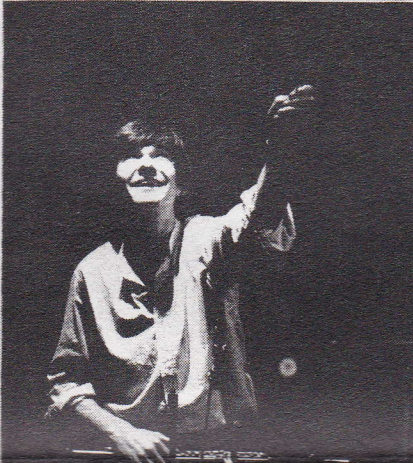
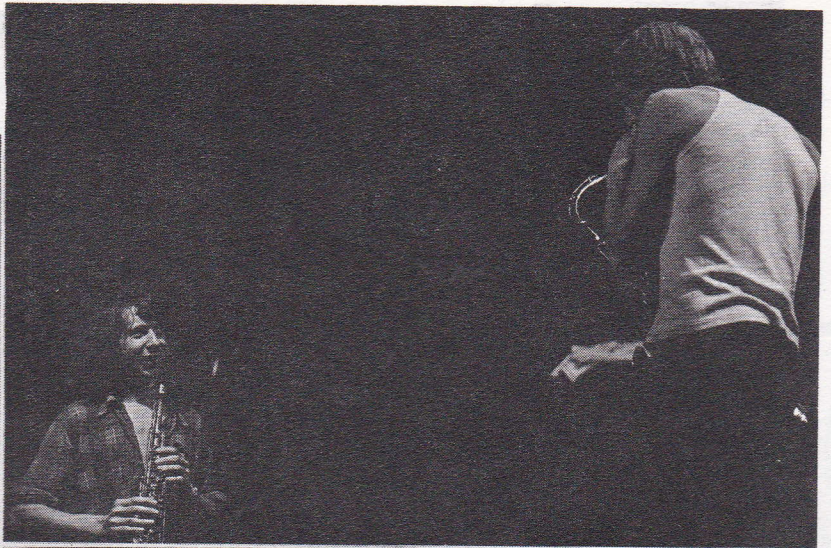
1. What is this thing called music?
2. Where does music start and where does it end?
3. How far are you influenced by qualities of "musicality"?
4. Does your music stand in contradiction to anything, musical or otherwise?
5. To what extent do "statements" in music involve you in drama?
6. How much importance do you attach to memory?
7. Is it desirable that there should be a world music?

(BMC would be pleased to receive answers both from participants and non-participants in the festival.)





# CONCERTS



The Arts Centre. top: Bob Downing, Mark Pickworth, Mark Langford  
bottom: Ian Menter, Bob Helson middle: Richard Beswick, Brett Hornby.  
Arnolfini: Mark Langford, Will Menter, Leo Smith.



# WORK

At first it appeared that the workshops had been too formally organised.

The first session of open workshops (Saturday afternoon) quickly degenerated into a mess, with people doing much more playing than listening, and wandering from room to room (to garden) oblivious of their musical surroundings.

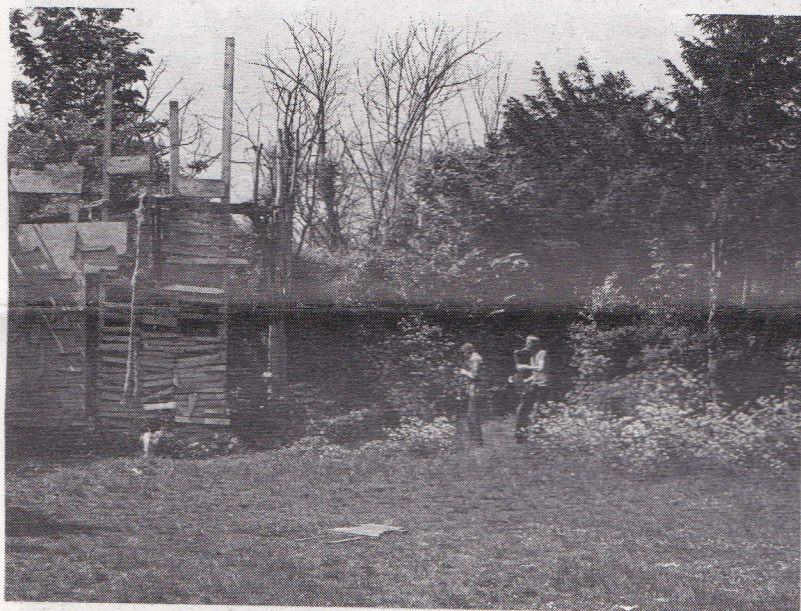
Sunday morning's institution of a few rules about shutting doors and respecting others' playing produced some of the best sessions of the weekend.

