University of Birmingham

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About

I am a composer, primarily of multichannel acousmatic electroacoustic music, with a particular interest in the use of real-world sounds.

Qualifications

BA, DPhil (York)

Biography

I studied piano and horn (National Youth Orchestra, British Youth Symphony Orchestra) before going to the University of York in 1970. At York, I studied composition with Bernard Rands, David Blake and Elisabeth Lutyens, gaining my DPhil in Composition in 1980 and discovering the electroacoustic music studio along the way. Between 1976 and 1980 I lived in London, preparing electroacoustic material for a number of productions at the National Theatre and teaching studio techniques at City University. In 1980 I joined the **Music Department** of the University of Birmingham, where I founded **BEAST (Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre)** in 1982.

As a composer I have received a number of prizes (Bourges International Electroacoustic Awards; Prix Ars Electronica, Linz; Musica Nova, Prague; the Lloyds Bank National Composers' Award; the PRS Prize; an Arts Council Composition Bursary; a Leverhulme Research Grant and AHRB/AHRC Research Grants), and received commissions from leading institutions and performers (Ina-GRM, Paris; GMEB, Bourges; the International Computer Music Association; MAFILM/Magyar Rádió, Budapest; Electroacoustic Wales/University of Bangor; IRCAM/Ensemble InterContemporain, Paris; BBC; Sonorities Festival, Belfast; Birmingham Contemporary Music Group; Fine Arts Brass Ensemble; Singcircle; Thürmchen Ensemble; John Harle; Harry Sparnaay; and Jos Zwaanenburg).

My music is regularly performed and broadcast worldwide, and several works are available on commercial releases (see Publications, below).

Teaching

My teaching activity focuses on composition (especially acousmatic electroacoustic composition) and associated topics – performance practice, history and analysis. I have also taught several modules addressing the music of the 20th and 21st centuries, but I have, on occasion, ranged as far back as Wagner.

Postgraduate supervision

Since coming to Birmingham, I have supervised around 90 postgraduate students – some 48 at PhD level (36 completed to date), as well as at MMus, MPhil and MPhil (B), and those on taught the MA programme. Nearly 30 of my former postgraduate hold or have held teaching and research posts in universities in the UK and overseas – including Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Bangor, Manchester, Sheffield, Bath Spa, De Montfort, Huddersfield, Falmouth, Oxford Brookes, Hull/Scarborough, Birmingham City, Victoria (Wellington, NZ), Malaysia (Sarawak), Uberlândia (Brazil), Dalhousie and Concordia in Canada and Ball State (Indiana), Bowling Green (Ohio) and Harvard in the USA.

Research

My primary research area is composition, especially of acousmatic electroacoustic music, including its performance practice, history and aesthetics. I have a particular interest in spatial strategies in the composition and performance of acousmatic music and most of my work since the late 90s has been in multichannel formats.

A secondary research interest is in the development of software tools for multichannel composition and performance. I was Co-investigator on the AHRC-funded research project led by my colleague **Dr Scott Wilson** into the control of large loudspeaker systems.

Other activities

Besides composing and performing acousmatic music, my other principal musical activity is conducting – I recently conducted a staged production of Berio's *Laborintus II* and one of the four groups in Stockhausen's *Carré*. I have also conducted six performances of Stockhausen's *Momente* in two different productions, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, Berio's *Passaggio*, *Sinfonia* and *Folk Songs*, Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, Debussy's *Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un faune*, *La Mer* and *Jeux*, Skryabin's *Poem of Ecstasy* and works by living composers, including Harrison Birtwistle, Jonathan Lloyd, Rajmil Fischmann, Simon Holt and my former colleague Vic Hoyland. During the 90s, I made a number of conducting appearances with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group.

I have been a jury member for a number of international composition competitions, including the Bourges Electroacoustic Awards (France), the Prix Ars Electronica (Austria), HEAR (Hungary), Métamorphoese (Belgium) and Destellos (Argentina). I was an active Board Member of Sonic Arts Network for many years and have served on the Peer Review College of the AHRC. I was a member of Sub-panel 67 (Music) for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise.

