

# times2arts

## Vote here for the shock of the new

**Tomorrow's music could be in the hands of Times readers, says Stephen Dalton**

**T**he stars above are alive with the sound of music, according to one nominee for this year's most ambitious and experimental music competition. Billed as a cross between the Turner prize and the Mercury Music prize, the New Music Award is one of the youngest such competitions in the musical calendar. With a cool prize pay-out of £50,000 it beats both the Turner and the Mercury in financial terms, too.

A celebration of innovation, the New Music Award covers every genre from classical to industrial, from stage musical to avant-garde sound installation. Former runners-up have included an oratorio for an antique fairground ride, an Afro-British folk opera and a nocturne conducted by the movements of bats. This year's shortlist is no less eclectic, with an astronomical symphony, a concerto for satellite and iPhone, and acoustic scientists pushing music beyond the frontiers of technology.

The biennial New Music Award was launched five years ago by the PRS for Music Foundation. The foundation, now celebrating its tenth anniversary, is an independent charitable offshoot of the Performing Rights Society.

The inaugural award was won in 2005 by the former Pogues member Jem Finer with his *Score for a Hole in the Ground*, an elegant piece incorporating landscape and falling water. In 2008, the prize went to Jane Grant, John Matthias and Nick Ryan for their *Fragmented Orchestra*, a dazzling musical network modelled on the human brain, which was connected via the internet from 24 different sites across Britain.

For the winner, that prize money is intended to fund their proposal from sketchy concept to full fruition over the year ahead. But even unsuccessful nominees from previous New Music Awards have gone on to be commissioned elsewhere, including an acclaimed collaboration between the beatboxer Shlomo and the classical pianist Anna Meredith. The foundation's goal is not simply to promote their own pet projects but to encourage a healthy and more widely accepted culture of musical innovation.

The next New Music Award winner will be crowned on September 16 at the Serpentine Gallery in London by a panel of judges that includes critics, composers, DJs and the Turner prize-winning artist Martin Creed. Meanwhile, for the first time, the decision-making process will also include a public vote. Readers can cast their vote for the award on the Times website or at the foundation's own homepage.



## The Top 5 new music candidates

### The Organ of Corti by Liminal

The composer David Prior and the architect Frances Crow have designed a remarkable mobile device, pictured above, that can block, redirect or "recycle" unwanted sounds. "The Organ of Corti is an instrument, but it's also a composition," Prior says. The organ is built from "sonic crystals" that can be tuned to block some frequencies while amplifying others. "The term crystal is somewhat disingenuous," Prior says. "It sounds a bit hippy-dippy but it's got nothing to do with that. This is more about cutting-edge acoustic science." Indeed, the sci-fi technology behind the organ could potentially be used to neutralise traffic noise, make nuclear submarines "sonically invisible" and even dampen earthquakes.

### SatSymph by Marc Yeats, Ralph Hoyte and Phill Phelps

A portable "satellite symphony" in the form of an iPhone app, which will beam down music and words from a GPS satellite, turning parks and public spaces into outdoor concert halls. "We are creating a completely new way of experiencing music, and a new way of composing," says Yeats, a Somerset-based composer and visual artist. "The user dictates how the events unfold via their movements, which are tracked by satellite. You could have 100 people all standing in different parts of the park, all having a completely unique experience, tuning and composing with the landscape."

### AroundNorth by Robert Jarvis

The sound artist Robert Jarvis was shortlisted for the 2008 New Music Award with his Echolocation project, which used flying bats in the composition process. This time he proposes a permanent installation generating musical sounds that reflect the size, brightness and movement of the stars above Armagh Observatory. "It is potentially a new way of interpreting scientific data," Jarvis says. "Music should touch the heart, but wouldn't it be interesting if it could also have different functions?"

### Automata Musica by Terry Mann

Another former shortlisted nominee for the New Music Award, the London-based composer and instrument maker intends to hand-craft a mechanical mini-orchestra inside a series of wooden boxes. Although he will programme these "automatic musical instruments" with his own pre-written score, Mann also wants the public to interact with

them, thus creating new compositions. "You may have a bunch of primary school kids coming in, and everything will be going off at once, creating a cacophonous row that may in itself sound absolutely marvellous."

### Battle of the Wordsmiths by Blue Hippo Media

The Birmingham-based film production company is bringing together rappers, beatboxers, musicians, storytellers and dancers to create a multimedia live spectacular that links West African Yoruba mythology with contemporary urban Britain. "It's based on one chapter of a book called *The Lyrical Kingdom*," says Rob Taylor of Blue Hippo. "There is a train of thought that suggests the roots of hip-hop and rap go back into African culture, in terms of verbal battles back and forward, so that is one theme. The other is the theme of drawing on ancient wisdom to resolve conflict. Not everything needs to be resolved with guns and knives."

To watch specially commissioned films about each of the shortlisted entries and vote for a winner, visit [thetimes.co.uk/music](http://thetimes.co.uk/music) or [www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward](http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/newmusicaward)

Voting closes on September 5 and the winner will be announced on September 16. The films will be shown free from July 12 to September 5 at: The Sage Gateshead, Gateshead; Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff; Watershed, Bristol; Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow; Roundhouse, London; Blackbox, Belfast; Broadway Media Centre, Nottingham; Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool; Cornerhouse, Manchester; Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon