The Electronic Music Foundation

JOEL CHADABE

EMF, 116 North Lake Avenue, Albany, NY 12206, USA
E-mail: chadabe@emf.org

The background to the creation of an international resource organisation is discussed. The author goes on to describe various activities of the Foundation, including the provision of hard-to-obtain CDs and access to other materials of interest to the electroacoustic community. The Foundation maintains a substantial presence on the World Wide Web: http://www.emf.org

The Electronic Music Foundation (EMF) was founded in September 1994 to ensure that the developmental work of musicians, engineers and entrepreneurs was well documented and that historically important objects and instruments were archived for the future. It was and remains my conviction that the development of the electronic musical instrument through the twentieth century constitutes a culturally important history and that we all share an obligation to preserve it.

My interest in the history of electronic music grew with my knowledge of it. And my knowledge of it grew with writing *Electric Sound* (subtitled *The Past and Promise of Electronic Music*) between the summer of 1993 and the spring of 1996. In the course of conducting the more than 150 interviews that constituted the primary research for the book, I became increasingly aware of how little of the history I had known and how interesting and important it was.

I also became aware of historical absurdities and cultural crimes. The Telharmonium, for example, Thaddeus Cahill's turn-of-the-century synthesizer, was eventually scrapped in the late 1950s after a home for it could not be found. And Peter Zinovieff's incredible London studio (which in 1970 contained two PDP-8s joined together, various synthesizers including a Synthi 100, a large array of amplifiers, oscillators, envelope generators, filters, switches, clocks, DACs and ADCs, zero-crossing detectors, a few percussion devices, and some custom devices built by David Cockerell such as the Digital Oscillator Bank, the Spinwheel, and a pressure-sensitive keyboard called Squeeze-Me), as another example, was disassembled and ultimately thrown away following the financial failure of his company, EMS Ltd. These things happened because of a general historical insensitivity. They should not have happened.

It was not only outrage at the occasional historical injustice, but also a growing awareness that important materials were not in reality available because very few people knew they existed, and even when their existence was known, no one knew where to buy them. By way of illustration, several years earlier a colleague at Bennington College had shown me a compact disc that contained Varèse' *Poème Electronique*. I hadn't known that the disc existed. More incredibly, even knowing that it existed, I couldn't buy it. I searched stores, placed special orders, tried to find the publisher's phone number. Finally, with the persistence of a fanatic, I found the publisher's address and ordered the disc directly. And not only compact discs of important music, but hard-to-find materials also included books, monographs, photographs, videotapes, and so on. It became apparent to me that in a world of relatively easy international communications and transportation, a project aimed at worldwide awareness and dissemination of albeit non-commercial materials might eventually prove to be self-supporting, by means of what in the commercial world is called 'niche marketing'.

The reasons for forming the EMF were, in short, the need to cultivate a historical sensitivity in electronic music, with all of the attendant implications of preserving important materials, and the need to make culturally and historically important materials available.

The opportunity to form the EMF came about during the summer of 1994, when several serendipitous events coincided. First, a space became available. In 1983, with Thomas E. Bezanson, a musically enlightened attorney in New York City, I had co-founded Intelligent Music, a company whose mission was to develop an interactive instrument for the home entertainment market. What actually happened, in fact, was that David Zicarelli joined our ranks and we instead developed *M*, *Jam Factory*, and a host of other computer programs for the professional music market. We also developed a touch-sensitive pad that registered continuous changes in pressure as well as the position at which it was touched. In 1990, Intelligent Music sold the software to Dr. T's Music Software. In 1994, Intelligent Music

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sold the touch-sensitive pad to Stratos Product Development Group. In the summer of 1994, Intelligent Music's office space, a beautiful and inexpensive loft in downtown Albany (in upstate New York), furnished with chairs, tables, desks, computers, fax machine, and so on, became essentially free of daily operations. Second, an executive director materialised. Julie Panke, a graduate of Lawrence University and the State University of New York at Buffalo, whom I'd met while teaching at the State University of New York at Albany, indicated an interest in an administrative position related to music, and she was willing to help establish the EMF on a volunteer basis. With Paul Lansky and Neil Rolnick joining me as a founding Board of Trustees, and with Julie Panke as Executive Director, in September 1994 we filed the appropriate papers to form a not-for-profit corporation in the State of New York.

Third, we invited several colleagues to join a group of advisors and we sent letters to composers, professors, and other electronic music professionals, asking for financial support. Jon Appleton responded immediately and positively. Larry Austin, Jean-Claude Risset, Iannis Xenakis, Patte Wood, Carla Scaletti, Warren Burt, and many others responded within a very short time. Indeed, within the next several months, many colleagues worldwide, some of them old friends, as well as several organisations and some companies, had become Charter Subscribers. A Charter Subscriber was defined as someone who made a modest financial contribution to the start-up of the foundation. By the end of the enrolment period in October 1996, approximately 500 people had made contributions. Their support was meaningful in three different ways. Financially, it provided an early capitalisation to the launching of the EMF's first programmes. It also signified an important community effort among electronic music professionals. Most important, it provided a clear demonstration that the foundation addressed an essential need.

