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Mooney, JR (2013) International Electronic Music Catalog: Hugh Davies and the (ethno)musicology of electronic music. In: Electronic Music Symposium at Anglia Ruskin (EMSAR), 11 May 2013, Cambridge, UK. (Unpublished)

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International Electronic Music Catalog

Hugh Davies and the (ethno)Musicology of Electronic Music

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This is a transcript of an oral presentation given at the Electronic Music Symposium at Anglia Ruskin (EMSAR), Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, on Saturday 11 May 2013.

An audio-visual version of the presentation, with recorded narration, is available online at http://www.james-mooney.co.uk/catalog_emsar2013/.

In this presentation I will discuss Hugh Davies's *Répertoire International des Musiques Electroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog*.¹ It is a book of 330 pages that lists, ostensibly, every piece of electroacoustic music ever composed up to the time of its compilation. I will begin by describing the *Catalog* itself, and the process of compiling it. I will then discuss Hugh Davies—aspects of his character, and interests—and suggest how these might contribute toward an interpretation and contextualisation of the *Catalog*. I will refer to a sample of publications that reference the *Catalog*, highlighting some of the broader issues that the *Catalog* raises in relation to the musicology of electroacoustic music, including some specifically international issues.

The *Catalog* aimed to list every piece of electronic music composed anywhere in the world up to a cut-off date of April 1967. It lists just under 5000 compositions, and references are given to a further 2500 for which full details could not be traced.² 935 composers have works listed. At the time of the *Catalog*'s publication Davies estimated that it accounted for 'probably about 90% of all electronic music ever composed.'³ Davies continued to trace compositions after the *Catalog*'s publication, and by 1999—despite more than 30 years on the case—had identified only about 500 further works composed before April 1967.⁴ This suggests that his original 90% estimate may have been reasonably accurate. (There are a few issues with Davies's criteria for what 'counts' as electronic music, but I will not discuss these here.)

The *Catalog* is organised alphabetically by country; 39 countries are represented. The listings reflect the country in which a piece of music was created, not the nationality of the composer. An appendix of composers' nationalities is, however, included and can be cross-referenced as required. Within each country, individual electronic music studios are listed alphabetically by the town or city in which they are located. The *Catalog* is, in other words, geographically organised.

¹ Davies, Hugh (1968), *Répertoire International Des Musiques Electroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog* (New York: MIT Press).

² *Ibid.*, p.iv.

³ Davies, Hugh (c.1967a), 'MIT Promotion: Hugh Davies,' typewritten document (unpublished).

⁴ Davies, Hugh (c.1999), handwritten document (unpublished).

The entry for Israel illustrates nearly all of the *Catalog*'s organisational features within its first two pages: the reader may find it helpful to refer to this during the following explanation.⁵ Studios are listed alphabetically by city (Jerusalem; Ramat-Gan; Tel-Aviv). The name of the city is followed by the name of the studio and its associated institution, and/or—in brackets—the name of the studio's owner. The year in which the studio was founded is also given, or in some cases the period for which it was active. Each studio has a category—PO, PP, io, or ip—reflecting both whether the studio is private or official, and permanent or improvised (see Figure 1). (There are problems with a 'studio-centric' approach like this, but again I will not discuss these here.)

	Private	Official
Permanent	PP	PO
Improvised	ip	io

Figure 1. Four categories of studios used in the *Catalog*.

Under each studio there is a chronological list of the works composed there. The information given about compositions includes: composer, title, function, date of realisation, duration, number of tracks, references to the appendices of the *Catalog*, and notes.

The 'function' column gives an indication of the intended function of the music, and is more information-rich than it first appears. It is divided into three sub-columns. A listing in the left-hand part of the column indicates that the composition is intended for standalone concert performance as a work of 'pure' music. A listing in the middle part means that the electronic music accompanies some sort of extra-musical live performance, such as a ballet, opera, or theatre production. The right-hand side denotes electronic music for film, radio, and other recorded media or broadcast media (i.e. not live performance). Davies sub-divides standalone concert music into three distinct categories: tape only; tape with instruments; and live electronics. A full list of the functional categories used in the *Catalog* is shown in Figure 2.

