

Past - Present - Future

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Past - Present - Future

Aims

- Introduce music technology to young people
- Encourage creative thinking through group work
- Challenge participants' notions of music and music-making
- Present opportunities for self-expression

Design

In Past – Present – Future we set out to create a performance which would celebrate the opening of Alsop High School's new Music Art & Drama facility. Our initial approach was to discuss with the students and teachers how they felt about the new building. From these discussions it transpired that the history of the site was of great importance to staff, students and the local community.

Prior to the new development the site had been a community bowling green. In the time between the bowling green closing and the builders moving onto the site local children had used it as a football pitch. In discussions with the group we found out that there was some controversy amongst staff, pupils and parents as to the best use of the land. Some of the parents and grandparents were upset at the loss of the community bowling green, some of the pupils were upset at the loss of their football pitch and many staff, pupils and parents were excited at the prospect of the new performing arts facility.

One of the central aims of the piece we created was to allow pupils, parents and staff to address some of these issues and, through dialogue, explore the different perspectives in order to create better understanding. Through intergenerational communication both the school and the local community were better able to comprehend one-another's positions.

There were clearly three stages to the history of the site that were important to all concerned so we decided to build the piece around these three themes.

1. Past – Bowling Green
2. Present – Football Pitch
3. Future – Performing Arts Centre

Past

Our first step was to gather the visual and aural materials to be used. Through community liaison we arranged for a group of pupils to visit the bowling club that the site's previous members had moved to. We worked with the pupils and their teachers to devise questions with which the pupils could interview the bowlers and which would provide suitable audio and visual material for the project. The pupils took audio and video recording equipment with them. Through this process students were introduced to aspects of documentary research and sound and video recording.

In these stills you can see the pupils interviewing members of the bowling club. A variety of opinions were expressed about the new bowling facilities and the upheaval that had been caused.



However, all of the bowlers were interested to hear what was going to be built on the site and in the end were very supportive in regard to the performing arts centre's positive impact on the pupils' education.



The pupils invited the bowling club to the opening performance of **Past – Present – Future** and the bowlers were very supportive and decided to come.

Overall we felt that some barriers had been broken down here and that there had been real progress in communication between the school and the local community.



As you can see the pupils printed out their prepared questions and took turns to interview several different bowlers.

Another group of students visited a public bowling green and filmed action shots that would provide both visual and sound materials for the performance. These included chasing bowls running along the ground and bowls striking one another.



Present

When we arrived at the school the site's function as a football pitch was at the front of most pupils' minds. The impending loss of the football pitch was causing a lot of debate. In order to reflect the importance of football to the pupils we gathered a variety of footage which included:

- Pupils demonstrating their footballing skills
- Pupils talking about the importance of football in their lives
- Music that pupils associated with football
- Footage of their favourite teams



The documentary research skills that had been cultivated in the previous section were further enhanced during the development of this section.

Future

This section served to illustrate the types of activities that would take place in the performing arts centre once it was completed. Discussion with pupils and staff revealed a repertoire of performance skills including, drama, dance and music. Due to the collaborative nature of the project we were able to combine elements of music that the pupils found meaningful as well as creating original compositions. This allowed us to work with the pupils at a number of different levels and provided them with a range of access points through which to engage with the project. Live performance was combined with a variety of media to produce a collage representing future activities in the performing arts centre.