John McMillan



Tony Wren and Peter Brandt

Workshop at Baptist Mills Infant School (Leo Smith)



Mark Pickworth and Mark Langford



Workshop at Baptist Mills Infant School (Will Embling)

I was very impressed by the organisation - with the minimum of bureaucracy the festival happened. There were workshops with structures for those who wanted it, and for those (I think the majority) who just wanted to play, groups formed and changed with little fuss.

Some of the nicest workshop blows I eavesdropped were: Bob Helson/Will Menter/Mark Pickworth/Paul Buckton; Mark Langford/Phil Durrant/William Embling; Mark Langford/Mark Pickworth (in the garden) and a large group also in the garden on Monday, which I later joined.

Brett Hornby

Will Menter

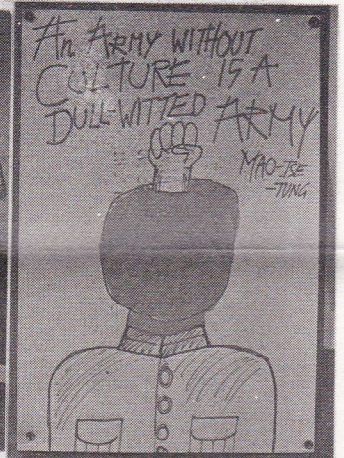
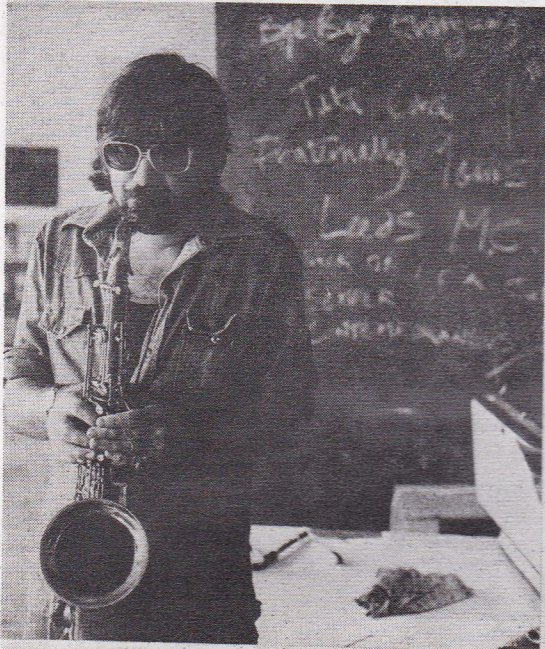


# SHOPS

How will you know when the water tower  
shall be filled when you cannot see over  
the edge.

How shall you know when the resting bell  
will sound when you cannot will  
it.

Anthony Barnett

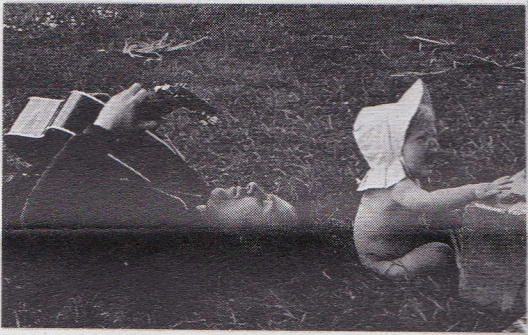


top: Ron Caines  
bottom: Will Menter

top: Will Embling, Anthony Barnett.  
middle: composition workshop directed by Freddie Hill.  
bottom: Mark Pickworth, Tony Wren, John Eaves.



