

## CMTT project: ~~Dancing About Architecture~~, Ouchmonkeys Podcast.

### Why a Podcast?

Several years ago, while in the studio recording songs for an album, one of my best friends (Tom, the band's other guitarist) father came to visit and check on our progress. Tom's dad was the somewhat legendary record producer Nigel Gray (Summers, A. 2016), noted for producing bands such as *The Police*, *Siouxsie and the Banshees*, and *Godley and Crème*. During a studio break, Nigel took us all out for dinner, and being a huge Police fan, I proceeded to discuss with him - for many hours, the making, recording of, and a great many other stories surrounding the band's first three albums. Before this, I had spent time working with Australian Producer and engineer Tony Cohen (Blair, D. 2021) (*Nick Cave/Birthday Party*) as assistant sound engineer on a Lodger recording. During my time working with Tony, I enthusiastically questioned him at every chance I got. Cohen was more than happy to share his expertise with an inquisitive junior assistant, even going so far as to let me start the final mixes and make decisions of audio effects - before (while explaining to me the process) finishing the songs himself. A similar pattern emerged when recording and assisting for Phil Brown (*Talk Talk*, *Led Zeppelin*, *John Martyn*) and many of the multitude of talented producers and musicians I have been fortunate to work with and learn from over the years.

My personal development as a producer, engineer, and musician owes a great deal to these opportunistic conversations I stumbled upon with my peers. Fast forward, and by 2015 the Podcast as a means of accessible long-form discussion had firmly taken root. Contemplating my discussions described above, I began planning to record a Podcast myself, talking to these people I had worked with and learned from, and hoping to share their valuable insight and experience for the benefit of everybody. However, fate intervened, and after agreeing to record a conversation with Nigel Gray, he died suddenly (2016) before getting the chance to meet up. Not long after, Tony Cohen, another former mentor I had scheduled to record, also passed away. My plans for a Podcast were put on hold, although my initial motivation of sharing these stories for posterity now seemed more important than ever.



Nigel Gray (with the Banshees),



Tony Cohen,



Phil Brown

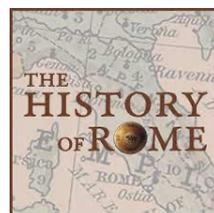
**What does this have to do with a community music project?**

When considering ideas for this community-based project, I began thinking about what it was, in terms of being a professional musician, that had helped and inspired me over the years? I considered various other ideas - taking instruments into schools and introducing young children to music (something I have done previously at the request of friends who are teachers). However, the podcast idea lingered, and after some reflection, I decided sharing the stories of my peers, professional musicians, and indeed professors/fellow students via this relatively new medium might be of considerable benefit. Not just for the students of Salford University but the wider musical community as a whole. This project would be the incentive needed to push me into reviving my previous attempt/s at recording a podcast.

### **Inspiration.**

Over the past decade, we have been able to listen (for free) to online Podcasts such as the popular *Joe Rogan Experience*, *The Lex Fridman Podcast*, *Mike Duncan's The History of Rome*, and *Huberman Lab*. A technological portal has grown which allows us to sit in on virtual lectures where the guests - often leading experts in a particular field, discuss subjects ranging from history to neuroscience, psychology, art, and more.

It is perhaps also worth mentioning other potential benefits offered by the verbatim nature of the medium as a long-form means for open discussion. While some shows, for the sake of necessity, are more presented and scripted in nature (e.g., *The History of Rome*), many take on a looser, more conversational approach, often in a kind of asymmetrical sense concerning the discourse. An expert in a particular field (Neil deGrasse Tyson, Andrew Huberman, etc.) might break down and simplify complex theories while explaining them to the (non-expert) host and listener, making previously inaccessible information available to anyone who listens. Joe Rogan's ever-increasing popularity would appear to bear testimony to this. Another possible advantage is that the natural conversational tone is often disarming for all parties, allowing interesting (and admittedly sometimes not so interesting) tangents to emerge and develop during a given episode. Coupled with the ease of access and cost (Podcasts are freely available on any smartphone or computer), the listener, or indeed subscriber, often feels invested in, and in some way a part of the conversation.



