

# Notes on how we ran the SuperCollider Symposium 2012

Dan Stowell

Centre for Digital Music

Department of Electronic Engineering

Queen Mary, University of London

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## 1 Introduction

This document is a collection of notes and numbers that could hopefully be useful for someone thinking of running a SuperCollider Symposium. It's written in the immediate aftermath of SuperCollider Symposium 2012 in London, with some facts and figures from it. I also include some written notes from my own perspective; it doesn't necessarily reflect the "official" stance of other symposium organisers past and present.

### 1.1 Two purposes

I think the following two "purposes" of the symposium are useful to bear in mind, and helped to shape some choices about what we did:

#### **BRINGING EXISTING PEOPLE TOGETHER**

Like many open-source communities, SuperCollider users and developers are a widely-spread community who largely communicate online. Real-world get-togethers have a vital role in knowledge exchange, getting to know each other, and hacking together. Some aspects of this:

- SuperCollider people do a wide variety of things - art music, club music, classical music, pop music, sonic art, machine listening, etc. It will help you a lot if you can reflect some of this **diversity** in (1) your organising committee and (2) your review panel!
- As well as the timetabled events, make sure people have time to hang out a bit.
- It's good to provide a "developer day" or some focussed time for the developers of SuperCollider itself to get together and fix/implement stuff together.

#### **REACHING OUT TO NEW PEOPLE**

The symposium is a chance to showcase some of the best of people using SuperCollider, and to inspire and educate new users. Some aspects of this:

- Weekend workshops, at low cost, for beginners and intermediate users, are important to do. (We also provided some time in a concert where newcomers from a workshop could have performed/demoed something, though this didn't actually happen in the end.)
- Tried to keep the price affordable (especially since we were in London, an expensive place for accommodation etc). Getting funding was crucial for this. We also had in-kind support from various places (mostly the different London universities). If we had run the event in the summer holidays, we might have been able to offer cheap university accommodation, which would have helped with people's costs. We also had to think quite hard about costs we were putting in the ticket price, such as the conference tea-break catering (and whether to provide any meals - we decided not to, and this seemed to work out well, with people going in groups to some nice+cheap eateries in the area). We tried to make sure there wasn't too much travelling around London required, but in the end our events were spread out quite a bit.
- Sell one-off tickets for concerts / club nights, not just full-week tickets. You do want people to buy full-week tickets (it helps for financial clarity); so maybe only sell the one-off tickets closer to the time (or on the door), when casually interested people might decide to pop along.
- Don't make it too much of a university-ish thing. University people are geared up to come to conferences etc, and universities can help run them, but it's important to remember that SuperCollider is also used by independent musicians, artists, coders, hobbyists.
- We ran our art exhibition in a public space with free entry. One early plan we had was a prominent central-London location, which didn't come through but would have been higher-profile than the gallery we used in the end. However the gallery we went with was delightful, in a great location, and had some passing custom too.
- A review process with a formal "Call for works" is a good way to get potential pieces/acts but remember that it's easier for academic/institutional types to respond to these, than club musicians etc. Don't make the barrier too high.
- We ran a "bursary scheme" (which consisted of giving a free full ticket to a number of applicants) - this is good for supporting people who might not be able to justify the cost otherwise. Our bursary-scheme people seem to have got a lot out of it (they told us so!). Note that the free-ticket approach to bursaries makes it very easy to administer because there's no cash to be circulated, but it does mean that we weren't supporting anyone for their travel or accommodation costs.
- Music events with broad appeal. For example, we made sure to have our club nights in proper good club venues (harder to hire than some university room). We also paid for a known club act to headline (someone who was not even a SuperCollider user!).