# PICNIC





# discussion 2

Extracts from the discussion on political aspects of improvised music. Edited by Ian Menter.

AB - Anthony Barnett  
MB - Max Boucher  
RB - Richard Beswick  
TB - Talcott Belbin  
BH - Brett Hornby  
RH - Rob Hunter  
IM - Ian Menter  
WM - Will Menter  
SR - Steve Raybould  
PW - Phil Wachsmann  
TW - Tony Wren

the end of it. But the practical point is that when one involves oneself in some kind of unpopular or radical or community activity one finds that one goes through experiences - certain kinds of battles and struggles - and there are crisis points at which one has certain choices to make. You can give up and read a jazz book or you can remain committed to what you first believed in. Therefore the activity in itself creates a political climate about it through necessity.

MB: I don't hold with the notion of improvised music as a stylistic area. My definition of what I'm interested in is self-organised music, that area places no restrictions on vocabulary at all. This was the point of the MFS open sessions and clarifies a lot of contradictions. There obviously is this danger in our music being taken up as "Art Music" and an improvised music that is not aware of this has got no function.

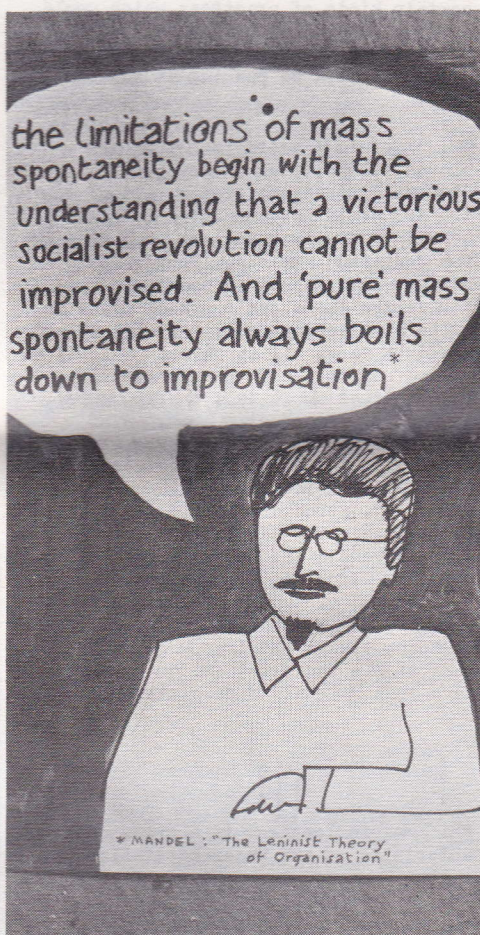
PW: Where do politics begin and end? Is politics a matter of power, in which case it's not so much the music we're talking about, it's more the relationship of something in front of an audience? And I think there's another type of politics which music can be involved in - more general statements, less overt - what you think about society, how people should communicate, how language restricts our ability to say certain things which is less concerned with the power game of audiences, environment and so on.

RH: This (cultural) system doesn't absorb or "degut" any kind of radical art, it has little enclaves that it can apportion it off into where it's got its own group of devotees and followers. You can get all these little pockets of radical art groups that can never effectively challenge the dominance of the Arts Council or the BBC or the IBA or the industries the monopolies that actually dominate the mass entertainments industry.

PW: I'm against the idea of turning musical activity into a direct battle for power - why should one actually change the style if you want to divert? Why should you direct all your attention into making people agree with you? This is something that runs throughout the improvised music scene. It's a misconception that we're all doing the same thing.... It's actually a kind of subversion to start playing the power game with the Arts Council if it affects what you're doing musically. If you fight a system you're actually becoming a victim of it....

If you change one institution or one aspect of an institution it has to take into account how it functions and relates to all the other aspects and the institutions around it. Therefore as soon as you start making these compromises your change just becomes a complication of the existing system.

