

## **Return to Ritherdon: Incidental Rendition**

Nicola and I began our collaboration on *Incidental Rendition* by capturing the sonic environment within the factory. Listening to the recordings from our first visit in December, I was intrigued by the rich harmonies and interesting textures produced by the machinery. Initially, I aimed to use the recordings as raw material, and manipulate these into sounds that bare little resemblance to their original form, a well-established approach in electroacoustic composition. However, with Nicola explaining the notion of the “incidental person” in relation to her artist placement at Ritherdon (see Artist Placement Group), I began considering the various meanings of the term “incidental” in the field of music. In film scores, “incidental music” describes sounds that are used to produce a particular mood during a scene, with the sounds typically being non-diegetic, meaning not part of the on-screen environment or heard by the characters within it. In music performance, however, “incidentals” refer to all unintentional sounds produced while a performer interacts with their instrument, for example string slides on an acoustic guitar or key pressing on a saxophone. And although technically these can be considered errors, they make up an intrinsic part of each instrument’s sonic character, with skilful players able to creatively exploit incidentals during their performance.

The interpretations of the term “incidental” in music led me to reconsider my approach when treating the Ritherdon recordings. While the initial intention was to isolate specific sounds from the factory’s background noise, we then realised that this noise is the result of functions that are vital for the equipment’s operation during the manufacturing process, quite like an instrument’s incidentals. Moreover, the same noise also acts as incidental music, with the sonic environment of each location across the factory floor possessing a distinct character. The factory’s infrastructure such as extractor fans, voltage regulators, pneumatic actuators, and all other auxiliary devices, can be heard working in the background as required. Therefore, to isolate specific sounds from their background would end up removing the character of the environment they occupy. Consequently, to detach them from their environment would be to erase them from the manufacturing process that forms a central part of both Ritherdon’s operation, as well as Nicola’s creative process during her placement.

With this concept in mind, we decided to treat the recordings of each location as self-contained units of music, and combine them relatively unaltered within the composition. Ritherdon’s manufacturing process not only makes up the sound of the composition, but it also lends itself towards its arrangement. For the initial recordings, microphones were placed in close proximity to the factory equipment, as to capture sonic details that often go unheard while in the environment. We then used a field recorder to capture sounds while walking through the factory’s different areas. Our route followed the order of manufacturing, where sheet steel is processed into electrical enclosures. Us capturing the factory’s sonic environment while walking relates to the practice of soundwalks; this practice forms living compositions, where audiences experience them by moving through a space. Therefore, the arrangement of *Incidental Rendition* is a reflection of the manufacturing process. Our soundwalk introduces a performance element by bringing different sounds in focus according to the sequence we discovered them along our route. Some of the captured movements were planned, others the result of serendipity, with the final composition comprising of two separate soundwalks, performed as to capture the sounds produced during the different stages by which Ritherdon makes its products.

## Programme notes

*Incidental Rendition* is a sonic reflection of the Ritherdon factory at work. Composed for headphone listening, the piece presents the manufacturing process as a metaphorical symphony; the factory's tools and machines are the instruments, the people working in Ritherdon are the ensemble performers, the background noise is the reverberant concert hall resulting from the factory's architecture, and the order of the process is the conductor.

Our walk begins at goods in, where the sheet metal enters the factory through the roaring roller shutter performed by Danny P. We briefly pause at the entry to absorb the bustle of the delivery bay, until jolted by the alarming entry of Terry on the Lansing E15 moving a new delivery. Then we walk past Pete on the Masterplat Robopac who is gingerly enveloping a freshly assembled enclosure in its cellophane cocoon before it is sent on its way. Approaching the punching machine station, Jock is on the controls of the Trumpf Trumatic 5000R, heard slowly awakening, steaming and whirling while stretching its mechanical arm. With Jock retrieving the relevant programme from the Trumpf's memory, it begins its first solo with a sequence of calm yet complex percussive patterns. The punched blanks then move on to the press brakes, where Dawid, Aadam, Jason, and Harry jangle them in the Edwards Pearson PR100. The menacing roar of the Bosch GWS 880 follows, while Andy and Oggi grind the steel sheets, before they are rolled to Tony and Ross in the welding booths, who provide an electrifying performance on the Thermal Arc 400SP. Moving deeper into the factory, we reach "No man's land", an area of rare calmness and eerie stillness. No performers are present. All we can hear is the factory's heartbeat, the electricity regulator, with its minimalist pulses providing the whole operation with vital energy. Moving away from "No Man's Land", the calmness is broken by the ensemble of machines making up the paintshop, performed by Matt, Rhys, Filip, and Aaron. The quartet includes the clicking percussion of the overhead conveyor, the pressurised streams of the wash, and the compressed harmonies of the spray booth, while all are enveloped by the constant drone emanating from the stoves. The last piece in the process comes at assembly, where Pete, Paul, and Jan shape Ritherdon's products into their final form, all under the monophonic songs played on the Technika Digitalradio. Walking through assembly, we reach our starting point, where the Trumpf greets us with its second solo, a pounding crescendo of industrial-strength beats. Stunned by the thunderous performance, we are then soothed by the familiar sounds coming from the Masterplat Robopac, where Pete packages the latest batch of steel enclosures. We follow them out on the loading bay, sent out the same route they came in as sheet metal though Danny P's roller shutter.

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