- Advertising and promotion. If you don't put effort into promotion you'll only get the dedicated "core" community. The core people are great, but a thriving community needs to attract new people too. So, even though this is not a profit-making exercise, it's important to put some budget and effort into advertising and promotion to help with general awareness. All the usual promotional stuff applies: use twitter, facebook etc (or whatever succeeds them in future); get someone to do good visual design for your website/posters/flyers; make some promotional videos; have interesting things you can announce in the lead-in to the event (e.g. headline act, keynote, bursaries, competition...).

One particularly successful outreach/promotional thing we did was the remix competition. Good things about it were its sufficiently broad appeal, *non-SC users* could get involved, and people who *weren't coming* to the symposium could get involved. Also we had actual prizes ("Launchpad" controllers, kindly donated by Novation) which were useful to SC users and non-SC-using digital musicians alike. It led to coverage in the BBC (more than once, with hundreds of thousands of views, and secondary coverage elsewhere), had the biggest number of pageviews on our website, and got submissions from around the world, mostly from people unknown to the SC community.

This doesn't imply you should be planning an automated remix competition... maybe there are other things you can do which have some of the same benefits and allow a kind of "peripheral engagement".

## 2 Timeline

Here is the main timeline of deadlines, announcements and meetings. It was about 18 months overall. It's certainly possible to do it in less time than that; but note the things that need to be done with plenty of time (funding applications, call for works).

I've also included a graph of the numbers of emails sent, to emphasise Jan's advice about organising events like this: "It's mostly a lot of emailing." This was true.

