INTRODUCTION

Not Necessarily "English Music": Britain's Second "Golden Age"

In the early 1960s, Britain—its empire in tatters, its economy listing heavily—moved into a position of musical leadership not experienced since the Golden Age of Byrd and Purcell 4 centuries earlier. Alongside Spam and chewing gum, American GIs had bequeathed a legacy of jazz and blues records that were obsessively studied, learned note by note by young British musicians. When the flow of vinyl finally reversed, the "British Invasion" hit the U.S.A. like a bomb. Britain's cultural shift from the "small, brown, sad paintings" that artist Joe Tilson described as the art flavor of the 1950s [1] to the shiny electric guitars that symbolized the 1960s also triggered an extraordinary outburst of quirky, inventive, thoughtful experimental music. From Profumo to Thatcher, new music in the U.K. flourished in an atmosphere of inspired inclusivity and utter disregard for the niceties of critical success, popular acclaim or the historical record. Merseybeat [2] provided musicians with fame and wealth (and musicologists with handy dissertation topics), but this other "English Music" has remained strangely unacknowledged and under-documented.

Back when Chuck Berry was in jail, Little Richard back in church and Buddy Holly in heaven, the Rolling Stones and the Beatles were needed to re-introduce Americans to their *own* music—American musicians imitated British musicians imitating American blues. British Pop bands revived the tradition of the songwriter/singer that had gotten lost between the cotton fields of Mississippi and the corridors of the Brill Building [3]. The best of the British bands offered a perfect balance of interpretation and innovation, juxtaposing a respect for diverse musical traditions with bursts of true originality (e.g. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—a record that could only have been put together by a band that once played "Bésame Mucho" and "Twist and Shout" in the same set).

The British experimental music that emerged in the mid-1960s owed as much to this new Pop sensibility as to the dominant European modernist style—as David Toop writes, "after all the rigorous, radical and exclusionist music theories that slugged it out during the twentieth century, English music allowed things to happen" [4]. Composers got up on stage to play, rejecting the classical distinction between creator and interpreter; they drew on musical material and ideas outside the high-art canon, including Pop and "World" music; they appealed to ears raised on Pop because they made use of Pop instruments and Pop sounds, rather than confining themselves to the acoustic orchestra; their rhythms were often closer to Bo Diddley than to Boulez; and while Pop hooked you with guitar riffs, this music was built on "brain riffs," clever ideas that held your attention in a way a tone row never could.

In *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond,* composer and critic Michael Nyman presents British music in the context of parallel American and European activity, and points out the influence of John Cage and Christian Wolff in particular [5]. But British music displayed idiosyncrasies that separated it from these other, better-documented movements. This music abounds with seemingly paradoxical juxtapositions: composition *and* improvisation; professionals *and* amateurs; Maoism *and* Merchant Ivory [6]; bloodless systems *and* halcyon sentimentality. In the essays presented here a handful of names keep cropping up, sometimes as "composers," sometimes as "players," sometimes as "organizers," sometimes as "critics"—musical functions shifted fluidly in a relatively non-hierarchical musical society. Few of these composers demonstrated the stylistic tenacity of, say, LaMonte Young—radical changes of tack seem commonplace. To quote Toop again, "this willingness to abandon a fixed sense of place or identity within the cultural map is a legacy that remains with us today" [7].

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Imaginative and witty, this second "Golden Age" was nonetheless patently uncommercial. It could not compete with Pop for shock value, and was overshadowed (in the American press at least) by the easier-to-catch wave of American Minimalists such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Nyman's 1974 book (mentioned above) still stands as the best single reference. In recent years the work of Cornelius Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra have been the subject of several articles and concerts. But much of the music still remains unfamiliar, even to younger British composers. In this volume of *Leonardo Music Journal* we aim to document this reclusive chapter of musical history, follow up on the current activities of its original participants and trace its influence on younger British artists.

Among the contributors to this issue, Michael Parsons, Eddie Prévost, Ranulph Glanville, Lawrence Casserley, Hugh Davies and Stuart Jones were all active participants in the emergent scene of the 1960s and 1970s; their recollections overlap one another to create a Rashomon-like portrait of the time, with each writer's denouement pointing in a different direction. Sarah Walker extends several of these tag endings to weave an overview of recent music by veterans of those earlier days. Walker's essay highlights the centrality of the piano in British experimentalism, while Matthew Sansom focuses on the role of improvisation.

Cornelius Cardew emerges as a key figure in the evolution of numerous musical movements in Britain [8]. Coriún Aharonián analyzes the conflict between Cardew's radical political beliefs and his avant-garde musical background, addressing contradictions that many still find quite hard to reconcile many years after his untimely death in 1981.

