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## Geeky get-together

**J**UST BEFORE CHRISTMAS I was lucky enough to spend a day in Mile End, East London, at the HQ of Queen Mary University's Centre for Digital Music. The occasion was the annual Digital Music Research Network one-day workshop (DMRN+4).

Presentations included a keynote by Vesa Välimäki describing, in terms even I could understand, how to make a synthesizer sound more like... a synthesizer; Nick Collins' musical exoskeletons (the musician of the future wears an ill-fitting mechanical suit, generating sounds with every move); Dan Stowell's stunning beatbox vocalisations (try going 'boom-boom-tish' into a mic next time you do a conference); some highly mathematical approaches to automatic music composition courtesy of Georg Boenn; and Panos Kudemakis' essential presentation on interoperability and metadata standards. Many of the algorithms behind some of these tools are tested in the annual Mirex (Music

## Soundbytes

The latest news  
in music retrieval



Information Retrieval Evaluation Exchange) contest. Stephen Downie took this opportunity to present an update on Mirex, showing how his team at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is using super-computing to make it easier for the community to test algorithms with their Networked Environment for Music Analysis (Nema). These insights into research, evaluation and practice were drawn together by Mark Sandler's 'Tools and Toys for Music Informatics and Musicology' introduction, discussing the Omras project, where researchers at Queen Mary, in close collaboration with Goldsmiths College's Department of Computing, aim to develop tools to

enhance music engagement. The real point of all this highly technical and well-respected work is to increase the value of computer tools in engaging with music, whether it concerns listening, searching, performing or studying. Omras tools such as the Sonic Visualiser and mHashup are at the forefront of the development field, enabling users to see 'inside' the music and search for music with similar sonic events to a seed song. DMRN+4 was not just a snapshot of the state of the art but also acted as a crystal ball, enabling us to get glimpses into the future of everyday music use. If one day you're able to make music by waving your arm around or pressing a few keys on your desktop, or find a piece of music from Africa with a section that sounds a bit like your favourite hook in a Britney Spears song, it's more than likely it will have been developed by research presented at one of these types of gatherings. Truly, the geeks will inherit the earth.



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