As an aside, pre-podcast, I greatly admired oral historian Studs Terkel's (1912 -2008) verbatim style of writing. His book *Working* (Terkel, S. 1974) provides a fascinating, unedited glimpse into the working lives of the American population during the early 1970s. Ironically perhaps, the original tape-recorded interviews transcribed by Terkel for the book have now resurfaced as audio files. Perhaps, one day they too will be made available as a Podcast.

## **Getting started.**

After outlining a simplified course of action with my course supervisors, I began planning the steps needed to get a Podcast off the ground. An undertaking, which at a cursory level might appear relatively simple, yet in reality turned out to be a complex and indeed time-consuming procedure. I created a personal blog (<https://ouchmonkeys.com/wp>) to track my progress, writing my first post on 21st March 2021:

I have created this WordPress Blog/website intending to keep a log of sorts – tracking the work and progress of my *Community Music Theories and Techniques* project, a part of my MA studies (Music) @ Salford University. Based on a love of ‘Studs Terkel’s verbatim writing and the rising prominence of the “podcast” as a medium of long-form discussion, I hope to carry out a series of recorded conversations with a broad range of subjects connected to music such as musicians, producers, creators, etc.

Ideally, in so far as is possible, these conversations will be presented as ‘unedited’ (Terkel-like) audio recordings (possibly video/YouTube), allowing for both broad, and simultaneously focused analysis. Thus, I intend the discussion/s to remain informal and conversational in tone and aim to tie individual episodes of the podcast together with recurring themes centred around meaning, culture, perception, emotion, practice, creativity, and mental health.

So, what about the community aspect of this project? Who might benefit from such conversations (apart from myself), and which community is it aimed at? – I will write about that later...

(McCorry, M. 2021)

A podcast of this nature requires participants. Thus, to get the project moving I would have to first find, and then contact some prospective guests. Alongside this, full-scale UK COVID restrictions were in place as I began planning, presenting further logistical difficulties (not least figuring out recording locations with social distancing rules). Both of my MA supervisors helped me to contact former/current Salford students to interview, so I composed an outline/proposal for an email - briefly explaining my plans, aims, objectives, etc. However, before I could reach out to anybody, I discovered that I was required to submit a whole load of paperwork to the university’s ethics department. Forms and methodology reports such as detailed participant information sheets (PIS), data management plans (DMP), data protection guidelines, risk assessments (including COVID risk assessment), and consent forms all needed completing before the project could even begin.

## **Clearing Ethics.**

Although challenging, extremely (and surprisingly) time-consuming, and somewhat (though necessarily) bureaucratic, I found this procedure most helpful in aiding the formulation of my plans. Writing the participant information sheet (see attached portfolio for all ethics paperwork) provided clarity regarding my aims and objectives. The data management plan

(and other plans) helped form my procedural methodology concerning the many logistical elements that would go along with creating an ethical podcast in conjunction with the university. On 5<sup>th</sup> April 2021 I wrote:

#### Easter Weekend Update

Have done some more work on the Participant Information Sheet, it's now pretty much finalised – save for any changes – and there will be changes! This is because every time I find myself ticking off the ethics application check-list I end up modifying everything previous - sort of dynamically. That said, it's getting there. I have started the Consent Form (individual) and the Data Management Plan (found some examples online to help). Alongside this I bought the domain name *dancingaboutarchitecture.media* for emails and to present this blog and just because...

(McCorry, M. 2021)

Once all the ethics paperwork was completed, I could begin emailing and phoning various friends/contacts in the music industry, along with those provided by my supervisors. I wrote a brief email outlining the project's aims (see blog entries) and sent a personalised version to approximately ten people. Aware of time constraints, and with other projects to complete, I aimed to record around five episodes in the first instance. The response to the first wave of emails was largely positive, with almost everybody getting back to me within a few days. So, I followed up with another email - this time attaching the personal information sheet, etc. With a full-time job, the ongoing COVID situation to contend with, and the fact I live in London (more than 200 miles away from the university), I would have to plan the recordings a few weeks in advance before booking time off work and driving up to Manchester to record. After emailing back and forth with the prospective guests (some couldn't take part until later in the year), I arranged to record three episodes during the last week of April 2021. In another blog entry dated 23rd April, I wrote:

Ok, have done loads of work on this (and my Mutator project) over the past two weeks. Contacted and followed up on all my previous emails. Sent Personal Information Sheet to prospective participants. Finished all the ethics paperwork and submitted it to the university (lots of paperwork). Spoke about my project with a number of the CMTT group – the others and my tutor (Robin) seemed to react in a positive way regarding my ideas.