In May 1995, the first round of offerings for what we called *eMUSIC*, the worldwide sales of compact discs, was published as a catalogue distributed by e-mail. In the sense that orders almost immediately began to materialise from around the world, it was an instant success, certainly a proof that the basic concept was correct. The EMF's office staff expanded through the next months to include Nick Fortunato as Associate Director, and eventually Alicia Zuckerman as Administrative Associate. Everyone, however, including Julie Panke, worked on a virtually volunteer basis. In February 1996, the EMF's first site on the World Wide Web was launched. During the next several months, *eMUSIC* expanded and eventually became *CDeMUSIC*™ as a response to the existence of a commercial mail-order compact disc company also called eMUSIC and also operating on the Web. In July, a completely new and expanded site was designed and launched to include several new programmes. The significance of the July site was twofold. First, it defined the organisation, both for the public and for itself, by defining the initial round of all its programmes. Second, it provided a base for the EMF's programmes to function.

CDeMUSIC™, in fact, was rapidly expanding. Its initial offerings had focused on the history of electronic music, but it had become clear that it was a unique and important service and that the scope of its offerings should include acoustic contemporary music as well as improvised music. It was also clear that many of the composers represented in *CDeMUSIC*™ catalogues composed acoustic music or improvised with electronics in addition to composing electronic music. In short, the lines that separated different approaches to non-commercial music were increasingly seen as artificial and useless and it was decided that *CDeMUSIC*™ should represent the entire new music community. In October 1996, at the instigation of Steve Peters of Nonsequitur, with the collaboration of Bill Gerstel at Tellus, and hosted by Harvestworks in New York City, discussions between many independent compact disc publishers were initiated, in part to explore ways that *CDeMUSIC*™ might represent the entire community of non-commercial compact disc publishers. Such thinking is to everyone's benefit. There needs to be one place in the world where everyone can see what is available.

CDeMUSIC™ also expanded in other ways. The EMF label was organised as a vehicle for publishing compact discs that were historically and culturally important and that were otherwise unavailable. The first release on the EMF label, in April 1996, was of George Todd's music, composed with the Middlebury College (Vermont, USA) Synclavier. The title of the compact disc, which includes several text–sound pieces, is *Green Ideas Furiously Asleep*, a reminiscence of a phrase that Noam Chomsky used to illustrate that grammar and meaning are not necessarily the same. Jon Appleton praised the compact disc as 'a thrilling experience for those of us who have long admired Todd's work . . .'

The *Inner Circle*, as another extension of *CDeMUSIC*™, was conceived as an outreach vehicle towards those of the general public who are serious about non-commercial music but may need guidance in their choice of which compact discs to purchase. And the *Open Market*™ was formed to create a means by which composers of music that does not fit the EMF's normal guidelines could offer their music for sale. Through the *Open Market*™, any composer can offer his or her compact discs, cassettes, videotapes, or other materials for sale, without our recommendation or endorsement.

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As a major event connected to the unveiling of the new site in July, The EMF Store opened its virtual doors. The first round of products included a new edition of Iannis Xenakis' *Formalized Music*, an updated version of Intelligent Music's *M*, Big Briar's videotape called *Mastering the Theremin*, and Curtis Roads' *The Computer Music Tutorial*, along with other books, videotapes, historically important software, and other items of interest.

In summary, *CDeMUSIC*™ with its extensions and *The EMF Store*™ are vehicles for making materials available to the public through sales. But access to materials addresses only some of the need. Access to information is also essential and, consequently, two additional programmes were launched which provide information free to the public.

The EMF Worldwide Calendar is a Web-based guide that includes calendar listings of concerts, conferences, and other types of events. It also includes special reports and professional notices. In October 1996, for example, the reports were photo descriptions of the installations at the International Computer Music Conference in Hong Kong in August, a photo description of Tod Machover's *Brain Opera* as it was presented in New York City in July, and a 'Letter from Malaysia' by Barton McLean. The professional notices advertise such things as available positions, equipment for sale, and competition submissions.

Sites, *Sights*, *and Sounds* is a three-part guide to World Wide Web sites that includes pointers to exceptionally interesting sites, listings of ongoing resources for the electronic musician, and a comprehensive Internet directory with appropriate URLs and e-mail addresses.

As of October 1996, access to materials was provided by *CDeMUSIC*™ and *The EMF Store*™, and access to information was provided by The EMF Worldwide Calendar and *Sites*, *Sights*, *and Sounds*. These programmes will mature and expand as new projects and programmes are launched and organised. In its first two years of operation, priority was given to programmes that would support the foundation and ensure its continuing existence. We are still optimistically en route to achieving that goal. If sales of materials provide reasonable income, if enthusiasm continues within the professional community, and if sufficient support can now be enlisted from the commercial world, the EMF will be in a position to continue to realise its goals.

The next projects need to be historical. *Electric Sound*, while based on primary sources, is a beginning and an overview. What's needed now is a worldwide comprehensive project to collect and make available information in coherent form. The EMF has begun a photo archive project which aims to make available historically important photos of electronic music instruments and pioneers. But a picture does not replace a thousand words. We need the words. We need the interviews, the eyewitness accounts, the thoughts of the participants. We also need to house important artifacts, including instruments and other materials, and preserve them in an operating state. Several projects have already been initiated, in particular in England, in France, in the United States, perhaps in other countries. But it is not enough and the places that do exist are not yet known and documented.

As the EMF matures during the next year or two, and as its financial base becomes more secure and its current programmes evolve and run more smoothly, it will increasingly serve as an umbrella for historical projects. In the meantime, the EMF is fulfilling an essential function.

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