Alvin Lucier contributes an affectionate portrait of his former student Stuart Marshall (1949–1993). A visual artist by training, Marshall returned to England after studying with Lucier and taught for several years in art schools before shifting to video and film production. He served as a bridge between the American and British experimental traditions and between the musical and visual worlds, and exerted a subtle but profound influence on a generation of younger British artists.

Mary Lucier, gathering of U.K. composers, London, 1971. (© Mary Lucier) This photo was taken outside an Indian restaurant in London following a concert by the Sonic Arts Union. Present are Mary Lucier (the timer-triggered camera was on a tripod across the street), the members of the Sonic Arts Union (Robert Ashley, David Behrman, Alvin Lucier and Gordon Mumma), their wives and/or girlfriends, and what Alvin Lucier described at the time as "all the interesting composers in England." I recently persuaded Mary Lucier to dig out the negative and make a print for this issue of LMJ, but neither she nor Alvin could identify any of the faces. I passed the photo on to a few of my English friends who were equally unhelpful. I believe the tall guy at the right is Cornelius Cardew. Any reader who can identify individuals in the photo should notify me (ncollins@artic.edu) so that we can print a clarification.

Robin Rimbaud (a.k.a. "Scanner"), Janek Schaefer and Joe Banks (a.k.a. "Disinformation") represent the more recent wave of British music and its obsession with the physicality of electronic media. Rimbaud's moniker derives from the public-service band scanner radio he used to eavesdrop on cellular telephone conversations in his early recordings and performances. Schaefer is an experimental DJ who has been pushing the limits of both the record-player mechanism and vinyl itself. Banks works with the sounds of non-broadcast electromagnetic signals, such as those produced by the aurora borealis, meteorites, the electrical power grid, navigation satellites and paranormal phenomena.

We were very fortunate to persuade David Toop to curate the CD accompanying this issue. No *single* person was better placed to do so: musician, composer, writer, producer and fan, Toop has been a fixture of the British music scene since his teenage years. Through the strength of long-standing friendships and collaborations he has managed to assemble 27 extraordinary tracks, most of which are previously unreleased or long out of print. Together with Toop's own essay and the artists' notes, they provide tangible evidence of this heady time and its continuing repercussions.

"English" Music? Obviously not *just*. Britain is much more than England—Wales and Scotland have strong cultures, musical and otherwise, and are loath to rally under the flag of St. George. But the phrase "English Music" has a sonic resonance that the clinical precision of "British Music" lacks, and it carries specific and appropriate historical connotations. Since the Age of Dunstable (1400–1460) the term has been used to describe a peculiar "conservatism . . . strong enough to transform borrowed styles and genres until they became suitable for genuine native expression" and to "preserve old traditions even in periods of experimentation" [9]. Or, as Eddie Prévost puts it, "Amidst the general climate of fashionable change that is represented by 'the 1960s,' there came about a generous sense of convergence" [10]. Generosity is, by its nature, an untidy virtue.

So, in the untidy spirit of generosity and convergence—"English Music." And *Not Necessarily English Music*.

NICOLAS COLLINS
Editor-in-Chief

References and Notes

1. Joe Tilson, in conversation with Susan Tallman, February 1993, quoted in Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print—From Pre-Pop to Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) p. 60.

2. "Merseybeat" refers to the phenomenon of the dozens of British Pop bands (including the Searchers, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Dave Clark Five, the Animals, the Hollies, Herman's Hermits and the Beatles) formed in Liverpool (and in other British ports) in the early 1960s. The Merseybeat scene was independent of London and heavily influenced by imported 1950s American rock 'n' roll and rhythm 'n' blues.

3. New York's Brill Building was the home of pop songwriting during the late 1950s/early 1960s. Songwriters Barry Mann, Carole King and Gerry Goffin started their careers in the building, as did producer Phil Spector. In 1962 there were 165 music businesses in the building, ranging from songwriters, music publishers, arrangers, demo studios, record companies, managers, singers, radio promoters.

4. David Toop, Introduction to the CD Companion Section, in this issue.

5. Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1974) (2nd Ed., Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

6. Merchant Ivory is a film production company specializing in movies portraying the British white-flannel crowd during the interwar period.

7. Toop [4].

8. *Leonardo Music Journal* **8** (1998), entitled *Ghosts and Monsters,* took Cardew's essay "John Cage—Ghost or Monster?" as a point of departure, and the volume's accompanying CD includes Cardew's composition "There Is Only One Lie, Only One Truth." LMJ8 is available from the MIT Press (journals-orders@mit.edu) or from CDeMUSIC (http:// www.cdemusic.org).

9. Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969) p. 288.

10. Eddie Prévost, "The Arrival of a New Musical Aesthetic: Extracts from a Half-Buried Diary," in this issue of *Leonardo Music Journal.*