

On 27 March, two open letters to Sound and Music and Arts Council England were made public, criticising both organisations for their activities since the former of these was founded from a merger of the Society for the Promotion of New Music, the British Music Information Centre, Sonic Arts Network and the Contemporary Music Network in 2008. The letters, signed by various respected composers and musicians at various stages in their careers, have provoked lively debate, but the undersigned are concerned both by its tone and by certain assumptions made by the letters' signatories. It has also been alarming to see well-known members of SAM staff and board, whose own work covers notated instrumental music as well as electronic and electroacoustic musics, personally described in derogatory terms in the ensuing debate.

Both letters criticise Sound and Music's promotion of sound art and other music, describing these areas as 'fringe activities which have little or no connection with the mainstream'. In so doing, the signatories appear to assert that notated, contemporary composition should receive a specially privileged status within Sound and Music's activities, whilst at the same time failing to acknowledge the considerable amount of work the organisation has in any case undertaken in this field. In a time when musicians and composers increasingly work across genres and media and defy simplistic categorisation, it is divisive and unhelpful to seek to separate any one strand of contemporary music and sound from others or to plead for special treatment. Indeed, notated contemporary composition is itself a 'fringe activity', in the sense of being a small minority pursuit. But minority pursuits perceived to have wider significance and potential should be encouraged and supported; part of the purpose of public subsidy is surely to do this, whether for notated contemporary music, sound art, or any other forms of music.

As Sound and Music themselves recognised in their response to the recent debate, the transitional period since the merger has been a difficult one and in many ways the organisation is still finding its feet, a task made more challenging by the 42% funding cut from Arts Council England last year. In discussing how to secure a positive future for and greater awareness of British music both at home and abroad — a task in which Sound and Music has an undoubtedly vital role — the musical community should be as open-minded and supportive as possible of all their colleagues, and be prepared to embrace possibilities for widening the range of creative work produced, rather than restricting it to that already firmly established. It is by working together and interacting with each other, rather than ghettoisation or jealous guarding of limited conceptions of new music, that we will build a stronger and more successful community, and make possible that which is genuinely 'new'.

Martin Butler, composer, Professor of Music, University of Sussex; former Chair, SPNM

Rolf Hind, pianist, composer, Professor of Piano, Guildhall School of Music and Drama; former Artistic Director, SPNM

Andrew Hugill, composer, Professor of Music, De Montfort University, Associate Researcher, Université de la Sorbonne

Ian Pace, pianist, writer, Lecturer in Music, City University London

Mariam Rezaei, composer, improviser, performer

Chris Swithinbank, composer

Ximena Alarcón, New Media artist, Research Fellow, CRiSAP
Newton Armstrong, composer, improviser, Lecturer in Music, City University London
Simon Atkinson, composer, academic
Brendan Ball, trumpeter, member of Ensemble 10.10
Richard Barrett, composer, performer
Andrew Bowie, Professor of Philosophy and German, Royal Holloway, University of London, jazz saxophonist.
Neil Boynton, composer, artist, academic
John Butcher, improviser, composer
Michael Casey, composer, computer scientist
Philip Clark, musician, writer
Tansy Davies, composer
Julio d'Escrivan, composer
John Levack Drever, composer, academic
Tim Ewers, composer, Director of Studies for Music, Kingston University
Nick Fells, Head of Music, University of Glasgow
Jerry Fishenden, composer, technologist, academic
Ian Gardiner, composer, Lecturer in Music, Goldsmith's College
Mark Gasser, pianist, Lecturer in Piano and PhD Candidate, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts
Dan Goren, composer, performer, director of Source Music Services
Orlando Gough, composer
Tom Haines, composer
Tom Hall, composer, Senior Lecturer in Creative Music Technology, Anglia Ruskin University
Phil Hallett, former Director, Sonic Arts Network
Louise Harris, composer, Lecturer in Music, Kingston University
Roddy Hawkins, Early Career Research Associate, Institute of Musical Research
Björn Heile, Senior Lecturer in Music, University of Glasgow
Ron Herrema, composer
Kathy Hinde, audio-visual artist
Bennett Hogg, Lecturer in Music, Newcastle University
John Kieffer, writer, curator, former Creative Director, Sound and Music
Josh Kopeček, musician
Leigh Landy, composer, educator
Becca Laurence, freelance project manager and creative educationalist
Anton Lukoszevics, cellist, director, artist
John Lunn, composer
Nigel McBride, composer
Eliza McCarthy, pianist
Scott McLaughlin, composer
Annelie Nederberg, composer
Carola Nielinger-Vakil, flautist, musicologist
Katharine Norman, composer, writer, sound artist, Honorary Research Fellow, De Montfort University
Aki Pasoulas, composer, educator
Jeremy Peyton Jones, composer, academic
Eleri Angharad Pound, composer, harpist

