

## **AMMUSIC Liner Notes**

The sleeve notes for the 1967 album were a collection of aphorisms. These too are reproduced with this CD. Again, it was decided to offer some context and explanation. The following text is reproduced from an article published in ReR Records Quarterly Magazine Volume 2 number 2 (November 1988). AMM - a few memories and reflections. When Chris Cutler first asked me to contribute a piece about AMM to the ReR Records Quarterly I was reluctant to accept. Part of Chris's objective was that together with some hitherto unreleased early AMM recordings, a commentary from one of the group would be an appropriate counter to some of the articles that have appeared over the years that have tended to focus more perhaps upon our quirky and abrasive persona than upon the nature and relevance of the music.

Eventually I decided to resist apathy and negotiate the hazardous rapids of memory; using a format which would confront the very earliest thoughts we had assembled collectively I have taken as my text the sleeve notes of our first album AMMUSIC (Elektra EUK-26S) which was released in 1967. In the following I try to remember the context which gave rise to these writings and expand the context so as to give a broader idea of the practical and philosophical questions that informed our work. Accompanying this trip down memory lane will be some current thoughts on these issues in so far as they continue to preoccupy us. This treatment is inevitably inconsistent and, of course, very personal. It does not necessarily reflect how others in AMM did or do perceive these things, although my involvement - as a founder-member ought to ensure that I am (consciously or otherwise) a fairly reliable transmitter.

Before turning to the specific material I should perhaps give you a description of how these aphorisms came into being.

From the earliest of times the desire to understand what we were doing was paramount. And, by the time Lou Gare, Keith Rowe and myself were joined by Lawrence Sheaff, a weekly discussion session accompanied our musical forays. However, our public performances began to necessitate utterances of some kind. This usually turned out to be a hybrid of description and manifesto. Much of the language was, of course, affected by the tenor of the times. We were all young men trying to make our way in life and in our art. Cornelius Cardew, after he joined AMM, rarely attended these discussions, although his input at various times obviously influenced the way AMM performed and thought. His contributions were generally a reflection upon what Lou, Keith, Lawrence and myself had said plus his own ideas. These were presented in a more formal and considered way. Given Cardew's previous preoccupations (serialism and after), his background, education and personality, the general musical environment he had hitherto inhabited, I suppose it is no surprise that his first contributions were so composerly. This also hints at the reserve Cornelius initially had about the hurly-burly of collective activity.

But to return to the text. Elektra, having rejected our first sleeve design, went on to stampede us into providing an alternative plus sleeve notes at very short

notice. As it turned out Cornelius wasn't available to help in the brainstorming sessions necessary to create the materials required (and, if I recall correctly, Cor was not too happy about being excluded from this process; I'm not sure I would have been either). But we did take into account his thoughts. And in later years he acknowledged the strength and appropriateness of the materials we produced in his absence. Given Cardew's early reluctance to enter group discussions it is appropriate (so it seems in retrospect) that his influence should have been so minimal and distanced in the creation of the texts. I should also mention here that none of us are absolutely certain to whom these aphorisms can be attributed. In this sense they became part of AMM's collective thinking.

### **Aphorism 1**

*'Does group direction, or authority, depend on the strength of a leading personality, whose rise or fall is reflected in the projected image, or does the collation of a set of minds mean the development of another authority independent of all the members but consisting of all of them?'*

Given the subsequent discussion about Improvised music-making it is interesting to note that our first really public utterance hit on an important issue within collective creativity. At the time we were grappling with new experiences that thrust this particular Issue to the forefront as real and disturbing. For within the whirlwind of change that was going on in the music we each had to assess, and adjust to, what it meant to our individual being.\* Continual change at such a pace was neither likely or necessary Despite whatever doubts any of us had about what was happening to the music and to ourselves, a strong sense of camaraderie accompanied our creative association. And, although there was no overt internal competitiveness, there were tensions and uncertainties about the line and direction we were taking. Concern about what a 'group' meant and the danger of it being a tool for one individual's thinking always lurked beneath the surface. Externally this fear was justified. Because the world still measured (as it does today) all activity in terms of dominating personalities. The natural collectivist sentiments which our music exemplified were more or less ignored For example, reviews of our first album referred to AMM as "Cardew's group" (Musical Times) while Jazz Journal (laughably) called AMM "The Cornelius Cardew Quintet."

