



for-Wards: Citywide Feeney Fellowship Report

I have used the Feeney Fellowship to support the development of an ambitious citywide music programme called ***for-Wards: Citywide***. This 2-year music programme is the development of a community based music pilot project that took place from October 2014 – March 2015. In the pilot project we invited Birmingham residents from three Birmingham wards to share in the creative process of composing three new musical works about their area.

for-Wards: Citywide commissions 10 Birmingham composers to compose music about one of Birmingham's 10 constituencies with the collaboration of four community groups found in the four wards that make up their constituency.

Residents share in the compositional process starting with community field recording sessions. 40 community groups from each of Birmingham's wards will guide their 'composer collaborator' to source sounds found in their locality that best represent their ward. Regardless of musical aptitude and musical understanding, by listening to and identifying sounds they feel best represents their ward, communities are contributing to a sound archive which we will share both online and on a vinyl record. Each composer with their community group collaborators respond to their 'found sounds' and stories for inclusion in their district commission.

As part of my Feeney Fellowship I received mentoring from 3 music specialists who work with field recordings in interesting and often innovative ways. The learning and artistic development gained from this experience has had a profound impact on my role as lead artist/composer and artistic director and, consequently on the wider artistic team. I was also able to purchase equipment to support my field recording research.

Mentoring Team

- Duncan Chapman who uses found sounds and often involves community groups and school children in field recording activities.
- Ian Rawes from the London Sound Survey
- Janek Schaefer – award winning sound artist who uses found sounds in the majority of his work: www.audioh.com/. I was recently asked to submit field recordings to Janek's live radio collage of foundsound places <http://www.foundsoundscape.com/>.

Mentoring Sessions



In January 2016, I met with Duncan Chapman for a day packed full of mentoring. Duncan and I went out to explore one of the districts for year 1 of *for-Wards Citywide*. We headed out on a cold winter's day to record sounds in 3 quite contrasting parts of Northfield district. During the second half of the day I asked Duncan to demonstrate some of the ways in which contemporary composers have used field recordings.

As Duncan and I walked around quite urban parts of Longbridge we discussed the obvious fact that Birmingham is mostly a built up area and a lot of sounds that communities and composers would come across in their field recording sessions would consist of sounds you could locate anywhere such as traffic, cars etc. We spoke about ways in which combinations of 'found sounds' could be sonically more interesting and, the importance of each composer letting the community guide them to 'hidden gems' in their area where interesting sounds could be located. We also spoke about the role of the field recordist and differing opinions within the field about whether the person capturing the sounds should try and be as invisible as possible.

In the afternoon we did lots of listening to the various ways field recordings have been used by composers, Duncan shared the following works:

- Environment: The nightingale in The Pines of Rome (Respighi)

Recording used to locate the listener in a particular environment

Dialogue : Cantus Arcticus (Rautavaara)

“Conversation” between recorded sounds (in this case, birds) and instruments

- Triggers: Trans (Stockhausen)

The shuttle sound appears to trigger changes in the music (you could develop this idea with audible cues from recordings triggering different fragments or phrases)

- Musical phrases extracted: Different Trains (Reich)

Taking the contours or speech and rhythms and making them into instrumental music

Another (maybe more sophisticated?) example is in Jonathan Harvey's

“Speakings” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6UJ2RXIEXa4> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3558730/Jonathan-Harvey-how-I-gave-voice-to-an-orchestra.html>)

- Association/evocation: Jesus' Blood (Bryars)

Loop that gets orchestrated with instruments joining in

- Transformation: Encounters in the republic of heaven (Trevor Wishart)

Taking fragments and making something from their character

- Conceptual: An Apple a Day (Matthew Herbert)

Using an idea of something unique (in this case apple varieties) but could relate to locations?

- Acousmatic transformations: Busk (McDonald / Virgo)

Birmingham buskers fragmented and mangled

The second half of the day in particular was really useful and I decided there and then that the inclusion of field recordings in each commission did not have to be as rigid as the brief I set during the pilot project. I also felt quite liberated by not having to incorporate the field recordings in such a literal way.



In February 2016 I spent a day with award winning artist Janek Schaefer. Janek and I spoke extensively about our musical journeys and he was curious to learn how the idea for *for-Wards* was conceived. He spoke about his musical inspirations including DJ Phillip Jeck who performs using turntables. Janek has created a tri-phonic (three armed turntable) which enables him to play with temporality in real time.

