



History of the LMC

Clive Bell

Above left: The Club Room with Martin Klapper and Richard Sanderson 1998
Above right: Feminist improvising group, late 70s
Below: Derek Bailey, Maggie Nicols, Lol Coxhill 98, Otomo & Eye 94



"It's funny, we do all these interviews with *Melody Maker* and *NME* and the fanzines, and we try to talk about this real underground of London, improvisers like Evan and Derek, Lol, Moholo, the whole African contingent—and of course none of them have ever heard this music. It's kind of a bummer. It's such an underground music. It's very serious but it's also very humorous. It's very alive."

Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth in *The Wire* 108, Feb 1993.

At the end of the 90s, the free music world can still seem a wonderfully well-kept secret, a genuinely underground art activity. For 25 or 30 years there's been a scene there, all those club concerts listed monthly on the London Musician's Collective (LMC) Calendar; the LMC Annual Festivals—but is it a musical genre? Sometimes it feels like you can pin it down. At Derek Bailey's annual *Company* series, even though the musicians ranged from classical French horn player to thrash guitarist, you could see a simple listen-and-get-on-with-it approach. But even here the low key presentation, the strange theatre of encounters between musicians who had never met, and the outbursts of completely unplanned musical brilliance all combined to bewilder and undercut neat theory. The qualities of *Company* were often down to Bailey's personality and style. As in the world of jazz, strong individuals stamped their character on musical encounters. And the LMC was born because individuals wanted to band together for everyone's benefit.

"The group of people that were working around the *SME* (Spontaneous Music Ensemble) at that time—John Stevens, Derek Bailey, Trevor Watts, Paul Rutherford—were working on a method that I could call 'atomistic', breaking the music down into small component parts and piecing them together again in a collective way, so as to de-emphasize the soloistic nature of improvisation and replace it by a collective process. But at the same time *AMM* had what I would call a "laminar" way of working, where although the solo had been lost and the emphasis was on a collective sound, an orchestral sound if you like, it was not done by breaking the music into small components but by contributing layers which would fit together and make a new whole."

Evan Parker, talk at Actual Music Festival, ICA, August 1980.

"An obstinate clot of innovation", was how the *Wire* magazine described the LMC in 1997. The LMC has shown remarkable powers of survival, but it was not the first grouping of its kind. Richard Leigh: "The Musicians, Cooperative was set up as a pressure group for a clearly defined set

of musicians, usually referred to as the 'first generation', of improvisers. These included Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Paul Lytton, John Stevens, Tony Oxley, Howard Riley, Paul Rutherford, Barry Guy and Trevor Watts" (Quote from *Resonance* Vol 2, No 2). This was around 1971, and concerts were held at the Little Theatre Club in Garrick Yard and the Unity Theatre in Camden Town.

Then, in April 1975, came *Musics* magazine, which Martin Davidson remembers as resulting from a phone conversation between himself, his wife Mandy and Evan Parker. The editorial board in summer 1975 was Bailey, Parker, Steve Beresford, Max Boucher, Paul Burwell, Jack Cooke, Peter Cusack, Hugh Davies, Mandy and Martin Davidson, Richard Leigh, John Russell, David Toop, Philipp Wachsmann and Colin Wood. I remember Colin Wood remarking that *Musics* was the first thing this crowd had found that they could all agree about. And I'm sorry about these lists, but if you want to make enemies with a history like this, all you have to do is leave out someone's name.

"STOP PRESS REVIEW SECTION: Three years ago ten music students from Cologne sat in horseshoe, one end of fine Wren church in Smith Square, sang ninth chord all evening, sound mixed and rarefied by man in nave. Last Saturday ten religious men from Tibet sat in horseshoe on same spot, sang tenth chord all evening, no sound mixer."

Colin Wood in *Musics* No 4, October 1975.

Musics came out six times a year and ran for 23 issues. In its coverage of improvised and non-western music alongside performance art, it reflected the broad interests of a so-called 'second generation' of improvisers, and provided a convivial focus point. Interested outsiders were welcome to share in the work of pasting the magazine together. In those pre-wordprocessing days pasting meant paste, as well as glue, scalpel and unwashed mugs. These days the unwashed mugs are the only survivors of the era.

