

Including Disabled Musicians Using Technology

Summary

This case study articulates impacts arising from Ulster University research into how the creative application of accessible technologies can facilitate and enhance inclusive participation in music-making (composition and performance) for artists with disabilities.

The underpinning research comprises two strands: first, the development of practical methodologies aimed at maximising the potential of new technologies in the creation and performance of work; and second, the design of new accessible multi-touch and remote-control interfaces for music composition and performance.

Impact

Findings generated by the research have fuelled numerous creative projects, residential programmes and training events in the UK and Ireland, Sweden, the US and Japan.

Historically, performances by disabled musicians have been marginalised, often taking place at events limited to the 'arts and disability' community. The increased levels of artistic accomplishment achieved by those musicians with disabilities who have worked with the research project's technology-focused methodologies have resulted in greater visibility at mainstream music events. This in turn has helped the artists to gain wider public acceptance and understanding of, as well as respect for, their creative output. The research also suggests that creative application of new technologies with artistically appropriate interfaces increases the possibility that more musicians with disabilities could enter the music profession as creative artists in their own right.

This research has been presented to the Stormont Assembly and to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, which took it into account in the formulation of its five-year Music Strategy. It has also helped Share Music Sweden, one of Europe's leading arts and disability organisations, to shape policy regarding music technology provision for musicians with disabilities.

As part of the UK City of Culture 2013 celebrations, the publicly funded Culture Company Ltd. in Derry/Londonderry devoted over £100K of funding to music, disability and technology events, and commissioned Professor Lyons to organise a showcase of cutting-edge creative work by composers and performers with disabilities.

In the course of this work, the lead researcher Professor Frank Lyons has directly influenced over five hundred composers and performers with disabilities to reassess their creative practice. Several contemporary composers have been inspired to create works based on his methodologies for the Wired Ensemble, which features both disabled and non-disabled musicians. Over fifty access tutors in the UK and Ireland have also revised their approach to working creatively with disabled musicians after training on accessible technologies which draws on this research.