M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

Project Title			
Re-composing Heritage: Utilising Music Composition & Mixed Reality to Empower New Modes of Engagement with Nottingham Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall Past & Present			
LEAD INSTITUTION			
Name of HEI institution	University of Nottingham		
Lead regional city	Birmingham ☐	Coventry ☐	Leicester ☐ Nottingham ☒
PARTNER ORGANISATION			
Name of organisation	Nottingham Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall (TRCH)		
URL for organisation website			
THE RESEARCH PROJECT			

Are you a composer with a passion for empowering community through your practice? This is an opportunity to complete a PhD in Music Composition at the University of Nottingham while embedding in the Nottingham Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall, supporting creative learning, participation, and heritage programming with new music.

Research Context

In 2018, Nottingham Theatre Royal & Royal Concert Hall (TRCH) launched an online digital archive to celebrate the rich history of the Theatre Royal, which first opened its doors in 1865. TRCH has recently appointed a Heritage Officer to further develop the archive, expanding the collection to encompass the history of the Royal Concert Hall, which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2022, and to establish a space to house the physical collection and facilitate public engagement. This PhD project will enable the venue to realise their ambition to create opportunities for the public—particularly children and young people in the area and those who may face barriers to access—to engage with the archive actively through performance, music, and sound.

The M4C PhD composer-researcher will create a series of exploratory new works which invite the public to engage with the archive in different contexts, including:

1) Installation works, including work utilising augmented reality accessed via personal mobile devices, which will enable the public to engage with the history of TRCH in recently renovated spaces around the venues before, during the interval, and after mainstage performances.
2) Online, interactive work, which will encourage playful, creative engagement with the digital archive.
3) Live performance work to be performed in TRCH, which reanimates regional stories from the digital archive with interactive materials to facilitate off-site engagement, particularly in school settings.

This project is also timely as it will enable the PhD researcher to continue to develop regional expertise and networks supported by the ERDF-funded 'Live, Experiential and Digital Diversification: Nottingham' (LEADD:NG) project (led by PhD co-supervisor Helen Kennedy), which concludes in June 2023.

Research Questions

The PhD researcher will investigate the following questions:

1) How can a composer utilise music and mixed reality technologies to reanimate history for contemporary audiences and empower civic pride/engagement?
2) How can online platforms enable and activate engagement with audiences before, during, and after performances/installations, both within a brick-and-mortar cultural venue and beyond, and facilitate new audience development?

Methodology

The project will require the PhD composition student to draw on diverse research methodologies. The primary methodology will be practice-based research, which will unfold in an iterative process with work-in-

progress tested in workshop sessions with supervisors and TRCH staff, reworked and refined in response to feedback, and then shared with the public. The researcher will utilise qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to interview and collect feedback from audiences to capture insights as to how they experience and interpret the works.

The researcher will also undertake archival research and contribute to the ongoing development of the TRCH online archive, supported by TRCH and their partners.

Research Benefits of Collaborative Context

By working within the TRCH, the PhD composition student will be able to develop the project in close collaboration with archivists, programmers, the local community, and diverse audiences to maximise impact. In Year 4, the researcher will lead a series of workshops to train arts organisations, archives and artists in strategies for utilising web-based platforms and mixed reality for audience development and engagement. These workshops will be delivered in in-person/hybrid formats to regional stakeholders. The researcher will also deliver an online workshop for international artists and organisations, and compile an online resource with information and guidance. Through these workshops and activities, the PhD researcher will build his/her professional network and establish their position as an emerging leader in 'music and mixed reality' in community settings. TRCH will provide space and marketing support for the regional workshops.

At the same time, the TRCH will benefit from the PhD student's artistic contributions to their digital archives, concert programming, learning and participation programmes, and audience development initiatives. The region will benefit from the leadership the PhD student will provide in workshops.

Supervisory Team

Throughout the 4-year project, the student will receive supervisory support from David Longford, Creative Learning Manager at TRCH, in addition to an interdisciplinary team from the University of Nottingham including lead supervisor composer Dr Elizabeth Kelly (Associate Professor in Music Composition), computer scientist Dr Adrian Hazzard (Research Fellow in Computer Science, Mixed Reality Lab), and Professor Helen Kennedy (Professor of Creative and Cultural Industries, Department of Cultural, Media, and Visual Studies).

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE	
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