

Curatorial > PROBES

With this section, RWM continues a line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view organised in curatorial series.

**PROBES takes Marshall McLuhan's conceptual contrapositions as a starting point to analyse and expose the search for a new sonic language made urgent after the collapse of tonality in the twentieth century. The series looks at the many probes and experiments that were launched in the last century in search of new musical resources, and a new aesthetic; for ways to make music adequate to a world transformed by disorientating technologies.**

Curated by Chris Cutler

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At the start of the seventies, Chris Cutler co-founded The Ottawa Music Company – a 22-piece Rock composer's orchestra – before joining British experimental group Henry Cow with whom he toured, recorded and worked in dance and theatre projects for the next eight years. Subsequently he co-founded a series of mixed national groups: Art Bears, News from Babel, Cassiber, The (ec) Nudes, The Science Group and p53 and was a permanent member of American bands Pere Ubu, Hail and The Wooden Birds. Outside a succession of special projects for stage, theatre, film and radio he still works regularly with Fred Frith, Zeena Parkins, Jon Rose, Tim Hodgkinson, David Thomas, Peter Blegvad, Daan Vandewalle, Ikue Mori, Lotte Anker, Stevan Tickmayer, Annie Gosfield and spectralists Iancu Dumitrescu and Ana Maria Avram. He is a permanent member of The Bad Boys (Cage, Stockhausen, Fluxus...), The Artaud Beats and The Artbears Songbook. Adjacent projects include commissioned works for radio, various live movie soundtracks, *Signe de Trois* for surround-sound projection, the daily year-long soundscape project *Out of the Blue Radio* (for Resonance FM) and p53 for Orchestra and Soloists.

He founded and runs the independent label ReR Megacorp and the art distribution service Gallery and Academic, is editor of the occasional sourcebook *Unfiled*, author of the book *File Under Popular* – and many articles and papers published in 16 languages. He was on faculty for a while at the Museum School in Boston and lectures irregularly on theoretical and music related topics worldwide. He has appeared on over 160 recordings.  
[www.ccutler.com/ccutler](http://www.ccutler.com/ccutler)

# PROBES #27.2

## Auxiliaries

The PROBES Auxiliaries collect materials related to each episode that try to give a broader – and more immediate – impression of the field. They are a scan, not a deep listening vehicle; an indication of what further investigation might uncover and, for that reason, most are edited snapshots of longer pieces. We have tried to light the corners as well as the central arena, and to not privilege so-called serious over so-called popular genres. In this episode typewriters invade every imaginable musical genre, while hoovers, bicycles, lightbulbs, foley work, the Eiffel tower and mail-franking are all conscripted into musical employment in quest of novel sonorities.

### 01. Playlist

[00:00 Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978]

[00:06 Frank Zappa, 'Bicycle', on the Steve Allen Show, 1963]

Here's a very young Frank Zappa on the Steve Allen show in 1963, long before the formation of the Mothers of Invention and, in spite of Allen's nervous undermining and Frank's inexperience, when it comes to the point, Frank still manages to make this work. On prime-time television. Two bicycles are played, first with an ensemble and a tape and then alone. The spokes are played with sticks, bowed and the handlebars blown into.

[01:39 John Zorn, 'Dictée' (excerpt), 2010]

'Dictée', a tribute by the musical polymath John Zorn to Korean-American author Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha, is a studio work that includes – alongside instrumental and spoken passages – a great deal of foley work, or sound effects – which include the crumpling of papers, the whirr of movie projectors, the sounds of birds, wind, water and, here, the rhythmic clicks of a typewriter.

[02:11 Robert Nasveld, 'Preparations for Coma' (excerpt), 1974]

Robert Nasveld is a Dutch pianist, noted as a specialist in the piano works of George Crumb, whose complete works for single piano he recorded in 1991. He is also a composer of both electronic and contemporary music in his own right and programming editor of contemporary music for NPO Radio 4. This short work is written for typewriter and bass clarinet.

[03:45 Ferde Grofé, 'Run of the News', 'Sob Sister' (excerpts), 1931]

Ferde Grofé (1892-1972) was an American composer, arranger, and multi-instrumentalist (piano, violin, viola, baritone horn, alto horn and cornet) who by the age of 15 was performing with dance bands. Between 1920 and 1932 he was Paul Whiteman's chief arranger, most famously, orchestrating George Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' and turning Gershwin's two piano version into the work as we know it today. He also worked extensively in film and television, as well as producing works for the concert hall, most of which are strong on Americana, the most famous being the 'Grand Canyon Suite', later visually interpreted by Disney in his eponymous 1958 documentary. In the four-part 'Tabloid Suite' – a sound picture of a tabloid newspaper – Grofé wrote both typewriters and sirens into his score.