AB: It seems that what's being said here is that it is wrong for anyone to believe that this is a movement of music which has come about for political reasons and political motives at



AB: Of course we haven't actually moved into a new area at all. I think that what most of us or all of us realise is that the essence of music is improvisation and not composition - composition is an available mechanical means of manipulating things. Centrally music is improvisation and always has been.... The multitude of diverse influences that have enabled this field of improvised music to develop are in fact so great that it is in fact a world music now. It cannot be located in an isolated way as part of a particular national culture. I believe this is very important.

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AB: (to RH) On the top of page 37 (in "Unpopular Music") you suggest that essence of every art form is the communicative act. This I absolutely deny in every way other than the way that everything that happens in the world is a communicative act but that's not a usable definition. To get beyond that point we have to say that art is not in essence a communicative act. It is something that is brought into existence - it exists - and for most people who work with good intentions their work is not meant to communicate....

RH: The emphasis is on act. I don't mean that at the level of conscious intent of the artist it's "What shall I communicate?" and "What's the best form of doing that?" By taking discrete elements of things that already exist, under some kind of aesthetic faculty you are ordering that, you are re-arranging it in some way, you are making a kind of second creation out of things that already exist, perhaps in a way which is trying to communicate meaning.

AB: This is such a fundamental misconception of what's going on in the work process that it's dangerous. In talking in that way one is getting into a practical argument about whether one is going to work with a big audience or a small audience. This is a complete fiction of what work is about.

BH: People do seem to assume that if you're playing music or are an artist, then you want to communicate. I don't. It's nice when you do, but I'm not trying to.

PW: ....The concept of communication is a very conservative one based within the institution of our culture. This comes back again to piecemeal engineering. If you talk about communication as a major factor you are actually reinforcing traditional values in terms of what the bourgeoisie think goes on when you listen to this music.

TB: An art work initially is a production - it's produced - either to a certain set of rules or combining certain elements - it's a combination, a form. After production communication presupposes: 1) a transmission and 2) a reception. This production is put to a certain use. It could produce nothing, but that would mean someone was using it as nothing - interpreting it.

BH: If it is not received then you are saying that it hasn't communicated, that the art has failed. That's why I think it's wrong. I think the value of the music is in the transmission, not in the reception as well.

TB: How can you absent the reception? Surely you're hearing the music, you're playing the music. That in a sense is a reception as well, as it's a creation, a production. So you are critical of your production, you ascribe certain values to it - unless you just play on and on and go away and forget about it.

BH: It may be just semantics, but I would say I am trying to express, not communicate.



**TB:** Express what? You're talking about intention. Intention is a very small part of what communication is.

**BH:** The point of the music that I'm trying to play is that I'm playing it, it is being produced. Whether it is being received or not shouldn't affect the music - it does, but it shouldn't.

**TB:** When you say you don't want to communicate I understand by that that you don't want to involve yourself in a certain habit, a certain historical residue - a certain style, if you like.

**BH:** I'm doing it because I need to.

**TB:** In a way a lot of improvised music is trying to escape history or the context or the condition and get out of it. The trouble is that when you've stopped history begins again, someone begins interpreting it. Improvised music already has its own documentation its own kind of backlog. For me it's an escape from that kind of structure.

**BH:** I don't consider I'm trying to get away from anything. Improvisation gives me a medium which I find very useful to express what I need to express.

**TB:** At any one time, what are you trying to express?

**BH:** If I could say it in words perhaps I'd be a poet.

**TB:** But to express something you first have to know it.

**BH:** I know it but I still couldn't put it into words.

**TB:** So I fall back on my own powers of interpretation - "What is he trying to express there?". We get back to transmission and reception.

**TW:** It's semantics again.

**BH:** I'm trying to say that transmission is its own justification.

**SR:** This music is expression, possibly without direct intent or meaning, and why should it have meaning? If you can give me the meaning of existence then I can give you the meaning of this music.

**IM:** Talcott, you seem to be saying that you're trying to make a break with history, but at the same time you accept that this isn't possible?

**TB:** At the moment of playing, I am escaping recognised styles, which are history.

**AB:** You aren't now - there are recognised styles of improvisation.

**TB:** Right - history returns and suddenly what is improvisation becomes a style of improvisation. When I'm improvising I'm not thinking about it (I may).