The 'appendices' column provides cross-references to the appendices of the *Catalog* and is divided into three sub-columns: 'disc,' 'tape,' and 'others.' 'Disc' and 'tape' indicate whether a composition is available on record or tape; an abbreviation of the record label or tape publisher/distributor cross-references to 'discography' and 'tapeography' appendices. The 'others' heading sounds rather unimportant, but it actually points to (in my opinion) one of the most original and interesting parts of the *Catalog*. It refers to seven appendices entitled, respectively: Jazz, Painting, Poetry, Popular Music, Precursors (of tape techniques), Sculpture, and Synthesizers (computers, etc.). These appendices list electronic music works of relevance to each of those areas, effectively providing, in raw data form, seven interdisciplinary

⁵ At the time of writing the *Catalog* is available online via the UbuWeb website: http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/emr/periodicals/EMR2_3.pdf. (Note: 220MB download.)

perspectives on the early history of electronic music. Pieces are linked to those appendices by cross-referencing with an abbreviation of the appendix title: Jaz, Pnt, Poe, Pop, Pre, Scu, Syn.

Standalone music	Applied music	
	Live	Recorded
C (tape)	O (opera)	F (film)
C+ (tape & insts.)	B (ballet)	R (radio)
C* (live electr.)	Th (theatre)	TV (television)
(c = concert)	MT (music theatre)	D (disc)
	Sn (sonorisation)	In (interval signal)
		St (study)

Figure 2. List of functional categories of music used in the *Catalog*.

In compiling the *Catalog* Davies had to send around 550 letters⁶ in six different languages—English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese—to composers and studios all over the world, as well as managing and collating their responses, which of course were sometimes contradictory, late, incomplete, or missing altogether. This was in addition to many telephone calls and personal meetings.⁷ He worked with two institutions on two different continents, firstly for 3½ months at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales in Paris (it was the GRM that originally commissioned the *Catalog*) and then for a further 5 to 6 weeks at the Independent Electronic Music Center, which had recently been established by Bob Moog in New York. The *Catalog* was eventually published as a joint venture between those two institutions and the MIT Press, and in order to see the project through to completion Davies had to grapple with the politics and peculiarities of all three organisations.

At the GRM impenetrable bureaucracy (as Davies saw it) seemed always to impede progress. In a letter Davies wrote: ‘I will be glad to see the last of the organisation here, or rather the way that it attempts, very ponderously, to function.’⁸ The GRM, having initiated the *Catalog* project, was concerned—perhaps rightly—that the IEMC would gain undue credit for it, and this caused further delays as negotiations took place.⁹ Meanwhile, the Independent Electronic Music Center was experiencing a financial crisis, making matters even more difficult.¹⁰

Davies also had to deal with potentially competing publications, the most significant of was a list of electronic music works being compiled at the University of Illinois by

⁶ Davies’s notes list 551 letters sent between September 1966 and April 1967.

⁷ Davies (c.1967a).

⁸ Davies, Hugh (c.1967b), Letter to Reynold Weidenaar, undated c.1967 (unpublished).

⁹ Weidenaar, Reynold (1967a), Letter to Hugh Davies, dated 17 February 1967 (unpublished).

¹⁰ Weidenaar, Reynold (1967b), Letter to Hugh Davies, dated 31 July 1967 (unpublished).

the musicologist Sven Hansell. A provisional version of this list was, in fact, published in 1966.¹¹ There appears to have been a degree manoeuvring and perhaps even wilful subterfuge between Davies and Hansell over the ownership of information and, ultimately, whose catalogue would be published. Both parties claimed already to have a contract with MIT Press when, in fact, neither of them did. Ultimately, Hansell was offered a contract whereby he would surrender his completed list of compositions to Davies, with no guarantee that they would be included in the final *Catalog*, but with the suggestion that he would be credited in the introduction if they were.¹² Perhaps unsurprisingly, Hansell refused to sign.¹³ Thus, no mention of Hansell—or of any of this episode—is made in the preface to the *Catalog*. Hansell never published (to my knowledge) a catalogue of electronic music beyond his original ‘Provisional List’.

