MUSIC FOR PARALLEL CONSUMPTION
AN OPEN-ENDED SELF-RECONFIGURING MUSICAL COMPOSITION AS APP

Composed in 2010 but not released until some final polish was applied in 2015, *Music for Parallel Consumption* is a 4-channel digital composition made for delivery and playback via a custom computer app. The title refers only partially ironically to the tendency to consume music as part of a backdrop to our otherwise-engaged lives. At the same time as offering an alternative to this mode of consumption (((THE DETAILS, THE DETAILS!))) the very nature of the piece's construction and delivery strategy invites similar disregard. Not intended for concert performance, the app format almost encourages you to *set and forget*: choose your output mode, set the level, hit play, and let it run for as long as you like. Such contradictions are further inherent in the the polarisation of the meditative nature of much of the music against the album artwork—war being the ultimate consumptive impulse.

interface

When you first start this app you'll be presented with an extremely simple interface: play and stop buttons (space bar toggles these), an elapsed time indication, and a + button. If you press the + button you'll get more controls; conversely if you press the - button when in the extended control interface you'll go back to the simple controls.

- **sound card settings**: Sampling rate should be 48Kz. This is set automatically by the software at startup but it doesn't hurt to check by clicking the *sound card settings* button. This is where you can also set your sound card output channels.

- **stereo**: Stereo vs Quadraphonic playback. The application is designed for automatic quadraphonic diffusion (4-channels: two front, two rear) but an automatic mixdown to stereo is in fact the default.

- **wander time min** / **max**: when playback is quadraphonic, these values set the speed of movement of the different layers of the mix between front and back speaker pairs. A random time for this is always selected between the user-specifiable minimum and maximum values, given in seconds. These default to 10–25 seconds.

- **front** / **rear**: these two gain sliders allow you to adjust overall level and balance between front and rear speakers. Moving the top (front) slider will set the same level for both front and rear pairs; moving the rear slider will adjust the rear levels only. Meters don't go beyond 0db (i.e. no amplification, only attenuation) so that peaks don't clip.

- **compressed**/**dynamic**: click to select *compressed* in order to dynamically compress the output (for louder listening environments perhaps). *dynamic* is uncompressed (original dynamics). This works in both stereo and quad mode. Metering and gain sliders are post-compression.

All of the interface settings here should be saved when the application exits and reloaded the next time you start it.

main properties of the piece

Once started the piece runs until you press stop. It constantly reconfigures itself and recycles its sonic materials in an infinite variety of combinations. A complete cycle will last 15:19.

There are four structural layers to the piece, each containing its own set of pre-mixed and rendered sound files. We're always (and only) mixing sound files

in this app; there is no real-time synthesis or processing. The compositional challenge was to pre-set levels and textures to work well with each other no matter what the combination would be.

The piece is made of samples—mainly of gongs but also of many other sources—as well as some virtual analogue synthesiser sounds made with the *UltraAnalog* modelling software.

some geeky details

Although the app was created with *MaxMSP*, the programming logic and compositional design was formalised first of all with my *slippery chicken* algorithmic composition software, then in JavaScript. Similarly, sequencing is performed in real-time via JavaScript task callbacks. Sound file definition and test mixing was performed with Nuendo. More information is available at http://michael-edwards.org/wp/?tag=music-apps

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