[05:16 Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'Himmels-Tür' (excerpts), 2005]

Scored, for the most part, for a large, custom-built wooden door, a percussionist and a little girl, this work occupies the fourth hour of 'Klang' – a cycle of 24 chamber compositions, one for each hour, composed between 2004 and 2007 – when it was interrupted, three hours short of completion, by the composer's death. The idea for the work – and the door – emerged from a dream in which Stockhausen found himself at the gates of heaven, which were locked against him. The door itself, divided into six sonorous zones and made using six different kinds of wood producing twelve specific pitches controlled by density, was



[The Boston Typewriter Orchestra]

designed by Stockhausen himself in collaboration with the German cabinetmaker Jörg Richter. The work was commissioned by the Angelica Festival in Bologna and premiered in Lugo, in 2006.

**[06:06 The Boston Typewriter Orchestra, 'Floating Holiday' (excerpt), 2017]**

The band was founded by Tim Devin, who soon quit, leaving a pool of friends and roommates to take it forward – at least five of them assembling for any performance. At the last count, the ensemble consisted of a Hermes Rocket and various Remingtons, Underwoods and Smith Coronas, as well as an RC Allen and a Remette – the players variously being a mortgage banker, computational biologist, tech support officer, librarian, haberdasher, voiceover artist, archivist, software engineer and crossword puzzle writer. Their material evolves slowly and, for the most part, collectively: essentially, they rehearse in a loft, record their rehearsals and then select and perfect the parts that work. Sometimes the quirks of particular machines are the basis for a composition, sometimes somebody's suggestion. Many of the instruments are modified, with aluminum rolled around the platen, or PVC tubing replacing it. Or with strategic copper piping inserted and the end-stop bells replaced. But they are not amplified – except when they play in larger venues, as they did this year when they opened the 2017 Ig Nobel Award Ceremony. High praise indeed.

**[06:57 Randy and the Rest, 'The Vacuum', 1967]**

This little-documented band from Birmingham, Alabama, won a couple of competitions, released two singles – both in 1967 – and then was heard no more. This single, *The Vacuum*, has the same track on both sides – though one version is half a minute shorter than the other. They are probably the only garage band, though, to have released a single with a vacuum cleaner solo.

**[08:12 Wolf Vostell, 'Le Cri' (excerpt), 1990]**

Wolf Vostell (1932-1998) was a German painter, sculptor, installation artist, organiser of happenings and early adopter of video art. In the fifties he worked television sets and automobiles into street events and gallery exhibitions and, in the sixties, became an active member of Fluxus, organizing events for the group in Europe and participating world-wide in Fluxevents. This excerpt comes from a 'musical installation' he prepared for the Jean-Pierre Lavignes Gallery in Paris in 1990. It was for 90 performers and miscellaneous instruments, voices and everyday objects – including 20 television sets and, as heard here, 30 vacuum cleaners.

**[09:40 Joseph Bertolozzi, 'Tower Music' (excerpt), 2016]**

American composer (b.1959) of mainstream orchestral and ensemble music most celebrated for his architectural confections. This one – apparently some twelve years in the making – used only raw, untreated sounds recorded in various parts, and on various surfaces, of the Eiffel Tower, which were then painstakingly assembled into what amounts to timbrally highly-nuanced percussion music. It was his second foray into architectural territory, following the method initiated on his 2009 recording, *Bridge Music* – on which all the sounds had been derived from bits of the Mid Hudson Bridge, in New York State.

**[10:41 Bob Lens, 'Vacuum Cleaners' (excerpt), 1992]**

From a special edition of 8-cassettes packed in a wooden box compiled and released for the 30th Fluxus Anniversary, in Holland. The other side of Bob's cassette features alarm clocks.

**[11:58 Cyro Baptista, 'Typing With Oswald de Andrade' (excerpt), 2008]**

Cyro Baptista is a Brazilian percussionist, now resident in the U.S. who has worked with a vast array of people including Herbie Hancock, Yo Yo Ma, John Zorn, Paul Simon, Derek Bailey, Laurie Anderson, Derek Bailey, Gato Barbieri, Daniel Barenboim, Dr. John, Brian Eno, Carlos Santana, Sting, James Taylor and Michael Tilson Thomas. This from a solo CD released by Tzadik in 2008. José Oswald de Souza Andrade was a Brazilian poet and polemicist who spent most of his life in São Paulo and was one of the founders of Brazilian modernism.

