

## The Secretariat under Dieter Christensen: New York, USA, 1981–2001

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Dieter Christensen (1932–2017) made a seminal contribution to ethnomusicology as a scholar, teacher, archivist, and ICTM's secretary general. A member of the IFMC/ICTM since the 1960s, he chaired the programme committee of IFMC's 20th Conference held in 1969 at the School of Scottish Studies in Edinburgh, United Kingdom. A year later, he was co-opted and later elected to the Executive Board, on which he served from 1970 to 1991. In 1975, he chaired the programme committee of the 23rd IFMC Conference held at the University of Regensburg in the Federal Republic of Germany. In 1981, he was appointed secretary general, an office that he held for twenty years. He was also editor of the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* from 1982 to 2000.

Throughout the two decades in which he served as secretary general, the ICTM was central in the lives of both Dieter and his wife Nerthus (née Karger, 1932–2003), trained in anthropology and library science, who served as the Council's executive secretary from 1981 to 2001. Driven by idealism and a firm conviction of ICTM's important mission in furthering music and dance research, and in developing dialogue between scholars throughout the world, but especially in countries that were divided by ideological differences and/or political strife, the Christensens worked tirelessly to serve the ICTM, developing personal and professional relationships with scholars in many parts of the world. Under Christensen's leadership, the IFMC/ICTM was transformed from an essentially European organization primarily concerned with folk music collecting, documentation, and preservation into one of the most prominent international organizations in music and dance research with a wide outreach and a robust financial situation.

The following retrospective on Dieter Christensen's engagement with the IFMC/ICTM draws on my experience as a Board member (1986–2001) and vice president (1997–2001) during the period that Christensen served as secretary general. In addition, as his former student, co-fieldworker in Oman, and co-author of the resulting monograph (Christensen and Castelo-Branco

2009), I witnessed his engagement with the Council and shared many moments of work and conviviality with the Christensens in which the Council was invariably a topic of discussion. I also consulted documentary sources such as the ICTM *Bulletins*, and the minutes of Executive Board meetings. Finally, the interview I conducted with Dieter at his home in Berlin on 28–29 January 2015 was also an invaluable source.<sup>1</sup>

### A biographical sketch

Dieter Christensen was born in Berlin where he studied the cello at the Staatliche Hochschule für Musik (1950–1953), and comparative musicology, historical musicology and anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin (1952–1957), where he earned his doctorate in 1957 with a dissertation on music in Papua New Guinea (Christensen 1957). As a boy, he lived through World War II and its aftermath. At the age of eleven, his parents sent him alone to Dresden, a city that was “believed to be the culture treasure that no one would dare to attack or destroy” (interview, 29 Jan 2015). His experience in war-torn Germany informed one of his priorities for the ICTM, namely to facilitate dialogue and collaboration with colleagues across the “Iron Curtain.” Following his PhD, his professional career was launched at the Phonogramm-Archiv of the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, where he held the posts of research assistant to his professor Kurt Reinhard, curator, and later director (1958–1971). Recalling this initial phase of his professional career, Dieter commented that he “enjoyed working with the recordings, including the old wax cylinders” (interview, 29 Jan 2015). At the same time, he maintained his connection to academia through his post as adjunct lecturer in ethnomusicology and anthropology at the Freie Universität Berlin (1962–1970). The knowledge and experience that he had acquired at the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv were instrumental in the next phase of his career at Columbia University's music

<sup>1</sup> Some of this interview was published, see Castelo-Branco (2015).



**Figure 1.** Nerthus Karger and Dieter Christensen during fieldwork in Macedonia, Yugoslavia. Klepa, summer 1956 (photo courtesy of Velika Stojkova Serafimovska).

department where he founded and directed a sound archive. From the late 1960s, Christensen was increasingly involved with the Society for Ethnomusicology, where he served as a member of the Council from 1967 to 1981, and the chair of the Publications Committee from 1968 to 1972. In 1970, he was invited as visiting professor to Wesleyan University and Columbia University where he was asked to evaluate the Laura Boulton Collection of Liturgical and Traditional Music and to advise the faculty in the early stages of a new PhD programme in ethnomusicology. In 1971 he accepted a tenured position at Columbia University as associate professor of music, director of the then Center for Studies in Ethnomusicology (presently Center for Ethnomusicology), and curator of the Laura Boulton collection. In 1975, he was promoted to full professor, a post that he held until his retirement to Germany in 2002. Trained in comparative musicology, Christensen became increasingly engaged with the anthropological orientation of ethnomusicology in the United States, which characterized the ethnomusicology programme at Columbia University that he headed for over thirty years.

