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“Internationalisation and Historicisation in Hugh Davies’s International Electronic Music Catalog: A Position Paper”

—OR—

“Hugh Davies: International Electronic Music Champion”

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This text is a combined transcription of presentations given at the Eighth Biennial International Conference on Music Since 1900 (Liverpool Hope University, 12–15 September 2013) and the *Royal Musical Association’s* 49th Annual Conference (Institute for Musical Research, London, 19–21 September 2013). An online version (slides and recorded narration) can be viewed at http://www.james-mooney.co.uk/davies_sep13.

Hugh Davies will be remembered by many as an improvising performer and instrument builder; however, in this presentation I focus on his work as a researcher and documenter of electronic music in the 1960s. In particular, I discuss Davies’s work as a champion of two causes in electronic music: internationalisation; and historicisation. ‘Internationalisation’ refers to: building an awareness of global activities in electronic music (in contrast with a situation where electronic music activity takes place in multiple isolated pockets with limited awareness or understanding of activities elsewhere); building a so-called ‘electroacoustic music community’ that spans international borders; and promoting awareness of and sensitivity to the local practices of different electronic music cultures. ‘Historicisation’ refers to activities designed to promote an awareness of the history of electronic music, rather than just the current state-of-the-art: documentation of electroacoustic music history; conservation projects.

Davies was working in the 1960s, at a time when the practice of electronic music was still young, had yet to develop a coherent international community, and had not had sufficient time to develop a strong sense of its own history. I intend to suggest that Davies’s work, and in particular his International Electronic Music Catalog,¹ played an important role here—that is, in the internationalisation and historicisation of electroacoustic music—and that his contribution remains important in electroacoustic music studies to the present day.²

Davies was born in 1943 in the south of England. His father was a civil servant, and Hugh’s first international experiences came about through his father’s overseas postings in India and Canada. Awareness of different cultures, and cosmopolitanism, were thus a part of Davies’s life even from his childhood and teenage years. He first became interested in electronic music while he was at school, and in 1961 wrote his first piece of electronic music research, a short essay entitled ‘A Survey of Electronic Music.’³ Already, then, an interest in historic documentation, and a tendency to undertake survey-like studies, is in evidence. After school he went to study Music at Oxford University and in 1963 he wrote an article entitled ‘New

¹ Hugh Davies, *Répertoire International Des Musiques Electroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog* (Paris & Trumansburg, NY: Groupe de Recherches Musicales de l’ORTF & Independent Electronic Music Center, Inc., 1968).

² Because of limited time available in the conference presentations from which this text is transcribed, somewhat more attention is paid to internationalisation than to historicisation.

³ Hugh Davies, ‘A Survey of Electronic Music’, 1961. Unpublished essay.

Directions in Music,'⁴ which will be discussed shortly. The following year he completed his undergraduate dissertation, 'Electronic Music and Musique Concrète: An Historical Survey,'⁵ as well as publishing a discography of electronic music commissioned by the British Institute of Recorded Sound.⁶ These works evidence a continued interest in cataloguing and historical documentation. After university Davies lived in Germany where he developed his international credentials as personal assistant to Karlheinz Stockhausen. Towards the end of that period, around 1966, he received a commission from the Groupe de Recherches Musicales in Paris to produce a survey of electronic music worldwide, and it was this survey that was to turn into the bilingual publication *Répertoire International des Musiques Électroacoustiques / International Electronic Music Catalog*, published in 1968.

What shape did Davies's idea of internationalisation actually take? In a letter written in 1964 Davies claims to have been involved in what he describes as 'small scale campaigning' to promote the avant-garde music of composers from under-represented nations, in particular Poland and Japan.⁷ He contacted publishers and asked them to distribute foreign scores that would otherwise be unavailable in England, for example. Such efforts to achieve British recognition of avant-garde musics from foreign countries show that Davies actively pursued a campaign of internationalisation even early on in his career. Why did he pursue such a campaign of internationalisation? A clue can be found, I suggest, in the article mentioned previously, 'New Directions in Music.' In that article Davies seems to suggest—to boil his argument down to its essence—that the cross-fertilisation of international musical traditions is a good source of musical innovation; a good way of keeping avant-garde music diverse and exciting without becoming superficial and self-referential. To quote Davies:

With the continental avant-garde [...] the greatest hope lies in the [...] influence of composers from countries that were until very recently outside the traditions and avant-garde culture of this century.⁸

(He refers, of course, to the Euro-American avant-garde, and to the influence of composers from countries outside Europe and the United States.)

Why, then, does Davies think that composers from fringe countries are the greatest hope for the European avant-garde? The answer is not entirely straightforwardly put by Davies, but—reading between the lines a little—what he says might be interpreted roughly as follows. According to Davies, for meaningful musical communication to take place there needs to be, at some level, a rich and highly evolved musical language shared between composers and audiences; the kind of sophisticated system that can only really develop out of a long-standing musical tradition. He criticises certain members of the European avant-garde for dismissing tradition too readily, relying too heavily on their own hastily invented systems which cannot

⁴ Hugh Davies, 'New Directions in Music', *The New University*, 12 (1963), 8–17.