**WM:** I've been trying to think recently about the differences between the way I listen to improvised music and other kinds of music. One of the things I feel as a very gut feeling is that improvised music is the only music that doesn't batter at my head and doesn't actually try to impose an ideology on

me. Beethoven certainly was communication in that way - it was trying to make you see the world in a certain way - pop and rock music that you hear on the radio is too. Jazz does that, music from the jazz tradition. All other music that I've heard, basically. It could be questioned whether that might be the difference between improvised music and other musics.

**IM:** Isn't that just another way of saying it fits in with your own ideology?

**WM:** Perhaps.

**RH:** If you think Beethoven or jazz or rock is pushing an ideology that's because you can see it retrospectively. You can see a whole weight of tradition and political and social implications which that music has drawn to itself during its progress through history, through the way it has been promulgated. If improvised music went on another ten or twenty years it would draw to itself certain kinds of practices which would apply a kind of meaning, and that music would then have some kind of ideology which it would be pushing at somebody's head.

**TW:** There's a third factor in the meaning of music or of any art apart from any intentions on the part of the creator or any active interpretative behaviour by the recipient, and that is the contextual meaning. People feel perhaps that Mozart is meaningful and improvised music isn't - that might be quite a widespread reaction. And I wouldn't be at all surprised if the so-called communication or understanding in classical music is a fairly spurious one - it's just a question of familiarity. To a large extent what perhaps is the difference between improvised music and any kind of pre-organised, structured music is, to a certain extent a distinction between palliativeness and provocativeness. Anything which can be repeated or studied and distanced can become reassuring, anything which is constantly changing always requires work on the part of the recipient and can never have that palliative property.

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**RH:** Meaninglessness is a prime characteristic of art under capitalism. No matter what ideology any particular art is bearing it is contradicted by the commodity character. This is a problem that all radical art has to face. If you're trying to make a popular influence the further away from conventional art you are the less likely you are to make effective points of contact - you can radicalise yourself out onto the fringes.

**AB:** Any situation whereby you are allowed to do the work you believe in and get on TV and radio is fine. But the moment you begin to make any kind of compromise I think it's a load of bullshit....

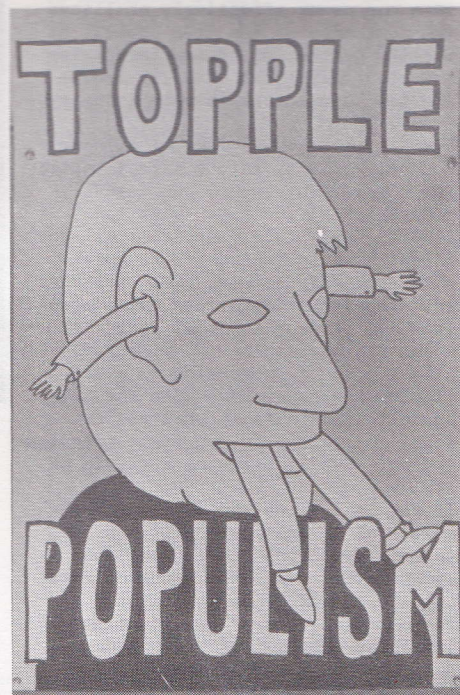
**RH:** (to AB) You've been putting a model of "pure" radical art outside the system.... I don't think the system is watertight (it can be "used")

and I don't think if you make a small compromise your work loses its effect. For example, Trevor Griffiths (in his television plays) tries to exploit the leakiness of the system.

**WM:** Many improvisors would say, I think, that if this music is listened to by half a million people they must be communicating something they don't want to communicate.

**TB:** Recognition - I don't want to be recognised by the media. That kind of recognition means the transformation of my activity, my improvised music, into a commodity. I am not a commodity I am a producer, a production, an activity. When I play my music I am not trying to come over with a certain style or communicate a certain style/feeling/meaning. I'm just playing, just producing consciously or unconsciously. The moment you start to sell me, the musician, my records and what have you, as a particular form, then it becomes a commodity. A commodity is an alienation and to me that is the subversive nature of improvised music..... It's just what I play - what I improvise. It's many meanings and receptions but it's not a commodity. In improvisation you return to the nub of the world, that is our activity - people producing the world, that is our power. To transform that into a commodity, either by selling it on stage or on television or through the appearance of hierarchical structures like in industry, that transforms me the producer into a commodity.