What kind of an individual is it that produces a work of scholarship such as this, particularly under the circumstances just described? Presumably a fairly determined individual, but also one with a penchant for comprehensivity and accuracy of information, combined with an almost obsessive attention to detail. Davies’s father, Harold Escott Davies, was noted by one commentator for ‘the precision with which he approached every task,’¹⁴ and this seems to have been a characteristic that Hugh Davies also possessed. David Toop, a friend of Davies’s since the early 1970s, comments on Davies’s academic work as follows:

[M]eticulous documentation of minutia [...] was typical. A stickler for detail and factual veracity, Hugh became an authority on many hitherto neglected subjects relating to 20th century music... Many who listened to him talk on these subjects would experience a sense of awe at the depth of scholarship and accuracy of information... There are difficult aspects to being filled with such erudition, and Hugh’s mind sometimes seemed to be a massive filing system running out of control. On occasion, his lectures had a tendency to collapse into disconnected and indigestible facts as the need to link everything to everything else overwhelmed the clarity of good communication.¹⁵

(Think of all the cross-referencing in the *Catalog*.)

On the issue of ‘neglected subjects’, one of Davies’s long-held interests was to engage in what he once described as ‘small scale campaigning’¹⁶ to promote the avant-garde music of under-represented nations. As a student, for example, Davies worked to promote British interest in Polish and Japanese avant-garde music. Almost 30 years later, he wrote an essay entitled ‘The Beginnings of Japanese

¹¹ Hansell, Sven H. (1966), ‘A Provisional List of Electronic Music Compositions,’ *School of Music Experimental Studio Technical Report*, No. 11 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois).

¹² Weidenaar, Reynold (1967c), Letter to Sven Hansell, dated 26 April 1967 (unpublished).

¹³ Hansell, Sven (1967), Letter to Reynold Weidenaar, dated 1 May 1967 (unpublished).

¹⁴ Unknown author (1995), *King’s College Cambridge Annual Report*, November 1995, p.50.

¹⁵ Toop, David (2005), in sleeve notes for Hugh Davies, *Tapestries* (Rome: ANTS, AG04), audio CD.

¹⁶ Davies, Hugh (c.1964), Letter to Denis Stevens, undated c. early 1964 (unpublished).

Electronic Music,'¹⁷ demonstrating not only his interest in marginalised countries, but also in what might be described as the 'unexplored formative years' of musical cultures.

Conservation, preservation, and documentation were also issues of importance to Davies, both personally and professionally. The very act of documenting electronic music compositions in a catalogue is, of course, closely affiliated to the view that electroacoustic heritage should be conserved.

It is these concerns, central to Davies's character, that provide the key to interpreting his *Catalog*, and it is, I believe, necessary to *interpret* the *Catalog* in order to see beyond its superficial appearance as a rather boring list of compositions, useful only for the verification of dates, durations, and the names of studios. Of course the *Catalog* does serve that purpose really rather well, and a fair quantity of subsequent scholarship makes use of it in precisely that way. However, there is also a body of literature that uses the *Catalog*, not merely for the provision of facts, but as a pointer to a range of broader issues of relevance to the discourse of electroacoustic music studies, some of which have been touched upon already.

I am currently in the process of conducting a literature review of studies that have cited the *Catalog* in the 45 years since its publication. So far, a provisional sample has been identified, comprising 50 texts in 8 different languages that explicitly reference the *Catalog* (i.e. they include it in their bibliographies or references; see Figure 3).

Category of text	#	Summary of texts
Catalogue	9	Bibliography (x5), work list (x3), dictionary.
Composer / ensemble	8	Barraqué, Brün, Gentle Fire, Gerhard, Grossi, Hindemith & Toch, Kagel, Reich.
General readers	7	Electronic music (x5), C20th art, C20th music.
Specific studies	8	Electric bowed string works; electroacoustic music 1948-53; radiophonic music; serialism; sound poetry; spatial music; telharmonium; University of Helsinki studio.
New technologies	2	Computer-based conducting; analysis/resynthesis.
Aesthetics & techniques	4	...Relationships between (x2); notation in electroacoustic music; academic practice in electroacoustic music.
Restoration & archiving	2	...Of studio hardware; ...of electroacoustic works.
National	10	Latin America (x4); Japan (x3); Czech Republic; Finland; Italy.

Figure 3. Provisional sample of 50 texts citing Davies's *Catalog*.

