University College Bretton Hall - Studio Report

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Abstract

This studio report concerns the vast changes the Music Department at Bretton Hall are currently putting into place, most of which are pertinent to the ICME community. In 1994 the Music degree will be replaced by a Contemporary Music degree. This department will therefore (most likely) be the first to be specifically geared towards today's and tomorrow's world. This paper discusses the background, philosophy, expected results and of course focus on the central role digital applications are playing.

1 Some Background

Bretton Hall is a college of the University of Leeds consisting of three faculties: Performing Arts (Music, Dance, Drama), Fine Arts and Humanities, and Education. There are ca. 2000 full-time students. Therefore Bretton is neither a conservatoire nor a large self-contained university with subjects offering a wide range of arts. It is a centre for the arts in the first instance.

Due to recent changes in British education, the Music Department is able to roleguessedly offer new postgraduate programmes. Under the direction of a new Head of Department, it has been agreed to introduce new programmes and simultaneously modernise the pre-existing undergraduate programmes. A new BA in Contemporary Music (CM: in all things contemporary, this degree replaces the previous traditional BA in Music) will be offered along with an updated version of the existsent Popular Music Studies (PMS) degree; furthermore an MA in Contemporary Performing Arts (in collaboration with the Dance and Drama departments) has just been introduced along with an MPhil and PhD programmes in a chosen area of CM. For the first three degrees, a workshop/project approach is being applied to create CM's being trained holistically so that thinking musicians and practicing musicologists and music technologists are trained.

Due to the way things were, Bretton was high on contact, production (the faculty is responsible for ca. 300 performances per year), but low in research. As part of these changes, research has suddenly been prioritised and supported, and consequently a better balance has been found (see below).

2 Some Aspects of the Bretton Philosophy

2.1 Holistic Education

Simply stated Bretton's music courses are all run on a project system which is holistic-based. Each project uses a musical theme in terms of socio-cultural elements, history, (exception) analysis, performance, arrangement and composition. The workshop approach to the devising of music from the concept stage through composition, realisation/performance and documentation provides above skills-based approaches to musical practice.

2.2 Technology = One Focus

As music is the subject of the course, we are very interested in Music technology as opposed to music Technology present at many other universities. Technology is a focus in the sense that there is a great deal of interest in various facets of electroacoustic music composition and performance including those aspects common to popular music. But more importantly from an educational standpoint, technology is treated as a medium through which virtually any aspect of musical knowledge can be acquired and gained. Therefore CAL programmes, still in their youth, represent an important mode of learning. All Bretton staff are aware that students without a high level of computing knowledge face little chance of work later (i.e. Bretton is not a conservatoire fordering to orchestras); therefore all first year students are given a great deal of introductory concerning and access to computers. In later years, computing is considered a tool for various forms of learning and music-making.
2.3 The Other Time-based Arts

Although the three departments of the Faculty of Performing Arts are separate, all three believe in crossing over whenever possible. This is especially important to any Music Department willing to take into account what many call today's "Image Culture".

2.4 Music in Schools and other Communities

Part of the Breton philosophy is a question of a preposition. We do not believe in only
making art for public; we also believe in making art with people. Furthermore, we are as
aware as any how marginal the vast majority of today's contemporary (computer) music is.
Therefore, embarking many of Kodaly's notions concerning the ability to interest the
youths from age four onwards, Breton offers its expertise to various courses run in the Faculty
of Education, where contemporary music including IT and popular musics must now be
taught within the National Curriculum. Our involvement in various forms of music in the
community in the sense of making contemporary (electroacoustic) music with, not
at, groups large or small with common
interests is of similar importance.

3 Studio Facilities

The Breton view is to offer affordable as well as "top of the line" hardware and software.
The range of computers is from Atari,
Macintosh (of which there are several) and
PC's in NeXT and Indigo Iris. A very broad
spectrum of software applications and MIDI
equipment is intensively used. There are two
16-track and two 8-track studios currently; Pro Tools and GRM Tools will arrive this year. A
modest sound diffusion installation for
electroacoustic works is being phased in; the
PMS course already has complete PA
facilities. These are used at our three fully
equipped theatres which include MIDI
controlled lighting rigs. All music staff and
computer literate; one third of staff are
specialised in computer music applications.

3.1 The Integration of Information Technology in Music and Other Performing Arts Courses

As mentioned above, the concept of the "Image Culture" plays a major role at Breton.
Therefore two video suites have recently been installed; the intention is to put in a third
professional one within the next twelve months. Furthermore, the Music Department participates in the Theatre Design and
Technology course as far as sound in the
performing arts is concerned. Therefore our
interests include not only the creation of music
for the other performing arts and intermedia,
but also sound diffusion and design in a variety
of contexts.

4 Research, Composition and
Breton's Performance Groups

Obviously there is a broad scale of research in the
department. Key areas include the
aesthetics and analysis of electroacoustic
music, experimental pop music, live electronic
applications with pitch tracking and the future
of sampling. Working with colleagues from
the University of York (GB), three initiatives
are worthy of mention: the journal Organized
Sound: A Journal of Music and Technology,
(coming soon), the Composers Desktop Project
and Sound Experience (courseware tools for
students in schools). As composition is part of
the project approach, it is an aspect of virtually
everyone's daily life. All students play peer
cieces; a number of visiting composers visit
every year, many of whom are involved in
electroacoustic music in a variety of forms. In
the latter half of 1994 two new groups will be
formed: The Caradwen Ensemble, Breton's new
music workshop group which will work with
students, perform locally and tour extensively
and also J • D • S • X (hide fix) Experimental Sound Theatre, a music-based
performing arts group.

5 Festivals, Conferences, Events

Alongside the hundreds of student generated performances per year within the Faculty,
Breton hosts a conference every two years at
Easter. This year's conference was entitled
"Leaving the Twentieth Century: Ideas and
Visions for New Music". Its final report will
be published in 1995 in Contemporary Music
Review. It is expected that each conference
will have a very concrete thematic centre with
new technology plays a major, although not
necessarily the most central role. With a new
venue of our own in the city of Wakefield and
the use of two neighbouring venues for performance, it is expected that Breton will
host a yearly contemporary performing arts
festival alongside its student-based BredFest in
the early spring. Currently summer programmes are being held specialising in
collaboration between composer and
choreographer and in amateur contemporary
music-making in the community.

6 Future Plans

... to get to the next century first.