(\*Six months before the Elektra album AMM had been a free jazz group (just), so one can easily assess from the Crypt recordings (12th June 1968) the speed of development how fast that change was happening.)

As young aspiring artists we were not immune to these responses and resistance to them was itself a struggle to carry through since we had all inevitably been infected by the ethos of the prevailing culture and its cynical disparagement of anything remotely collectivist. We naturally wondered whether individuality was at risk, though Ironically I suspect we were not fully conscious at this stage of what individuality actually could be like. If it was anything like the so-called 'freedom' and 'security' we felt in everyday life - then who needed it.

Whatever incidents may have prompted the construction of this first statement, it became part of the bedrock of basic thoughts and questions which guided our activity. And through discussion and work we came to recognise that a new creative and social experience based upon collaboration was more liberating than imprisoning despite having to deal with the background aversion to collectivism that oozed from every crack in our culture.

At this point in our history AMM (in party terms) was apolitical. Most of our ideas were affected by the mood, if not expressed in the patois, of the times. Various esoteric philosophies had their impact. These Cornelius perhaps found hardest to accommodate though he later had his own bouts of religiosity. Despite the colourful and exotic overtones - which strangely hardly ever infected our language (as I think the Elektra sleeve notes demonstrate) the collective consciousness of AMM gradually consolidated. Group activity and its implications gave us all sufficient confidence so that we were content for our individual contributions not to be identifiable. In the early days this self-less element was something which Lou, Keith and myself found it easiest to come to terms with, even revel in. Cornelius, it seems to me, was often perplexed and irritated - and perhaps confused about the relevance of these things to the music I think these micro-social issues reflect upon Cornelius's preoccupations with intra-personal and intra class relations later in his life.

As I recall our ideas and activities some twenty years on, I naturally no longer feel the tensions or excitements that were then uppermost. Nevertheless, much of the same ethos still pervades our music. Maybe it is a kind of trap. Certainly the music we make and our social relationships are indissolubly linked. For example it has always taken a new member some while to settle in often years rather than months. This was true of Cardew, Hobbs (who perhaps never really settled), Tilbury and de Saram The music of AMM needs a lengthy gestation in which individual and group relationships congregate and settle This may also be true of our relationship with audiences.

## **Aphorism 2**

*'An AMM performance has no beginning or ending. Sounds outside the performance are distinguished from it only by individual sensibility.'*

Underneath this apparently cool and direct analytical assertion lay excitement. Playing within the ambit of AMM at that time meant quite literally making music as if music were being made for the first time - and knowing it. As such it was a powerful experience. The emphasis we gave, the meaning we could invest in any sound, meant of course that all sounds had an aural and perhaps a musical value beyond the merely physical. What gave it meaning was perception, Intention and organisation. And, as all listeners had different aural, psychological and aesthetic dispositions (if only in degree) it followed that individual sensibility was the measure of sound as art. Many commentators, friendly or otherwise, rightly observe that AMM makes great demands upon its listeners A listener may choose to use the references of the culture which dominates his/her perception, or they might try to transcend them seeking to illuminate the priorities which

inform likes and dislikes. 'Likes' and 'dislikes', in effect, are the measure of the world; they indicate the kind of social/psychological environments possible. Such realisations obviously affected our ordinary lives outside performances. Even accommodating loud and nuisance noises became increasingly easier. They could also be used in performance. A paradoxical corollary to this was our use of silence, a frequent though never programmed feature of early AMM performances. The idea of no sound as music was a logical extension of the idea of all sounds being potentially musical. This was in no way influenced by Cage's 4'33" (the silent piece). I had never heard it before we began to use silences. And of course Cage's idea remained mainly conceptual whereas (as our listeners can testify) AMM silences were (are) invested with great emotional impact: Å The room was utterly still. After a very long silence it became obvious that the performance was over Å for Cardew lit a cigarette. Prévoſt began slowly dismantling his kit, and Rowe pulled out his plugs. Yet the audience didn't stir and sat rapt for minutes in some new and absolute state of sympathy and awareness Such is the awesome power of AMMÅ² (Melody Maker, 18.12.71).

