Studio Report: the GRM – Groupe de Recherches Musicales, 
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Abstract

Founded in 1948, the GRM – Groupe de Recherches Musicales has been the first and is still one of the major institutions active in the production and development of electroacoustic music. An overview of past and currently activities is given, with a focus on new directions such as archives preservation and contents distribution.

1 Introduction

The GRM was founded by Pierre Schaeffer in 1958 with its actual name, but exists since 1948; its former names being "Groupe de Recherche en Musique Concrète" (1950-1958) and earlier, the "Club d'Essai" (1948-1951). The GRM is what one could call an old lady, which has lived through all the periods of modern technology, going from Shellac records to Internet exchange. During these 56 years his members have worked with and for composers to bring up new ideas, new tools and approaches to music, and making this music accessible through concerts, records, radio and writings.

Fifty years later, what is the role and impact of such an institution in our musical world? When technology has become a popular issue and composers don't necessary need any more to go to a special place in order to access to technology and means, what is the function of institutions whose main interest is to explore the rich and exciting roads of music and machines? New objectives, adapted to our contemporary world have to be continuously looked for, while historic perspective has to be maintained and encouraged, mainly in the domain of ideas and conservation.

2 What did the first GRM look like?

The main discovery of Schaeffer was the possibility of making music with recorded sounds; this meaning that sounds could be relatively easily combined, independently of their production context. The second discovery was that combining any sound questioned the fundamentals of musical and the way the perception works in order to create sense (Schaeffer 1952). He then brought together three kinds of specialists: composers, that could experiment with creation and develop the lines and possibilities opened by Musique Concrète; engineers and technicians that would develop the necessary machines for sound manipulation; and philosophers and psychologists that would work on the results and question the interpretation and construction of sense in our perception. Among the composers we find Pierre Henry and Philippe Arthuis, who opened the studios to a large number of curious composers. As engineers, Jacques Poullin and Pierre Schaeffer himself developed the first machines as the Phonogènes and built the first dedicated studios (Poullin 1954). Finally, Abraham Moles (1960) brought the human sciences approach to explain the organization of this new music.

This model prevailed until the sixties, when musicologists began to be included in the group and pedagogical actions were developed to diffuse and make known the possibilities issued from new music. Since then the model has not changed much: technologies, persons and music have changed in great extent, but the essential concept of bringing together composers, researchers, technicians and perception specialists has been strong and rich in results.

Two new domains have appeared in the last years due to time and evolution of technologies. The first domain is conservation; the activity of a research center develops a natural accumulation of results, be it music, papers, books or software. These form collections, which have to be looked out and organized so to be able to be accessed. These collections were conceived as libraries, to be kept for the future. In the last years the necessity of a digital migration has become a major issue, in order to guarantee this transmission towards the future. Analog tapes and machines are disappearing; so urgent action has to be imagined to be able to preserve the past.

Digital conservation has opened the doors of new access: the second domain developed in the recent years is to make contents available through the net, mainly for pedagogical purposes even if more and more people enjoy accessing music and finding organized and prepared material.
3 What objectives for the GRM in 2004?

If we analyze the four domains of activity: production, research, conservation and content distribution; each has a specific orientation that takes into account history, technology and society evolution.

3.1 Production

Since 1970, production has been the main activity of the GRM in terms of volume and financing. Twenty to twenty-five composers come every year in GRM to develop a musical project, which is normally performed in a concert. Even if composers very often have their own home equipment, working in the GRM studios (3 studios) permits the possibility of working 24 hours per day, in unique listening conditions and without bothering any neighbor. Concerts is the second activity of production, a concert series running from October to June, permit to present in a prestigious place as the Radio House and with an unique array of 80 loud-speakers (30 outputs) called the Acousmonium (Bayle, 1975, 1993). In these series (28th year in 2004) are presented the works created in the studios and other major works bringing together sound, performers and images. Three types of concerts are made: Acousmatic concerts, where only music composed for a fixed media is presented, live-electronics, bringing together performers, recorded sounds and processing, and multimedia where image or actions are presented. Radio production is the third activity; 50 hours per year of radio programs dedicated to electroacoustic music are realized, presenting music from all domains and countries.

Production is an essential aspect of the implication of GRM in the musical society; composers find, in the studios and concerts, a rich exchange domain, where music can be experimented, discussed and presented. Composers receive a commission to compose and production means; they have contacts with the research activities and meet other composers with different ideas and scopes. As always through the past (with Jazz, Pop and Rock music) GRM constitutes a strong attraction for popular musicians from the Techno or the Electronics domain; rich and original collaborations develop; experimentation is regularly done to exchange esthetical approaches.

3.2 Research

Research objectives have been in the last years of two types: technological and on musical sciences.

On the technological domain, the most known results are the GRM Tools, a series of real-time sound processing plug-ins for Digidesign™ (RTAS, TDM) and Steinberg™ (VST) environments, which have become extremely popular between composers, sound artists and cinema sound effects (Favreau, 1998, 2001). Through their GRM Player they are now autonomous and can be used as an independent tool. Many of these plug-ins have been closely developed with composers who propose new issues and experiment the results.