Past - Present - Future

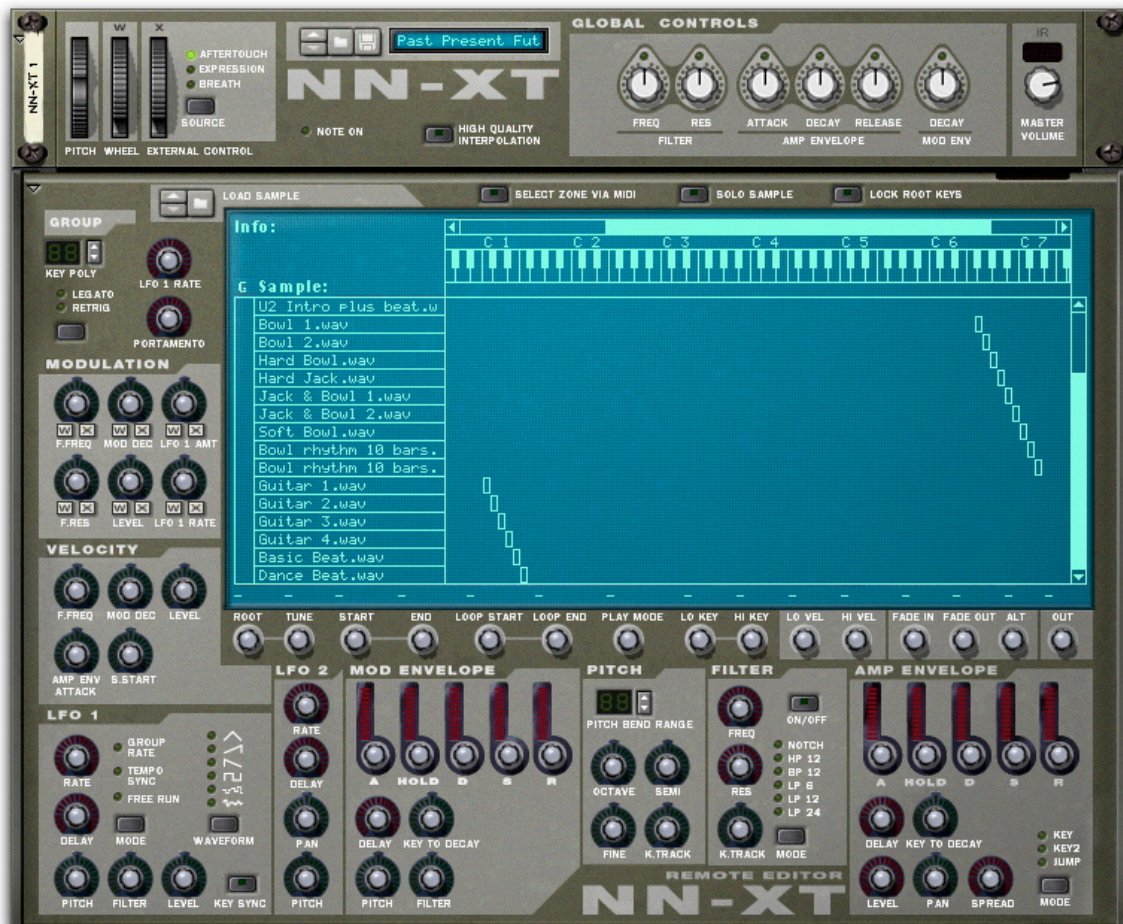
Technology

In order to realise this performance we used a combination of software and hardware: Soundbeam (4 beams, 12 triggers), Arkaos VJ software and Reason sampling software. These software programmes were chosen for their relative ease of use. Familiarity with this equipment would be a distinct advantage but realising a project like this provides an opportunity for a teacher to develop new skills for future classroom activity.

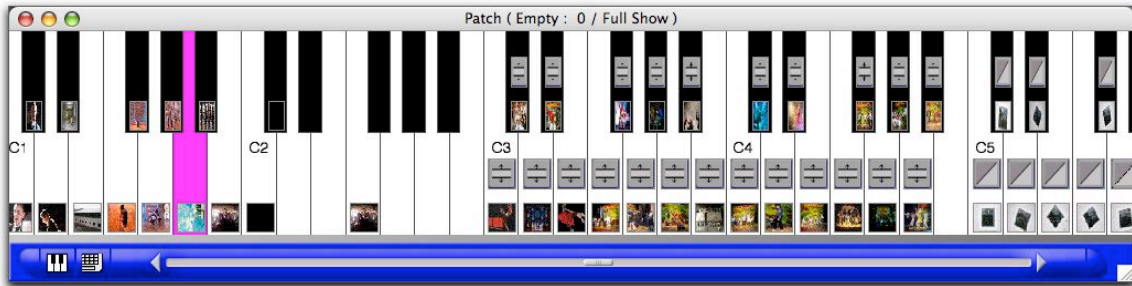
Soundbeam: the Soundbeam desktop unit allows sounds and video clips to be triggered via MIDI using a combination of ultrasonic detectors and switch based triggers. The desktop unit can be edited using a graphic interface and has a variety of options to route different triggers to different outputs.

The computer was also used to run Reason. A separate computer was used to run Arkaos.