"The LMC was formed by the slightly newer lot of musicians simply because everyone was fed up with playing in bad rooms above pubs or nowhere at all. Whereas Musicians' Co-op members had briefly enjoyed (?) the hospitality of Ronnie Scott and his club, due to Mr Scott's justifiably high regard for Evan Parker, Tony Oxley, Howard Riley, Barry Guy et al, musicians such as Nigel Coombes, Tony Wren, Paul Burwell or Colin Wood might just as well have come from Mars (or stayed there). There was nothing happening, other than the music."

David Toop, *Resonance* Vol 2, No 1, winter 1993.

A source of continuing inspiration to the younger

musicians was John Stevens' work in concerts and workshops. Maggie Nicols was another improviser who excelled at leading workshops. Within one hour, a roomful of assorted and embarrassed individuals could be led to build a communal musical experience of enormous power. Suddenly the mysteries of group improvisation and experimental music were opened up—veils fell from eyes, and the sheer joy of music-making seemed accessible to all. I recall one musician warning me that after a John Stevens workshop he had observed that most of the male participants had erections. I couldn't really see what was so wrong with this—maybe this music wasn't so cerebral and abstract as some people made out?

In 1975/76 the London Musicians Collective emerged from a series of meetings, and mailed out its first newsletter in August 1976. The Collective was separate from *Musics* magazine, but involved many of the same people. It was hoped that an organisation would carry more weight in dealings with other organisations, institutions and the press. And these musicians had a lot in common: nowhere to play, and no wider recognition of their music.

A major difference from the Musicians' Co-op was the LMC's openness to anyone who wanted to join. Richard Leigh again: "It was always seen as a network drawing more and more people from varied backgrounds into the scene". Improvisers were dipping their fingers into the many pies of mixed media, dance, film and performance art. And in fact at this time, just before punk and its DIY ethic erupted, there was a remarkable burst of energy in the underground arts scene. Dancers founded the X6 Dance Collective and *New Dance* magazine at Butlers Wharf, while film makers started the London Film Makers Co-op. These too have survived and are with us today, in the form of the Chisenhale Dance Space and the Lux Cinema in Hoxton Square. For musicians, the venue crisis was becoming acute. The Little Theatre Club had folded and the Unity Theatre burned down. The usual expedient of hiring a room in a pub, college or community hall was dependent on the whim of the landlord, and would not allow performances to be run on the musicians' terms. A space with maximum flexibility was needed if the work was to develop freely.

"We had been looking for premises (I remember surreal dealings with the Diocesan Committee for Redundant Churches)...Actually a lot of the connections between the LMC and LFMCC happened through informal contacts, for instance I had fallen in love with Annabel Nicolson when she and the Film Co-op were still in the Dairy in Prince of

Wales Crescent, and I hung about while she was programming films there, doing odd jobs like selling tea and biscuits, sweeping the floor, and designing a membership card that was also a Thaumatrope... The LMC wanted to take the space at 42 Gloucester Avenue (Camden Town), but it was too large for them, and I think Guy Sherwin approached the LMC with a view to subletting. I think Annabel might have had something to do with the idea, as the LMC 'office', and meetings were located in her one room flat."

Paul Burwell, Performance magazine.

Even before finding a venue, "LMC events" had been happening all over London, ever since the organisation was founded. Now many of these moved into the Camden building, and a calendar and newsletter were started up (1977/78). The level of activity, and its breadth, were both remarkable, and for the next ten years an average of 200 public performances a year were organised, almost entirely by unpaid administration. Nearly every day of the year the space was in use for rehearsal. This was a musicians' initiative, run on musicians' terms, so the chaos was often high, but there was plenty going on. The National Jazz Centre in the 1980s, by contrast, spent half a decade and untold sums of money not organising a single gig.

By anyone's standards the LMC building was a flexible performance space, little more than a shell packed with potential. Members spent hours clambering all over it, trying to render it habitable. Sylvia Hallett installed electricity and wiring, and Annabel Nicolson contributed a wooden floor from her flat to build a wall. The floor was as hard as you like: you could flood it, light a bonfire on it, bounce rocks off it. And after the show no staff would grumble, because there were no staff, and you would be cleaning it up yourself. Many saw the space as not especially to do with improvised music, but simply "astonishing... a place where you can do things you can't do elsewhere". (David Cunningham, quoted in *Time Out*, 1980)

"Was the real Britain very different from how you had imagined it?"

On my second day here I went to an Environmental Music Festival, where I met some musicians who played on canal boats, and others who played the piano with their feet, and I thought: what a different attitude towards art, so playful and free.

What inspired you to set up the Frank Chickens?