I have been the Keynote Speaker at a number of conferences, including the Australasian Computer Music Conference, Wellington, NZ (1999), SEA '03 Conference, Scarborough (2003), SoundAsArt conference, Aberdeen (2006), Applied and Creative Arts Conference, Sarawak, Malaysia (2005), Royal Musical Association Conference, Aberdeen (2008), Sonic Spatial Perspectives, Leeds (2009) and Toronto Electroacoustic Symposium (2011).

I have been Featured Composer at festivals and concerts – Rien à Voir, Montreal (1997, 2002), Deep Wireless Festival, Toronto (2002), Realtime-Non-Realtime Festival, Basel (2005), University of Cologne (2006), Festival L'Espace du son, Brussels (2006), University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna (2008), The Tank, New York City (2009), Harvard University (2009), San Francisco Tape Music Festival (2011), Stanford University (2011), University of California at Berkeley (2011), Toronto Electroacoustic Symposium (2011).

I was guest composition teacher at the summer school of the Ionian University of Corfu (2006) and the Sound Travels Intensive, Toronto (2011) and in 2010 I was the Edgard Varèse Guest Professor of Computer Music at the Technische Universität, Berlin.

I have been composer in residence in a number of leading studios: Ina-GRM, Paris; IRCAM, Paris; GMEB/IMEB, Bourges, France; Magyar Rádió, Budapest; Atelier Zum Kleinen Markgräflerhof/Elektronisches Studio, Hochschule für Musik, Musik-Akademie der Stadt Basel, Switzerland; Studio Métamorphoses d'Orphée, Musiques et Recherches, Ohain, Belgium; Bangor University.

Publications

Recordings

Solo albums (*empreintes* DIGITALes, Montreal) of acousmatic music:

1996 Articles indéfinis (CD – IMED 9627) *Pair/Impair* (1978), *...et ainsi de suite...* (1992), *Unsound Objects* (1995), *Aria* (1988), *Hot Air* (1995)

2000 Évidence matérielle (CD – IMED 2052) *Klang* (1982), *Sorties* (1995), *Surface Tension* (1996), *Splintering* (1997), *Streams* (1999)

2007 Environs (DVD-Audio – IMED 0788) *Undertow* (2007); *ReCycle*: *Rock'n'Roll* (2004), *Internal Combustion* (2005-06), *Free Fall* (2006), *Streams* (1999); *Afterthoughts* (2007)

See: **http://www.electrocd.com/en/bio/harrison_jo/discog/**

Several works appear on compilation albums on NMC (London), Asphodel (New York), Mnémosyne Musiqe Média (Bourges, France), Centaur (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), Clarinet Classics (London) and EMF (Albany, New York).

Scores

A number of works for instrumental or instrument(s) and electroacoustic sounds) are published by the **University of York Music Press**.

Papers and articles (selection)

1988 'Space and the BEAST concert diffusion system' in *L'espace du son* (Ed. Francis Dhomont), Ohain, Belgium

1998 'Sound, Space Sculpture: Some Thoughts on the 'What', 'How' and 'Why' of Sound Diffusion' in *Organised Sound* 3(2) (Cambridge University Press)

1999 'Imaginary Space – Spaces in the Imagination' in *Proceedings of the Australasian Computer Music Conference*, Wellington, NZ (Keynote)

2000 '**Diffusion: theories and practices, with particular reference to the BEAST system**', in *eContact* 2.4, website of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community/Communauté électroacoustique canadienne

2007 'Dilemmas, Dichotomies and Definitions: acousmatic music and its precarious situation in the arts' (Keynote, **SoundAsArt Conference**, Aberdeen, 2006) 2010 'Rethinking the BEAST: Recent Developments in Multichannel Composition at Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre' in *Organised Sound* 15(3) (Cambridge University Press)

2010 Co-editor, with Dr Scott Wilson, of *Organised Sound* 15(3), *Sound <–> Space: New approaches to multichannel music and audio* (Cambridge University Press)

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