Since his early student days, Christensen was an indefatigable fieldworker having carried out field research, in many cases jointly with Nerthus Christensen, among the Sami in northern Norway, in Macedonia (figure 1), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mexico, Oman (figure 2), as well as among Kurdish communities in Turkey, Western Iran, and the Kurdish diaspora in Berlin, especially following his move back to his native city in 2002.

## Engagement with the IFMC

Dieter Christensen's proactivity and vision for the IFMC were already evident when he acted as chair of the 20th IFMC conference held in Edinburgh in 1969. A motion setting a new norm for the organization of the IFMC's conferences was proposed by twenty-two delegates, amended by Christensen, and carried by a majority vote at the Extraordinary Meeting of the General Assembly held in conjunction with the conference. The motion empowered the programme committee to define the conference themes and formats which, up to then, had been set by the Executive Board. Christensen's amendment read as follows:

The undersigned move that the Programme Committee be empowered to devise topics for the themes and to consider new concepts in the organisational format of the forthcoming Conference in consultation with the Executive Board. (*BIFMC* 35, Oct 1969:34)

In the interview I conducted with Dieter in January 2015, he shared his perspective on the IFMC and his vision for the ICTM:

SECB: How was the IFMC at the time you joined?

DC: The IFMC at that time was an international organization and it had some history to it. But the standing of the IFMC in the musicological world was comparatively low. This was because it had a strong connection with folk music collecting and folk music research through Maud Karpeles in England and other countries in Europe, especially Switzerland and southern Germany. The collecting of folk music was still an



**Figure 2.** Dieter Christensen conducting fieldwork in Oman, probably in the late 1980s (photo courtesy of Carolyn Christensen).

issue. It was a matter of interest in particular after World War II when of course things had changed considerably through migrants coming in from Eastern Europe and so on. The whole scene had become mixed up and people became concerned with preserving the original folk ... And, I began to think about the state, status and perspectives of an ICTM as a global organization. There were some issues that were quite apparent: one was the lack of support from the German musicological side, the old fashioned musicological side. Secondly was the question of the relationship to SEM with the somewhat different orientation where the professional engagement of SEM in American academic musicology played an important role. (interview, 29 Jan 2015)

Christensen's perception of the IFMC expressed in this interview, and in other conversations, was shared by other scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. For example, in response to Bruno Nettl's interrogation to Alan Merriam as to why the goals that were set by SEM's founders could not be accomplished by the IFMC, Merriam's reply

involved his perception of the IFMC as specifically interested in music alone; the notion that folk-music scholars were interested in only a small segment of the music of any society; and the idea that the IFMC included a substantial practical component, that is, was in large measure a society of folksingers and dancers. (Nettl 2010:143)

The scholarly orientation that Christensen envisioned for the Council was already evident in the three main themes of IFMC's 23rd conference held in Regensburg in 1975 of which he was programme chair: "Improvisation: idea and practice (concepts and reali-

sations); Musical instruments and change (historical, social, aesthetic, organological); Recent trends in the study of orally transmitted music" (*BIFMC* 46, Apr 1975:3). The conference's focus on some of the then current issues was referred to by John Blacking in his "Summary of the Conference" as "stimulating and wide ranging [tackling] ... important theoretical issues as well as providing new factual information on a variety of musical traditions" (*BIFMC* 47, Oct 1975:21).