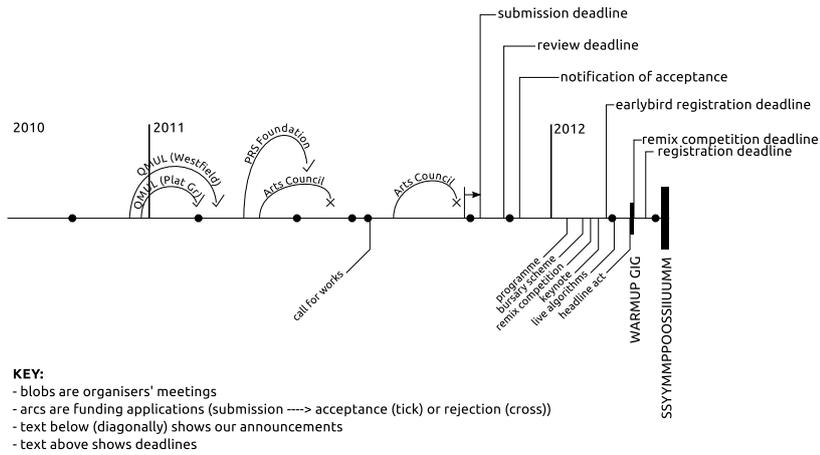


Figure 1: Timeline of deadlines, announcements etc over the 18 months

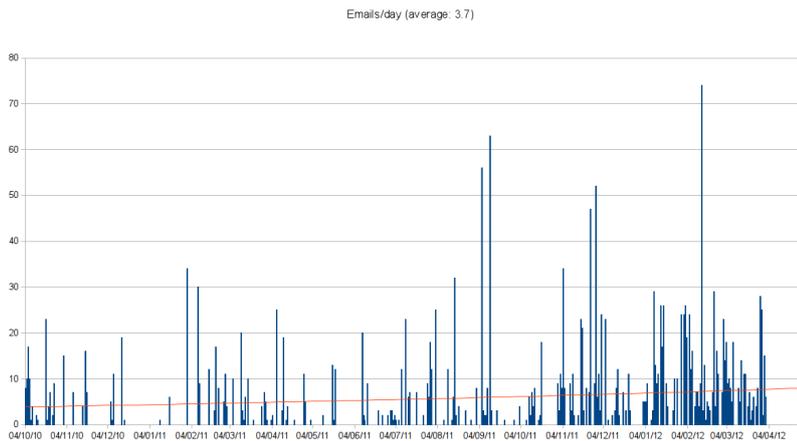


Figure 2: Timeline of email discussions over the 18 months

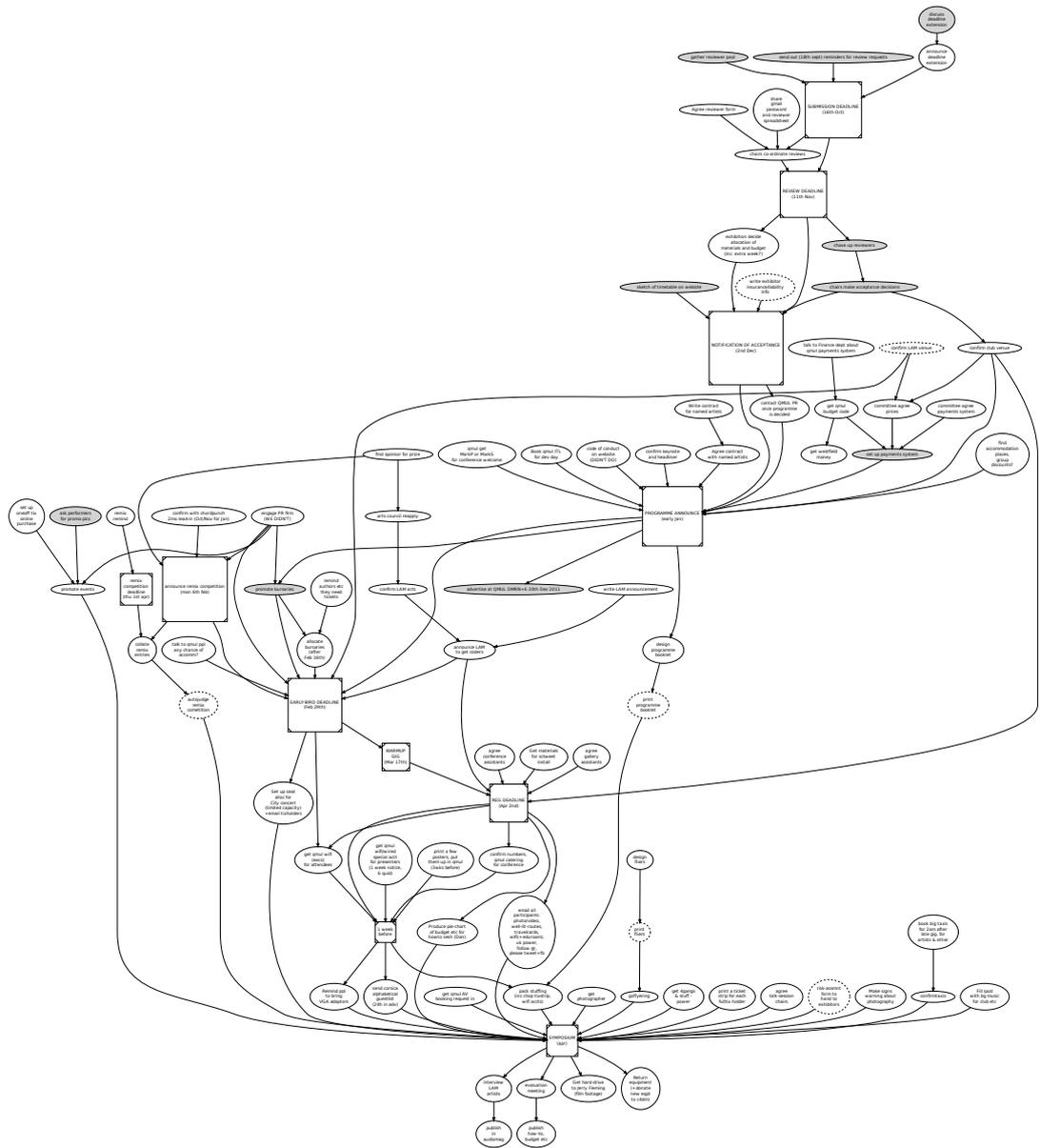


Figure 3: Main organisational to-do list

### 3 Attendees

The following pie-chart comes from our main list of people registered for the full week of events. Since we gave free admission to workshop leaders and bursary people, plus the organisers and volunteers, the proportion of free-entry people is a fair amount. As well as full-week people there were also people who came for workshops or single evening events (shown in the table).