All this begged the primary question of what music really was. Music was not every audible experience; yet we seemed to be proposing, and sometimes proving, that any physical manifestation could either be sound or music. We seldom discuss these matters nowadays. They have become, to a large extent, given qualities which guide the music, though we might, if pressed, express them rather differently now. However, we have absorbed and converted the aesthetic Impacts of Gagaku or buddhist chanting, as we have other facets of the world of music and ideas. AMM remains an experimental medium. And whereas the long dramatic silences do not feature in our performances any more, they are certainly alluded to by quiet meditational passages. This is one way AMM treats its own history. By development, conversion and integration, not by repetition.

### **Aphorism 3**

*'The reason for playing is to find out what I want to play.'*

The theme of enquiry echoes again here. And the desire to break away from an emulative way of playing. \*This is a bold act which some musicians never negotiate or even contemplate. And I am sure it is an act easier (or at least less difficult) in a group context offering support and dialogue. Nevertheless, beginning the process of actually making music is a fearsome experience. And the kind of perpetual questioning indicated in the third aphorism indicates too how strongly and seriously AMM viewed the relevance and meaning of musical life. It was coming to grips with this question, I suspect, that led Lawrence Sheaff not to continue to make music, a decision based on an understanding reached through the practice of making music itself: by the musician not only experimenting but being the object of the experiment. Lawrence Sheaff left AMM in 1967. But I know that some fifteen years afterwards - having left music completely - he still feels the force of the process. He still marvels at and values this formative experience. I found this acknowledgment humbling because

Lawrence had good reason to feel unhappy about some aspects of his association with AMM. There developed a musical and personality clash mostly between Lawrence and Keith. Cornelius stayed completely out of it. Lou was uneasy because he was fairly close to Lawrence. But he and I were unhappy about Lawrence's behaviour towards women (in particular). Lawrence was a tall handsome man and seemed incredibly strong. Yet after the somewhat painful discussion - which typically English, hated getting to the point Lawrence was stunned. It was not a question of sacking a musician. Lawrence duly arrived at our next concert although he did ask my advice on what to do. I can't remember being able to help him much - save to try and work through the problem. At the Commonwealth Institute, where we were playing, Lawrence sat crouched Immobile and silent over his cello I don't think he ever played again In effect he had been banished.

(\* Or as ChrIs Cutler ably described this process of emulation: "consuming music In the process of learning, rather than producing music" (Re Quarterly. January 1986)

#### **Aphorism 4**

*'Given a certain amount of experience, it is not difficult to assimilate any object.'*

There is (and was) a general misconception that the new jazz or the avant garde of the mid-sixties was an indulgence. Some observers tried to write it off as a series of pranks by charlatans. I recall a review by Francis Newton calling us, after a concert at the ICA, "the boys" with the other element of his article an album by Sonny Rollins, as "the man" (New Statesman, 23.366). In musical terms Rollins and AMM hardly seem to be the same species. The article has an element of amused (feigned?) resentment. This is rich coming from E.J. Hobsbawm (alias Francis Newton) who, as an academic, I admire so much for his contribution to changing the established historical perspective.

Making a new music demanded putting aside as many prejudices and residual responses as possible; and accommodating new elements within music meets with resistance from both musicians and listeners. For Instance. can a musician transmute the raw material of transistor radio or yoghurt carton Into a meaningful aesthetic experience? Now that so much that was new then has become part of the common vocabulary. it is perhaps difficult for younger musicians (and the contemporary public) to appreciate just how difficult and iconoclastic those first moves really were.

Early AMM performances were often made in total darkness. This environment somehow aided the process of assimilation. Listeners were not aware where a particular sound came from. Nowadays, I note, young musicians are keen to observe how certain sounds are achieved. They seem to accept the result as 'normal' and have become more interested in the technique. I regret this to some extent because it seems little different, in essence, from perfecting (maybe classicising) any other musical form.

