

## An interview with previous ICMC hosts

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*Array: Christopher Haworth and Scott McLaughlin*

Array: What is required of an institution to host an ICMC?

M.Clarke: Hosting an ICMC is complex and does require significant resources. We first thought about staging it in Huddersfield in the mid 1990s but eventually decided we didn't have the resources at that time. By 2009, when we were again asked to consider bidding for the conference, we had a new building, many more staff working in computer music, and a University keen to encourage such ventures. Certainly fifteen years earlier we would not have been in the position to stage the sort of conference we did in 2011.

It is a large conference, often with 300 or more delegates, but it is also a kind of festival. Furthermore the music, and sometimes other aspects of the conference, often involves complex

*\* Qs 3 & 4 were not posed to M. Clarke.*

technical arrangements. All this implies a lot of spaces - halls for concerts (of suitable size, acoustic etc.), spaces for installations, listening rooms and demos as well as rooms for papers sessions, posters etc. With several concerts a day and the rehearsal demands of technically complex music there really need to be several concert venues (we had 3) all with their own sound systems, technical teams etc.

Although the delegate fees cover many of the costs of staging a conference (the music makes it particularly expensive), in my experience they are unlikely to cover the full costs of the very substantial administrative work and planning over many months. This therefore has to be covered either by external sponsorship, internal financial support, people donating their time freely, or some combination of these. We were fortunate to receive very generous support from our University.

Another key factor is having a dedicated team prepared and able to go beyond the call of duty. For ICMC 2011 I was very fortunate to have such colleagues. The Music and Paper chairs did an extraordinary amount of work as did our paid administrative assistants and the numerous volunteers.

But I hope I am not putting others off staging an ICMC - it really is great to

do and brings many benefits. It is an important service to our computer music community too. And it would also be a pity if only large and experienced institutions felt able to stage it - part of ICMC's role I feel sure is to take computer music to new parts of the world to engage new regions.

M.Ciglar: First of all the hosting institution should have interest in the field of computer music. This means that it should in a way be engaged in research and development of audio technologies, it should be developing artistic projects and productions, and, if possible also conducting educational programs. IRZU – the host of ICMC2012 had all this but it did not have/own any infrastructure. The venues we needed for hosting the ICMC were contributed by our local partners (concert-halls, theaters, galleries, etc.) It is not difficult to create a local network of co-producers and venue-partners. It is a logistical task. Much more important is to have an idea what to do content-wise, and how to effectively merge the local context and history (concerning the hosting institution, as well as a broader local community of computer music practitioners) with the inputs delivered by the international community around ICMC.

C.Hope: (Hosting an ICMC requires) good partners. Whilst we are in a

university, the support they could offer was limited, and the timing of the conference meant we did not have access to their facilities. So we had to find venues, and additional funds. You also need tenacity and the ability to 'sell' ICMC as a valuable event worthy of sponsorship. And of course, you need to know where to look for funding. Also, on a more pragmatic level, you need very, very good technical support.

Array: How do you see the crossover between scientific and artistic research at ICMC? Is there always scope for both to co-exist, or is that tension an important aspect of computer music in general (the tension of "research" in two different paradigms)?

M.Clarke: For me one of the key things about the ICMC has always been that it brings together musicians and scientists (and many subcategories of each of these!) The conference is at its best when these many diverse groups interact. It is a real opportunity for these communities to learn from each other and inspire one another. Something I tried to encourage when I was ICMA Music Co-ordinator (2000-2004) was more activity that crossed the boundaries, such as piece and paper categories, round-table discussions between composers and the people who create the technologies they were using. I'm not really sure I succeeded very much

in that at the time but I am pleased to see some of these things happening now.

M.Ciglar: I always see the scientific part of the “computer music” field as a kind of an extended Solfeggio or music theory. It is crucial for both the scientific and artistic research practice to co-exist and cross-fertilize each other. In practice however, computer music composers seem to be very busy with writing etudes. In a way, it is a normal phenomenon, because as music-technology advances, the musical language is continuously expanding. Technology now offers so many expression possibilities that artists/composers sometimes forget what exactly it was that they wanted to express.