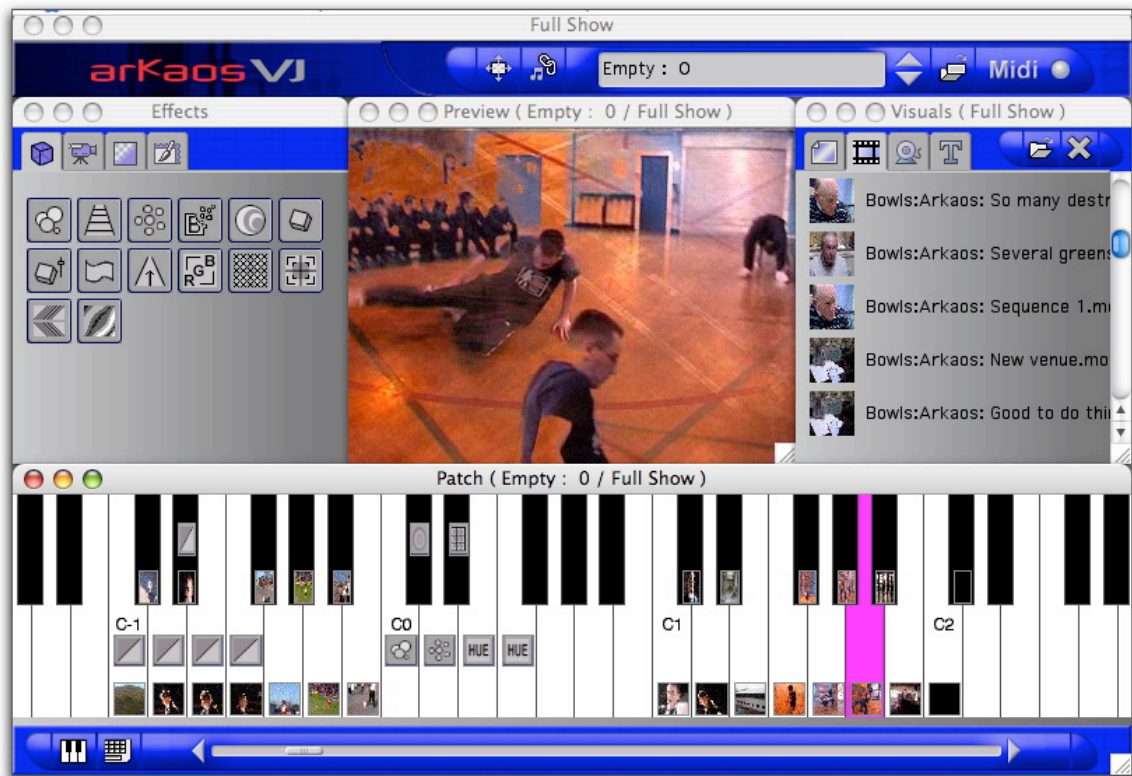
Reason: the NN-XT sampler in Reason allows you to place sound samples on a virtual keyboard, these samples will play when triggers are received from Soundbeam.



Arkaos: this software allows you to place video clips and effects on a virtual keyboard, these clips will play when MIDI triggers are received from Soundbeam.



Clips and effects can be dragged onto the keyboard and previewed:



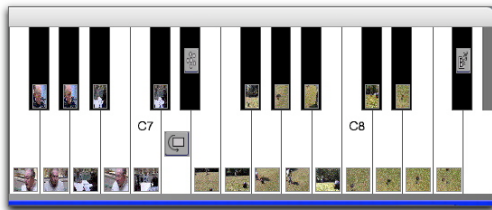
Some of the Soundbeam beams were set to trigger video effects. This allowed the pupils to improvised with one another, selecting different effects to match the triggered video clips.