**[13:09 Four Ghanaian postal workers (excerpt), 1975]**

This is not a musical performance or a recording made with musical intent, it's a field recording made in 1974 of four workers at the University of Ghana Post Office, canceling stamps. They do it this way because it's more fun. Two men sit opposite one another, each with a cancelling machine an ink-pad and a stack of



[Shelley Hirsch]

letters. They slip one letter at a time from the stack, ink the marker and stamp the letter. You hear the letter slapped onto the table rhythmically, several times (light thuds); the marker being inked (low, resonant sound) and the stamp being cancelled (high-pitched mechanized sound) – often one or all actions carried out more than once for each letter in the interests of rhythmic variety (no one is concerned with Taylorian efficiency). The third man clicks a pair of scissors – he’s not cutting anything, just adding to the rhythm, while the fourth whistles along – in this instance, a popular church hymn.

**[13:48 Michael Vorfeld, ‘Lightbulb Music’ (excerpt), 2010]**

The German percussionist and visual artist Michael Vorfeld has increasingly shifted his attention to sound and light performances that are centered on arrays of lightbulbs (of all types), controlled by switches, dimmers, relays and flashers both to illuminative and sonic effect; the sound produced by the bulbs is amplified using microphones and piezos. This is from his CD *Lightbulb Music* and features only standard lightbulbs.

**[15:27 Shelley Hirsch, ‘Sitting in a Room’ (excerpt), 2002]**

Born in Brooklyn, New York, the composer and performer Shelley Hirsch is one of the great experimental voices of our age, whose technique is impeccable (not shown off in this clip) and whose work has complex roots in psychology, Hollywood, glossolalia, mainstream song and mimetics. Here, however, she is musing – with a typewriter.

**[16:38 Mistabishi, ‘Printer Jam’ (excerpt), 2009]**

Mistabishi is one of the recording aliases of James Pullen, who was once a highly regarded producer of drum and bass, dub, rave and electronica and is now pretty much universally shunned. Before that, he made some interesting music using – as well as the usual resources – windscreen wipers and, here, printers as ur-material. In the same year in which he made this recording Pullen was accused of only pretending to perform at a live show while, in fact, he was just playing a pre-mixed CD. Scandal ensued and early this year, after he’d uploaded some ill-judged racist tweets, he was dropped by his label and became the subject of much more overtly vicious abuse himself. Sic transit Pot and Kettle.

**[18:10 Lisa Mezzacappa, ‘Ghosts (Black and White, Then Blue)’ (excerpts), 2017]**

American bassist, bandleader, composer, curator and producer Lisa Mezzacappa leads a number of groups, co-leads a few others and collaborates frequently in cross-disciplinary projects, mixing sound installation, film/video, sculpture and public music and art. She programs the annual JazzPOP concert series at the UCLA Hammer Museum and a live cinema series, Mission Eye and Ear, as well as having her oar in many other rivers: activist, organiser – and a fine musician. This is from a noir-inspired collection that uses foley and field recordings as well as acoustic instruments. In its making she walked the routes and neighborhoods where the Dashiell Hammet and Paul Auster stories she works around were written, making the field recordings as she went. Percussionist William Winant plays the typewriter.

**[20:12 Richard Lerman, ‘Travelon Gamelon’ (excerpts), 1990]**

The American composer, sound and video artist Richard Lerman studied with Alvin Lucier, Gordon Mumma, and David Tudor. His work largely explores the possibilities inherent in his custom-built contact microphones, which are unusually small and can be attached to – for instance – blades of grass – amplifying ants in motion. Like ‘Cartridge Music’, much of his work reveals the minute and inaudible, bringing into experience unfamiliar sounds. He works mostly in the field with installations and activities. This work – which dates back to 1980 – involves a flock of amplified bicycles and volunteer riders.

**[21:51 Ennio Morricone, ‘Svegliati e Uccidi’ (excerpts), 1966]**

From the Italian crime drama *Svegliati e Uccidi*, directed by Carlo Lizzani, based on the life of an Italian criminal known as *il solista del mitra* (the machine-gun soloist) Luciano Lutring. Also known as *Wake Up and Die, or I Kill for Kicks*, it won Lisa Gastoni a Silver Ribbon for Best Actress. The great score by Morricone covers a lot of ground, including some of the best typewriter scoring in the business. Composer, improviser, innovator, trumpeter and author of over 500 film soundtracks – as well as music for television and countless songs – Morricone (b. 1928) was also a member, between 1964 and 1980, of the experimental improvising and noise ensemble Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza.



