



Since 1990, Jon Leidecker has performed appropriative collage music under the pseudonym Wobbly, aiming for extended narratives spun from spontaneous yet coherent multi-sample polyphony. Selected recent works are freely available online at <http://detritus.net/wobbly/>. He is currently curating for Ràdio Web MACBA the series entitled *VARIATIONS*, dedicated to the history of sampling music.

Q: After the learning process of curating the RWM series on the history of sampling music and sound appropriation, and considering the fact that you were already a specialist on the subject, which would be the main discoveries or revelations?

A: At first I wasn't planning on doing much in the way of narration, I just wanted to hear all the hall-mark pieces of collage music lined up in a row in chronological order. There are more of them than most people realise, and it's good to hear the more obscure pieces in context with the well known ones. But very quickly it became clear that these pieces illustrated a major transition in twentieth-century music, from the use of sheet music to the use of audio recordings as the definitive medium of a musical composition. We now take for granted that music is made of organised sound because we can hear those sounds, and the audience is now more familiar with what musicians can do with electronics to transform and control those sounds. And collage music has always been the most transparent illustration of what a composer can do to sounds in the studio - when you know what the original source material sounded like, you can more readily hear what the composer did to it. So collage and sampling music in a way is the clearest illustration of how the role of the composer has changed over the last hundred years, as he's learned the new tools afforded him by the recording studio.

Q: Can you reflect a bit more on the change of paradigm that's been explained both in your lecture and the first episode of the series... how the concept of authorship evolved and changed with the invention of audio recordings?

A: Well to a degree we inherited the concept of authorship from the paradigm of sheet music. For hundreds of years after the invention of written notation, people didn't even dare to sign their names to their compositions; it just wasn't done, it flew in the face of what the musically literate saw as the purpose of music, which was religious praise. Fast-forward several hundred years after that, however, and suddenly the 'composer' has become an immortal, the sole individual in the musical process to stick around, and his significance became weighted. Recorded music spreads that weight around by documenting all the other individuals involved in a performance, from the musicians to the audience to, increasingly, the producers and engineers who compose being used. Recordings once again begin to portray music as a social activity. At the same time, however, it separates the musicians from their audience, who increasingly begin to see their relationship as one of an isolated consumer. There's a struggle between the old paradigm of the individual creator and the potential of music to bring all of us together being acted out in the experience of recorded music.

Q: Any other significant and/or surprising discoveries from your research?

A: The thing that most surprised me the moment I put the second episode together, the one about the sixties, was the percentage of pieces that were world music collages. There was an explosion of composers who began making ensembles out of musicians from different cultures, finding harmonies and counterpoints out of people from different continents. It's a natural idea that arose around the same time as McLuhan's idea of the Global Village. The really interesting thing is how it anticipated the global fusion music that started happening in the eighties, where musicians from different cultures actually started getting together in person to try to find compatible ways to express these same harmonies. Often, you can use the recording studio to posit something unprecedented, and once people hear what those combinations actually sound like, they start to try to play like what they can now hear. It proves that things can happen. There are many examples in sampling and collage music that posited hybrids that didn't yet exist, like Disco, or were impossible to perform, like Drum and Bass. And once they existed, people learned to perform that music live. Collage at its best does hold a kind of utopian promise that has a tendency to actually come true, so it pays to ask for the best things from it.

Q: What's the next episode about?

A: The first three episodes covered the development of collages in art music, novelty singles and DJ sets, and episode 4 starts in 1980 and the birth of hip hop, which is pretty much the exact point where the collage aesthetic crossed over into a pure form of pop music and infiltrated the mainstream. It's also when the first commercial samplers were introduced, and the term 'sampling' actually comes into common usage. Samplers were first introduced as primitive drum machines, but by the mid-eighties they are being used everywhere in pop, either invisibly or overtly. While hip-hop continued to make inroads towards the mainstream charts, artists such as Negativland and John Oswald built self-conscious or critical collages out of the materials of popular culture, mapping out of the vocabulary, the effects and the meanings of what it means to be a sampling artist.

Q: But this explosion of creativity got stuck with the crude reality of the nineties...

A: The first wave of sampling lawsuits hit hard in the early nineties, and it fundamentally altered the direction that most artists like Public Enemy, the Beastie Boys and De La Soul seemed to be naturally following, towards a greater density and diversity of materials. It suddenly became unfeasible for artists using upwards of five to thirty samples in a single song to obtain licenses for each of their sources, and so the commercial model that triumphed was basically a simple retrench of the cover version - take one or two bars from a single song, amp up the drums, rap over it and your track is done. Even then, they'd run into trouble. There's no such thing as compulsory licensing for sampling - any artist or lawyer reserves the right to deny a use. By the late nineties, artists like Dr. Dre were actually hiring musicians to replay the loops he'd chosen, then simply clearing the new loop as a cover version. Artists more interested in juxtaposition and collage had all been driven underground, to the fringes. They stayed on smaller record labels until the internet emerged and solved the distribution problem, at which point, mash-ups of disparate pop songs began commanding millions of downloads, and much of the creative work in sampling music moved online, which is the forum we have to look to for the vanguard today.

1. Los *novelty singles* son un género discográfico típicamente norteamericano fundamentado en canciones-broma y pequeños sketches humorísticos musicales, que tuvo su apogeo en las primeras décadas del siglo XX [N. del T.]

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