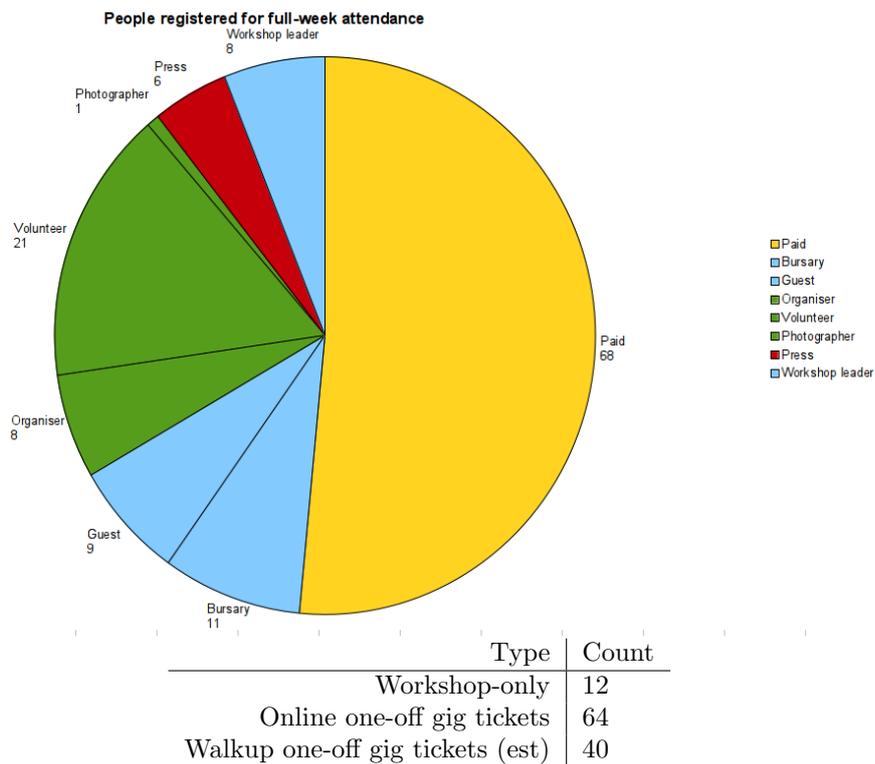
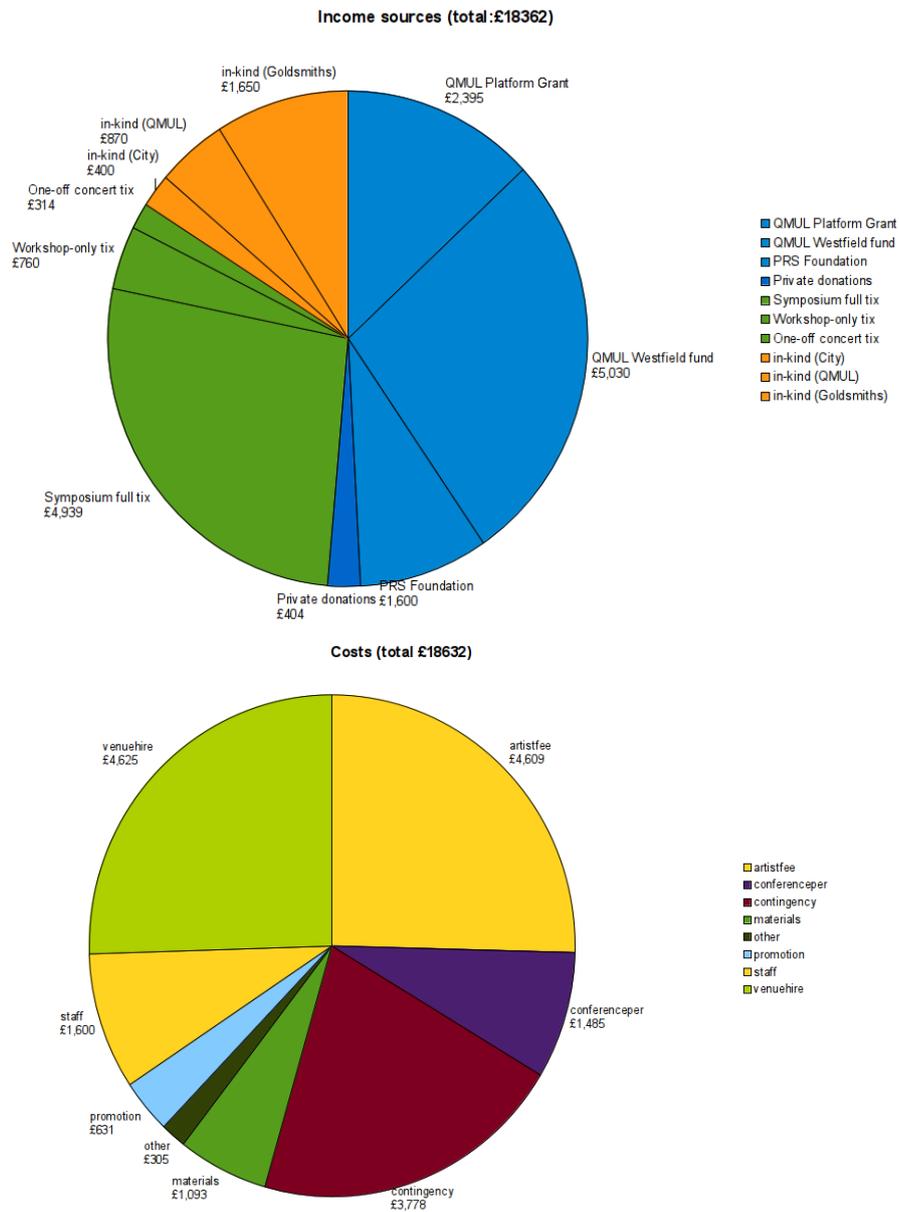