I became involved with the London Musicians Collective after the festival I mentioned, and started performing straight away. I had had this idea that I was an artist since childhood."

Kazuko Hohki interviewed in Japan Embassy newsletter, March 1998.

David Toop's 1978 Festival of Environmental Music & Performance was a nine day event, in some ways a massive celebration of the LMC's new found home, and a major influence on subsequent work. Warming up with a talk from Trevor Wishart and an instrument building workshop, Toop, Burwell, Parker, Paul Lytton and several others flung themselves into a continuous 24 hour concert called Circadian Rhythms. Visiting performers included Alvin Curran (USA), Luc Houtkamp (Holland), Carlos Trinidade (Portugal), and Christian d'Aiwée (France). F.I.G. (the eight piece Feminist Improvising Group, whose performances were renowned for their hilarity) alternated with seminars ("Music/Events/structure/Context"). Stuart Marshall, Annabel Nicolson and Whirled Music played on nearby Primrose Hill, and guerrilla activities by Lol Coxhill and Michael Parsons could be encountered along the towpath of the Regents Canal.

The festival came at the end of a month (July 1978) which had already witnessed 13 performances, several open workshop sessions, and two meetings: one devoted to the LMC Records label, the other the usual monthly meeting open to all Collective members. Improvisers Mike Hames, Roger Turner, Hugh Metcalfe, Sinan Savaskan and Roger Smith had played. The Alterations quartet (Toop, Beresford, Peter Cusack and Terry Day) had brought over Fred Frith and Peter Brotzmann to perform alongside their own brand of dub'n'din



improv. Dislocation Dance (Manchester) and Reptile Ranch (Cardiff) linked up with local alt-punk duo The Door & The Window. Andrew Brenner's 49 Americans had explored left-field pop "in a relaxed atmosphere of concerned patriotism", sharing their Tuesday night slot with The Majorca Orchestra ("original marches, waltzes, descriptive fantasies, Edwardian disco and Scottish reggae"). The LMC was bursting at the seams.

"BARRY LEIGH'S REPORT:

1. The wall blocking the railway bridge at the rear of the building has been demolished.
2. Jumble leftovers are to be cleared from the loft.
3. Health inspector and surveyors will be contacted about the toilet (to be installed). It was noted that relations with the Film Co-op are deteriorating.

TOILET: The Gulbenkian Foundation say nothing doing, about our application for financial assistance.

DOORS: Stuart Boardman will put handles on the doors to the performing space."

LMC Newsletter, December 1979.

But behind all the glamour and the razzmatazz, what was the LMC really like? Personally I always found it a rich source of friendly and healthily eccentric people. Joining was like running away to join the circus. The place was a model of self-help and an opportunity to experiment in ways impossible elsewhere. As an organisation, it was most riven by factional strife when the membership was most active, of course. And as a building it was a bottomless pit into which you could pour your unpaid time. There was always some administrative headache to do with the ghastly business of running a London experimental venue in a bare loft. Noise: the laundry downstairs and the Kings Cross main line out back ensured there was noise coming in. As for noise going out, there were flats across the road, our soundproofing consisted of closing the windows, and some of the concerts were a little, er, exuberant. I remember watching the Dead Kennedys building an immense PA one sunny afternoon, in preparation for an unpublished gig which had people queuing around the block. I cycled away before the mayhem was unleashed. Then there were fire regulations ("You can't do that in here"), charitable status ("We can't give you subsidy to do that"), and a lack of toilets. There were toilets in the Film Co-op next door, there was a British Rail toilet under the building, there was a toilet in the pub opposite... OK, let's admit there were no toilets. This became a conundrum, a problematic fortress against which successive waves of voluntary admin would charge uphill, only to reel back down in stunned defeat. Benefit concerts, grant applications, sympathetic builders—nothing seemed to work. Let's just hope it added to our beatnik loft-dwelling cred.

"When we joined the LMC two years ago we did so in the belief that it was a collective—built on the political tenet of collectivism. We find in actuality a club set up to celebrate individualism. We feel that the newsletter must call for collective involvement from its 'collective' membership, yet in doing so we are accused of being sectarian. However, under the constant cringing criticism that we receive, we shall continue to coordinate the newsletter and until removed by the LMC shall continue to attempt to build toward 'Collectivity.'"

Dick Beard and Tim Dennis, LMC Newsletter, August 1980.