### Dieter Christensen as ICTM's secretary general

Christensen was appointed by the Executive Board as the IFMC's secretary general starting 1 January 1981, succeeding Graham George who had resigned after having managed the Secretariat from 1969 to 1980. The Secretariat moved from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada, to Columbia University in New York, USA, where it remained until 2001. The announcement was made in the IFMC's April 1981 *Bulletin* by the then president, Poul Rovsing Olsen:

Professor Graham George has resigned as our Secretary General and Professor Dieter Christensen—as requested by the Executive Board—has accepted to take over from January 1, 1981 ... I welcome Professor Dieter Christensen as our new Secretary General. There seems no doubt that the IFMC will benefit from his dynamic personality, his talent for administration, not to speak of his high-ranking scholarship in the field of ethnomusicology. (*BIFMC* 58, Apr 1981:3)

Dieter Christensen served as secretary general with four ICTM presidents: Poul Rovsing Olsen (1977–1982), Erich Stockman (1982–1997), Anthony Seeger (1997–1999), and Krister Malm (1999–2005). Particularly important for the Council's development was Dieter's friendship, intellectual respect, and collaboration with Erich Stockmann, president of the ICTM for most of Christensen's term as secretary general. In 1981 Nerthus Christensen was appointed as executive secretary, receiving a very modest salary. The Christensens worked as a team, devoting much of their time and energy to running the Council.

Christensen's main goal for the Council was to "transform the IFMC into a global organization with scientific goals, away from the limitations that come with the concept of folk music" (interview, 29 Jan 2015). He also saw the Council as an organization of professional scholars, steering away from the "broader and not always so academic orientation" (Nettl 2010:156) that characterized the early years of the IFMC. He worked towards these goals by widening the scope of the Council's activities, focusing scholarly debate on current themes in music research, and expanding the Council's membership and outreach in Europe, North America, and beyond. A crucial step in the transformation of the IFMC was the name change which was being considered since the 1970s. Christensen initiated the debate at the 54th EB meeting in Dresden "in view of the irrelevance of the term 'folk music' to many aspects of non-European traditional music with which the Council is concerned" (EB minutes, 54th meeting, 18–21 Aug 1978:§866). The proposal "engendered vigorous, serious and far-reaching discussion" (ibid.:§883). Two years later, at its 57th meeting in Tunis, the Board voted with a narrow majority to recommend to the General Assembly to change the Council's name to the International Council for Traditional Music (EB minutes, 57th meeting, 1–4 Jul 1980:§938). The historical name-change as well as other alterations to the rules were adopted by the majority of the General Assembly that was held in conjunction with the 26th IFMC conference in Seoul, Korea, on 27 August 1981 (*BIFMC* 58, Apr 1981:22–31). As a consequence of the Council's name-change, the *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* was renamed *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, starting with volume 13, published in 1981.

The name change engendered opposition, especially from scholars from Eastern Europe where the term "folk music" carried considerable ideological weight. In response to this opposition, the ICTM's president, Erich Stockman, underlined the advantages of the new name:

In the world of music, our new name is leading to a better understanding of our goals, capabilities, and potential functions. We find the ICTM surrounded by new expectations and tasks that constitute a challenge

for the whole membership and particularly for the Executive Board. Our place among the international music organizations in the UNESCO family is being redefined. The role of the ICTM in a variety of UNESCO-related projects is now under discussion, and the ICTM must rise to these new tasks (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:11).

In hindsight, Christensen interrogated the concept of "tradition" and its use in the Council's name:

DC: What is tradition? ... Indeed, I regretted when it was too late that I had not proposed "International Council for Musical Traditions," not "Traditional Music." But this was too late. For years, I considered whether I should have that changed again to "musical traditions," but it was not practical. (interview, 29 Jan 2015)<sup>2</sup>

