UK STARTUP & APHEX TWIN REDEFINE MUSICAL TUNING

UK-based ODDSound's collaboration with Grammy-winning electronic artist Aphex Twin seeks to evolve a fundamental musical component - the note.

- A new computer music technology, **MTS-ESP**, sets notes completely free.
- **MTS-ESP** challenges the dominant western tuning, giving musicians the tools to compose in alternative tunings and presenting new creative possibilities.
- **MTS-ESP** allows for fresh creative approaches to musical composition, enabling electronic musicians to define and change pitch at any moment even whilst notes are playing.
- Independent developers collaborate to empower musicians to access alternative tunings.

CORNWALL, UK - March 22, 2021. When young we're told that there are seven colours in the rainbow. As we grow we realise that this isn't true; the rainbow is a spectrum of colour, a chromatic blur, and we're completely used to visual artists utilising its variety. In music we're similarly told there are twelve equally spaced notes (12 Tones of Equal Temperament, or 12 TET for short). Again, we grow to realise pitch is also a spectrum, yet this notion rarely extends to the music we listen to because the industry has been firmly rooted in those twelve notes...until now. A collective of British musicians and software developers seek to challenge the tyranny of a de facto tuning system imposed on us all.

Although 12 TET has been a musical concept for millennia, its ubiquity is comparatively recent. Prior to mass manufacture of musical instruments the world was brimming with localised intonations, theories of tonality and tuning experimentation on the parts of composers. 12 TET enabled the industrialisation of instrument manufacture through standardisation, but the dawn of digital synthesizers in the 1980s ended the need for this conformity. In theory a synthesizer could be tuned arbitrarily, so after lobbying from Robert Rich and Carter Scholz the MIDI standard was extended to include specifications for changing tunings in 1992. Sadly that technology, known as MTS (MIDI Tuning Standard), never achieved broad adoption.

The constraints of 12 TET became increasingly apparent - pop hits often have similar melodies, leading to the all-too-common lawsuit and our ears have grown so accustomed to this single tuning we can find anything else discomforting (something TV and film composers have leveraged for decades now). Young musicians marvelling at world music such as Gamelan may wonder how such ethereal composition could be achieved, as often little is taught on the subject at western conservatoires or universities. Musical commentators started to ask the obvious questions - <u>have we run out of notes</u> and <u>is this dependency another vestige of western colonialism</u>?

> *"It has been long evident that composers have been taxing both the system and its instruments far beyond their capacities, and that the continued tyranny of Equal Temperament is leading to the degeneration of tonality...It would be healthy for us to realise fully that our instruments are exactly as poor as the system and habits of thought with which they evolved."*
> **Harry Partch**

Many musical mavericks and global musicians already knew the answer - there's a continuum of pitch, tonality is subjective and escaping the prison of those twelve notes can give music a whole new life. To this end developers Damon Hancock and Dave Gamble (of UK audio brand [DMGAudio](#)) hatched a solution - an easy-to-use system unlocking the whole pitch spectrum. It allows synthesizers to be tuned however one wishes and for tuning to be modified in real-time with no setup required. MTS-ESP was born.

Tuning enthusiast Richard D James (Aphex Twin) showed them his vintage Rhodes Chroma synth with custom firmware that enabled him to author new tunings by ear and then transfer them to other instruments. It was a laborious process, often taking hours to tune all the instruments on a recording, but it worked and was more musically intuitive than alternatives. These ideas were consumed into the project and soon a holistic, centralised approach to tuning emerged. EDM producer and coder Oli Cash (a.k.a. Far Too Loud) joined the team and a new company was formed, ODDSound, specifically targeting the boundaries of creative music technology.

There was one small problem left - whilst the system delivered solid results with existing hardware and software the perfect solution necessitated third-party developers to add code to their products. Adoption of new technologies in computer music has often been a slow process, spanning many years if not decades, so why would anyone integrate MTS-ESP prior to launch? Richard, already friendly with numerous synth companies, offered his support to the project. Now it has been opened up for anyone to use, with freely available code for developers and free software for users. MTS-ESP now enjoys one of the broadest adoptions on launch of any computer music technology in history, as well as a zero-cost entry point for everyone via the MTS-ESP Mini plugin paired with free software instruments.

"You now have 63,050,394,783,186,944-128 more frequencies to play with"
Richard D James

A plethora of compatible software, some free and some commercial, is available now from forward-thinking developers including :

- Audio Damage
- Audiorealism
- CWITec
- DMGAudio

- Expert Sleepers
- HY-Plugins
- Modartt
- Surge

- Soundyan
- TAL
- U-He
- Xfer Records

More are joining weekly and the possibilities for tuning don't end there either. The full MIDI Tuning Standard, mentioned earlier, is resurgent on modern hardware synths, notably those from Moog, Waldorf and Novation, offering a way to control the tuning of individual notes from the system. Expert Sleepers provide a way to retune analogue and Modular synths using Control Voltage (CV) with MTS-ESP integration in their "Silent Way" plugins. MTS-ESP can also be used for tuning in the virtual modular VCVRack and MAX/MSP visual programming environments via free modules provided by ODDSound.

The launch of the MTS-ESP ecosystem is a huge leap forward for electronic music creators that utilise the infinitude of alternatives to 12 TET. Veering from tuning norms has been costly, time-consuming and frustrating until now, but this technology remedies the issues whilst empowering users to explore a universe of approaches to tuning. Now independent developers have united to push music technology forwards perhaps we will see more such projects to come.

- The ODDSound MTS-ESP Suite is available now at oddsound.com for £79.99 (GBP).
- The ODDSound MTS Mini plugin is available now at oddsound.com for free.

ENDS

Accompanying logos, screenshots and pictures of Richard D James can be found here :
https://www.oddsound.com/press/ODDSound_Imagery.zip

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