Have taken a week of work and now (Yay, COVID allowing) travelled up to Manchester to carry out interviews. Note, this is a little rushed – and has left me needing to try and get hold of an extra microphone. Alongside this have arranged 2 interviews for the upcoming week (Weds and Thurs) and emailed the studios at Salford University re: a room/studio to record the podcast in. Also, with Robin's help have group-emailed (Blackboard) the MA cohort requesting anyone interested in participating contact me.

Will talk to Grippa on the phone and arrange a time to interview him – as well as other professional musicians.

(McCorry, M. 2021)

## The recording Process.

The first episode, featuring James Stone – a Ph.D. student at Salford University, was recorded on 28th April at a rehearsal room on campus (New Adelphi). Despite never having met James (I had attended an online masterclass of his), both of us had plenty to discuss, and the recording went well. From a technical standpoint, there were only a few minor problems to deal with (noisy air-conditioning), although coming from a recording and engineering background, I was confident that the final sound quality would be ok. The university studios had allowed me to borrow a condenser microphone to record the dialogue (I had one of my own). However, the following recordings would take place on location, and I would need to find another. After recording James, I went across the road to PMT Manchester music shop in Salford and bought a new one – with a hefty student discount. For a detailed list of all the equipment needed and used to record with (including software) please refer to the attached Data Management Plan.

The following evening, 29th April, I recorded a conversation with my MA supervisor Robin Dewhurst. Our conversation was going to be recorded over Microsoft Teams, a form of online conferencing software I had rarely used previously, which presented me with a problem. How could I record good quality audio from two different sources? I prepared by routing the audio from my external microphone into Logic Pro, and Robin's audio from Teams via an external app called Loopback (see Figure.1). With Robin recording a backup copy, I pressed record, and (fortunately) everything worked as planned. I had a second episode of the podcast.