Our Project

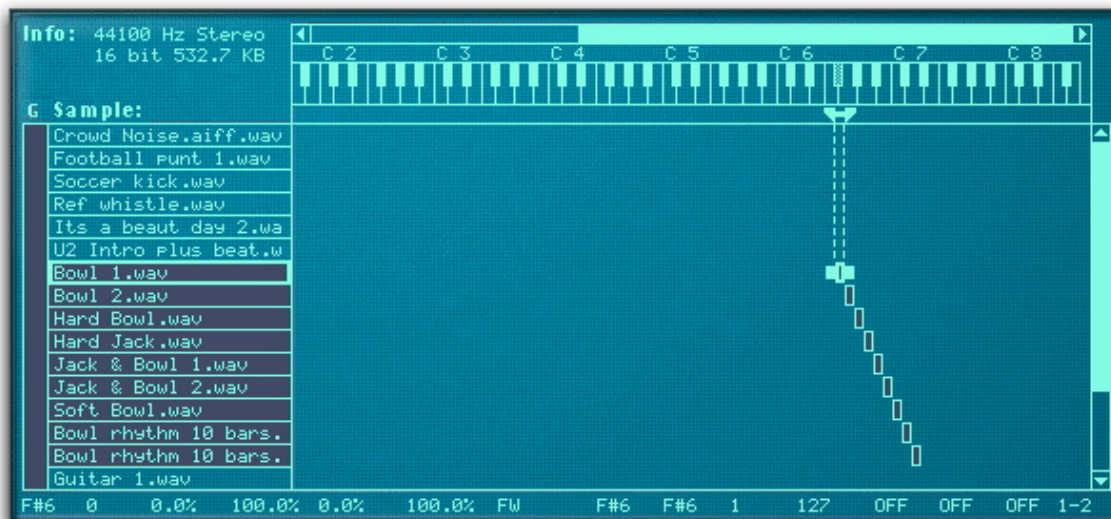
We divided a MIDI keyboard into three sections, each representing one of the three containers into which we have poured our materials. Using Soundbeam's multiple MIDI outputs we routed all sound triggers to Reason and all video triggers to Arkaos.

Container I: Bowls (F6 to F#8)

- Video clips: Interviews F6 to C#7, Bowls E7 to F8
- Video effects: *Turnix* D7, *PlanetWorks* D#7 & *Particles* F#8



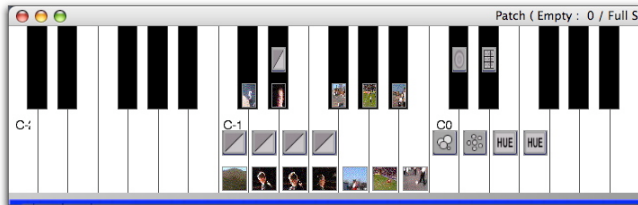
- Audio samples: Bowling woods rolling F#6 & G6, wood hits G#6 to C7
bowl rhythms C#7 & D7



The bowl rhythm loops were set to repeat every 4 bars using the NN-XT's looping facility. One loop was panned fully left and the other fully right. The pupils could trigger these loops simultaneously or trigger them independently to produce hocketing rhythms (akin to Reich's phasing method used in *Clapping Music*).

Container 2: Football (C-1 to F0)

- Video clips: Dribbling C-1 & C#-1, Interviews D-1 to F-1, Playing Football F#-1 to B-1
- Video effects: C0 to B0



- Audio samples: Football sounds C-1 to D#-1, U2 clip E-1, U2 loop F-1

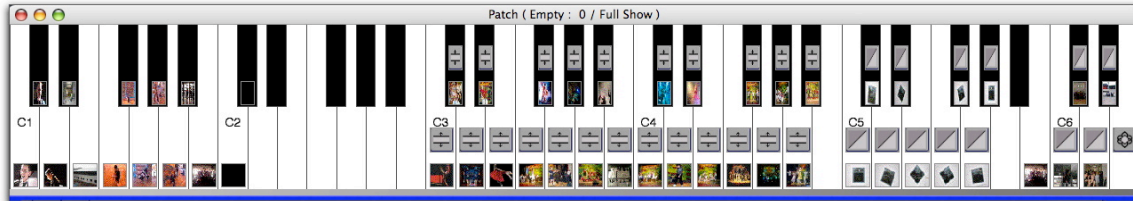


The sound of a football being kicked was used to build up a rhythm under the interview clips to introduce the U2 beat loop, which brought in the clips of the pupils playing football.