¹⁷ Davies, Hugh (1993), 'The Beginnings of Japanese Electronic Music,' *DecimE Mitteilungen*, 11, pp.11-14.

Of those 50 texts, 9 are subsequent catalogues of one sort or another: bibliographies, discographies, etc. 8 are studies of the work of an individual composer or ensemble. There are 7 general readers or textbooks on electronic music or 20th-century music and art. 8 are musicological studies that are more specific, concentrating on a narrowly-focussed topic. Not all of the texts are historical. 2 journal articles cite the *Catalog* in discussions of new technologies. The 4 texts under 'aesthetics and techniques' include discussions of specific techniques including academic scholarship itself, and also texts discussing the relationship between techniques, technologies and aesthetics in electroacoustic music. 2 texts address the issue of restoration and archiving in electroacoustic music; this issue will be returned to at towards the end of the essay.

10 texts in my sample have an explicitly national focus, referencing the *Catalog* in studies of the electronic music of Latin America, Japan, Finland, Italy, and the Czech Republic. This may not be entirely surprising given Davies's decision to organise the *Catalog* by country. However, this concentration of national studies is not a mere coincidence, I suggest, but a by-product of Davies's quite deliberate efforts to promote the interests of under-represented electronic musics.

Being organised alphabetically, the *Catalog* does not afford any privileged status to the usually canonised activities of Germany, France, and the United States, instead representing these nations as equals alongside less well-represented ones. Except insofar as the alphabet privileges A by placing it before B this is non-hierarchical. That said, it is entertaining to speculate that a concentration of Latin-American studies citing the *Catalog* may in part be related to Argentina's 'privileged' status as the first country listed.

In an article by the Argentinean composer Ricardo dal Farra,¹⁸ Davies's *Catalog* stands out as the earliest English-language source providing any information about Latin-American composers, and the only such source written by a non-Latin-American author. The *Catalog* is also cited in at least 3 different studies of Japanese electronic music, and again is one of the few non-native sources cited.

However, it is a point of curiosity that, in the *Catalog*, Davies lists many of the Japanese compositions as 'concert' works whereas a subsequent study states unambiguously that most of these pieces were in fact radio dramas, in some cases based on traditional Noh or Kyogen theatre pieces.¹⁹ Of course, this error could be accounted for by facts becoming lost in translation during Davies's research. On the other hand, it could be that the list of available functions is perhaps not as appropriate for Japanese cultural practice as it is for Western. The *Catalog* attempts to apply an essentially Western system of classification (ballets, operas, concerts) on a world-wide scale. Nowadays it is easy to foresee that these

¹⁸ dal Farra, Ricardo (2006), 'Something Lost, Something Hidden, Something Found: Electroacoustic Music by Latin American Composers,' *Organised Sound*, 11(2), pp.131–142.

¹⁹ Loubet, Emmanuelle, Curtis Roads, and Brigitte Robindoré (1997), 'The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1950s and 1960s,' *Computer Music Journal*, 21(4), pp.11–22. See the section entitled 'An Aesthetic Unique to NHK?' On the other hand, several years before this Davies had corrected Loubet on details given in her previous essay on Japanese electronic music; see Davies (1993). The details of this exchange are worthy of further investigation.

categories will not be universally applicable in all cultures. This, in turn, points to a broader array of problems and questions. Is it even possible to classify global cultural artefacts according to a single set of categories? Is the very idea of ‘electroacoustic music,’ as enshrined in the *Catalog*, implicitly biased in favour of Western cultural models?

These sorts of questions come to the fore in a quite heated exchange of letters between composers in which Davies’s *Catalog* is, again, cited.²⁰ The complainant is Martín Fumarola, an Argentinean composer based in Córdoba. He takes issue with two other Argentinean composers based overseas—Osvaldo Budón (based in Canada) and Horacio Vaggione (based in Europe since the late 1960s). Fumarola’s argument is essentially that these expatriate composers have no real understanding of Latin American electroacoustic music. He accuses them of being ‘Eurocentric and imperialist,’²¹ and of attempting to judge Latin American music by incompatible European standards: ‘Mr. Budón judges Latin American electroacoustic music as a European... of the 19th century.’²² Vaggione responds by reaffirming his central involvement in the formative electronic music activities of Argentina in the 1960s, citing the information given in Davies’s *Catalog* as the proof.²³ So it is that the *Catalog*, although in some ways Eurocentric itself, is called upon to act as an impartial authority on marginalised electronic musics.