If we accept the liberal idea of art as an autonomous space, where other values can be considered and explored, then the LMC building was like a concrete expression of this. Established by

free improvisers, one of its most distinctive features as an organisation was its openness and inclusiveness. Other musical pressure groups were more closely tied to one genre or style of music making, while the LMC forever had a hankering for the genuine experiment, whatever the idiom. This has contributed to its resilience, and also generated a constant debate about what on earth the LMC stands for.

For many years the LMC was a large collective (200 members), supposedly running itself in an authentically collective manner. Open monthly meetings enabled the entire membership to participate in a lively criticism of any member who had actually done any work. The problems of collectivity are well known. These days we shake our heads and think we know better, but the LMC's factional struggles were a simple result of a large number of musicians all being passionately involved and trying to get a hand on the steering wheel. In this piece I am deliberately giving my personal view of what the LMC was all about—in the early days there were many different agendas. Many British improvisers were, and still are, highly politicised, in all the different Marxist and anarchist hues. For many others, the collective spirit still expresses important truths about the co-operative and non-hierarchical nature of improvised music, and the importance of musicians taking creative control of their own music. A glance at life inside an orchestra, with its composer-driven hierarchy, is usually enough to remind us of the alternative.

"The dynamics of the current magazine meetings depend more on pointed silences, emotional blackmail, mumbled asides and semi-sneers than on direct statements. The *Musics* collective is frightened of growth, frightened of taking and using power. There is no sense of history, of where the music is from and why people play it. The collective is a morass of impersonality. We trivialise each other's contributions."

Steve Beresford, letter to *Musics* collective meeting, titled "Why we need a new publication", October 1980.

In 1980 factional struggle and good old-fashioned personal rowing resulted in several resignations from the LMC and the demise of *Musics* maga-

Left: Tilbury
Below: Paul
Burwell on the
beach in the
seventies
Bottom: Derek
Bailey and
dancer





Left: Eugene Chadbourne 99
Centre: Cusack group
Right: Clive Bell 99
Bottom: Tristran Honsinger 99

zine. The December 1980 newsletter contains scary outpourings of vitriol and the squealing of bruised egos. Frustration is clearly audible. Almost completely unrecognised by the outside world, these musicians were consistently ignored or sneered at by the music press, and regarded as suspicious charlatans by the contemporary music establishment. Arts Council support was indeed forthcoming for larger scale events and it paid the rent, but long hours of unpaid admin and building work were leading to burnout at a tender age. Meanwhile our richer and better equipped neighbour, the Film Co-op, was trying to evict us.

"There is a clear polarisation between 'collectivists' and 'musicians'. Many of the Cs are interested in music, and many of the Ms are concerned to maintain collectivism, but it looks as though the basic differences are insuperable. The Cs resent any suggestion that there are useful musical criteria which give certain examples of music greater value than others. In my view if you can't, or won't, distinguish between a 'good', piece of improvisation and one which isn't, there's nothing to aim for and you might as well watch the telly."

Tony Wren, open letter to LMC, in December 1980 Newsletter.

After patching up the spat with the Film Co-op, the LMC kept up a high level of activity during the 1980s. Some of the founders had resigned, and political strife seemed a thing of the past. Members came forward to do the dirty work, whether it was taking glasses back to the pub or phoning the Goethe Institute. Peter Cusack, Paul Burwell, Sylvia Hallett, Susanna Ferrar, Tom Sheehan and Dean Brodrick all showed astonishing reluctance to pack it in and get a proper job. Those who sat in the little office space overlooking the railway tracks were sometimes accused of being power-crazed careerists, but the truth was that your own music would probably suffer if you spent too much time there. On the other hand, if you leaned on a broom in a corner of the space for long enough, you would see an extraordinary carnival pass through. For example, Dean Brodrick's "Great Little Inuit Eskimo Show" in February 1985: an Inuit drum battle, shadow puppets, igloo building for beginners, a contest where pairs of singers chanted into each other's mouths, the film *Nanook Of The North* accompanied by improvising string quartet, and a discussion led by anthropologist and film maker Hugh Brody. For several months Max Eastley's Aeolian harps were fixed to the roof above the entrance, singing eerily to the street whenever the wind got up. Inside, one of the many "floor percussionists" might be setting up: Barry Leigh with his revolving glass coffeetables, played with chunks of polystyrene, or Roger Turner's junk kits, heavyweight detritus of the Industrial Revolution.