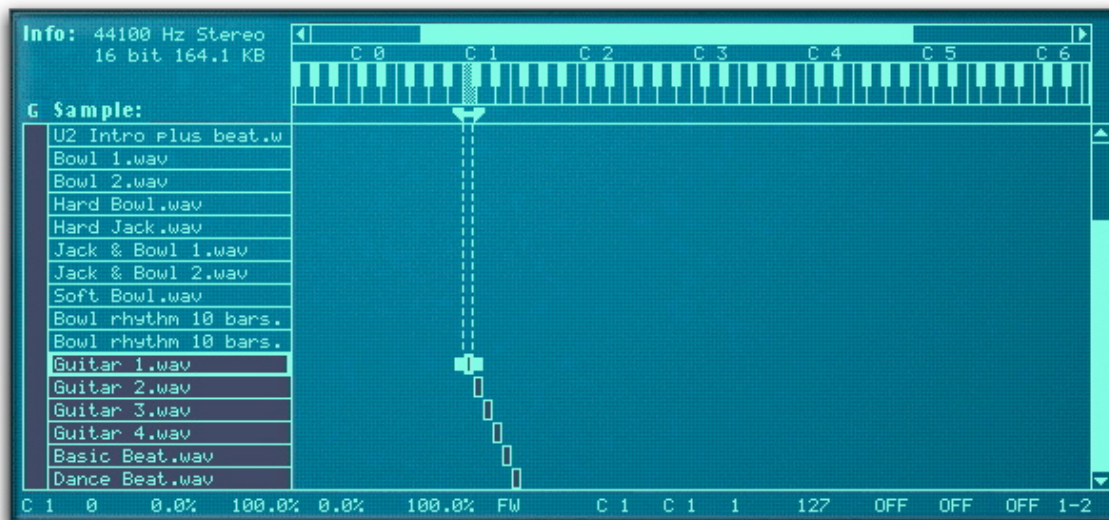
Again effects were triggered by the beams allowing the pupils to choose different effects for different sections and different video clips.

Container 3: MAD Block (C1 to E6)

- Video clips: Interviews C1 to C#2
- Still images: Performing C3 to A#4, Windows C5 to G#5, Tour C6 to D#6
- Video effects: *Kaleidoscope* E6



- Audio Samples: Guitar hits C1 to D#1, Loops E1 & F1



We would encourage you to develop your materials through teaching and learning strategies that promote active participation. Providing a range of access points (e.g. pupils' own favourite CDs, drama, movement, etc.) appropriate to your students will allow a solid foundation through which creative group work can successfully function. Music for young people is important in many aspects of their lives, e.g. fashion, relationships and leisure. With this in mind the generation of material may extend beyond just the manipulation of sound. It will be clear to you from the examples provided on the accompanying CD that our project utilised drama, dance and music with audio and video documentation. The choice of artistic approach and the nature of the material created strongly reflected the group and as a consequence promoted ownership. Although your motivation may be to develop music skills, a project involving such diversity may be viewed as a stepping-stone towards more detailed experimentation with musical doing.

Examples

Now it's your turn but here are some suggestions to get you thinking. What are the current issues that concern your pupils?

School dinners, food in general, health, image.

Bullying, gangs, social standing, difference.

Exam pressure, grades, employment, timetable.

Local issue (mobile phone masts, playing fields) community, politics, safety.

Leisure (skateboarding, football, dancing), culture, identity, image.

When approaching your theme you should think about the sights, sounds, fashion, geography, movement, music and language that it embodies. All of these stimuli will provide material in the creation of your piece. Good luck.

Glossary

- MIDI:** MIDI stands for Musical Instrument Digital Interface. It is a standard communication protocol which allows a variety of controllers (musical keyboards, drum pads, Soundbeams, etc.) to trigger a variety of sound modules (samplers, synthesisers, drum machines, etc.). The MIDI keyboard has a maximum of 128 notes stretching slightly less than eleven octaves from C-2 to G8.
- Trigger:** The triggers used in this piece are switches which are attached to the Soundbeam controller. In the Soundbeam Desktop software these can be assigned to produce MIDI note events which can trigger sounds from Reason's NN-XT sampler or video clips from Arkaos.
- Sound Module:** Sound modules are devices that respond to MIDI input by producing sounds, e.g. synthesisers and samplers.
- Beam:** Soundbeam produces an ultrasonic beam which can detect how far away an object in the beam is. From this it can produce a MIDI note which can be used to trigger a sound module or video clip.
- NN-XT:** The NN-XT is a virtual sampler module inside the Reason software. It can be used to produce sounds whenever a MIDI note event is received.
- Sample:** A sample is a sound that can be played from a sampler when a MIDI note is received.
- Loop:** Samples can be looped so that they will play over and over again for as long as a MIDI note is held down.