

# SATSYPH

Marc Yeats • Ralph Hoyte • Phill Phelps

**Q:** Hi Marc! Thanks for 'chatting' with us about **SATSYPH**. Can you tell us a little bit about the project as an introduction?

**A:** Yes, of course!

**SATSYPH** is a collaboration between me, a south-west-England based composer and artist, and Bristol based poet **Ralph Hoyte** and coder **Phill Phelps**, that will allow people to create their own "satellite symphony" through an iPhone app. A complex virtual sound-world of music and poetry and everything in between and beyond will be triggered by satellites, depending on the direction in which the user moves.

**SATSYPH** has been shortlisted for the £50,000 Performing Rights Society New Music Award, dubbed by the press 'The Turner Prize for New Music'! The judging panel said "it harnessed current technology in a creative way". There are five shortlisted pieces in all. The award will be won by the project judged to represent the most pioneering music in the UK today and the prize money used to make the project a reality.

This year's judging panel includes artist Martin Creed, composer and pianist Michael Finnissy, pianist and conductor Joanna MacGregor, and music journalist Paul Morley. The panel will be responsible for choosing a winner from amongst the five new musical ideas, which will be announced on 16<sup>th</sup>. Sep 2010.

For the first time this year, the public will be able to watch films about the shortlisted entries and vote for their favourite idea to be developed and realised by the end of 2011. (The public vote counts as one judge.) The **SATSYPH** team considers that a win will give context-aware media another boost to really push this technology over the threshold to wide public interest and acceptance.

To vote for **SATSYPH** visit:

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward/vote.htm>



Phill Phelps, Marc Yeats, Ralph Hoyte, on the River Frome, Gloucestershire.

**Q: Where did the concept for the project come from? How did you ‘choose’ your partners?**

**A:** Ralph Hoyte, one of the **SATSYMPH** collaborators, was in on the beginnings of this new media form (‘pervasive’ or ‘context-aware media’) and was exploding with excitement at its potential to revolutionise the way artistic and literary content are created and experienced. A chance introduction on the doorstep of the Bull Hotel in Bridport, Dorset, after a PVA MediaLab event led to the discovery that Ralph and I were both thinking very similarly about how contemporary music and contemporary poetry were and could be structured.

In my own composition work, I was already thinking about how I could create music that you could ‘enter’ at any point; that had no beginning, middle or end and could be experienced differently with each hearing. I had gone so far using live musicians and conventional methods but ultimately couldn’t capture what I was trying to achieve. In talking to Ralph about the potential and possibilities in context aware media, a whole new world of creative possibilities opened up.

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 41, for a sextet. The score is written for six instruments: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Violin (Vn.), Viola (Vc.), Maracas (Mar.), and Piano (Pno.). The music is in a complex, contemporary style with various dynamics (p, f, mf, sfz) and articulations (accents, slurs). The Flute part starts at measure 306. The Viola part includes glissandos (Gliss. sul D, Gliss. sul G) and a 10:8 ratio. The Piano part includes a 10:8 ratio and a 'locco' marking. The Maracas part has a 7:4 ratio. The score is written in a system with five staves. The page number 41 is in the top right corner.

Extract from ‘shadow and the moon’ for sextet.

Our other very important collaborator, introduced to me by Ralph is Phill Phelps who will write the codes to make **SATSYMPH** function in an array of technical ways, delivering the complex inter-relationships between our vision of word, music fusion, landscape, location and position. But Phill is also a musician and brings with him a great deal of creative input. Indeed, Phill composes with binary codes to build structures in very similar ways to the music and word structures Ralph and I make to populate **SATSYMPH**. The three of us see our interdisciplinary work as being without boundaries. Music, word, landscape, coding and the composition of all of these are fused into one process where each of us has an expertise but where the vision and creative process is shared.