Another national study that references the *Catalog* is Petri Kuljuntausta’s book *First Wave: A Micro-History of Early Finnish Electronic Music*.²⁴ The book puts forward the idea that electronic music is both under-represented and *misrepresented* in almost all of the literature on avant-garde and classical music in Finland. Davies, being a specialist in addressing matters of under- and misrepresentation, is drafted in to help. To do this Kuljuntausta refers to a relatively obscure article²⁵ in which Davies makes a case for Nordic electronic music as an autonomous and distinctive entity in its own right, independent to some extent from the rest of the European avant-garde rather than a mere by-product of serialism as some more conservative accounts would suggest.²⁶ (In terms of direct reference to the *Catalog*, Kuljuntausta corrects Davies on quite a number of Finland’s entries.)

By way of a conclusion, I will make some comments on the *Catalog*’s contribution to electroacoustic heritage and musicology. Daniel Terrugi credits Davies’s *Catalog* as ‘the first large-scale attempt to identify’ the totality of electroacoustic music works,²⁷

²⁰ Fumarola, Martín, and Horacio Vaggione (2002), ‘Letters,’ *Computer Music Journal*, 26(1), pp.5–8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

²² *Ibid.*, p.7.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.8.

²⁴ Kuljuntausta, Petri (2008), *First Wave: A Microhistory of Early Finnish Electronic Music* (Helsinki: Like).

²⁵ Davies, Hugh (1988), ‘Electronic Music in Sweden.’ In: Sten Hanson (ed.), *Nordiska Musikfester = Nordic Music Days: 100 Years* (Stockholm: Musikaliska Akademien / Föreningen Svenska Tonsättare), pp.61–88.

²⁶ Kuljuntausta, p.30, p.118.

²⁷ Terrugi, Daniel (2004), ‘Electroacoustic Preservation Projects: How to Move Forward,’ *Organised Sound* 9(1), pp.55–62 (p.57).

and to that I would add, the first attempt to map its topographic distribution. Davies provided a global sketch of electronic music activity, mapping for the first time the territory of electronic music production across the world.

The *Catalog* provided the initial data for a new catalogue undertaken at the Technical University in Berlin in the 1990s,²⁸ and subsequently made available online.²⁹

Terrugi holds that the 'EMDoku' database is the closest thing in existence to a complete inventory electroacoustic music, and that such an inventory is essential if we're to stand a chance of preserving any significant volume of electroacoustic music for posterity.³⁰ Thus, the very possibility of a lasting legacy of electroacoustic music can be credited, in part at least, to Davies's efforts during those arduous few months in Paris and New York.

The EMDoku database now includes records of almost 32,000 works.³¹ The real total is practically impossible to define owing to the ubiquity of electronic music-making tools and the inevitably fuzzy borders of the electroacoustic domain. When Davies's *Catalog* was first published, reviews of it tended to express a combination of admiration and bemused astonishment, highlighting only the problem of keeping it up-to-date as a potential issue. But (as I understand it) maintaining an always-up-to-date inventory of the total electroacoustic oeuvre was not Davies's intention. Rather, he sought to provide a historic 'snapshot' of formative works in the medium, as comprehensive as possible up to the cut-off date of April 1967, but never extending beyond it.

²⁸ Hein, Folkmar, Thomas Seelig, and Golo Föllmer (1996), *Internationale Dokumentation Elektroakustischer Musik* (Berlin: Pfau).

²⁹ Hein, Folkmar (1999), 'Internationale Dokumentation Elektroakustischer Musik,' website, <http://www.emdoku.de> [last modified 16 September 2012; accessed 13 May 2013].

³⁰ Terrugi, p.59.

³¹ Information retrieved 9 May 2013.

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Suggested Citation

Please reference this text as follows:

J. Mooney (2013), 'International Electronic Music Catalog: Hugh Davies and the (ethno)Musicology of Electronic Music,' oral presentation given at the *Electronic Music Symposium at Anglia Ruskin (EMSAR)*, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, 11 May 2013. Available online at <http://www.james-mooney.co.uk/publications>.