

Luke Fowler and Mark Fell: Computers and Cooperative Music-Making

This collaboration between Glasgow-based artist filmmaker Luke Fowler (b. 1978) and Sheffield-based multidisciplinary artist Mark Fell (b. 1966) examines the development of two computer music languages from the 1980's and their associated ideologies and communities.

The computer is a ubiquitous device in music studios and on stage. Drawing on archival research, this exhibition looks at how the use of computers began to shape music-making through experimentation with unfamiliar methods that involve sound transforming algorithms, chance operations and tuning systems – all buried deep in the fabric of today's electronic music.

Focussing on two historic computer music languages that emerged in the 1980s, the display considers how technical systems and aesthetic vocabularies are intertwined. At the core of these new languages was the idea of developing affordable digital tools that enabled composers to experiment freely and to customise their software – alongside the creation of new sound material anchored on everyday experiences.

The Composers Desktop Project (CDP) was developed by Trevor Wishart, Archer (Tom) Endrich, Richard Dobson, and later Richard Orton in York, UK. Working on a cooperative basis, its aim was to democratise and disseminate new computer tools for sound design, and a 'detailed and flexible access to the inner features of sounds'.

A programming language for music composition and performance, the *Hierarchical Musical Specification Language (HMSL)* was co-authored by Phil Burk, Larry Polansky and David Rosenboom at Mills College, Center for Contemporary Music, Oakland, USA. Using the Amiga computer to control cheap and homemade digital synthesizers, its experimental topography radically re-shaped traditional compositional procedures.

Using archival images, documentation, original footage, writings, recordings and scores, the display reflects how these software systems adopt different architectures, methodologies and approaches to sound and music.

The Whitechapel and the artists are grateful to the following individuals and organisations:

John Bischoff, Phil Burk, Philip Corner, Steven Curtin, Archer (Tom) Endrich, Frog Peak Music, Harry-Ed Roland, Nick Didkovsky, David Malham, Robert Marsanyi, Maggi Payne/Mills College CCM Jeanne Parson, Larry Polansky, David Rosenboom, Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York, Trevor Wishart.

Join a talk with artist Mark Fell, Georgina Born, Professor of Music and Anthropology at University of Oxford, and Jan Hendrikse, to discuss the history of computer music.

Take part in computer-based music workshops especially devised for schools. Pick up a guide or visit whitechapelgallery.org for details.