One of the initiatives launched by Christensen a few months following his appointment as secretary general that widened the scope of the Council's activities, and focussed scholarly debate on current issues in music research, was a series of regular ICTM colloquia which ideally were to take place every other year, in alternation with the biannual ICTM conferences. These scholarly meetings were conceived to include a small number of invited specialists to debate a current issue in music and dance research. The first colloquium was held in May 1981 in Kołobrzeg, Poland, at the invitation of the Institute of Musicology of the University of Warsaw. It focussed on "Music and the language mode," a theme that had been debated in music research since the 1960s. Christensen headed the programme committee and Anna Czekanowska ran the local arrangements. The colloquium had forty-five participants from fourteen countries (*BICTM* 61, Oct 1982:17). It was described as an "undeniable success, an example to be followed" (*BICTM* 59, Oct 1981:8), pointing out that the "depth of understanding achieved during [the] discussions, across all barriers of language competency and scholarly ideologies, has encouraged the Board to establish such IFMC colloquia, each devoted to a specific theme and attended by a limited number of invited specialists, as a regular item on the IFMC meeting calendar" (ibid.:8, 14). Revised versions of the papers presented at the colloquium by Steven Feld, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Doris Stockman, and John Blacking were published in volumes 13 and 14 of the *Yearbook for Traditional Music*.

Following the success of the first colloquium, colloquia became a regular ICTM activity. During Christensen's mandate, sixteen colloquia were organized in different parts of the world on current topics, many resulting in key publications. In most colloquia, Christensen played a central role in proposing themes, programme and local arrangement chairs, and inviting scholars.

<sup>2</sup> A similar debate concerning the adequacy of the Council's current name had been ongoing for several years.

Christensen's "long-term vision" and his role in stewarding "the transition to the ICTM as a professional organization of ethnomusicologists and dance ethnologists" (Ricardo Trimillos, email, 10 Feb 2022) were also accomplished through ICTM's conferences in which he was proactive in proposing to the Board conference venues, themes, as well as programme and local arrangements chairs. The first ICTM conference with him as secretary general was held in August 1983 at Columbia University, Christensen's home institution, with Columbia professors Adelaida Reyes Schramm and Philip Schuyler as programme and local arrangements committee chairs, respectively. A landmark conference attended by three hundred delegates from thirty-nine countries (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:9), the main theme was "Music in urban environments," reflecting the growth of urban ethnomusicology pioneered by Adelaida Reyes in the 1970s. As she pointed out in the "editors preface" of volume 16 of the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* where several papers that had been delivered at the conference were published, "the conference was an occasion to raise questions about the Council's new role; as [the] 27th [conference], it was a celebration of the Council's established status" (Reyes Schramm 1984:viii). Furthermore, the papers published in the 1984 *YTM* deal with "certain areas of concern that have been previously peripheral if not extraneous: music in and of complex societies ...; technology as it affects how and what we study ...; the music of urban and urbanized populations ...; the processes by which music communicates and is communicated through changing physical and mental landscapes" (ibid.). The 1983 world conference reflected the Council's broad notion of "tradition" and its new emphasis on current issues and contemporary expressive practices.

Christensen regarded ICTM's cooperation with UNESCO as strategic to the Council's positioning and its development as an international organization. When he took office as secretary general in 1981, ICTM's relations with UNESCO were conducted through the International Music Council (IMC), a non-governmental organization constituted in 1949, of which the IFMC was a founding member, as an advisory body on music matters.<sup>3</sup> During the two decades in which Christensen was in office as secretary general, ICTM cooperated with UNESCO on several projects, programmes, and publications. In September 1983, he represented the ICTM on IMC's General Assembly held in Stockholm where IMC

expanded the responsibilities of the ICTM within the network of cooperative ventures that the IMC maintains. These expanded responsibilities concern the organisation of symposia in conjunction with all

UNESCO/IMC Rostra of traditional music; the development of an exchange and information service for broadcasting organisations (International Broadcasting Exchange for Traditional Music – IBEXTM), and the compilation of a comprehensive directory and inventory of archival resources on traditional music for the UNESCO Music in the Life of Man project (World Inventory of Recorded Traditional Music WIRTM). (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:7)