**FW:** Diversity is an important element in what we're doing. I don't really understand how to function politically if it isn't part of what I'm doing musically. I'm against the power game, but I play it when it involves what I'm doing musically.



All the posters were made by  
heuristic music.

X  
In London it is very easy to become very isolated - socially this is a survival factor. In Bristol I found myself voicing attitudes and opinions formed a long time ago - which no longer apply. I had to think and re-evaluate, and was able to do so by contact and discussion. It will take a long time to assimilate the music and attitudes I came across at the Bristol weekend.  
Brett Hornby



This festival, I can say straight away has provided one of the most unusual and rewarding experiences of my musical career to date. While my conditioning does not permit me to accept it's outlook totally uncritically, I should like to enumerate the rewards I have gained from it, and meanwhile to point out where I feel it differs from other comparable musical experiences.

In my ten or so years as a student of music, then as composer, arranger, teacher, and trumpet-player, I have been obliged on many occasions, for the sake of expediency or economy, to perform in settings I would not have chosen, to accept or tolerate standards which are not my own. This still occurs with me and with practically every other professional musician. For this reason the Festival which does not claim commercial or "popular" approval as its self-justification was a great tonic. The things which give a music its vitality and integrity, adventure and fearlessness in thought and expression, were greatly in evidence this past week.

The political philosophy behind this form of music making forbids one member of a given group from asserting leadership over the others so that everyone's contribution may be allowed to appear equally valid. Since the more experienced and technically adept have only the same share of the proceedings as those less so, there is little occasion for formal tuition. Everyone has the opportunity to explore the farthest capacities of his instrument, so that sounds not normally thought of as "musical" are encouraged. The one orthodox criterion which he will recognise is that of playing together and mutual listening.

My experience during the past week has been of music making as basically a sociable activity, without professional jealousy, technical showing off or personal tensions. How far music made this way is capable of making an impact on those not actively involved in it does not admit of an easy answer.

Music has meant many different things to different peoples of the world at different periods of history, and of course prehistory. To people of our background, predominantly white, middle-class, European and more or less liberal in outlook, music has been presented in two predominant guises: either as the vehicle for sublime thoughts and feelings (art-music) or as a battery of immediate physical and/or emotional response (pop-music) both of which are primary examples of music which, as Cage has said, is done to people. True, those of us who have had the opportunities may find a more or less secure way of learning the techniques of presenting these musics, in which case we are made into functionaries of the present system, observably distinct from the rest of humanity, but the viability of this type of career depends on our being in at least a 1:500 proportion to the rest of the public.

A third type of music-making, the oldest and the most universal, may be called raw music, earth-music or in the purest sense of the term, folk-music. This is the production not of inspired individuals, nor of the industrial delivery plant, but of ordinary people alone or collectively, in response to the varying pitch of life. In primitive societies, whom packaged and pre-recorded music has not

reached for mass consumption, the opportunities for spontaneous music making are many and inevitable, to celebrate or bewail the varying fortunes of man. Songs for heavy labour and riotous leisure, weddings and funerals, success in the hunt and the bringing in of the harvest, of love and the loss of love, and in an exalted form, music as an aid to worship and as an accompaniment to public ceremonies.

Our primarily industrial society has its musics for all these eventualities at the press of a switch, the revolution of a turntable or a machine-head. The barons of the recording industry know that the desire for this orchestration has not died out with the coming of mechanised civilisation. What in our case is missing is the compulsion to perform these rites ourselves. Folk music in various forms has fed both art-music and popular music, and it seems that if the tradition of music making as a universal and communal activity is allowed to waste away, the whole field of western music will suffer. Is it too early, or too presumptuous to claim, that the Festival of Unpopular music might be an attempt to fill the gap left by the decline of the folk arts. It demonstrated that music is an activity everyone has a right to take part in, to release his tensions and communicate his feelings in communal security. Many people have and will continue to deride the observable manifestations of this revolution (including regretfully the present writer in certain unguarded moments) but it is potentially a revolution; furthermore, this music which we now call unpopular, is a fact and will not go away.