In 1982 Alan McGee, later to be mogul of Creation Records, was running the weekly Beet-Bop Club in the LMC. Possibly the most spectacular and downright life-threatening event was the debut performance by the Bow Gamelan Ensemble, climax of Sylvia Hallett's 1983 "Evening Of Self-Made Instruments". This was also a prime example of how the Collective regularly gave birth to highly original and influential work, which barely fitted within any definition of new music. The place was packed for this riot of pyrotechnics and barely controlled arc-welding equipment abuse, but it was noticeable that Burwell's friends were hovering nervously around

the exit.

"Memories... the Musicians Du Nil changing the Collective into an Eastern Bazaar after their concert, when they attempted to sell the audience their instruments, trinkets, and, I think, items of their clothing... Annabel Nicolson flooding the place in a representation of the Mississippi river (actually quite convincing, but I'd drunk a whole bottle of Southern Comfort and thought I was Huckleberry Finn)."

Paul Burwell reminiscing in Performance magazine.

New, younger members arrived to gaze with respectful awe at a room where Evan Parker had played a trio with Kazuko Hohki and a seven foot inflatable Godzilla. Or to dismiss the past as "a bunch of saxophonists tooting away for hours to an average audience of six or seven" (The Door & The Window, quoted in *Time Out*). Not everyone was happy with the LMC's name; I recall someone suggesting that the building be renamed "Risks", and neon letters should be fixed to the roof. For a while we affectionately subtitled it The Palace Of Living Culture, as we struggled to mend smashed windows and doors.

By 1987 it was clear that professional administration was required, whether we could afford it or not. A hiring out for a private party had resulted in equipment being stolen from our neighbours, the Film Co-op. Recriminations flew. After ten years of concerts, we were informed we had no license for "music and dancing", so were liable to be closed any day by Camden Council. And the condition of the building was not compatible with our status as pioneering arts amateurs, let alone its original function as a British Rail social club canteen.

"A last minute ironic twist to LMC development plans: Today is the launch of the LMC's 'Home Additions' appeal, our plans to carry out major improvements to these premises, starting with the foyer area you are standing in! In total part one will cost £9,000... As long ago as last September we discussed the possibility of a long lease with British Rail. There doesn't seem to be a problem, they replied. Last week they sent us a notice to



quit. By March 24th 1988."

LMC Press Release, September 1987.

The Film Co-op, also given notice to quit, hung on for many years before decamping to Hoxton Square. But a rumour went round that the LMC had already closed up shop, so members stopped hiring the space, income dried up, and moving out came to seem a positive option. The words "albatross" and "neck" were used in discussions about the dear old building. Both brake cables on my bicycle were severed one evening during an LMC concert, something I noticed only after tumbling off at the bottom of a hill in Chalk Farm. This stoked my paranoia, but it had no bearing on the LMC's decision to leave. In spring 1999, 42 Gloucester Avenue still stands, derelict and empty, sadly gazing at railway and canal.

In spite of the end-of-an-era gloom, the final Gloucester Road newsletter in June 1988 publicised some dozen events happening there, including a Musicians Against Nuclear Arms benefit involving 40 players. The LMC's longest surviving inhabitant, Member Number 1 Paul Burwell, having played the premises, first ever concert, also performed at the last. Administrator Dave Matzdorf was now followed by Simon Woodhead and Philippa Gibson. The organisation camped out in Simon's office in the Diorama, Regents Park, and contemplated its venue-less future. Events were organised at the Diorama, Red Rose, Air Gallery and Tom Allen Centre in Stratford, but a proper home proved hard to find.

From September 1989 Richard Scott, a big Ornette Coleman fan, brought a certain jazzy flair to the admin. His "Three Cities" festival in March 1990 featured the first performance by Manchester's Stock, Hausen & Walkman, "the industrial cartoon soundtrack tape manipulation ensemble". SH&W went on to become one of the internationally most successful young improv groups of the 90s.

However, the period 1989 to 1991 feels with hindsight like the LMC's darkest hour. A series of woefully underpaid workers wrestled with a dozen types of administrative chaos. In February 1990 the AGM heard they had been struck off the register at Companies House (not Richard Scott's fault, I hasten to add). Elder members wrung their hands. Susanna Ferrar and Eddie Prevost administered the kiss of life to the accounts. Nick Coudry performed legal emergency surgery. But even Paul Burwell's new computer seemed powerless to arrest the slide.

