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Sound**bytes**

The latest news
in music retrieval

Organising sustainable research collections

AS THE SNOW plough crews prepared themselves for another onslaught on the white stuff in the run-up to Christmas I made my way to Queen Mary University at Mile End in east London for the Digital Music Research Network (DMRN) workshop (www.elec.qmul.ac.uk/dmrn/index.html). This annual gathering of researchers and practitioners expert in getting computers to enhance the musical experience is always a great opportunity to catch up with the state-of-the-art, and this season's workshop did not disappoint. Presentations examined the future of the digital music market, the importance of the role of communication in the musical experience, the presentation of new-fangled software allowing users to create multi-track recordings with their friends on Facebook (thounds.com) and wonderful gizmos designed to make music in new ways (the 2032 software synth, and a selection of strange wiry devices enabling performer gestures to produce sounds and rhythms). These talks were interspersed with intricately detailed posters describing late-breaking research including the wonderfully named 'Serendipitychord', 'multichannel Wiener filters' and 'Schrödinger's cats'.

Techno-trickery aside, one important issue arose that is of particular interest to information scientists. Work in the area of digital music involves the development of algorithms which are tested against data-sets. These experiments are reported in specialist journals and conference proceedings. Afterwards the algorithms are often made available to like-minded members of the computer science community for development. However academic papers do not usually have space to discuss every detail of a project, and there is no central source (dare we call it a library?) for these materials. It was therefore proposed by representatives of Queen Mary's Centre For Digital Music (C4DM) that such a service would help 'to support the sustainable development and use of software and data to enable high quality research in the audio and music research community' (www.soundsoftware.ac.uk). Software would be shared and re-used for research in sometimes unanticipated ways and not lost on an old hard drive or left buried in the web for future digital archaeologists to unearth. This would not only save enormous amounts of time and effort re-inventing the wheel (or iTunes, perhaps) but allow non-coders access to highly specialist software which they may not have the expertise to develop themselves. This would encourage the much-mooted interdisciplinary approach required to develop music information retrieval as a discipline by giving opportunities to computer scientists, performers, industry, musicologists etc to work together.

How this knowledge would be organised, however, is not clear. Although what is proposed is essentially a digital software library there seemed to be a lack of clarity regarding the cataloguing standards that would be best suited in the organisation of what is potentially an enormous and valuable collection of multi-version, multi-format, multi-function 'documents'. I was assured that it is only a matter of time before this issue is addressed. Interested parties should watch soundsoftware.ac.uk for developments, or maybe drop in to next year's DMRN.