Freddie Hill

Action Painting or Abstract Expressionism, the movement which emerged in New York in the mid 1940's and was to dominate the language of International Art until the 60's, was the first Modern Art Movement to throw away the bonds of subject matter, to range over all the elements of picture making, to raise Improvisation as means of organising the felt expression of felt experience.

These pioneer artists spoke of "being in the painting", of "allowing the work to develop its own identity", of the "Act" of painting, and Painting as self discovery. On finishing a picture they would look at it and say, "How did I do that?" Each painting was unique and could never be exactly repeated again. There was talk of new space, scale, the introduction of new materials and gesture, which was to do with the physical movements of the artists hand and body in making the work.

Colour and form ceased to be tied to imitative representation. No longer confined to the representation of say a sleeve but were allowed to function as pure form and colour and material in their own right with a life of their own. (The movement was superseded by Pop art, which was partly a reaction to it, and bears some resemblances to Punk art and fashion in style and impact.)

The best English improvisors I have heard achieve many of the objectives in exploration of sound that the Action Painters were aiming for two decades ago. Saxophonists are no longer restricted by the now seemingly narrow range of notes suggested by the saxophone

## afterthoughts

fingering manual. Although using the same tone holes and mouthpieces of conventional contemporary players the range of new sounds which many of the players are achieving are truly astonishing. These elements are being organised in exciting ways, sometimes silence and space seem to dominate and the sounds from the instrument play a subdued role.

These new sounds may indeed be "unpopular" or perhaps more properly unfamiliar. Parker and Coltrane, Schoenberg and Stravinsky met with a similar lack to understanding and hostility. But there is no doubt left in my mind that this is the "now" music and the genuine music of today, embodied in a fundamentally new aural approach to experience and the organisation of sound.

The Aesthetics of the new music also happen to reflect the condition of the individual in society today. The individual yearns to seek his own identity freed from the crass restrictions and mindlessness of mass-produced pleasures, products, regulations and nightmares. The freedom of the improviser in new music is astonishing and ideas about players to other players, to audience, to star syndrome, music as shared experience, belonging to everyone, not just the virtuoso (or as previously the master composer who was able to write notation and the conductor able to give orders) and is especially

relevant to discussion of its significance in society. The making of creative music is no longer controlled by bar lines etc. and other devices of musical composition. The boundaries which do exist are always low walls which can be easily stepped over.

Free music cannot be faked. Those who are fakers are exposed. This explains the form exactly. All art movements contribute to the body of artistic expression, then naturally decline in significance and lose their potency and power of expression. Also the boundaries of new art eventually become defined and the practitioners develop their individual contributions. After this point movements become closed off, and artists who follow seek new solutions.

The fascination of creative music today lies in the fact that the guide lines and boundaries have not been reached, let alone drawn. The critics have not yet succeeded in pigeon-holing us to extinction. Criteria are slightly intangible, difficult to impose. There is little musical bigotry, generally agreed dogma. The situation is changing constantly. A very exciting time, one day the audience will hear what the musician is playing for him. ("How could we ever have restricted ourselves to bar-lines, key signature, etc.")

This music has given freedom back to society, and is the only antidote to the corruption and debasement of modern life.

Ron Caines



Following the meeting about Politics and Music, informal discussion continued. I told Max Boucher that it was a pity he had not said more about his own point of view. He answered that it would have taken too long but that it was to do with the need to attack the things one does not like about present day institutions.

Mark Pickworth joined the conversation and suggested that there was an ideal situation to work for - a situation where everyone who wished to make their own music did so, and where dirty or menial jobs were shared out so that no-one would be exploited.

I said that I thought we should go beyond imagining an ideal or attacking an existing situation. Most important was to consider whether one could imagine or envisage a transition towards an ideal. Actually I do not think this transition is imaginable, and attacks are useless unless both alternative and transition are available.

..... a reaction

..... meanwhile back in Bath "The Festival" is in full swing, not that you would notice walking through the streets; no sound of music to be heard except by the connoisseur at a fixed price in the concert halls. Not for Mr. Everyman to hear the sounds unannounced and informally in and around the city; a week of perfect weather and five park bandstands pleading to be used.....