**Q: So, what is SATSYMPH?**

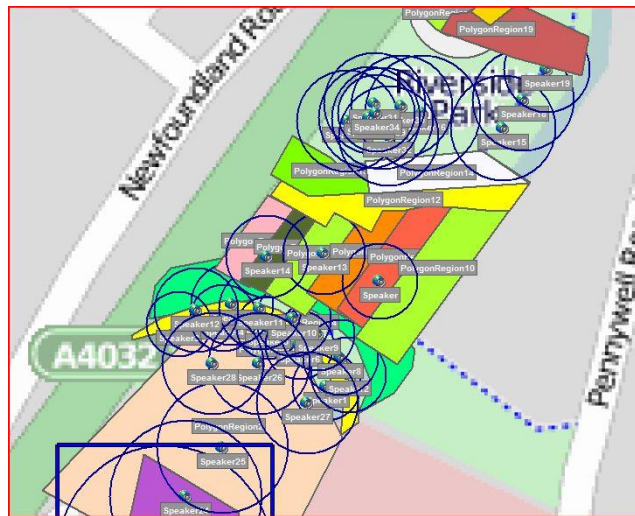
The first **SATSYMPH** opus is the specially created ‘**ON A THEME OF HERMES**’. The user will hear a contemporary music/poetry fusion with content inspired by the Greek god Hermes, Messenger of the gods, guide to the Underworld, patron of boundaries (and those who, as in this project, “travel across them”...), of thieves, liars, of literature and poets. ‘*On a theme of Hermes*’ is a pre-recorded acoustic, digitally processed contemporary music/word fusion that consciously operates outside the logic of any of the customary gamut of compositional techniques.

## THE LOWDOWN

**SATSYMPH** is a complex, multi-faceted project. Let's explain it in steps:

1. Firstly, contemporary poetry & contemporary music are composed for a very dense, multi-responsive and heavily authored environment. We, the composers, cannot determine HOW this environment is going to be negotiated by the user. This means that the music & words MUST be compelling 'in any direction' (= 'as heard in any way at all').
2. We record the music & words (professional musicians from the Bristol Ensemble play all the parts live & professional voice artists will be used).
3. In a very work-intensive process, the recordings are digitally processed, stacked, layered, modulated, stretched, morphed – you name it, we do it (and get very little sleep the while...)
4. A whole series of 'modules' result from this process – modules of music, of words, of words-as-music, of music-as-words, of wordusic, of muwords (we'll make up this new language as we go along)
5. The aforesaid 'modules' are used to populate 'a virtual auditorium'. This means we use software, which allows us to place a virtual layer over a real landscape. This is another form of composition – composing with landscape. SATSYMPH composes with music, words and landscape.
6. Once 'the virtual auditorium' is populated and very intensively tested (even less sleep), users will be able to go online and download SATSYMPH onto their iPhone as an Apple app.
7. You go along to any space big enough to use ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD - oh, maybe a couple of hundred meters each way, such as your local park, or the Altiplano in Bolivia (well...) - click on the app – and **SATSYMPH** unrolls the aforesaid 'virtual auditorium' over your chosen space
8. Stick your headphones on, watch out for rampant llamas or big red buses, and wander, or roll in your wheelchair, or toddle, or stroll, skip, crawl, sidle...
9. What you hear depends on where you are! Repeat: what you hear depends on where you are! This is a highly complex, densely populated GPS-triggered environment. There's masses going on. You'll very quickly start to think about 'music' and 'poetry' in an entirely different way: "Hey, look, over there under those trees, there's a huge swell of processed Alpenhorns mixed with gremlin-like poetic mutterings, they reach a crescendo at that mound, then drop into a deep well of almost heart-breakingly intimate water-maiden-speak..." "Did you get those blobby bits of staccato next to the playground?" "I reached a cusp and then it dropped me off into infinity". It's an almost synaesthetic experience: words and music are placed, they become tactile objects you manipulate by your movements. **SATSYMPH** composes with music, words and landscape. The interface is LANDSCAPE – how do you negotiate this new interface?
10. Enough? More: this experience is individual, or shared with a few friends. **SATSYMPH** proposes to make the individual communal. Your iPhone will, if you want it to, track your unique route through **SATSYMPH**. You can then upload samples of 'my own symphony' to the **SATSYMPH** website for others to hear and comment on. You can join user groups and user forums to discuss and partake of the technology. And in 2011 you will be able to take part in a series of concert seminars to be held in Bristol, Belfast and Poole, Dorset. Here, users' individual experiences (their journeys through **SATSYMPH**) will have been logged through time-stamped GPS co-ordinates recorded and uploaded to our **SATSYMPH** website earlier. A musical score will be created using this data to initiate and control music and voice material as experienced in **SATSYMPH**. Using live musicians and voice artists from the Bristol Ensemble along with pre-recorded music and words from the **SATSYMPH** regions, we will use these newly created scores to recreate user's individual journeys through **SATSYMPH** giving an impression of what the **SATSYMPH** experience sounds like and share this with an audience along with presentations and discussions of the technology and work made.