Figure 4: Counts of attendee by type. Pie-chart shows people registered for the full week, table shows those who weren't.

## 4 Finances



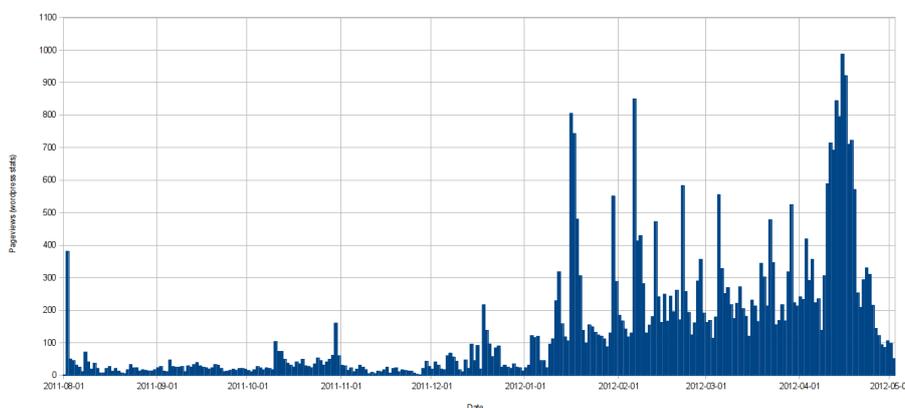
The figure shows the breakdown of costs and income by type. Note that the funding we secured meant that we didn't have to place a lot of the cost burden on the attendees, important to make it affordable for people. Also note that the organising team was entirely voluntary, working in their spare time and taking no fee. Many of the artists also participated for no fee. Thus it was a strongly community-supported event. If there was any profit-making then things would look very different, and it would be normal to pay artists.