C.Hope: I think it’s important to acknowledge the ongoing changing landscape for computers in music generally, and computer music in academia. Both scientific and artistic research can and should be represented at ICMC, by constructing appropriate streams for papers, but also different forums for presentation; workshops, piece and papers, concerts, installations, posters etc.

Array: The last two ICMCs represented something of a departure from previous conferences. The 2012 event in Slovenia foregrounded ‘non-cochlear sound’, a reference to Seth Kim Cohen’s 2009

2009 book, “In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art”, whilst the 2013 in Australia featured composers of popular electronica (Haco) and writers on sound art (David Toop) amongst its keynote speakers. Can you talk about your intentions in choosing to bring ICMC into closer relation to sonic art and electronica? Did it lend a different character to the conference? I ask because, in this issue, Seth Kim Cohen (keynote of ICMC 2012) expresses some trepidation at bringing his perspective as a sound artist and critic to bear on the computer music community, fearing that what he has to say may fall on “deaf, or even antagonistic ears”...

M.Ciglar: ICMC2012 was not framed in terms of sonic art. Much more, it was framed in the context of “non-cochlearity”. Johannes Kreidler, one of our invited composers, presented a concert piece, “Fremdarbeit”, for a quintet ensemble of acoustic instruments, sampler and moderator. Kreidler’s work is still one of the best examples of non-cochlear music. But the main aim of framing ICMC2012 in terms of non-cochlearity was to trigger some rather ontological discussions about the artistic practice within computer music, which of course is always a bit dangerous as it might question the importance of a lifetime-work and achievement of individuals.

Unfortunately, the theme was not really picked up at the ICMC2012. I think that in the end there were 1 or 2 submissions out of 600 that actually referred to the theme. And about 6 submissions which tried to refer to it but got it kind of wrong as they thought we were looking for tactile sound, sound visualisations, etc.

As for the event itself, I honestly did not have much time for informal discussions, since I was busy with logistics. All I can say is that the immediate responses to Kim-Cohens keynote were not very positive. It was not really surprising. It is difficult to open that kind of discussion within a keynote format. You could really see that the audience wanted to respond and open a discussion, but the schedule was just too tight. Perhaps it would be better to choose a different format, like a workshop or roundtable. Still it was very inspiring to have two keynotes on that topic sharing the same stage. Diedrich Diederichsen also had a brilliant presentation but, unlike Kim-Cohen, Diederichsen did not leave a space for the audience to feel offended. Altogether it was an unusual ICMC. Diederichsen and Kim-Cohen are not part of the ICMC community and all the time I felt a bit like I had flown 2 special unit G.I.’s into a war-zone to do their quick keynote operation and get out before they get them. I do not know how it felt for them and for the ICMC community, and I can’t

really tell if it made any sense to do this, but perhaps we could spark some new ideas in a few young composers’ minds by choosing this topic. We will see what the next ICMC’s will bring.

C.Hope: As I suggested in my earlier answer, computer music is always changing. For organisations like ICMA and their local affiliates to stay alive, we need to adapt to the changing face of computer music – where people learn it, where they make it, who makes it, where they find the equipment they need. Computer music is now being made by a wide range of practitioners, many who have never been to university, and who distribute their music or software through a range of different channels. I think ICMA needs to reach out to those people: show them ICMA are interested in what they are doing and how. It’s good for everyone. I think ICMA should be for the computer music community in a broad sense. Many academic courses for computer music now embrace popular music/electronica – and are developing new technologies and ideas within those realms.

Array: Array has a history of focusing on gender inequality and discrimination in computer music. Having reviewed all the submissions to a recent ICMC, you may have some empirical insights to share on this issue. Do things seem to be

changing from your perspective (for better or worse)? It is a big question, but in what ways do you think ICMC conferences can contribute to encouraging more gender diversity in computer music?