Obviously AMM in the late eighties is not breaking new ground, and we content ourselves (as do some of our contemporaries) with the fact that much that we innovated has been incorporated into the common domain. The adoption of particular features of our work (as per Test Department and Jesus and Mary Chain for Instance) only reveals the transience of such things. The use to which they are put no longer has the same Impact or cultural meaning. These musicians, quite legitimately, have adapted (or maybe invented for themselves) techniques to promote populist themes and personages and even put them to a rock back-beat. The Pink Floyd did much the same thing In the sixties. Such uses only serve to accommodate the desire of the marketplace for novelty. Little of the aesthetic, social or cultural significance of our experiments was examined or perpetuated. Our own experience in relation to influences, e.g. the Gagaku or John Cage's music, indicates how easily elements can be adapted without taking on board the cultural baggage of the original. In a sense it is all material to be exploited! Cage's 'chance' philosophy has no place in AMM's thinking, although superficially the sounds and effects may appear at times to be similar. By contrast AMM can create a much more powerful emotional response than Cage's work was ever able or designed to do. In fact our detractors in the 'straight' music field probably criticise us most for bringing emotion back into new music. The advocates of modernism seemed to prefer the cold and clinical, ironic and conceptual - and now, the postmodernists want the simple and whimsical! Sounds are, and always have been, a means to an end. The way AMM treats them can never be appreciated in the populist sense precisely because we use them for our own ends - to express our music and our view of the world. (The producers of our first album were all connected with the Pink Floyd. I suspect they thought it just possible that AMM might be marketable in the heady days of the sixties). My warning here is that assimilation can be for almost any purpose. Material features are neutral. it is the human decision that creates meaning. Swords or ploughshares?

**Aphorism 5** *'Every noise has a note'.*

Just as every object can be assimilated, it follows that every noise has a note. In conventional music a note is a specific sound that resides within a given series or set. The nature of the series is bound up with a wider aesthetic of what constitutes music e.g. various kinds of tonality. I suggest it follows that if a music can accept any sound within its general aesthetic, then each sound has a significance which may be judged within whatever scale, or series. exemplifies the form in question. There is an ironic mischievousness in calling an electronic squawk or a banging door a note. And there is even more mischief in referring to a series of such sounds as a melody. But given the way AMM has manipulated conventional and unconventional sound sources - having established its own music universe - such an idea is by no means strange to its listening public. Naturally it takes a leap of perception and imagination to acknowledge, as well as to create, such an aesthetic. It is a tribute to our early supportive audiences that they could respond to our work and reinforce the validity of our activity; these were immensely valuable responses given the newness and uncertainties

which accompanied the music.

**Aphorism 6** *'The past always seems intentional, but at the time it appears to be accidental.'*<sup>1</sup>

The Elektra album was released in 1967 (recorded if I remember correctly late in the summer before). As we, and other informed listeners now perceive it, the music flows and has an inevitability about it. It is a piece. What was the flowing in real time has become fixed - by the process of analysis and definition. This process makes an assemblage of sounds - music. What was fragile, mobile and elusive - a thing that would bend to whim and slip out of grasp evolves through assimilation into a master-work!

Aphorism 7 'Playing in AMM sometimes produces a state where you feel sounds in a completely different way from usual. Seeing as if for the first time this reddish brown object with all the strings going away from the left, a bow going across the strings on the right hand side and interwoven amongst the strings various little things, on top of that a plastic lid, and just watch the sound happening.'

This description alludes most graphically to the kind of wide-eyed incredulity felt in making AMM music. No manual, no teacher could ever convey or lead a musician to a similar state of music-making mind. A new kind of awareness of ourselves and of the sounds we conjured, individually and collectively, was generated by a very particular configuration of events and personalities that answers, historically, to the name of AMM.

A corollary of this experience was a reinforcement of our association, subsequently making it difficult for us to tolerate uninformed commentators, or other musicians who went through the motions but who could not achieve similar results - and were not even aware of their inability. (It is often assumed that because music is improvised that anything can be tolerated. This is not so. Each musician is responsible for making something coherent of group activity. Improvisation is at its worst when those concerned do not appreciate or know what is going on around them). Not surprisingly this was interpreted as arrogance, especially by those who did not share the idea that AMM was producing anything of significance. Be that as it may, there were enough indicators to persuade us that something special was happening. And given this, I think a fair-minded reader would understand our determination that it should not be marred by thoughtless intrusions. Since then, of course, many musical phenomena have emerged which owe part of their genesis to the liberation that AMM manifested - as they do to some of our contemporaries (e.g. Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Joseph Holbrook) who tilted towards (or away from) jazz. The jazz residues receded faster from AMM than most of the other forms prevalent. Others (e.g. Sonic Arts Union, MEV, the Taj Mahal Travellers and Globokar's New Phonic Art group) were all wedded (despite their rhetoric) to the musical establishment. (Their subsequent demise and the current musical lives of most of those involved seems to confirm this). Of all these examples it must be significant that AMM alone continues its unhurried way whatever fashionable music mode is prevalent. Obviously Cardew's presence in AMM meant that we