A second important aspect of research concerns musical representation and analysis, for this the Acousmographe permits to analyze, annotate, and extract information from any sound document (Koechlin and Vinet, 1991). It was initially conceive for music analysis but its range of application is extremely wide. It is an interesting platform to experiment on visual representation of sound and to its plug-in structure permit to introduce tools for statistic analysis of sound and media-mining.

The musical science domain works on musical analysis and perception, and their application to musical understanding and teaching. Seminars and Ph.D. students regularly work on the compositions done in GRM or explore the memories of the past.

3.3 Conservation

The GRM developed very early an "Acousmathèque" or specific place for conserving all the GRM archives since the beginnings in 1948. In 1998, a preservation plan was launched and the 1450 works were transferred to a digital medium. Since 2003, a digitization process has been taken place and a server is currently being loaded with all the archives, mainly for production and research activities, preparing the moment when open access will be made possible. This project, called Acousmaline, will include progressively all the documents, mainly the 5000 hours of conferences, concerts, debates and seminars organized by the group.

But the conservation activity has another concern, and this is the history of electroacoustic music. If nothing is done, in the next years, due to physical degradation of media, whole pans of our musical memory will disappear. On the other hand, music and documents have to become available; access has to be opened. For this last point, restrictions mainly depend on legal and right issues; this is why a first and original initiative is being developed by the GRM inside the Ina, (National Audiovisual Institute), in France, who keeps the legal deposit of radio and television. Within this legal deposit, which makes audiovisual documents accessible to researchers, a special collection dedicated to contemporary creation with audiovisual means is being installed, to receive little by little France's electroacoustic compositions. Composers voluntarily deposit their originals or copies of their works; works are digitized and made accessible only for research issues, with no copy possibility.

This same initiative is being extended to a European level, in cooperation with De Montfort University in Britain and the ZKM center in Karlsruhe, Germany. These three institutions are working together to develop a European initiative intended to identify, catalogue and launch preservation initiatives on endangered collections. The
ultimate goal is to develop interconnected repositories permitting an open access to European electroacoustic music.

This project is only beginning, more information shall be given in a next issue of Organised Sound, the International Journal of Music Technology edited by Leigh Landy at De Montfort University and published by Cambridge University Press. 

Historical and major centers are being contacted to organize this work, and mainly to make the inventory of the existing music. Any participation is welcome; it is an open project oriented towards the preservation of the memory of electroacoustic music.

3.4 Content distribution

This domain, which has always existed, is acquiring more importance in the last years through an increasing demand from contents, coming from different domains.

Already in the fifties, the first records and books were published, permitting the music to circulate and the ideas to be understood. A major change was brought by CD, which brought the listening quality, indispensable for electroacoustic music appreciation. The GRM has published circa 100 CD presenting works with a historical perspective, as well as the most contemporary ones.

Multimedia has opened new doors; the first was opened through the CD-ROM: "Les Musiques Électroacoustiques" which was commissioned by the French Education Ministry to provide to secondary teachers and effective and extensive overview of electroacoustic music (unfortunately, the CD-ROM only exists in French). This work presents a historical overview of the music and techniques since 1948, an extensive analysis of 6 works, with different points of view and visual representations done with the Acousmographe, and a workshop for processing and recording sounds. This product was a major success since more than 12000 have been sold (and still selling).

The second door is Internet, where a systematic publication of music, discussions, forums, was initiated 5 years ago (http://www.ina.fr/grm/), but has increased its output through the Acousmaline project (http://www.ina.fr/grm/acousmaline/index.fr.html), in which musical analysis, graphical representations of music are currently found as well as the composers projects and works, and very recently a Web radio (http://www. INA.fr/grm/radio/index.fr).

These activities not only have a great success, mainly within teachers and professors, but they have strongly interested the Education Ministry. New collaborations are being organized in order to provide tools and contents for multimedia publishing for the educational word. UNESCO has approached GRM to use some of its tools for global distribution (Acousmagic Player).

4 Conclusion – what’s next?

A main concern for today and for the future is the size of GRM. In the past the concept was that people had to be a part of the Group in order to work with or for it. Today the tendency is to have a small group of specialists working in each domain, and a very large association with institutions, composers, and universities, in order to propose actions and reunite people on common research and experimentation issues. About 100 persons gravitate around the 16 GRM members: composers, researchers and students.

Today's GRM will change year after year. Some basic concepts are always there to remember our origin (the radio and the listening without visual support) and our fathers, like Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, who set up the road for an unlimited research and adventure.

References


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1 The GRM is composed of 16 persons: Bernard Bruges Renard, Richard Bulski, Frédérique Cottard-Triaud, Jacques Darnis, François Delalande, François Donato, Emmanuel Favreau, Évelyne Gayou, Yann Geslin, Diego Losa, Claude Mussou, Élisabeth Perrin, Dominique Saint Martin, Jean-Christophe Thomas, Christian Zanési and directed by Daniel Teruggi.

Other people collaborate very closely, like: Philippe Dao and Solange Barrachina among others. 250 composers have regularly worked in the GRM; many have composed several of the 1450 musical works in our collection.