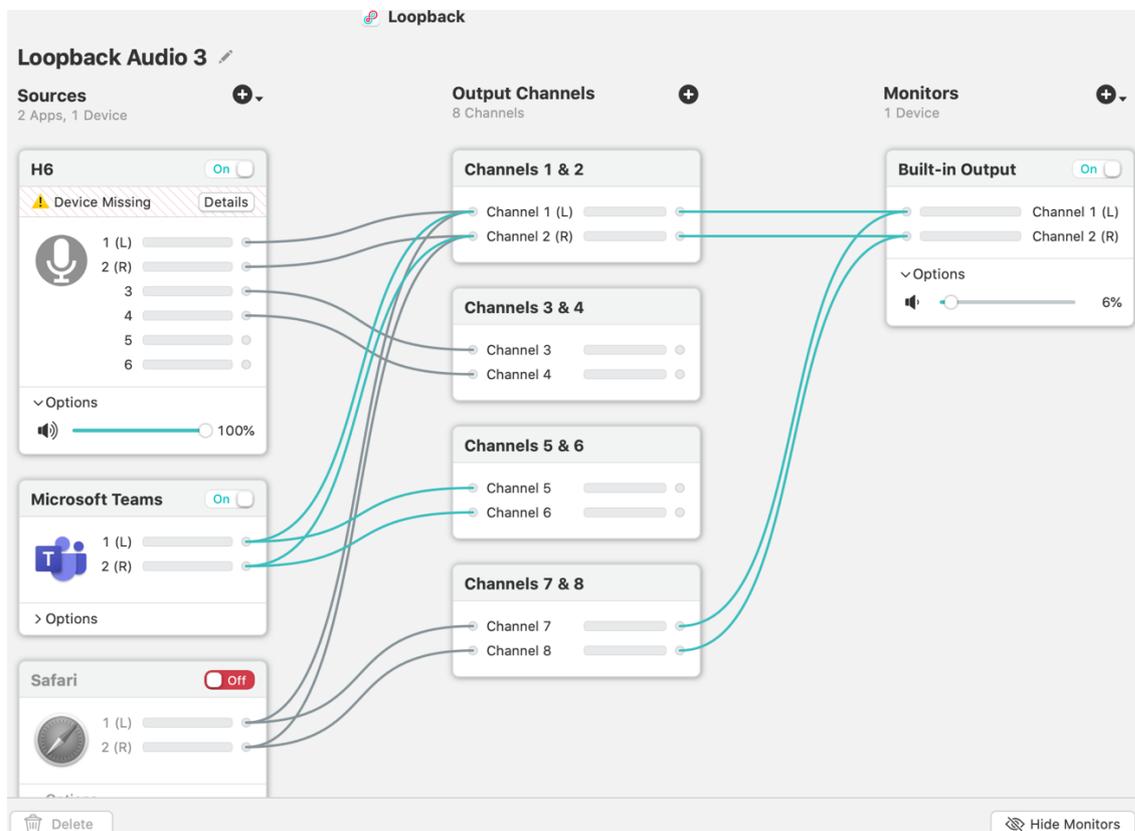


Figure 1. Loopback setup for recording various audio sources over the internet.

Other than late nights and long drives to Eccles (in Manchester) and Teddington (in west London), episodes three (Benjamin Richeton) and four (Tom Gray) were both recorded without any problems. The next task would be to edit and upload the material to the various online podcast servers.

### Editing and publishing the Podcast.

The recordings remained (for the most part) unedited – save for a couple of minor cuts (chatter/comfort breaks and testing at the beginning and end), and I cleaned up the audio (noise gates, EQ, compression, and limiting) in Logic Pro (see Figure.2). A theme tune (modified song of my own) was added to the introduction and end and I wrote and recorded a separate intro for each episode - which, permanently cringing at the sound of my voice I have to say I found particularly challenging. Once satisfied with the production quality, I bounced the audio to high-quality MP3 format for uploading.

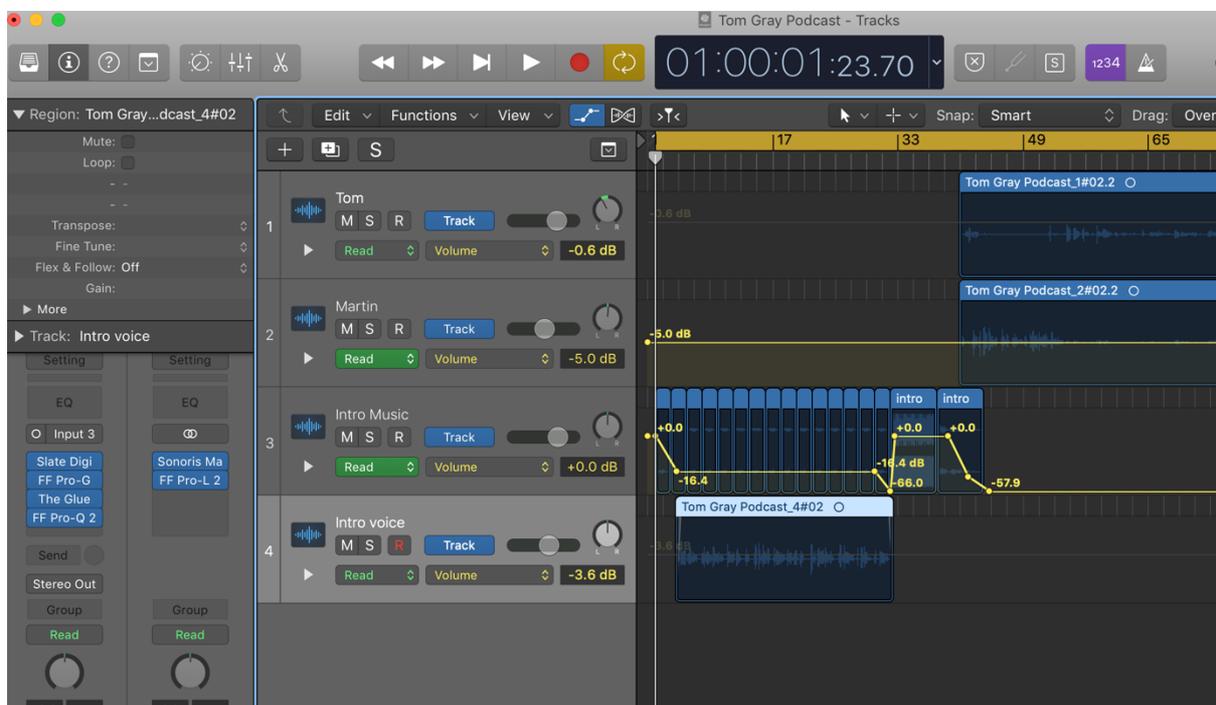


Figure 2. Editing the podcast in Logic Pro.