⁵ Hugh Davies, 'Electronic Music and Musique Concrète: An Historical Survey' (Oxford, 1964). Unpublished dissertation.

⁶ Hugh Davies, 'A Discography of Electronic Music and Musique Concrète', *Recorded Sound: The Journal of the British Institute of Recorded Sound*, 14 (1964), 205–224. (Supplement published 1966 in the same journal.)

⁷ Hugh Davies, letter to Denis Stevens, undated (c.1964).

⁸ Davies, 'New Directions in Music', p. 12.

hope to achieve the same nuance and complexity of musical communication: ‘parlour games,’ Davies calls them.⁹ The challenge for the avant-garde, as he sees it, is to somehow find a way to be innovative—a way, in fact, to be avant-garde—without resorting to ‘parlour games’, but also without losing the richness of musical communication that comes with time-honoured tradition. The question is: how might one do that? One strategy—and I am still interpreting Davies here—is to take two already highly evolved musical traditions and combine them in some way. That way, something new is created, but without resorting to novelty for novelty’s sake, and without sacrificing the depth of expressive power that comes with a highly evolved musical language. An example Davies gives is the Japanese composer Yoritsune Matsudaira. According to Davies, Matsudaira’s work is effective because it skilfully combines two already highly evolved musical traditions—Western avant-garde, and traditional Japanese, in both of which Matsudaira had training—rather than attempting to invent its own system of musical communication in a vacuum. Davies’s own particular brand of internationalisation, then, is not homogenisation: he did not believe that one single style of avant-garde music should be propagated the world over. On the contrary, Davies’s idea of internationalisation depended on there being many distinct musical cultures that are locally unique, which can combine to (as it were) spawn new ‘species’ of avant-garde music. Continuing the metaphor, internationalisation provides a deeper gene pool of time-honoured, traditionally-steeped musical models with which avant-garde music can cross-fertilise.

Now to Davies’s *International Electronic Music Catalog*: it is a book of 330 pages listing—ostensibly—every piece of electronic music produced anywhere in the world up to the end of 1966 (and some from January to April 1967). It is arranged alphabetically by country, and within each country, individual electronic music studios are listed alphabetically by city. Under each studio, there is a list of all the electronic music compositions realised at that studio. There are 39 countries included in the Catalog, 560 studios, and 7450 compositions.¹⁰ A detailed description of the Catalog is not necessary for the purposes of this presentation, but I have given one elsewhere.¹¹

I suggest that the Catalog can be interpreted as an extension of Davies’s campaign of internationalisation, and here are some reasons for suggesting that. First, the Catalog is organised by country. This immediately implies that national boundaries are a significant factor in electronic music. It seems to lend itself to the idea that each country might represent a distinct electronic music culture, or electronic music style. Of course that may or may not in fact be true, but it remains the case that national boundaries are singled out in the way the Catalog has been organised, and this seems in line with Davies’s preoccupation with international cross-fertilisation as a potent force in avant-garde music. Second, the fact that the Catalog is alphabetically organised means that it represents all nations as equals, or at least attempts

⁹ Davies, ‘New Directions in Music’, p. 9.

¹⁰ Full details are provided for 4950 unique compositions. Appendices and notes provide rather more sketchy information for about a further 2500.

¹¹ James Mooney, ‘International Electronic Music Catalog: Hugh Davies and the (ethno)Musicology of Electronic Music’ (presented at the Electronic Music Symposium at Anglia Ruskin (EMSAR), Cambridge, UK, 2013) <<http://www.james-mooney.co.uk>>. (Transcript available at the URL given.)

to. Unlike many other texts on the history of electronic music, it does not afford privileged status to Germany, France, and the United States. Rather, it represents those nations as equals alongside less canonised ones, and this is, I believe, in line with Davies's campaign to put under-represented avant-garde musics on an equal footing with the Euro-American mainstream. Finally, take into account that organising the Catalog by country was not the easiest of all possible options; in fact, it presented quite considerable difficulties, not least because quite often a composer would begin work on a piece in one studio, and then complete it in a different studio in a different country. In the early stages of compiling the Catalog it was put to Davies that it would be much easier to arrange the Catalog by composer. Davies agreed—yes, that would indeed be easier—but, he argued, arranging by composer 'doesn't give so clear a picture.'¹² One can infer from this that Davies wanted a clear picture of electronic music activity in different geographic areas and was willing to pursue that particular approach even though it was not the easiest possible option. In other words, Davies chose geographic organisation, perhaps, I suggest, because it fitted his agenda of internationalisation.