..... back to Bristol where our Unpopular Music Festival, in contrast, did try to reach out by serenading on the Downs, giving four continuous nights of concerts at the Arts Centre and most importantly holding a five-day series of open music workshops for improvisation. People played, people listened, everyone felt the exchange; informal music groups coming and going, changing sound structures in the school garden..... quiet, sometimes very quiet and in touch with the sticky heat..... indoors other musicians using the imprisoned sounds that a room can give ..... not quite as unpopular.....

John Eaves



I thought that while discussing attacks on institutions and a utopia, it would be useful to make a distinction between i) the Action and Contact Area immediately around the individual, and in which he has control, and ii) the Wider Area extending to the whole fabric of society and its institutions, where the individual's action is limited by society's context and grammar.

Furthermore, let us consider there is a man called 'A' who makes music and also makes his own bread. At some time he finds he should spend more energy on his music in order to improve his skill and expand the effect of it. Consequently another man 'B' must bake extra bread for 'A' to eat. Now 'A' spends more time making better music and 'B' works harder in order to hear this better music that 'A' makes. And so on as this process expands.

So Society can be regarded as being on an expanding conveyor belt and the idealist has to decide at what point he would like to enter this process, and at what point unwanted exploitation begins. For example, at what point is 'B' working too hard making 'A's bread and is 'A's music

not worth 'B's work? This process is compounded when we consider that to feed 'A' might cost many people (tax payers) a great deal and that 'B' has no longer time to enjoy listening to or participating in 'A's music, or maybe 'B' is no longer interested.

So the revolutionary idea is sadly modified. Maybe the best situation available to us is one where the various stages on this expanding conveyor belt can freely co-exist, rather in the same way that some forecasters see an alternative society developing where technology is shared but exploitation is kept in proportion, where there is highly developed technology (3D colour cable TV) but it is limited (one TV per community unit) and thousands of hours are not wasted (by people making thousands of boxes). I think this diverse situation is the one worth working for.

Philipp Wachsmann

.... at present my mind is a fair turmoil of more or less vivid impressions on the one hand, and of unanswered questions and contradictions of a more theoretical nature on the other.

Above all I suppose I hope that all the energy we saw and felt will not be dissipated as people retreat to relative geographical isolation, and that we can remain engaged in each others' music and ideas. I think it would be a mistake to make, or to be seen to be making, grandiose revolutionary claims for the music. For myself I'm not interested in the production of any kind of finished cultural/art object but only in improvising as an ongoing social activity and one that would discourage a passive following. I feel it as part of a movement/struggle to live freely and (hopefully) spread freedom in the world - "the desire to live freely and without constraints is a political decision" - and it is in that sense only that I see it as political. And if you're interested in living you've got to adopt a wider social perspective than just that of music.....

Mark Pickworth

John McMillan's answers to some of the questions.

1. "The silk strings resounding in harmony, this music surpasses all other arts" - Hsi Kiang (262 AD).
2. Peter Riley did an article called "Notes for a Geography Of Music" in MUSICUS 6. With a few modifications his map answers this question.
4. I play electronics/amplification and junk (/bits/clutter/things - depending on regional dialect). On a technical level, my music stands in contradiction to the tradition of "Musique-Concrete/Electronic Music" with its aims of total control over sound. It also contradicts the music of keyboard-oriented synthesizers.
7. i) No.
- ii) Perhaps.
- iii) All musics have in common the fact that they are restricted by the physiological limitations of our senses.

BRISTOL MUSICIANS  
CO-OP would like to thank  
everyone who has sent  
contributions for this  
supplement. We are  
sorry we haven't been  
able to include all  
the material.

PHOTOS: WILLY GUY  
(except where stated)

## Unpopular Music

is the name of a 52 page booklet published by Bristol Musicians' Co-operative.

Contents include:

- Unpopular Music in Bristol? (Ian Menter)
- The Co-op - A History of some of the Significant Events & Ideas (Will Menter)
- Improvised Music - Retreat of the Avant-Garde? (Rob Hunter)
- Larry Stabbins (an interview)

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