had a connection with the New Music scene and some of our first concerts abroad were on the strength of Cardew's associations. But this never really led anywhere. Our approach was always perceived as too amusical, too much away from the avant garde establishment. The initial curiosity of a 'serious' musician playing with jazz musicians soon wore off.

Let me give you an example of the aesthetic mis-match that existed: AMM was invited to perform in Berlin during the early seventies as part of a contemporary music festival. Group improvisation was in vogue at the time. Also performing were MEV and an Italian group led by Evangelisti. The festival, with an eye to novelty, was organised as a kind of circuit. Events occurred more or less simultaneously in different venues AMM was assigned to the St Thomas kirchin. The audience(s) meanwhile arrived in batches ferried around from venue to venue in buses. Being AMM, once having started to play we carried on regardless. The audiences arrived like tourists bent on doing Europe in three days. Suddenly we might become aware of a group of people peering at us out of the gloom. Just as quickly they disappeared as the coach schedule demanded their exit. The church had a booming acoustic and the normal high-church furniture. The only place for playing was the altar area which was paved with white marble Such a floor would be cool in any season, this was winter. As the music developed I remember thinking how I would like to get closer to the environment of the church, to feel the physical nature of the place just as we were sensing the physical characteristics of sound. I took my shoes and socks off. Instead of the complete numbness I had anticipated, somehow concentrating on the sounds and sensations gave me a feeling that was not uncomfortable. I walked about playing, revelling in the sensation. Given the place and the movement perhaps it could have been mistaken for some kind of weird ritual. But for me it was a personal experiment, part of the experience of immediacy that could be found in AMM Music. My feet then were like a 'reddy-brown object' seen as for the first time.

The performance provoked some interesting responses, although we were not made aware of them for some time. It happened that several months later some German musicians were playing a concert at the Purcell Room, London. They too had been part of the Berlin Festival. I went along to hear their music and say hello. As I waited at the stage door I overheard two Americans talking about the Berlin Festival. They were describing the AMM concert - as some mystic rite, implying that we must have been on some kind of a drug-trip. I took the opportunity to correct the impression, admitting sadly that the couple making athletic love in the pew was not part of our performance although I cannot be sure how much we had contributed to theirs!

Such impressions are impossible to counter completely. It is how myths are created. And such examples are the root of the widely held view that our music was religious. In some sense I would agree with this description. It depends upon what is understood as 'religious'. I think our notions of 'religion' weren't shared by those who used such descriptions. AMM was a means of heightened awareness. The sounds and combinations of sound we produced generated a



physical, almost tactile, sense of being at the point of creation. Part of this heightened awareness was expressed simply in terms of enquiry. It prompted us to examine the nature of sound, as well as philosophies of the East and West, graphics, language and politics. All stemmed from the first confrontation with a 'reddy-brown' object.

### **Aphorism 8**

*'There is no guarantee that the ultimate realisations can exist.'*

This statement was one of a number of examples I can recall concerned with the question of failure: a notion that has preoccupied AMM over a long period. References to it appear in the material accompanying The Crypt double album. Embedded within this question was a realisation that it was an essential feature of the human condition. The notion of failure impinged directly upon the collective work of AMM through our acknowledgment that whatever had been achieved before could not guarantee success in the future. We were prepared, no matter how well our last concert had gone, that such a level of playing might not occur again. This realisation caused problems in the prosaic activity of getting gigs. It was difficult enough to convey a meaningful description of AMMUSIC. And then we couldn't even guarantee to reproduce it. This has always been at the heart of AMM's dilemma in promoting itself in a commodity oriented world.

