USING THE MARANTZ SOLID STATE PMD660 RECORDER (Basic notes for oral historians)

The Marantz is a 'solid state', which means that there are no internal moving parts (like the cassette tape or CD) and that it records digitally onto a Compact Flash (CF) memory card - the contents of which you then download onto a computer.

What's in PMD660 carrying box / bag?

1. The PMD 660 recorder - handy size, buttons that are easy to use.

2. AC lead to plug into the mains (two varieties depending on the type of mains supply). You can also use the AA batteries that are slotted in at the back. Batteries have the disadvantage that they run down, but the PMD has a very clear icon on its screen that highlights when the batteries are low. Batteries have the advantage that you are not affected by power surges or breaks (and see below in relation to tracking).

3. USB cord that enables you to connect PMD to your computer.

4. Audio cable that enables you to connect the PMD to other audio equipment such as a hifi system.

5. CD-ROM with various software you should not need for recording.

6. One 2GB Compact Flash (CF) memory cards.

7. Instruction manual. The manual explains every button and facility on the PMD. I'll just highlight key points.

Pre-settings - so you don't have to worry!

I've preset the PMD so you should not have to change the basic settings. You should record on *.wav* not .mp3 files (the latter condense the sounds) so the machine is set on PreSet 2 (wav. files recorded 48k using the internal microphone on the marantz). On this setting the 2GB memory cards will record about 2 hours and 56 minutes of interview. (using mp3 you can record ten times longer but at lower, condensed quality). The screen will tell you how much recording time you have left.

Date and time is also preset so this is automatically flagged on each recording track / file.

I've preset *recording level at manual* (so you can adjust manually - see below) - there is an automatic option which is not good for oral history because it raises record volume for passages that are intentionally faint!

There is a facility (see manual) whereby it is possible to preset automatic *'tracks'* in your recording (for example a new track every 5 minutes). In one sense this is very handy, as you can use it to locate sections of an interview very precisely. The problem is that each track is a new computer file, and when you download from the memory card to your computer you then have to deal with lots of small files. A second problem is that the tracks suggest non-natural breaks in the recording. The British Library has decided to record each interview session on a single track - so I have followed their lead and preset the PMD without auto-tracking.

Getting started - recording

Insert *memory card* into the slot at the facing / side of the PMD - you have to open a protective cover that opens down from the top - it's a bit stiff, but take care. If there is a memory card already in the slot you can use that - but note that if it has a recording on it you will have less recording time (see below on wiping the memory card!)

Plug in *AC power* lead on right hand side (rhs) - or just use batteries (in which case check the battery icon on LCD screen when you switch on Power).

Switch on *Power* (rhs).

When you are recording you need to turn off the PMD's own *speaker*. Turn down the volume button located on left hand side (lhs) away from you. If you forget to do this you will soon know because there is a terrible squeal.

The *LCD screen* on the top of the PMD shows recording time remaining and above that, the track number. The LCD screen can also be used for lots of other functions.

Press the *red REC button* to commence recording. The LCD screen will show time elapsed and remaining.

Use the adjacent ***REC PAUSE*** button to pause recording. Don't use the PLAY/PAUSE button. While in Pause mode don't unplug the machine (if using mains power) - apparently this will wipe out the track you have been recording. This is an argument for using batteries!

The green *record volume lights* at the front of the PMD will light up. The top set is the left microphone; the bottom set the right microphone. They should be bouncing merrily as you talk and should flash up to 0 but not into the OVER section on the right (where the light changes from green to red).

Use the *record level dials* (front right) to adjust microphones. One for each microphone. These are a bit fiddly, and can be used together or separately (for example if one person is more faint). Adjust so each set of the record volume lights stretch well into the green but not red. As you will be using the machine's own internal microphone it's important to position the Marantz machine as close to the person speaking as possible. E.g. no further than two feet away from the person.

Use **STOP** to stop recording - this will also create a new track when you recommence.

Playback

After you stop recording you can press ***PLAY/PAUSE*** to playback the recording. You will not hear anything unless you turn the speaker dial (lhs) back up - towards you! Use the track jump buttons to navigate to the start or the end of the track. If you then start recording again the PMD starts a new track after the last recorded track - so you can't record over a track by mistake.

Copying sound files into a computer

You shouldn't leave the sound files on the flash memory card if you are borrowing the machine (unless you use your own memory card). There are different ways to download files to computer.

Use *USB* cable as explained in the manual. Connect the USB cable between the PMD660 (lhs) and your computer. Turn on the Marantz machine and 'USB connecting' will appear on the screen and your computer screen should display the information box 'open files to view'. This is similar to transferring files between a digital camera and a computer. Follow instructions on your computer screen. You can delete, move, copy etc the files from the memory card to your computer folders. When complete turn off Marantz and dismantle usb cord.

Alternatively, you can buy a Card Reader for about £10 - you take the memory card out of the PMD, slot it into the Card Reader and plug this directly into your computer to download files.

Once you have downloaded the .wav file/s on your computer, you can rename them with sensible titles (eg Jones 2Jan2005.wav). You should then use the 'save as' facility on your computer to save each file in mp3 format (eg Jones 2Jan2005.mp3). These files use much less space on your computer and are appropriate for playback, to transcribe or for burning onto a CD to give to interviewee or the archives. The original .wav files are the high quality uncondensed archive copy and can be burnt onto a CD or DVD-R (the latter will take about 6 hours of /wav recording, much more than a CD. A CD will only hold about 1 hour of wav recording - 700mb).

You can use audio editing software (eg Real Time or Audacity) to take the computer user to any time section of each file, and in your content summary and / or transcript you can identify real time markers for ease of access.

You can also use free software available on the web (eg Express Scribe) as a transcription aid (it can slow or speed the sound to match your typing speed). And with editing software (such as Sound Forge, which is not free) you can edit the sound files for other usage.

Deleting tracks from the memory card.

Don't do this until you are absolutely sure the tracks are backed up on your computer. Then follow **instructions in the manual.**