There are plenty of budget changes and surprises along the way. It's common

to recommend keeping 10% of the budget as contingency, and this was certainly important for us. Firstly because many small costs crop up at short notice (power adaptors, taxis, etc). Secondly some large costs appeared/disappeared: for example, it seemed at one point we'd have to pay the university a substantial amount for wifi accounts for attendees (though in the end we didn't have to); we didn't manage to get sponsorship; catering costed more than originally budgeted. Plus some costs didn't materialise (no promotions company, despite our efforts) – that's why the contingency amount is rather large in our pie chart, as we recorded those un-materialised costs as contingency.

These are not the final costs, by the way: various payments are still being processed, and the contingency will be largely taken by those misc items.

## 5 Website stats



The plot shows website pageviews for each day. A couple of obvious features: the first early spike is when we did our call for participation, the increase during October is related to our deadline and extended deadline, and the general increase in mid-April (near the end) is of course when the event was actually going on. Some of the other spikes are:

- 2012-01-16 (806 views): Programme announced
- 2012-02-06 (850 views): Remix competition announced
- 2012-02-22 (584 views): (not sure why! Most referrals were from Facebook, and most-viewed page was remix competition.)
- 2012-03-05 (556 views): Live Algorithms concert announced
- 2012-03-29 (524 views): Remix competition reminder, & warmup gig video

The busiest day was April 15th (mid-Symposium) with 988 views. Total pageviews over all time were 38,876 (as of 2012-05-02). The most popular page was the homepage (11,161 total views); notably, the second most popular was the remix competition with 3,499 total views.

Other figures: the BBC news website got approx 250,000 hits for the “Cowell vs computer” news article, plus approx 10,000 hits for the live algorithms video coverage.

## 6 Credits

### Organising committee:

- Dan Stowell (lead organiser, conference chair, club chair)
- Matthew Yee-King (workshops chair, live algorithms chair)
- Robin Fencott (exhibition chair)
- Newton Armstrong (concert chair)
- Sonia Wilkie (programme editor)
- Nela Brown
- Nick Collins
- Dan Jones
- John Eacott

### Assistants:

Dave Meckin	Zhenchen Wang	Asterios Zacharakis
Steve Hargreaves	Ben Bengler	Sam Myer
Yading Song	Ireti Olowe	Doon MacDonald
Evan Morgan	Fabio Lattanzi Antinori	James Leahy
Louis McCallum	Francesca Zedtwitz-Arnim	Pedro Kirk
Philippa Law	Fiore Martin	Simon Emberton
Charles Celeste Hutchins	Duncan Menzies	Eleonora Oreggia
Jessica Dussault	Richard Flanagan	Dimitrios Giannoulis
Stuart Braines		

### Reviewers:

Newton Armstrong	Ronald Kuivila	Till Bovermann
Robin Fencott	Miguel Negrao	Nick Collins
Jost Muxfeldt	Tim Blechmann	Nela Brown
David M Cottle	Julian Rohrerhuber	Chris Jeffs
Josh Parmenter	Becky Stewart	Pierre Alexandre Tremblay
Alex McLean	Alberto de Campo	Thor Magnusson
Matthew Yee-King	Chris Sattinger	Fredrik Olofsson
Hanns Holger Rutz	James Harkins	Jan Trutzschler
James McCartney	Andre Bartetzki	Stefan Kersten
Daniel Jones	Tony Stockman	Sonia Wilkie
Kode Fine	Critex	Judge Rules

### Web design:

- Dan Jones

### Funders:

- Queen Mary University of London
- The PRS Foundation for New Music

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