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Computer-Assisted Creativity: Help or Hindrance to the Composer?

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Abstract: Computer technology has become a well established tool for composers and sonic artists. In particular, it has been shown to facilitate the creation, manipulation, organization and nuancing of sounds and other media, generated from an infinite pallet of possibilities. Conversely, information technology is arguably least effective when supporting the types of non-prescribed or unpredictable human activities which, after all, are characteristic of how artists work. This talk sifts through evidence relating to the above tension. This evidence has been gathered from a series of related research projects, including naturalistic studies of how composers use composition software and studies of the impact of individual differences among composers, cognitive style in particular, on related information tasks. Issues highlighted are: tensions between software engineering norms and creativity; the negative effect of a mismatch between interfaces and cognitive styles; and the difficulty in modeling the information generated, using conventional IT solutions. The talk concludes by speculating on how computer systems may be adapted to create more fertile environments for creativity, and suggests areas for further research.

Barry Eaglestone recently retired from the position of senior lecturer in the Department of Information Studies, at the University of Sheffield. His career in computing spans four decades during which he has worked both in industry and as an academic. In 1985 he was awarded a PhD in applied relational theory and has subsequently specialized in advanced database applications. His research has covered both theory and practice, in a range of applications areas, including music informatics, healthcare and museum information systems. He has published extensively and widely in journals and conferences, and has authored textbooks on relational, object and web databases. At Sheffield University he led the Information Systems and the Music Informatics research groups until his retirement in 2010, and was until recently director of the Centre for Health Information Management Research.