

Paynter: A Digital Tablet-Based Platform for Collaborative Composition in the Classroom

This collection gives evidence of a practice-led research project which used a tablet-based app developed by Adam Hart to prompt collaborative composition of music in a primary school in Salford.

Context

Community-based composition projects typically do not involve digital technology, risking making classical composition appear more distant from contemporary culture than it actually is. In addition, typically community composition projects have tended to “respond” to a pre-existing work already programmed by the ensemble. Our work sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Can we use a tablet-based app to encourage inclusive and collaborative creative composition work in the classroom?
2. Can we use the material developed in this way as the basis for a composition in the concert hall, and reverse the traditional hierarchy of the flow of ideas?

Methods

Adam Hart’s Paynter app and is a graphic environment in which MIDI-type sounds can be positioned on a screen alongside icons which play back recorded sounds, creating an environment on screen which uses image and sound to construct narratives. Four BBC Philharmonic musicians and the University research team (Williams and Hart) visited a local primary school, introducing the students to the instruments. Williams and Hart then made a further 4 visits, introducing students to the app and encouraging them to collaboratively tell stories through sound, which they structured using Paynter. Two year groups worked on separate narratives and the audio results were transcribed by the team and made into 2 minute pieces using the sounding material created by the students, which were performed by the BBC Philharmonic musicians in their final visit.

These scores provided the material for a longer composition by Williams, which used material composed by the students, and was performed at a live streamed concert in the BBC Philharmonic studio (see *The Rivet’s Tale*).