

Composer Daniel Figgis talks to CMC's Director Evonne Ferguson about his latest project, The Battle of the Speeds.

EF: What is the THE BATTLE oF SPEEDS -phase 1?

THE BATTLE oF SPEEDS -phase 1 explores how we have listened to and enjoyed recorded music down the years, investigating how musical content has always been informed by recording technology and playback media. I am particularly interested in looking at the limitations thus imposed and the longterm archival and experiential possibilities.

The work consists of six recompositions each soundtracking a short video piece shot in Marlay Park boathouse. The recompositions reference different playback media. The event takes place in the Orangery, Marlay Park on 27 November between 10am and 4pm.

EF: Are the six short fantasy videos playing at the same time?

DF: Yes -above, below and all around the audient. 6 movies. 6 surfaces (four walls, ceiling and floor). Above, below, behind and front of. The White Cube experience in extremis.

EF: How does the soundtrack to each integrate? or are they intended to clash with each other ?

DF: Of course not. They harmonise. Hopefully rather beautifully.

EF: Why are you so intrigued by the battle of speeds? Why do you consider it a battle?

DF: I don't. The original legal case popularly known as T.B.O.S. sparked an unrelated notion.

It struck me that it would be intriguing to recompose my back catalogue for this investigation into recording and playback systems. THE BATTLE oF SPEEDS was envisaged, from the off, as an auto-recomposition project and as recomposers of my work go, I'm a shoo-in.

EF: We've all heard of remixing and revising of composition, but what exactly is recomposition? You have had an entire double CD album/online spinoff where other artists recomposed your works... Were you flattered by that?

DF: Spitroast Records asked me in 2002 for permission to commission a remix album: When It's Ajar: the music of Daniel Figgis?. This marked the inception of my recomposition concept. The Skipper album and a further 10 tracks provided the reference material -the latter formed the backbone for 5 years or so of my own concert events.

As to the how and why I originated the recomposition concept, I was strongly averse to the standard remix as understood and I wished, out of respect for the composers concerned, to avoid the classic compilation album mismatch. I therefore decided that the pieces should be based exclusively on recordings I had made. These component parts became the available lexicon for the commissioned composers' enabling them to write in their own vernacular yet making for a coherent listening experience.

Yes, I was extremely flattered by the project. Equally flattering is the fact that I am told one or two of the original artists commissioned are presenting a concert further interrogating my original idea -when you plant a seed you expect a little growth....

EF: Are you trying to create a kind of wall of sound for those experiencing it?

DF: This is a completely immersive experience - perhaps analogous to a floatation tank.

EF: How does the space inspire the work?

DF: My love affair with the Marlay Park boathouse and Orangery largely determined the visual content and generated the rather bucolic musical response.

EF: Could this be presented somewhere else?

DF: Yes, in one sense easily. This work is scalable, ever-evolving and thus both site-specific and site-neutral to each venue but, logistically speaking, the figures don't add up at the minute. So we're done here. And I feel compelled, having rather made my point, to return to the traditional concert/recording cycle.

EF: Do you get frustrated that these large scale multi media works which you spend months (?) working are over within the space of a few hours?..

DF: Yes, it can be frustrating but that just comes with the territory. You're essentially working with/in a landscape and, in every sense, the seasons change.

EF: Is that the attraction and you then move on to a new idea?

DF: Yes, that is also an attraction. One moves on very quickly.

In this case, onto a major new commission for Crash Ensemble.

But if an artist is to some extent an inventor, then I am, with THE BATTLE oF SPEEDS, truly enjoying my Caractacus Potts moment!

The interview was carried out by email during November 2011.