Music in the Life of Man (MLM) was a large-scale project that was carried out through IMC and sponsored by UNESCO. Spearheaded by the American musicologist Barry Brook, it aimed at publishing a comprehensive history of the world's musical cultures in approximately ten volumes authored by local scholars. MLM aimed at radically changing the existing knowledge on music history by "establishing a continuum and a connectedness between Western art music and all other musics – and between all music and the life of man" (Brook and Bain 1985:113). It was launched in 1980, and the ICTM was one of three scholarly organizations responsible for the project, the other two being the International Musicological Society and the International Association of Music Libraries. Christensen represented the ICTM on MLM's Board of Directors and several ICTM members were appointed as "regional coordinators" and authors (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:11). In 1988, following the ICTM's proposal, the project's name was changed to A Universe of Music – A History, and the Council became a co-sponsor of the project (see Malm's chapter on his presidency and *BICTM* 74, Apr 1989:5). However, the publication was stalemated, due to mismanagement, leading the ICTM to withdraw from the project in 1993 (*BICTM* 83, Oct 1993:10) and to a conflict between ICTM and IMC that resulted in the Council leaving the IMC in 1994 (EB minutes, 78th meeting, 25–26 Jun 1994:§2052; see also Malm's chapter on his presidency in this volume). A year later, ICTM was granted UNESCO's "C status" and thus could cooperate with UNESCO independently of IMC (EB minutes, 79th and 80th EB meeting, 3–4 Jun 1995:§2154), and in 1997 the Council was admitted as an NGO in formal consultative relations with UNESCO, a status that it still maintains. Krister Malm, then an ICTM vice president, recalls that he himself "did quite a lot of lobbying to achieve this" status which enabled the ICTM to apply for UNESCO funding for projects, publications, and meetings (see Malm's chapter on his presidency in this volume; see also *BICTM* 91, Oct 1997:7).

In addition to the MLM, the ICTM worked with UNESCO on other projects, a cooperation that was facilitated by the productive professional relationship that Christensen developed with Noriko Aikawa-Faure. Former director of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage unit, she was responsible for the ICH pro-

3 <http://www.imc-cim.org/about-imc-separator/relations-with-unesco.html>.

gramme since 1993 and was directly involved in the development of the Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity programme and the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (Aikawa-Faure 2009). ICTM's relationship with UNESCO was also facilitated by his understanding of "the Gothic bureaucracy of UNESCO and [his] skill in steering the IFMC/ICTM away from the benign control of the International Music Council and carving out a unique relationship for it as a body 'in consultation with UNESCO'" (Ricardo Trimillos, email, 10 Feb 2022).

On behalf of the ICTM, Christensen also coordinated the eliciting, evaluating, and editing of materials for release on the UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music of the World series of audio recordings between 1994 and 2001 (*BICTM* 85, 1994:24–25). He also coordinated the evaluation of applications to the UNESCO's Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001, a responsibility that was continued by Anthony Seeger, Christensen's successor as secretary general, in the 2003 and 2005 editions (Seeger 2009).<sup>4</sup> As Diamond and Castelo-Branco point out (2021:10), several ICTM members contributed to the debates leading to the configuration of the 2003 Convention (UNESCO 2003), including the discussion of the terminology used in the Convention. The involvement of the ICTM with UNESCO's 2003 Convention and other programmes has continued to be of great importance up to the present.

Another of Christensen's concerns was the Council's positioning vis-à-vis ethnomusicology and its professional organizations in North America, especially the Society for Ethnomusicology. In a seminal article published in *YTM's* volume 20 marking the Council's fortieth anniversary, he reviewed IFMC's historical relationship to "the Americans," which in the past were "perceived as a threat to the Council, and should never have been" (Christensen 1988:17). The closing paragraph of the article eloquently and succinctly describes his perspective on the relationship between ICTM and SEM, which are

both unique in their roles and they complement each other: SEM as the regional organization in North America that represents the interests of professional academic ethnomusicologists in the USA and Canada, and at the same time serves the field of ethnomusicology worldwide through its publications; and the ICTM, as the international organization in the domain of traditional music, including ethnomusicology that serves scholarship with an emphasis on the mutual recognition and understanding of diverse inquiring minds. (Christensen 1988:17)

Since the 1970s, ICTM attracted more scholars and students based in North American institutions as members and participants in the Council's management, as the Council moved "to an essentially professional organization" (Nettl 2010:144), offering a broad and diverse international perspective on music and dance research.