After much research (Google etc.) I found a relatively inexpensive host (£1.90 per month for 1000 listens) with which to upload and distribute the Podcast ([www.pod.space](http://www.pod.space)). The user interface is both simple and straight forward to use (Figures 4 and 5) - the only problem being the additional time required to fill out all the podcast meta data, episode descriptions and find appropriate artwork etc.

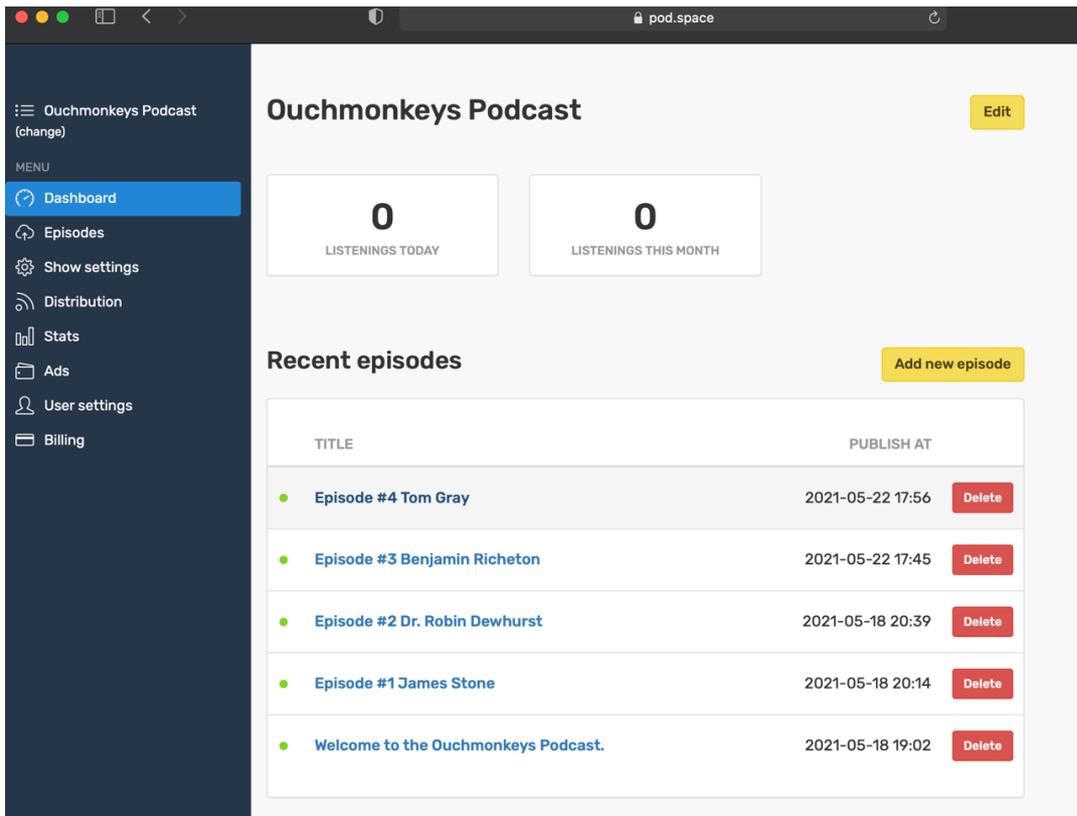


Figure 4. pod.space episode user window.