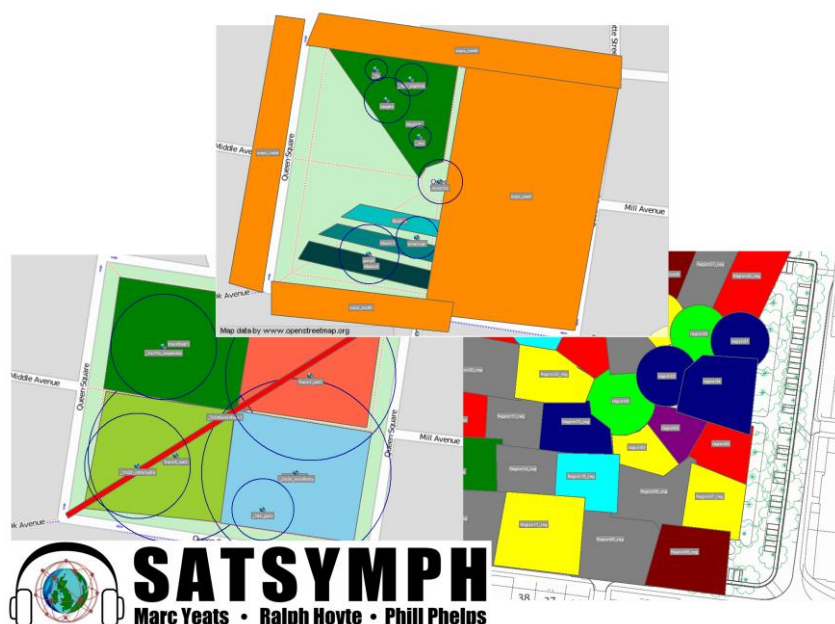
11. That's about it. No, it isn't. **SATSYMPH** is not just a one-off. Neither is it just confined to the UK. **SATSYMPH** will be available world-wide, and exists as long as the files are there to be downloaded and there is a GPS signal. This may be the first **SATSYMPH**, but it won't be the last. **SATSYMPH** is not just a performance, it is a vehicle for a totally new way of creating and experiencing music and poetry.



**Q: Is all the technology ready and available for you to embrace or did you have to create elements yourselves?**

**A:** All the technology is pretty much out there as open source, but we (and especially Phill) are working very closely with Calvium in Bristol (part of Pervasive Media Studios) who are developing a new platform for context aware media delivery that will serve as next generation development. At this stage we have trialed a pretty sophisticated scooping model using current technology to learn how to set up and experience these mediascapes.

Work of this kind is still in its infancy and the challenges are not only in developing the technology but how individuals relate to and use this technology for a meaningful, engaging and dramatic 'art' experience. **SATSYMPH** demands even greater flexibility and creative solutions within the existing platforms and it is these new demands that are influencing the development of Calvium's new context aware platforms. In working closely with software developers in this way the needs and vision of our creative work is influencing the development and direction of new technologies, which is very exciting indeed!



**Q: How much has the advancement of technology and new media shaped your practice?**

**A:** That's a really big question. The answer: a great deal!

Technology has influenced my practice in many ways across the years, ranging from computer software that could be used to notate music and manipulate audio and digital material – the rise in sampling sounds, electroacoustic techniques, being able to produce CDs on your home computer – the vast amounts of time saved as the donkey work was taken out of a range of processes – all these technological advancements have impacted upon my practice as a composer and painter.

However, as I suggested at the top of this interview, whilst I had ideas and concepts about how I wanted my music to develop, the search for the means to deliver these musical ideas had reached an impasse. It was through Ralph's introduction of context aware media that a whole new horizon of possibilities became apparent.

I think in this case, my work as a composer wasn't so much being influenced by the technology as being realized *through* the technology as a natural partner. It was as if I had suddenly found the other half of a vital equation and now, in bringing the two halves together, I could proceed to the next level of work. That was the first step in my relationship with context aware media. After that, as has been the case with the development of **SATSYMPH**, the demands placed on the technology to realise our vision have in themselves shaped the development of that technology. But similarly, the potentials within the technology have suggested further areas of development and exploration within the work. It's a sort of symbiotic relationship between vision, creative work and technology, but the justification for everything ultimately boils down to the need to create the work – **SATSYMPH**, is the ultimate driver!



Marc Yeats: Field recording for the composition, 'Responsoria' – St. Catherine's Chapel, Dorset.