Intellectual property, especially as it concerns "traditional music" was also one of Christensen's and the Board's concerns. In fact, the ICTM spearheaded the debate on issues of ownership and copyright in ethnomusicology (Diamond and Castelo-Branco 2021:12). A "Statement on copyright in folk music" was published in the *Bulletin of the IFMC (BIFMC* 12, Sep 1957:25–27), recommending that the laws of copyright be applied to folk music. Two years after Christensen took office as secretary general, at the 62nd meeting of the Executive Board held in New York in August 1983, he introduced for discussion at Board meetings several tasks that had not been undertaken by other organizations and that the ICTM should pursue, including acting as a "pressure group to bring issues of intellectual property in oral tradition and traditional music to move again, since UNESCO/governmental attempts are now stalemated" (EB minutes, 62nd meeting, 13 and 15 Aug 1983:§1082). In 1989, an ICTM Commission on Copyright and Ownership in Traditional Music and Dance was appointed by the Board at its 71st meeting with Krister Malm as its chair. The Commission was formed taking into account the interest of WIPO and UNESCO in addressing copyright for different forms of "folklore" and the work leading up to UNESCO's 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (*BICTM* 75, Oct 1989:5; Krister Malm, email, 8 Jun 2018). It was charged with conducting a "complete survey of concepts regarding ownership in traditional music and dance as well as customs related to these concepts in different ethnic groups. The commission will also compile information on existing legislation and other practices concerning copyright for traditional music and dance in different countries" (*BICTM* 75, Oct 1989:5). The results were envisioned "as a source of information to governments, institutions, organizations etc. which are going to implement UNESCO's recommendation on the safeguarding of folklore and/or legislate on copyright for traditional music and dance ... and to contribute to increasing resources for traditional music and dance out of copyright money" (*ibid.*). The Commission distributed a questionnaire with the ICTM's *Bulletin* 76, published in April 1990, and received replies from twenty-nine countries. A report based on the results was conveyed to UNESCO (see Malm's chapter on his presidency). Music, ownership, and rights was also one of the themes of the world conference that was held in Canberra, Australia, in 1995 (*BICTM* 84, Apr 1994:4); articles by

<sup>4</sup> <https://ich.unesco.org/en/proclamation-of-masterpieces-00103>.

Hugo Zemp, Sherylle Mills, and Anthony Seeger focusing on the same theme were published in the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 28 (1996).

Dieter and Nerthus Christensen served the ICTM organizationally and intellectually in many more ways that can be enumerated in this chapter. Membership development and the expansion of the ICTM's World Network were of paramount concern. Membership increased in all categories from the 934 members reported in 1981/1982 (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:12) to the 1,427 members listed in 1999 (*BICTM* 95, Oct 1999:13). Communication with the membership was maintained regularly through the Bulletin, published twice a year (April and October). A membership directory (initially a list) was launched in 1982 and published and updated regularly (*BICTM* 51, Oct 1982:4). ICTM's first website was launched in 1997 through Columbia University's Center of Ethnomusicology (*BICTM* 91, Oct 1997:9). Liaison officers increased from 33 in 1983 to 41 in 1999, and national committees from 18 in 1983 to 21 in 1999 (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983; *BICTM* 95, Oct 1999, front and back covers). The growth and intellectual vitality of the ICTM is also reflected in the increase in study groups and in their diverse orientations: from five in 1983 (Analysis and Systematization of Folk Music; Ethnochoreology; Historical Sources of Folk Music; Music Archaeology; Music of Oceania) to twelve in 1999 (in addition to the aforementioned five, the following study groups were founded: Anthropology of Music in Mediterranean Cultures; Computer Aided Research; Maqām; Music and Gender; Music and Minorities; Music of the Arab World) (*ibid.*).

Much more can be said about the Secretariat under Dieter Christensen which ended with his and Nerthus Christensen's dramatic resignation at the General Assembly held at the 36th World Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2001 (see chapters by Anthony Seeger on his service as secretary general, and Krister Malm on his presidency). While Dieter Christensen could sometimes be uncompromising, his sharp intellect, his enthusiasm for the intellectual endeavour, his commitment to the ICTM, and his ever-present sense of humour were stimulating to many of those who worked with him. He made a major contribution to the ICTM's scholarly orientation, international presence, and impact.

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## Interview

Interview with Dieter Christensen, Berlin, 28–29 January 2015.