In retrospect I think AMM, in all phases of its existence, created mood. and aesthetic experiences which have changed musicians and audiences alike. Yet given the simple and transient nature of the music - after all if you break down what we do in simple rational terms, a group of three year olds could do it. Yet despite its startling simplicity, AMMUSIC is the most difficult of all musics to make. It seems to live a life of its own. It gently but firmly resists analysis. It gently but firmly resists expectations. Early in AMM's existence the members used to meet frequently to discuss the music, its effect upon us and our audiences. Later we resisted all conversation about the music. We'd arrive, perform and then go home or on to the next gig without a word about it. As if any talk would risk a catastrophe and break the spell.

### **Aphorism 9**

*'To play and to arrive at the state where you no longer need to play.'*

This idea had two dimensions. One with reference to a particular performance, the other to the reason for making music at all. Offering music to the market is problematic to an improviser. Do you keep in the bits audiences seem to like? By this time, of course, the music has stopped and the commodity has taken over. Likewise Improvisation can be therapeutic: a musician's therapy is not necessarily of interest to anyone else. However, in AMM extra-musical features were paramount and maybe superseded the strictly musical. Audiences and musicians alike might feel refreshed, angered, invigorated or calmed (often all of these in a single performance). Not the kind of responses or terms that music

critics might use or be capable of making sense of. Yet such criteria were how a successful performance was judged. Our early audiences used to enjoy the complete darkness in which performances took place. One regular listener used to cocoon himself completely in a blanket. Clearly this kind of listening was nothing like listening to classical music, jazz or pop. In a sense those who participated listened until they needed to listen no longer. The satisfaction achieved was almost all non-cerebral - although our detractors always thought pejoratively that interest in AMM was wholly intellectual. Performances would almost always end with long meditative passages even though, within a performance, ear-splitting catatonic sequences might have occurred. The psychology of making music is a rich and largely untapped mine of information about the human condition - perhaps a minefield too. It soon became clear that the discussions and experiments, even the form, of AMM were of little significance if you could not relate them to internal responses. As Cornelius was to write, the sense in which AMM was most experimental was in its searching for sounds and discovering what emotional responses were attached to them (Treatise Handbook, Universal Edition). As far as playing was concerned, I think there was a feeling that one played until the refinement of materials and responses was so subtle that there was no sound or physical activity at all. Certainly - as musicians and audiences could attest - there was a great deal of latent energy in those magically still AMM silences. They went away not in an excited state, but calm; fulfilled emotionally and physically.

Naturally such experiences threw up all kinds of conclusions regarding technique and the purpose of music-making. We were not ignorant of other musics - especially those forms the West still thinks of as being illiterate. Obviously there were musicians in the world who made great music by virtue of their magnificent instrumental command. But there is a sense of revulsion confronted with empty excesses of inflated technique - especially from musicians who are so inescapably entrenched in the cash nexus. To make the kind of music AMM valued and wished to participate in made technique potentially a hindrance. Whereas attention, awareness and sensitivity were the real means and maybe the real ends of making music.

Throughout AMM's history, although less currently than at any other time, there have been occasions when uninvited musicians joined in our public performances. The openness of the music and the deceptively simple techniques employed was taken as an invitation; an ultra-democratic ideal was foisted upon such situations by those who saw that the logical consequences of our activity would be to embrace everyone equally within a sound universal. In theory it could. But this would depend on the sensitivity of all involved. It was open to all, but not by means of some crude and infantile democratic right that could destroy the experience for everyone. One of our most successful uninvited collaborators was a jaw harp player in Berlin, who during a concert in the early seventies made his/her presence felt and made a significant contribution to the music. Sadly we never met the player concerned. A year later, again in Berlin, we had an altercation with some musicians who invaded the stage in a childish demonstration of 'freedom in music'. After we had persuaded them to leave and

let us get on with playing, our friend the jaw harpist made music with us again. We never met this musician. There was no real need to meet, the meeting had been in the music itself. Other musicians have been less successful with their contributions. Needless to say clumsy demonstrations made us irritable and are possibly the basis for our reputation for being arrogant and exclusive, of not wanting to share our music. But our resentment was focused entirely upon those who destroyed the music for everyone else. Being such a fragile thing, improvisation lives or dies by the sensibilities of the participants; they must be aware of their relationship to each other and to the thing which is the group and to themselves. A preoccupation with, for example, a particular sound source (which may be a fascinating piece of technology) or with one's own ego at the expense of the ensemble is destructive.