**Q: Your **SATSYMPH** video clip on YouTube has had more than 2100 views! Impressive! Do you think that using YouTube and other social media to promote and engage people in your work has made it more accessible?**

**A:** Without a doubt! Social networking enables you to make contact with people from all over the world and introduce them to your work (whether they like it or not)!

My experience has shown that a great many people respond to my work when they feel they have had personal contact with me, even if it's only through messaging or being a 'friend' on somewhere like Facebook. In posting the video of **SATSYMPH** to 100s of people's walls on

Facebook, a significant amount have responded by commenting back, viewing the video, congratulating and crucially, voting. This, of course, is fantastic! And in some cases, a number of my contacts have been so impressed with the project that they have voluntarily spread the word to their friends, embedded the video to their friend's profiles and encourage them to vote for us too. You couldn't ask for more!



The **SATSYMPH** fan page on Facebook.

Facebook has been especially significant, bringing the vast majority of traffic to the PRSF YouTube video where all views are counted. But Twitter has also proved very useful to rally support with a whole range of cross network promotion and endorsement going on between individuals who are excited by and supportive of **SATSYMPH**; some of these individuals are contacts of contacts whom I don't know at all – such is the power of information proliferation through social networking. When you get it right, it will explode exponentially!

**Q: Some critics think that using technology as a basis or engagement point takes away from the 'art'. Do you agree?**

**A:** No, absolutely not!

Technology in all its forms has been instrumental in moving the arts and music forwards ever since man used sources other than his own voice to create sound. It was 'technology' and man's inventiveness that developed a whole range of instruments away from things that could just be struck. For instance, that drive for innovation much later facilitated the dramatic and expressive change from harpsichord to piano, which subsequently influenced the way so much music was written and conceived.

It was technological advancements that enabled the creation of the symphony orchestra, born over time from a developing understanding of acoustics and instrument making. And then, much later, there's technology used in electronic music making; synthesizers, electric guitars, the recording and amplification of music onto record, then cassette tape and finally compact disc, DVD and Blue Ray – welcome to the digital age! Developments from story telling, theatre to moving image and the silent screen to Hollywood Block Busters! – all these developments changed what was possible, how we consumed and experienced art and how we conceived creating it.

Composers and artists have, throughout time responded to the challenges and opportunities posed by these developments, constantly pushing the boundaries of what is possible, often to such an extent that new technological solutions have had to be developed to satisfy creative needs. Critics of technology in the arts forget that it's very hard to draw a line in the sand and say that technological advancements before such a time were good, but after such and such a time, were not good. It is worth bearing in mind that across time, if some artists, poets and composers didn't think outside of the box and push creative and experiential boundaries, and didn't make use of everything that was around them, including new

technologies, we would not be enjoying the vast array of rich art-forms, expressive media, delivery techniques and original, inspiring work that we do now. We have all benefited from development and technology in art and that development never stops, thankfully, for the moment art stops developing, it stagnates and dies, it becomes a museum piece and something of the past - that would be terrible for us all!

A musical score for a brass quintet, featuring five staves: C Trumpet 1, C Trumpet 2, Horn, Tenor Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (fp, f, mp, p, pp), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (flz., ord.). The music is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature.

*Extract from ....'the other side of air' for brass quintet.*

And one final thought on this.

Good technology does not make good art! Technology is a means to an end, a way of delivering (and sometimes generating) content to make a truly inspired work of art. Technology is not necessarily the end in itself. If you pour shite work or ideas into the most fantastic technological delivery, you will still have shite work at the end of it. It will always be necessary to seed technology with great ideas, whatever the art form.



*the round and square art of memory for piano and orchestra*

Marc Yeats Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>. July 2010.

**Links:**

SATSYMPH PRSF official video

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward/satsymph.htm>

PRSF New Music Award 2010 info.

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward/newmusicaward2010shortlist.htm>

PRSF voting page <http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward/vote.htm>

Marc Yeats: <http://www.marc-yeats.co.uk/>

Ralph Hoyte [http://www.ralphhoyte.net/pervasive\\_media/PM4.html](http://www.ralphhoyte.net/pervasive_media/PM4.html)

Phill Phelps <http://www.zenpho.co.uk/satsymph.shtml>

Marc Yeats talking about SATSYMPH <http://massimilianoturci.com/2010/06/19/marc-yeats-colours-of-music-satsymph/>