

CUT & SPLICE 2017

Distractfold Ensemble is proud to present Cut & Splice Festival 2017, Manchester, a festival of live, immersive, participatory and acousmatic new music. Cut & Splice Festival is presented in partnership with Sound and Music, the UK's national charity for new music, and BBC Radio 3. It is part of Sound and Music's wider Composer-Curator national touring programme.

Distractfold have taken over Hallé St Peter's and Hallé St Michael's in Ancoats with an exciting and groundbreaking programme of music that explores technology as an unreliable narrator – a witty, distracted, vague, at times misleading ally.

All performances will be recorded by BBC Radio 3 for broadcast on Hear and Now on 25 March and 1 April 2017.

CUT & SPLICE 2017, MANCHESTER:

CONCERTS AT HALLÉ ST PETER'S
10-11 MARCH, 7PM
FREE SOUND ART PROGRAMME
AT HALLÉ ST MICHAEL'S
10 MARCH, 5-7PM
11 MARCH, 10AM-7PM

Distractfold Ensemble is:
ROCÍO BOLANOS
LINDA JANKOWSKA
EMMA RICHARDS
ALICE PURTON
MAURICIO PAULY
SAM SALEM

CUTANDSPICEFESTIVALMCR.CO.UK

Someone once told me that all music is electronic music. This is because all musical actions originate with electrical impulses jumping across synapses in the brain. So, the only real difference between electronic and acoustic music is the theatre of whether there is a human or a loudspeaker on stage. It's an idea that demolishes the artificial boundaries between the two genres. [1]

Similarly, in Distractfold's world, to make a distinction between the human and the loudspeaker is to bark up the wrong tree. A fundament of the ensemble's ethos from its earliest concerts has been the programming of acoustic works alongside electronic pieces: speakers and people co-habiting the stage (sometimes even working together!) with the implicit idea that each is as musical as the other.

Of course, seeing the two things as equals wasn't always as easy. There's a story that, in the 1950s, when the Philips Studio in the Netherlands put on the first concert of the new electronic music they had started making, they were so concerned about the fact that there was nothing for the audience to look at whilst listening to the music that they tried to alleviate the problem by placing potted plants on top of the speakers!

Today, these problems are a thing of the past, and what Distractfold will be presenting to you, over the course of this two-day festival, is a singular aesthetic vision that encompasses not only the electronic and the acoustic, but installations and sound art as well. This is a festival that celebrates the new; Denis Smalley's Empty Vessels is the oldest piece on the

programme, and that's younger than I am! As well as (comparatively) older pieces by established artists, such as Smalley and the underplayed Argentinian composer Elsa Justel, the ensemble has commissioned new works by Lee Fraser, Hanna Hartman, Lee Patterson, Sam Salem and Katherine Young, with four of these written especially for this festival.

So, if the distinction between electronic and acoustic is no longer meaningful, what other genres can we dissolve...?

Just as you might reclassify avalanches and playing Super Mario Land as forms of dance, so you could also expand the term "theatre" to not only encompass the overt theatrics of Steven Takasugi's hyperactive The man who couldn't stop laughing and the balletic tension of Sivan Cohen Elias's Hack, but also the jitterbug dance of the speaker-cone as it pulses out spatial explorations by Helena Gough, Lee Fraser or Ana Dall'ara Majek.

Or, perhaps you could see choreography in Adam Basanta's A Truly Magical Moment, which throws FaceTiming iPhones around, as if a computer analysed the dancing scene in Titanic and erroneously concluded that the essence of human courtship is being rotated. Or, maybe dance is there in the movement of a bow across strings or of fingers upon keys in Fabrice Fitch's Agricola IXe or Murat Çolak's A song sung together.

In the theatre of the street, Christina Kubisch's Electrical Walks guide the listener on their own dance through

a sea of unseen electromagnetic waves. Kubisch's headphones put us in touch with an ephemeral realm from which electromagnetism speaks to us from out of the ether, just like Thomas Edison's "spirit phone" for contacting the dead. Amplification can do this too, making the tiny unheard minutiae of a sound suddenly audible – as in much of Lee Patterson's work.

Amplification provides a bridge between the human and machine; through amplification, a musician can perform a ventriloquist act, making the lifeless dummy of the speaker talk in their voice. But in Salem, Schroeder and Pauly's work, it is often unclear exactly who is talking, whether the dummy has taken on a supernatural life of its own, as human and machine become indistinguishable.

With Distractfold, sound can somehow become a cyborg. But not Kraftwerk's rhythmic and mechanical Man-Machine – instead, a fluid, morphing version (the T-1000 to Arnie's older model). It's sound that functions like a Turing test that cuts both ways: What behaviour must a machine exhibit to be mistaken for a human? but also: What behaviour must a human exhibit to be mistaken for a machine? And the answer is there somewhere in those moments in which it is no longer clear whether human or machine is the originator of a sound...

I remember sitting in The International Anthony Burgess Foundation in August 2015, watching Distractfold perform Marek Polik's monolithic hull not continent

(now recorded on the album hull treader) and realising how difficult it is to describe the music they play. I've written above about theatre, dance, the occult and cyborgs but these are not the themes of this festival in any way, only my interpretations; my attempts to find my own meaning in the works. The fact of the matter is that, as with so many of Distractfold's concerts, none of these works are "programme music" with obvious narratives, simple interpretations or easy answers. The collection of works brought together for this festival is not easily summed up by a catchy concept – sure, their work deals with technology and ambiguity but Distractfold, more than many other ensembles I know, are concerned with sound above all else – with pieces that demand to be heard, not written about. They play music that doesn't give up its secrets easily and encourages active participation on the part of the audience (you!) to build your own interpretations and find your own meanings, whether you choose for them to be as oblique and abstract as mine or not. It's music that ensures that, while you watch electricity coursing through the human or loudspeaker on stage, your own synapses are firing along with them in beautiful polyphony.

1. Thanks to Jeremiah Runnels for this idea.

David Pocknee

David Pocknee is a composer, performer and visual artist. He is currently studying for a PhD in music composition at Huddersfield University.

SOUND AND MUSIC & BBC RADIO 3 PRESENT CUT & SPLICE FESTIVAL 2017

CURATED BY DISTRACTFOLD ENSEMBLE

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