### **Aphorism 10**

*'AMM started itself. It was there a few minutes before we thought of it.'*<sup>1</sup>

Despite the usual pedestrian way music writers perceive things - which in our case was expressed in the retailing of the notion that AMM was the brainchild of one innovative individual who then led or used the others to realise his ideas (À la Stockhausen) - AMM developed in an intuitive, spontaneous and collaborative way. Our rationalisation of this developed after the event - and of course such rationalisation affected future development. Even from its earliest days AMM was dialectical, our first fragile and formative moves were very subtle. A bold manifesto would have been too robust and too crude a tool. Ideas abounded, competed. Most fell, too feeble under the pressure of actual experience. The description-cum-composition to come nearest to what the AMM experience is was probably Cardew's *The Tiger's Mind*. But although gentle, provocative and poetic, it never quite reached into the core of the group.

The essential nature of AMM was formed before any of us really knew it. You could say that the past twenty years or so were, and maybe the next twenty years will be, necessary to understand the full impact of the activity we had entered into.

### **Aphorism 11**

*'Within the time span of a performance the nearness of sound beauty becomes laughingly obvious, the players merely indicators of what is there already.'*

If music is meant to deflect the listener from harsh reality, AMM fails. It was possible only to find oneself - not escape - in our music: aural perception used as a means of knowing reality - of refining responses towards, and testing the consistency of, the world: hearing as intercourse with materiality; an activity not wholly passive or wholly mechanical. As a body can only be fully experienced through physical exertion and a mind through thinking, so listening is equally an exercise in existence. And a fuller world may be perceived through this kind of intensive practice.

AMM might be classified as yogic practice. But with no mysticism attached.

Rohan de Saram naturally feels affinities with the age old philosophy of his parental culture of Sri Lanka. Rowe, Tilbury and myself are materialists. Yet I would argue that the essential features of many ancient systems of awareness deal only with real things. Early in AMM's life various members had associations with Transcendental Meditation, Ouspensky's teachings, Buddhism and so on: these generally added to the pool of information and practice which informed AMM. But there was always a sense in which the group itself was the only real vehicle for self-awareness. Superficial elements sooner or later fell away. The continuum of AMM transcended these inputs. Schools offer only a secondhand, sanitised, safe impression of reality (and this applies as much to music schools as schools of mystic arts and sciences). There is no substitute for doing it. Naturally such assertions are likely to be met with incredulity. But there are more than a few of us who have become used to the usurpation of truth by a society which preserves itself by suppressing experience. Schools confine their inmates to a very narrow diet, a diet adequate for the continuation of western rationality with its bland convictions of liberal freedoms - its particular idea of democracy.

## **Aphorism 12**

*'Mistakes in and towards AMM could be due to constant references to sets of standards.'*<sup>1</sup>

The significance of many of these epigrams overlap. But I will use them to amplify important positions and risk boring the reader with repetition. It is difficult to convey the vehement criticism and scepticism to which AMM has been subjected. This manifested itself mostly in terms of media and establishment responses. Most early AMM music was performed in semi-private settings. It has never been, nor is it, wholly comfortable within conventional music settings. Although we have from time to time performed at prestigious contemporary music festivals and will continue to do so when asked, in general we have not courted attention and over our long existence have never acquired anything more than a minor cult following. Our detractors, however, work on many levels and totally out of proportion with the actual audiences we reach: virulent attacks, subtle distortion, pointed omission. The plain and simple fact is that there is a body of opinion opposed to the 'idea' of a music like AMM and this body of opinion reflects a fear of an erosion of the 'standards' which underpin our society. These standards are essentially 'platonic' insofar as they refer to measurable standards of perfection that consequently justify a hierarchy. The driving force of this ideology is not (as one ought to expect) 'perfection' but measurement. The measurable qualities of AMM music lead for example to erroneous and simplistic assumptions about a reduction of measurable standards and a drive towards musical (read technical) virtuosity. The ability to make one simple sound have a devastating aural and emotional impact is undervalued (attacked) because 'anyone could' (in theory) 'do it.' Thus it undervalues expertise. But AMM offers a categorical alternative to the priorities of western classical music, or the mass market oriented pop culture. Thus our detractors have to discount and ridicule any alternative set of values which