"In the past year or so, organisations have sprung up (for instance in Manchester and Colchester) which have shown that wider audiences can be achieved with positive presentation which makes no apologies for what improvisation is, but equally does not assume that everyone out there somehow knows about it. I believe that with a lot of hard work and clear thinking the LMC could do the same, in fact the LMC should aim to lead the field, not drag behind it. The LMC's ambition should be to be the principal organisation representing improvised music in Britain. If however the LMC does not have such ambitions, those involved should seriously ask themselves whether it deserves the funding it is claiming."

Nick Coudry, document titled "Does The LMC Have A Future?", September 1991.

"Ambition" is the key word here. The LMC had been lively, angry, wild at heart and wonderfully

deaf to common sense, but maybe it had never been ambitious enough. The first sign that this might be about to change was a small glossy leaflet splashed in orange and white, advertising the LMC "Autumn Collection", a series of ten concerts from September to December 1991.

Someone had invented word processing and graphic design, and the LMC had noticed. Then came the December 1991 newsletter—in place of the one-sheet catalogue of despair, castigating the membership for its lethargy, this was a 16 page magazine bulging with record reviews, advertising and a substantial interview with Alabama guitarist Davey Williams. There was even a trailer for an interview with 84 year old calypso singer The Roaring Lion, to be published in Variant magazine. Phil England and Ed Baxter had arrived.

"The venue was unconventional—a swimming pool, complete with water and hot, chlorinated atmosphere. The number of acts was uncommon—nine, and to describe their repertoire as diverse would be a highly misleading understatement. Judged in brutally logistic terms, the event was a resounding success. The auditorium was packed; the concert started almost on time; the proceedings managed to accommodate the activities of a BBC TV crew without serious disruption. I for one enjoyed the evening, although the overall impression was more reminiscent of a night at the music hall than a concert of leading-edge state of the art experimentation. But that's no bad thing in my opinion."

Forestry Commission employee Robert Matthews reviewing "Fiume" in LMC Newsletter, March 1992.

LMC funding had been devolved from the Arts Council to the London Arts Board. By 1991 I suspect that LAB saw an opportunity to offload a flaky client, and more or less threatened to withdraw funding unless the LMC proved itself to be more than an ageing crew of indignant but impotent improvisers. Nick Coudry assembled a new board of directors, including newcomer Ed Baxter, who had been looking into Camberwell Bus Garage or Butlers Wharf as new LMC bases. Baxter picked up the LAB gauntlet and set about promoting events much more ambitious in scale. "Fiume" was intended to create a splash, as it were, about the potential still within the LMC. United in the swimming pool were new arrivals like Sianed Jones and John Grieve alongside old favourites Charles Hayward, David Toop and Max Eastley, and Frank Chickens. For many the eerie beauty of Lol Coxhill's bald and bespectacled figure playing an almost submerged soprano saxophone remains an abiding memory. This was the kind of crazy avant garde extravaganza the media loves, and the coverage was enormous.

The next step was the First Annual Festival Of Experimental Music, five days in the Conway Hall, Holborn, in May 1992. Fresh-faced youths shared the stage with names from the Jurassic early seventies. Visitors from abroad notably included Ikue Mori (New York drum machinist, formerly of Arto Lindsay's DNA) and Sainkho Namtchhalak (Mongolian throat singer wearing vinyl LP head-dress). Baxter had the vision to see that if the event was big enough it would not only be visible on an international scale, but also more attractive to funding bodies. A hectic plethora of offstage performances, discussions, workshops and video screenings complemented the main concerts. At times the heated debates in the bar seemed as compelling as the music simultaneously bursting

out of the hall. Suddenly journalists and promoters from Europe and the States were hanging out. Older improvisers were fiercely condemning the antics of younger ones, and anyone concerned about the LMC's health could heave sighs of relief.

"Cardew was wise to stake out and defend his ground by spelling out the social dimension to his music. His purpose was not, of course, to defend "his" property rights, but to fight a corner and to express something human, faced with what Phil Ochs called the 'terrible heartless men' who still run our lives. Cardew's music is not concerned with entertainment or self-gratification, and I suppose in the wake of the collapse of communism and the triumph of capital (don't you just hate it when that happens?) few will take an interest in these recordings. Listening to them now, I am overwhelmed, rendered inarticulate and revitalised. Great stuff. The newspaper is full of details of how long 'Starlight Express' has been running. It's all quite clear. There is only one lie, there is only one truth. Whey hey hey!"