Amber Priestley, composer, sound designer
David Prior, composer, sound artist, Associate Professor, University College Falmouth
Lauren Redhead, composer
John Richards, musician
Sam Richards, improviser, pianist, composer, writer, Lecturer in Music, Plymouth University
Robin Rimbaud scanner, composer, artist
Samuel Rodgers, sound artist, improviser
Lee Scott, composer, PhD student
Stacey Sewell, PhD student, University College Falmouth
Andre Shlimon, composer, performer
Jack Ryan Smith, musicologist
Michael Spencer, composer, Lecturer in Music, University of Leeds
Neal Spowage, artist, musician
Tim Steiner, composer
Marcel Swiboda, Lecturer in Cultural Studies, University of Leeds
Philip Thomas, pianist, Reader in Music, University of Huddersfield
Craig Vear, composer, researcher
Oliver Vessey, composer, performer
Nina Whiteman, composer, singer, co-director, Trio Atem
Jerry Wigen, composer, improviser, performer
Ian Willcock, artist, academic
Marc Yeats, composer
Alistair Zaldua, composer

Supplementary signatories

Panos Amelides, composer
Kerry Andrew, composer, performer
Iain Armstrong, composer, sound artist, improviser, co-director SOUNDkitchen
Peter Ashton, teacher, composer, performer
Adam Asnan, composer, performer
Jovana Backovic, composer/performer
Michael Bassett, Creative Producer for Music & Sound Art, ICIA University of Bath
Sam Belinfante, artist
Mike Blow, artist and researcher, Sonic Art Research Unit, Oxford Brookes University
James Bulley, composer, sound artist
Duncan Chapman, composer, sound artist
Stephen Chase, composer, performer
Li-Chuan Chong, composer, sonic artist, improviser
Yiannis Christofides, composer, sound artist and researcher
Jonathan Cole, composer and teacher
Sarah Dacey, singer, composer, teacher
Andrew Deakin, composer, Co-director of Octopus Collective, Cumbria
Daz Disley, sound engineer, facilitator, software developer
Jason Dixon, composer
Graham Dowdall, musician, composer tutor at Goldsmiths

Lawrence Dunn, composer
Kevin Flanagan, composer, improviser
Philip Flood, former trustee, spnm
Owen Green, composer, improviser
Andrew Hall, composer, performer
Damien Harron, Senior Lecturer, Leeds College of Music
Andrew Hill, composer, researcher
Joseph Hyde, composer, media artist, academic
Simon Katan, audiovisual composer/performer
Peiman Khosravi, composer
Visa Kuoppala, composer, improviser
Duncan MacLeod, composer, Lecturer in Music, Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
Paul Mann, conductor
Ruaidhri Mannion, composer
Will Montgomery, musician, journalist, academic
Hilary Mullaney, composer, academic
Peter Nagle, composer
Ed Perkins, audiovisual composer/performer
Xenia Pestova, pianist, Lecturer and Head of Performance, Bangor University School of Music
Mark Pilkington, composer, PhD student
Jeevan Rai, composer, sound artist, improviser
Colin Riley, composer, former trustee of spnm, Senior Lecturer, Brunel University
Jez Riley French, composer, musician, artist
Stuart Russell, composer, performer, sonic artist, co-director of Colchester new Music
Tim Rutherford-Johnson, writer, musicologist
Matthew Sheeran, composer
Josh Spear, composer, musician
Ian Stonehouse, Head of the Electronic Music Studios, Goldsmiths, Univ. of London
Jamie Telford, composer, performer
Richard Thomas, cellist, sound recordist, former Bmic and SAM staff member
Peter Todd, new media artist, programmer, researcher
David Toop, composer, writer, curator, Senior Research Fellow at London College of Communication.
Bill Vine, composer, performer, sonic artist
Lisa Whistlecroft, composer, sound artist, former elected Director and Company Secretary of Sonic Arts Network
Tony Whitehead, sound artist
Paul Whitty, composer, Professor of Composition, Oxford Brookes University
Trevor Wiggins, musician, researcher, editor
Sean Williams, music maker, sound artist
Daniel Wilson, composer
Mark Peter Wright, artist
Reynaldo Young, composer, improviser, director of the Cardboard Citizens New Music Ensemble