undermine the prevailing philosophy. Within the alternative reference there are degrees of success: standards do exist. Some people improvise and make better music than others. I do not pose an infantile levelling down process where all are as good as they are equally bad. A bad Improvising musician is bad precisely because he misunderstands the materials and the process with which he must work. These lessons, these ingredients are what makes improvisation categorically different from the commodity musics or the establishment musics of our age. This discussion puts AMM (and other musics) outside of the current 'modernism versus post-modernism' debate, which seeks to confine the discussion within very narrow parameters. The heady analysis of serialism and the simplistic perfection of minimalism are both - as perceived from our perspective mindless and soulless.

### **Aphorism 13**

*'There is no certain knowledge, in relation to your development that the effort you are making at the time is the right effort.'*<sup>1</sup>

Here is a perennial conundrum for all<sup>1</sup> especially those of a rational or progressive persuasion. Western culture is wedded to the idea of progress and development. Ever better standards of living, perpetual innovation, an even nearer insight into, and mastery over, nature. Yet there are unforeseeable consequences that render progressive activity null, and temper the drive for change. In AMM we had come to recognise that formulations and expectations were frail supports in the process of making our music. Naturally we still had them – but as time went on they were treated simply as hypotheses – ingredients for testing part of the general process of discovery and understanding. Individually we all had favourite theories about our work. Some stuck better than others. AMM was, after all, a vehicle for such differences.

Yet the physical and emotional responses were (and are) so much more meaningful than any manifesto drawn from it. A literarily biased world somehow wants to reduce everything to words<sup>1</sup>- hence this article! Yet experience shows that knowledge often evades the word.

I suppose AMM deals in areas of human expression which counter (at best complement) the psycho linguistic formulations so apparently necessary in modern life. But AMM's reality has always been beyond the sharp focus of rationality. Often this has been to our embarrassment. And, in times when various shades of dialectical materialism dominated discussion, Cardew and Rowe, if not the music, were for a while forced to the conclusion that AMM was a corrupting, mystical and degenerate force. Rowe subsequently retracted from this position although his dialecticism remains. Even Cardew softened in his attitude towards AMM at the end of his life. This probably meant that he was coming to terms with himself (at last). The trouble with a death is that 'decency' expects us to be overly respectful – to keep our thinking embalmed. The strange branch of Marxist Leninism which Cor (and Keith also earlier) embraced now looks (in retrospect) so extraordinarily English and religious in its puritanism. I was never sure whether Cor couldn't forgive himself for being

upper middle class and/or bohemian, or whether he simply wanted to expand his life experience into what he conceived of as working-class. I readily acknowledge that his Marxism enabled him to express feelings for fellow human beings and declare his class affiliations<sup>1</sup> yet he was so often ill at ease with certain people. He seemed more communicative towards the end of his life, more at ease with himself and more relaxed about AMM.

All of us and our long-time listeners (and there are some who go back farther than some of the current performers) acknowledge the Impact AMM has upon theIr sensibilities. It still has a capacity to exist outside the personae of those who are most bound up with it. We may not fully understand what It is we do which, in accordance with one of our early dictums, is why we still continue to do it. Eddie Prévost

This compact disc contains 74 minutes of AMMMUSIC recorded on the 8th and 27th June 1966 in London. The sessions were produced by DNA\* and recorded at Sound Techniques. Parts of these recordings made up the AMMMUSIC album which was released in 1967,

ReR Records have worked hard and long to make the originally released material available again, for which we thank Chris Cutler, However, we (AMM) think that the LP format was never adequate to convey what AMMMUSIC was like. This CD too is not perfect; and replication and repeated listenings change and maybe distort the richer meaning of improvisations. Happily Chris was persuaded that the inclusion of hitherto unreleased material (made at the same sessions) allows the listener to hear prefigurations and continuities of the music which makes for a new and a more enhanced experience than the original album material. However, you can programme the CD to let you hear the 1967 released material only,

(\* Ronald Atkins, Alan Becket, John Hopkins, Peter Jenner)