<http://www.audioh.com/projects/triphonic.html>

I found the following projects and processes fascinating:

- Extended Play <http://www.audioh.com/projects/extendedplay.html>
- Recorded delivery http://www.audioh.com/projects/recorded_delivery.html “a sound activated tape recording of parcel travelling through the Post Office system from Exhibition Road, to the room of the installation in the Acorn Self Storage centre, Wembley, London.”
- Weather Report residency <http://www.audioh.com/projects/weatherreport.html>

I asked Janek many questions about his work, which is quite conceptual and often incorporates found sounds. I wanted to understand the methods and processes he had employed for his creations. During our discussion Janek noticed that *for-Wards Citywide* has at its heart a process of social interaction. He asked some tricky questions, “What makes a sound local or unique to Birmingham?”



We then explored different types of lo-fi microphones. Janek brought along a red suitcase full of microphones and equipment he had used in his work. I was given a temporary loan of various microphones and set me homework to complete for April:

I'd like to set you some home work with the mics

4 x short compositions each of any length less that a 7" single

- 1 with air mic
- 1 with water mic
- 1 with vibrations mic
- 1 with elecgtromagnetic mic

No ideas.. Just intuitive music tracks

World premier on my return in April please

Just enjoy the challenge
Deadlines make the world go around

And you may find something of interest in my resource page <http://www.audioh.com/information/soundartresource.html>

Thanks

Proffesssor Odd Job



In March 2016 Ian Rawes a professional field recordist came to Birmingham and we spent the whole day field recording and testing out equipment.

I learnt about the 'recordists' stance':

Recordings are often categorised and thought of according to their subject matter: wildlife, interviews, live music and so on. This makes sense from the listener's point of view. But for the recordist all kinds of factors are in play before they even begin work. If I had to try to sum them up in one sentence, it would be:

The fundamental issue in recording is the relationship between the recordist and their subject.

http://www.soundsurvey.org.uk/index.php/survey/post/five_fundamental_stances_in_recording/

Ian explained how for many years he has adopted the 'observational stance' which is "not influencing my surroundings as I record. More recently I have begun to venture towards the 'collaborative stance' by interviewing people. A composer like yourself may consider those stances or strategies, but you have other options too."

He continues "In my own experience, some sound artists at least approach recording with the aim of isolating specific sounds to use in compositions. They talk about 'sound textures' and like to experiment with equipment which holds out the promise of capturing such textures - for example, by attaching contact mics to metal railings, by burying in the ground mics which are sensitive to infrasonic rumblings, or using induction loops to make audible the electromagnetic emissions of all kinds of machinery prevalent in cities: car engines, ATM machines, power lines, trains, trams and so on.

With those sorts of possibilities in mind, I'll do my best to outline some equipment and accessory choices."

We discussed:

THE RECORDER.

I already have a Zoom H4n, which is quite a capable machine. We discussed pocket-sized recordings and mentioned the Sony PCM-M10. This is a very good little recorder and a bonus is that it comes with the Light Edition of the Sony SoundForge editing software.

This has two very specific but also very useful features which are maybe worth discussing:

1. Dynamics. Dynamic range compression.
2. Noise reduction.

THE MIC

I really liked the sound of the Audio Technica BP4025 single-point stereo mic. I purchased a second hand microphone with funds from the Feeney Fellowship.

WIND PROTECTION

Wind noise for small recorders can be countered by a small fluffy windshield. Good ones are made by the Hawaiian-based firm Redhead:

<http://www.redheadwindcreens.com/>

I bought several windshields which have supported the quality of recordings of the citywide project.

EDITING SOFTWARE

Ian Rawes recommended working in the spectrogram view provided by Izotope RX and that he wouldn't willingly switch to using anything else. He argues the spectrogram is far more informative of what's happening in the recording than the simple amplitude envelope which just about every other audio editor uses. It also has some good tools for removing unwanted noises from the recording, especially brief sounds like clicks.

<https://www.izotope.com/en/products/audio-repair/rx/>

He noted that some people recommend Reaper, which has an adequate free version.

<http://www.reaper.fm/>

Mentoring for *for-Wards: Citywide* Year 1 Composers

I decided to use what was left of my budget to bring back my mentors to support the training and development of the year 1 composers. Consequently the composers really enjoyed the sessions and said they learnt a lot. I'm confident that these sessions have impacted positively on the outreach work carried out by the year 1 cohort and the overall quality of the composition that will be produced.

I also invited Ian Rawes to co-facilitate the community field recording sessions for each year 1 composer which ensured the quality of the recordings would be good, as some of the recordings in the pilot project were not captured correctly.

Equipment

The Feeney Fellowship enabled me to purchase the following equipment which has been used throughout field recording session for year 1 of ***for-Wards: Citywide programme***.

3 x Sony PCM-M10
1 x Audio Technica BP 4029 and Rode Blimp
3 x Windshields
1 x Hydrophone and 1 x contact mic via Jez Riley
(sound artist)

I'd like to end by expressing my upmost gratitude to the Feeney Trust for their generous contribution towards the equipment, research and development element supporting ***for-***
Wards: Citywide!!