C.Hope: We made a concerted effort to include at least one female keynote, as well as embrace the region somewhat. ICMCA were great in assisting us to find women reviewers too, so there was some chance of a balance there in a blind peer review process. But still, there was a very low percentage of women in the mix of accepted papers. More in works, but still much, much less than men. I think the situation for women in music generally has actually gone a bit backwards: as if we all got comfy since ‘feminism is over’ and have been acting as though there is nothing left to do to encourage women in music. In Australia, whilst around 25% of composers are women, only 6% of music programming features women’s works (Australia Council report, 2013). So obviously – there is still work to do.

M.Ciglar: I only have insight in the 2012 submissions, not into earlier or later ones. In general the submissions (artistic as well as scientific) by female authors are rather scarce. We have the same problem in arts and science in general. As one of the dominant electronic/computer music platforms, ICMC certainly has the potential to encourage gender diversity

in this field. However, the problem with gender inequality goes deeper and cannot really be solved at the highest level that an academic conference represents. ICMC is an exclusive venue. In practice, it requires a research position in academia in order to get access to ICMC.

Array: The music technology landscape has changed a vast amount over the last decade. Given the rise of other conferences in the same space, such as EMS/SEAMUS/NIME, do you think there is still a need for a “computer music conference”? What is the relevance of ICMC today, and how do you see it changing in response to the landscape? What future directions do you think might be fruitful for ICMC?

M.Clarke. For the reasons mentioned earlier I think ICMC still has a vital role to play. Other conferences do very important work in specific, focused areas but there is also a vital role for ICMC in bringing together a broad range of work in the field. I think we do all benefit from that. There has been a drop in the number of papers submitted to icmc in recent years, especially in some scientific areas, perhaps because of the proliferation of opportunities for people to publish. Perhaps we need to think seriously how better to attract people in these areas and how to communicate what it is that ICMC has to offer them.

The field continues to evolve at a rapid pace, both in terms of technological development and creative approach. If I am right in seeing ICMC’s strength being its gathering together of all these strands it will need to continue to adapt imaginatively as the discipline transforms and embrace the full range of new work in the area. I would like to see future ICMCs continue to explore new ways of getting these varied communities to talk together and exchange ideas, not simply present different areas of work alongside each other. Perhaps one of the most difficult things is to do this while still attracting specialists in each area. But if it can achieve this I feel sure the ICMC will continue to play a major role in the discipline and be an exciting event to attend.

M.Ciglar: ICMC is one of the oldest academic venues for music and technology. I do not think that its name “computer music” nowadays is still understood literally. ICMC covers a very broad spectrum of work and it is very natural that throughout the years other conferences appeared, which specialized in certain sub-disciplines (artistic and scientific) of music and technology. The problem with ICMC as I see it, is that it is a rather hermetic and exclusive event, with a surprisingly stable and slowly evolving international community. Perhaps this is normal for

an academic conference, but still, the contents that are presented at the ICMC are also present outside of academia. There is a vibrant and dynamic scene out there that is often not even aware of the existence of the ICMC. Perhaps it would be interesting as well as beneficial for a further development of a broader music-technology landscape if the future ICMC tried to encourage a dialogue between the academic and non-academic world of computer music.

C.Hope: It is true that branches of computer music are popping up all over. We are also convening an inaugural animated notation conference soon. But I think that rather than being in competition, they compliment each other – it is just a result of the way computer music is moving and changing; or computing has become increasingly prevalent in all aspects of music practice. I think to keep ICMC relevant it needs to have an open minded curatorial platform about the kinds of music and research it seeks and takes on; keep its broad, worldwide focus; look beyond the university circuit without deserting it, become more affordable, support young practioners, women and students through different programs; and engage directly with the community that hosts it. Those conferences in ‘the same space’ could make good partners!