I would now like to present some evidence to support the idea that internationalisation in electronic music has, in fact, taken place since 1968, and can be at least partly attributed to the influence of the Catalog. Before discussing texts that cite the Catalog, here are some comments made by Kevin Austin, composer and professor of electroacoustic music at Concordia University, Montreal, and an active member of the international electroacoustic music community from the time of the Catalog's publication to the present day:

Knowledge of [the Catalog's] existence was a further stage in the development of an international community [...] another important brick in the foundation. It [...] helped the community establish itself, notably in the eyes of other (older) existing communities... Today many of these ideas have little traction as the internet has changed the landscape. People today don't remember 'being hungry' for any information... Information wasn't available [elsewhere]. This is pre internet...¹³

Most undergraduates today will not be able to remember a time before the internet existed. It is important not to forget that the influence of a publication like the Catalog would have been much greater in the 1960s than it would be nowadays, because that kind of information simply was not available anywhere else—at least, not conveniently in one place. The Catalog also signified 'that the "community" was passing into the stage of documentation of activity,'¹⁴ becoming, that is, an historicised discipline. Such statements point to the role the Catalog may have played in building an international community and an awareness of electroacoustic music's history.

¹² Reynold Weidenaar, letter to Hugh Davies, dated 5 October 1966. In the letter, Weidenaar suggests that 'it would be much simpler to list works by names of composers.' In the margin, Davies has written 'easier (!) but doesn't give so clear a picture. Cross refs. either way...'

¹³ Kevin Austin, personal communication with the author by email, 1 June 2013.

¹⁴ Kevin Austin, personal communication.

In a sample of 50 texts that cite the Catalog, 10 are texts that specifically deal with the electroacoustic music of a particular nation or geographic area. These texts, almost by definition, tend to emphasise the particular characteristics of the music that can be thought of as being unique to the particular area in question. Here are a few very brief examples, quoting or paraphrasing from texts that cite the Catalog. ‘In Latin American electroacoustic music, the difference between the musical and the extra musical is not so clear’ as it is in European music.¹⁵ Czechoslovakian electroacoustic music from the 1950s and 60s only makes sense if you interpret it as a clandestine activity that was prohibited by the communist state, a dimension that does not exist in most European electroacoustic musics.¹⁶ In Japan, some composers ‘began to turn toward the resources of Japanese [traditional] music to find an identity for Japanese electronic music.’ This hybrid was influenced by, but different significantly from, anything seen in the European and American traditions.¹⁷ The first generation of Finnish electronic music composers were ‘keenly aware of new trends in the international avant-garde [...] but [nonetheless] set out along their own maverick path in their experimental pursuits.’¹⁸

There are efforts in these texts, not only to describe unique national characteristics, but also to explain how these national musics are—at once—influenced by, but nonetheless distinct from, the mainstream European avant-garde; hybrids, in other words. This appears to be, I suggest, a logical extension of the scenario described in Davies’s programme of internationalisation: Davies posits that there are a number of geographically distinct music cultures; lays open the possibility that those cultures could cross-fertilise; and, in turn, we find a body of subsequent literature that, to a certain extent, demonstrates that this has indeed happened. Clearly it would be ridiculous to claim that Davies’s work was solely responsible for the appearance of these articles. However, I believe that it is reasonable to suggest that the Catalog formed an essential part of the groundwork that made them possible. Certainly, it is likely that the writing of those texts would have been more difficult were it not for the existence of the Catalog, an observation that suggests that Davies’s work has played at least some role in the construction of international histories of electronic music.

I have suggested that Davies’s electronic music research can be interpreted in terms of a programme of internationalisation and historicisation. Internationalisation, for Davies, was not a matter of homogenisation, but rather, had to do with the cross-fertilisation of distinct, developed, musical traditions. Historicisation was manifest in a preoccupation with surveying, and the cataloguing of historic data, activities undertaken by Davies at a point in time when hardly anybody else seemed interested in such pursuits. My suggestion is that Davies’s research, in turn, played an important role in the internationalisation and historicisation of electroacoustic music, by raising awareness of its history, engendering a concern for its documentation, and by acting as a catalyst for the establishment of an international community.

¹⁵ Martin Fumarola and Horacio Vaggione, ‘Letters’, *Computer Music Journal*, 26 (2002), 5–8 (p. 6).

¹⁶ Libor Zajicek, ‘The History of Electroacoustic Music in the Czech and Slovak Republics’, *Leonardo Music Journal*, 5 (1995), 39–48 (p. 39).

¹⁷ Emmanuelle Loubet, Curtis Roads and Brigitte Robindoré, ‘The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1950s and 1960s’, *Computer Music Journal*, 21 (1997), 11–22 (pp. 16, 18).

¹⁸ Petri Kuljuntausta, *First Wave: a Microhistory of Early Finnish Electronic Music* (Helsinki: Like, 2008), p. back flap.

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* Unpublished manuscripts and correspondence held, uncatalogued at the time of writing, at the Hugh Davies Archive, The British Library, 98 Euston Road, London, NW1 2DB.

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