Ed Baxter reviewing Cornelius Cardew's Piano Music in the pilot issue of Resonance, September 1992.

Later that year (September 1992) the burgeoning newsletter finally exploded, supernova-like, into the pilot edition of *Resonance* magazine, under the editorship of Keith Cross and Mick Ritchie.

Picking up the threads 12 years after the demise of *Musics*, *Resonance* has proved more durable. Seven years later its thought-provoking mix of interviews, reviews and theoretical articles now comes with the tempting bonus of a cover CD. Unlike the promotional fluff of most cover CDs, however, *Resonance* features recordings unavailable elsewhere, usually culled from LMC live events. The magazine has been creatively steered through the hands of a series of guest editors by Phil England. By keeping the editorial team small it has avoided the factional gang warfare that crippled *Musics*. And the sightlines have always been aimed wider than the confines of experimental music, trying rather to locate that music within a wider debate about culture.

Phil England became part time administrator in the summer of 1992, as the LMC stopped squatting in members, flats and took office space in Kings Cross. The office moved to Community Music in Farringdon for several years, and has now settled, south of the Thames for the first time, in the Leathermarket complex near London Bridge. Ed Baxter tried to give up his programming post in autumn 1992, and has been trying unsuccessfully to give it up ever since, as the LMC's activities have grown ever larger in ambition.

Meetings open to the whole membership were finally abandoned as hopelessly inefficient—if project coordinators failed to turn up the meeting could be effortlessly hijacked by anyone who fancied a debate on the purpose of the organisation, while practical work would be shelved. A team of directors with particular responsibilities was tried instead. Any member could still put themselves forward as a possible director. Slightly modified, this system continues today, with about eight directors having skills in marketing, law, website management and so on. The AGM remains a chance for all members to kick up a fuss.

There are only four or so musicians currently among the directors, and this is a direct result of the Charities Commission ruling that they cannot be remunerated for LMC activities; in other words, no paid gigs for directors. I suspect this is

actually strengthening and professionalising the organisation, as directors bring in a wide range of skill and experience from the outside world. At recent meetings directors have virtually been queuing up to make professional-style presentations involving laminated boards and highlighter pens. No laptop animations or corporate sweeteners yet, but it can only be a matter of time.

Discussion has been tightly focused, pragmatic and good humoured—as a veteran of Collective meetings it all feels odd, but strangely sane.

Backed up by a team of gluttons for punishment and hard work (Rob Storey, Dave Ross, Mick Ritchie, Steve Noble, Caroline Kraabel et al), England and Baxter have been administering and steering the LMC since 1992, which is considerably longer than any comparable team. Having observed them at work in the office, I have nothing but praise for their ability to combine mind-numbing paperwork with the seizing of initiatives. These are ferociously creative people who would have a major impact on whichever organisation they found themselves in, and the LMC is lucky to have felt their boots on its backside. Of course this tiresomely positive view is my own—feathers have been ruffled and resignations have been handed in from time to time, but the LMC in 1999 has no shortage of vision or ambition.

"Running throughout *Resonance* 107.3 FM was Peter Cusack's London Soundscape. Listeners were asked to send in or tell of their favourite London sounds. Surprisingly some of these included arcade machines and even traffic. From the vast response Big Ben was the favourite, but it was often the case that a collection of sounds was chosen. Who ever hears a sound on its own anyway? The recording of Deptford Creek was particularly memorable with the power station hum and the Thames brought together."

Tom Wallace writing about Resonance 107.3 FM radio, in Resonance magazine Vol 7, No 1, autumn 1998.

In spring 1999 it feels like the LMC is pausing to catch its breath after a year of extraordinary activity. It was hard to believe there was not a secret back room packed with full time workers somewhere, rather than the slender part time employment of two people. The Annual Festival, increasing steadily in international stature every year since 1992, finally moved out of Conway Hall to the South Bank Centre. Charlemagne Palestine and Pauline Oliveros visited from the States to great acclaim—their first appearances here in 25 and 17 years respectively. Vainio, Fennesz and Rehberg divided the audience with their fierce brand of Powerbook-driven electronica. Canny fundraising ensured that for the first time the Festival actually came in on budget.

