

The Masthead

The news that SoundCloud has sacked nearly half its workforce and faces an uncertain future is one of those periodic tremors through the ever-changing construction site of streaming platforms that makes you wonder what might come crashing down next. Few of these edifices, from SoundCloud to Spotify to Mixcloud, make enough money to stand on their own feet, which means many need periodic injections of cash to prop them up.

Me, I used to love SoundCloud, although, uh, I guess it's been a while since we last hung out. For a time, it was my go-to listening tool while editing at work. I would clamp on my headphones, marvel at the sight of the waveforms, like orange-coloured exotic sea creatures, and follow connections from artist to artist and see where they led. For artists, it became an effective place to store new tracks for anyone to check out, instantaneously and for free.

Our bust-up came when SoundCloud started to follow tracks you wanted to listen to with completely inappropriate ones you didn't, like an overenthusiastic music mate who claims "If you like that, you're gonna LOVE this" but views your tastes through a lowest common denominator lens. I have a similar relationship with Mixcloud, where searches for particular shows or stations often yield only alternative or half-related shows from long ago. More recently, SoundCloud has started to nudge you to login or register at each inconvenient opportunity, in order to keep you plugged into the social network side of the platform. But since most SoundCloud track comments say little more than "dude sick!" or "fuck yeah!", they're music conversations I can do without. On the grapevine, you hear about a darker kind of social networking with SoundCloud – it was apparently recruiting people for new jobs in new cities just weeks before this current tsunami of sackings.

Louise Gray, in this month's review of archive releases by Jocy De Oliveira and Annea Lockwood in *The Boomerang*, says, "The speed of contemporary digital communication is double-edged. For all the near instantaneous access it allows us to the cornucopian content available, there's a counterbalancing loss: of slow-forming communities, of gestating ideas and

intuitive leaps." Rather than the near instantaneous appreciation and opprobrium of SoundCloud comments or Discogs reviews, Louise lauds forums such as the 1960s publication *Source*, a global network for mutual support of experimental musicians through writing, editing, correspondence and collaboration.

This idea chimes with Luke Nickel, who is interviewed by Tim Rutherford-Johnson in his piece on composers who unsettle conventional musical scores by bringing performers into the equation. By using musicians as 'living archives' – real-life guardians of his compositions in preference to written records – Nickel creates what Tim describes as socially networked forms of composition. This initiative has since expanded into micro-broadcasts addressed to particular performers, and even instructions that "have to be deleted, *Mission Impossible*-style, after hearing".

In June I attended Mark Fell's small weekend festival Lush Spectra in Sheffield. Saturday night's centrepiece – or so it seemed to me, drifting between hyper-awareness and sleep at 3am – was Ryoko Akama's rendering of one of Éliane Radigue's *OCCAM* pieces on tape, synthesizer and other electronics. Akama, who writes this issue's Inner Sleeve about Yoko Ono, another innovator in the field of instructions and oblique strategies, says that she used "an oral description of what *OCCAM* was and how it should be played", and spent time with Radigue to discuss the piece and attune to her philosophies.

As I write, I get an email from Bandcamp, a site for music sales and streaming that does much to nurture musical communities and work directly with artists. Luis Alvarado's amazing Peruvian label Buh has just dropped a new album – "Enjoy!" it says cheerily, with none of the cajoling to plug yourself into the network that many streaming platforms view as the route to commercial solvency.

One hopes that SoundCloud and other music platforms are not about to blow up, *Mission Impossible*-style, but in the meantime, it's a reminder that the social networks we most value, online or not, are the ones with real relationships at their heart.

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