

Are the Internet and digital technologies changing the way musicians collaborate on recorded music?

Collaboration is the act of working jointly with others. People collaborate on a myriad of things, including writings, plans, and music. Collaboration is inherently a social act. For collaboration to occur between people there must be some type of communication channel set up to handle the shared information. In the case of music collaboration, the exchange of information has historically been manifest in written musical notation, aural communication, and playing music in a face-to-face situation.

More recently, technology has diversified the means in which people can communicate with each other. While email and instant messaging have changed one-on-one communication between individuals, online bulletin boards, news groups and, more recently, wikis and blogs have changed the way people discuss ideas and collaborate online. New technologies have also changed the way in which people collaborate on recorded music. Because of the Internet and other digital technologies, musicians can now collaborate and record music online, without ever being in the same room.

The goal of this paper is to explore the impact that the Internet and digital technologies have on collaborative recorded music. Specifically, the paper will explore an online community, Ninjam.com, whose members create recorded music using the site's platform for semi-synchronous real time music improvisation.

Why is this important?

Email and instant messaging connect people in fundamentally different ways than writing letters and talking on the phone. Additionally, the increased use of cell phones have created an 'always on' environment where users can be contacted anywhere at any time. The rise of the Internet and networked technologies is changing the culture of human communication, creating a subject worthy of investigation.

For these same reasons, it is important to explore how the rise of the networked world has changed the way people collaborate on music. Improvements in digital technologies have increased the availability of quality music recording devices. Also, mp3s and file sharing have changed the way people acquire and listen to music. These phenomena have also affected the way people create music. Discovering the impact of these changes will increase our understanding of how and why people collaborate on recorded music today, and how they might do so in the future.

Methodology

In the exploration of this question, I will research the ways in which people collaborate on recorded music by using the following methodology:

First, I will look historically at the way people have collaborated on recorded music. I will investigate the techniques employed by musicians, the equipment and artifacts used to share music among a collaborative group, and the environments musicians used to support their collaboration.

Second, I will explore how people collaborate on recorded music today. I will look at the tools musicians are currently using to collaborate on recorded music, the digital technologies that have been developed to facilitate such collaborations, and how musicians set up social networks to support these collaborations. I will compare and contrast the differences between recorded music collaborations of the past and the ones being produced today by comparing the quality and analyzing the level of individual satisfaction.

Third, I will investigate the activities of a specific group of musicians who collaborate on recorded music using a semi-synchronous real time music interface. This interface, found on the Ninjam.com website, allows musicians to record improvisational music in a nearly real time environment.

Finally, I will explore the advantages and disadvantages of using these new technologies for the collaboration of recorded music. In doing this, I will investigate how the barriers of entry have changed and how this affects the current community of musicians. I will also explore how the changes in barriers to entry have affected the pool of potential music collaboration partners, and delve into the 'long tail' phenomenon associated with this change in the music community. In conclusion, I will look at how this community of musicians is changing the way music is consumed online.

Research Methods

My research will primarily focus on one very unique music community: Ninjam.com. My research will consist of joining this community and participating in musical collaborations with its members. I will also observe the technology being used and how the idiosyncrasies of the technology fundamentally change the way recorded music improvisation is conducted. I will interview members of the community, using email and/or instant messaging, and explore how the members of the community view this medium as a platform for music collaboration. Specifically, I will find out about their experiences improvising music face-to-face, and compare these experiences to playing in the Ninjam online environment. I will ask them about the advantages and disadvantages

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to collaborating online versus face-to-face, their likes and dislikes about the two platforms, and I will explore their reasoning for participating in an online music collaboration environment.

For my secondary research, I will look at the history of recorded music collaborations by reviewing past records of such interactions. I will also explore other venues of music collaborations, such as MyVirtualBand.com, and the band The Postal Service. Finally, I will utilize academic journals to explore peer reviewed papers on the socialization of music, music collaboration, and the social interactions of people online.