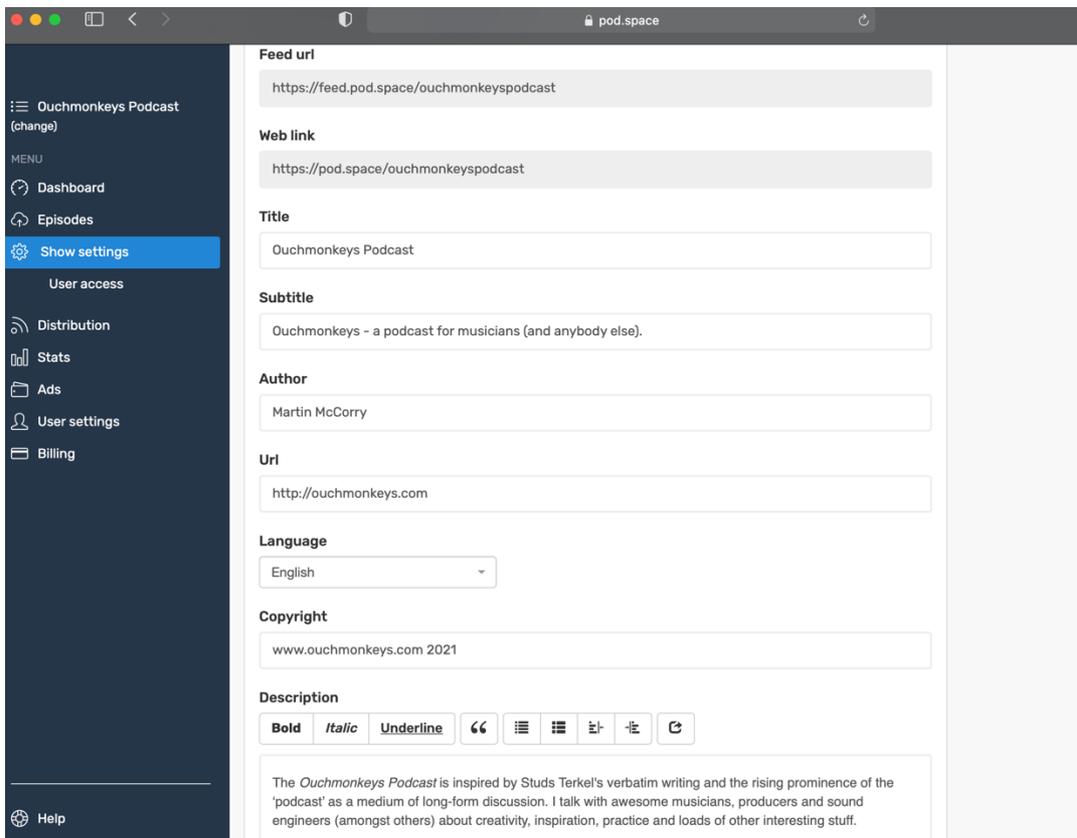


Figure 5. pod.space Show settings window.

## **Why the name change?**

As publishing time approached, my daughter suggested that I consider using social media (something I barely understand) to promote the show, which led me to discover a problem. While the domain name 'Dancing about Architecture' was available (I had bought it), a Twitter/Instagram user had started a podcast with the same name - my fault for using a Frank Zappa quote. Already short on time (with two other MA projects looming), I had to re-record all the introductions, change the artwork/metadata and come up with a new name. Fortunately, I already owned the domain name ouchmonkeys.com (a favourite song by The Teardrop Explodes). Success, this time there were no Podcasts registered under that name, and anyway, I figured in the future I could branch out of only talking about music if I used this less musically attached name.

## **Strengths and weaknesses.**

The podcast is now live on various different servers (list available in the bibliography), and I hope anybody who listens learns something – or at least enjoys the show. I am a relatively shy person, don't like the sound of my own voice, and perhaps often take on more work than I can manage. I rarely find time management a huge problem, although I realise, I can be characteristically slack when it comes to the planning stages. Fortunately, filling out all the paperwork for the ethics department required the formulation of detailed plans before the project could begin (I would have jumped straight in). As far as strengths go, I have always believed (and I am aware that this might also be considered a weakness) that anything is possible or indeed doable. I am a relatively fast learner – perhaps because I am comfortable with failure in the pursuit of success and I tend to push myself into uncomfortable situations (indeed, many of the most rewarding things I have done my first instinct was to avoid).

## **Legacy.**

Submitting this CMTT project is not the end of the Podcast. I have set up an Instagram account to promote the show (yet another challenge) and will continue to record new episodes over the coming months (have two more lined up). Being a musician is in many ways a solitary experience, with hours spent alone practicing, learning, and creating. Learning from my peers – often just by having real conversations with them has been the single most valuable aspect of my musical journey. People learn from conversations – we enjoy talking perhaps more than we enjoy listening.

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