Resonance 107.3 FM was the Collective's very own radio station, broadcasting for four weeks in June 1998 as part of John Peel's Meltdown Festival. This colossal and unique project, instigated by Phil England, was London's first station dedicated to Radio Art. Over 300 people took part in creating 600 hours of material, including live broadcasts, children's shows, drama and historical works of radio art from station archives around the world. Described by New York's Village Voice as "the best radio station in the world", *Resonance* FM was nominated for the Sony Station Of The Year Award. Provocative and often wild, this was the LMC at its most reckless and visionary.

Fifty programmes were specially made for

Left: Filament: Otomo & Sachiko 98
Middle: The Ex, Tom Cora and friends
Right: Sachiko M 99





Above Left: Keith Rowe 94
Above Right: Alan Tomlinson and Sainkho Nemchylak 92
Left: Paul Burwell & Steve Noble 93, Elliot Sharp & Zeena Parkins 93, Maggie Nicols & Pete Noble 93



Resonance FM at LMC Sound, the LMC's new studio in Brixton, which opened formally in November 1998. A carefully nurtured Lottery funding application has resulted in a fully equipped digital studio, which now bids in the market for commercial work and enables Collective members to devise recording projects there, or simply master their CDs. A small team of enthusiastic engineers is kept under control by project manager Mick Ritchie. As I write, the studio is in the midst of recording 30 hour-long shows dealing with London's alternative music scene, to be broadcast weekly in the New York area by WFMU station. A sharp learning curve for all involved, hopefully these shows will be taken up elsewhere. Also launched in November 1998 was the website <www.l-m-c.org.uk>. This is not only a source of information about concerts and current activities, but also a potential arena for creative work. The first live webcast by LMC musicians took place in February 1999, and the appointment of a website Artist In Residence is imminent.

"But again you see, John Edwards has a repertoire of sounds—a language which tries to subvert the instrument (double bass) in a way in which most classical players don't ever engage. If I am working with improvisers I don't want them to sound as if they improvising. This is the frustration about being a control freak. For instance, when John produces these fantastic sounds, I would rather place them exactly where I want them as opposed to where John might place them at the time. This is in no way a criticism of John's playing, his playing is wonderful. But it is the idea of placing a particular phrase and perhaps repeating it or putting it in a different area."

Sampling composer John Wall interviewed in *Resonance* Vol 6, No 2, July 1998.

While writing this piece I arranged to meet LMC administrator Phil England to find out what was currently on his mind. Not so much an interview, more a rumination over bowls of yogurt soup in a 24 hour Turkish café. England stressed the strategic thinking behind much LMC activity in the last seven years. Fighting against any tendency to parochialism, the strategy has been to raise the profile of the music to the highest visibility possible, as a way of benefiting the alternative musical community and its individual constituents. Rather than talking always to its own audience, the emphasis is on reaching out and placing LMC activities in a wider context of cultural debate. The way that improvisers work and collaborate locks in to many other cultural subgenres and tiny currents in society, and music must be part of that wider picture.

This strategy becomes all the more crucial given the chronic undervaluing and underfunding of this musical area. Inviting saxophonist Evan Parker onto a TV arts programme to react to a Jackson Pollock painting? It makes perfect sense to me, but it's unthinkable because Parker's entire musical genre is virtually invisible. Phil England points out how the Arts Council's own reports recommend exactly the type of musical activity promoted by the LMC, and how these reports are

then ignored by Arts Council panels. This music, so distinctively British in some ways, is supported by a fraction of the funding offered to contemporary composition or electronic music. Is it because it's a little more working class? Because it doesn't use as much sexy technology? Or simply that it deals too much in the provocative, the unexpected, the damn weird?

At a grassroots level the music carries on all year round in a gaggle of club spaces run by persistent promoters. A new LMC initiative aims to help out with publicity or PA equipment for these small but established clubs. Established, but not necessarily cosy—the last time I played one was at Hugh Metcalfe's long running Klinker, in an Islington pub. After some initial confusion (Hugh was convinced his van and PA had been stolen, having forgotten where he had parked it), the evening's mix of performance, poetry and music ran smoothly enough. I played a delicately coloured duet with violinist Susanna Ferrar, enjoyable chamber music if I say so myself. Then the final act was so ear-bleedingly loud I had to flee the room, and immediately a fight broke out: broken glass, a wet floor, a half-strangled promoter. As I stepped out into the cool night air half a dozen police rushed past me into the performing space. At least no one accuses the Klinker of opting for the easy life.

Thanks to Peter Cusack, Richard Sanderson, Sylvia Hallett, Paul Burwell, Ed Baxter, Phil England.