[Josep Maria Balanyà]

**[23:48 Tristram Cary, 'Divertimento (performance tape)' (excerpt), 1973]**

Son of the novelist Joyce Cary, Tristram Cary was a British composer and a pioneer of electronic and tape music. Although he studied composition, conducting, piano, viola and horn he very early turned to electronics, building one of the first electronic music studios in the world. He went on to found Electronic Music Studios, London [EMS] with Peter Zinovieff and David Cockerell, which created the VCS3 – the world's first commercially available portable synthesizer. He built an electronic music studio for the Royal College of Music in 1967 – and another in his home, which he later transported to Australia when he emigrated in 1974. Cary wrote for orchestras, soloists and small ensembles as well as electronic resources – including a great deal of music for film, radio, theatre and television (*Doctor Who*, *Town Without Pity*, *The Ladykillers*, *Quatermass and the Pit*, *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb*, etc.) 'Divertimento' was commissioned by the typewriter and office machinery company Olivetti for the opening of their new training centre in Haslemere. It was scored for various manipulated Olivetti machines (on tape), 16 singers and a jazz drummer. This excerpt is from the performance tape, without the human accompanists.

**[25:36 In Spe, 'Typewriter Concerto in D Major' (excerpt), 1985]**

The Estonian godfathers of prog, founded in 1978, whose leader Erkki-Sven Tüür went on to become a celebrated classical composer. When he left in 1983 to study music full time, the band came under the direction of the more jazz-orientated Alo Mattiisen under whose leadership they released their 'Typewriter Concerto in D Major'. Mattiisen also became a celebrated composer – and national hero – writing music for Estonia's Singing Revolution.

**[27:24 Josep Maria Balanyà, 'Good Work for Bad Pianos op. 73' (excerpt), 1997]**

Catalan pianist, composer, singer, sound artist, improviser and lecturer who specialises in piano preparations of various sorts and multimedia projects. Here he announces his piano by first playing the same introduction on a typewriter.

**[28:09 'Music For One Apartment and Six Drummers', film short (excerpt), 2001]**

A short Swedish movie filmed like a heist in which six dubious characters break into a suburban house and play, in turn, the contents of the kitchen, bedroom, bathroom and lounge. This is the living room. Roughly in order of appearance: table, metal lampshade, rhythmical book and DVD throwing (throughout), armchair bass, vacuum cleaner-tube, on-off switch, vacuuming up rattling trinkets, television set (speech), record player and stamped-on squeaky toy. Written and directed by Ola Simonsson, who followed up in 2010 with a full-length movie, *Sound of Noise*, in which a tone-deaf cop tries to track down a group of guerrilla percussionists who play everything, everywhere.

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## 02. Notes

### On length and edits.

The purpose of these programmes is to give some practical impression of the probes we discuss. This necessitates for the most part extracting short stretches of music from longer wholes, which, of course, compromises the integrity and disrupts the context inherent in the original works. I have also, on occasion, edited different sections of a longer work together, better to illustrate the points under discussion. So the examples played in the programmes should not be confused with the works themselves. Wherever the word 'excerpt' appears after a title in the programme transcript, this indicates that what follows is an illustration, not a composition as it was conceived or intended. If something catches your ear, please do go back to the source.

For your listening pleasure I have, as always, been cavalier in editing the tracks together, overlapping them, making sometimes hard-to-spot joins, etc. – so, for the sake of clarity, I have prefaced each track with its start time.

### Notification

If you want to be notified when a new probe goes up, please mail [remegacorp@dial.pipex.com](mailto:remegacorp@dial.pipex.com) with subject: Probe Me.



[In Spe, 'Typewriter Concerto in D Major', 1985]

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### 03. Links

[vimeo.com/7939104](https://vimeo.com/7939104)  
[www.shelleyhirsch.com](http://www.shelleyhirsch.com)  
[www.bostontypewriterorchestra.com](http://www.bostontypewriterorchestra.com)  
[www.josephbertolozzi.com](http://www.josephbertolozzi.com)  
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[vorfeld.org](http://vorfeld.org)  
[www.public.asu.edu/~rlerman](http://www.public.asu.edu/~rlerman)

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### 04. Credits and acknowledgments

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake. Special thanks to David Petts, Jeff Breeze, Bob Drake, Lisa Mezzacappa, Jonas Vognesen.

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### 05. Copyright note

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