

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.
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PROBES #31.2

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 installment we look at the diversity of instruments extended out from the xylophone and their sometimes surprising use in almost every imaginable musical context.

01. Playlist

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

[00:05 BBC Radio 3, *Fifty Modern Classics: Pierre Boulez's 'Le Marteau sans maître'* (excerpts), 2011]

[03:00 P.O.N., 'Petenshi #2' (excerpt), 1995]

A short-lived Japanese ensemble featuring various underground luminaries that made one very interesting record, in 1995, from which this track is taken. Kumiko Takara is the vibraphone player and the piece was composed by drummer and percussionist Masahiro Uemura.

[04:14 Louis Frank Chiha, 'Aloha Oe (Farewell to Thee)', 1924]

Louis Frank Chiha was an early 20th century vaudevillian and xylophone player, born in 1891. On this 1924 Edison release, where he's credited as Signor Lou Chiha 'Friscoe' he plays the Leedy Vibratone Bells. Composition credited to Queen Lili'uokalani.

[04:39 George Crumb, 'Madrigals, Book I, Part II' (excerpts), 2011]

Born 1929 and still with us, the American maverick composer, George Crumb, spent a lifetime probing and inventing unconventional techniques, across a whole range of instruments. The 'Madrigals' are written for soprano, contrabass and vibraphone and are based on lines of poetry by Federico García Lorca.

[06:16 Christopher Deane, 'Mourning Dove Sonnet' (excerpts), 1983]

Christopher Deane is professor of percussion at the University of North Texas and principal timpanist of the East Texas Symphony Orchestra. He worked closely with composer George Crumb, both as a performer and consultant. 'Mourning Dove Sonnet' is one of the canonic vibraphone solo works that combines and integrates traditional and non-traditional performance techniques, bowing and bending – as well as containing a literal transcription of a mourning dove's song. Performed here by Doug Perry.

[08:20 Sun Ra/Walt Dickerson, 'Visions' (excerpt), 1978]

Sun Ra and lightening vibraphonist Walt Dickerson first worked together when Sun Ra was employed as a session musician on Dickerson's *Impressions of a Patch of Blue*, in 1966. Then they were commissioned by the Danish label Steeplechase to make this one-off LP, in 1978. All the titles were written by Dickerson, who also made one or two live appearances with Sun Ra's Arkestra at around this time.

[09:55 The Dead Kenny G's, 'Black Budget' (excerpts), 2011]

A jazz duo started by Mike Dillon and Erik Walton in Seattle in 2004. Mike is vibraphonist.



[The Dead Kenny G's at the Bear Creek Music and Arts Festival November 2010. Photo: Bill Small]

[10:54 Stelvio Cipriani, 'Daria's Father' (excerpts), 1979]

Highly prolific and successful Italian film composer, who filled a long career with Spaghetti westerns, crime and action movies. This is from *Un'ombra nell'ombra*, a cultish, sleazy demonic possession movie, released in 1979.

[11:45 The Gary Burton Quartet, 'Interlude (Shovels)', 1968]

From the 1968 album *A Genuine Tong Funeral*, featuring the celebrated and innovative American vibraphonist Gary Burton and written by Carla Bley. Born in 1943 and mostly self taught, Burton developed a pianistic four-mallet technique (rather than the usual two mallets), now known as the 'Burton grip', which was widely adopted by others in jazz and classical contexts. As a young man he worked with the pianist George Shearing, for whom he composed an album, before going on to form his own innovative quartet and working widely with the likes of Gato Barbieri, Chick Corea, Stan Getz, Stéphane Grappelli, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, B.B. King, Steve Lacy, Pat Metheny and Astor Piazzolla.

[12:25 Lionel Hampton, 'Flying Home' (excerpts), 1957]

As a teenager in the 1920s Hampton studied the xylophone and became a professional drummer, working in Dixieland style bands while privately practicing the vibraphone – at that time still a relatively new instrument. During a stint with Louis Armstrong in 1936, Louis encouraged him to make the vibraphone his main instrument. He did and was immediately recruited by Benny Goodman for a high profile quartet with Gene Krupa and Teddy Wilson. After that, he and the vibraphone were celebrities. In 1940 he founded his own big band which ran on and off for the next half-century – amongst the people who passed through his various bands were Charles Mingus, Wes Montgomery, Illinois Jacquet, Clifford Brown, Art Farmer, Quincy Jones, Stan Getz, Annie Ross, Art Tatum, Dinah Washington and Oscar Peterson.

[13:32 The Gary Burton Quartet, 'Fleurette Africaine' (excerpts), 1967]

Also from *A Genuine Tong Funeral*.

[14:28 Ron Forbes, 'Two Jubilee Pieces' (excerpt), 1979]

From a privately pressed record entitled *Cults Percussion Ensemble*, intended mainly for participants and friends – and as a calling card for an ensemble assembled by percussion teacher Ron Forbes in 1976; their only recording. The ensemble of eleven (ten female, one male; average age 14) was drawn from various Scottish schools, and included a young Evelyn Glennie. Jonny Trunk reissued it in 2012.

[15:26 Morton Feldman, 'Why Patterns?' (excerpt), 1978]

An unusual outing for a glockenspiel in a trio with flute and piano based, according to the author, on patterns perceived in an Anatolian carpet.

[18:23 Samuel Andreyev, 'Stopping' (excerpts), 2006]

Samuel Andreyev is a Canadian composer and author who studied cello, oboe and composition at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Ontario, then moved to Paris to study composition, analysis, orchestration and electroacoustics at the Paris Conservatory and at IRCAM. He currently teaches at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg. His compositions for chamber groups, orchestras and soloists have been widely performed and this piece for two vibraphones uses all available techniques, as well as exploiting the possibility unique to two instruments of setting the motors at different motor speeds to create interference patterns. So far, so academic. He has also made an invaluable series of podcasts mostly interviewing contemporary classical musicians but also, at invaluable length John French, Mark Boston, Art Tripp, Jeff Cotton, Bill Harkleroad and Van Dyke Parks.

[19:37 The Art Ensemble of Chicago, 'A Brain for the Seine' (excerpt), 1969]

A quartet, The Art Ensemble grew out of the legendary Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) in the late 1960s and, like the Sun Ra Arkestra, took a wide and experimental approach to both music-making and performance, integrating different musical styles and free improvisation, using a wide range of instruments, toys, percussion and other noise-makers – usually in costume and face-paint. Don Moye is (still) their percussionist.

[20:36 George Hamilton Green, 'Intermezzo Russe', 1919]

By the age of eleven, the American xylophonist George Hamilton Green Jr.



[Claude Vivier]

(b.1893) was being promoted as the “world’s greatest xylophonist”. He wrote a xylophone method book still in use today and many ragtime compositions, still in repertoire. He and his two brothers worked on the music for Disney’s first cartoons and he made many popular recordings for the Edison Company, of which this is one. He retired from performing in the late 1940s to become a successful cartoonist.

[21:06 Claude Vivier, ‘Pulau Dewata’ (excerpts), performed by the McGill Percussion Ensemble, 1977]

The highly original Canadian composer, Claude Vivier, studied at the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal, then in 1971 continued his studies, at the Institute of Sonology in Utrecht and in Cologne with Karlheinz Stockhausen. In 1976 he made a long a long trip to the East, which changed the direction of his musical thinking. ‘Pulau Dewata’ stemmed from that period and is a tribute to ‘Balinese music and the Balinese people’. ‘This piece’, he wrote, ‘is a succession of nine melodies of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 sounds. These modes may be directly reminiscent of Bali, but what I wanted to write was a piece imbued with the spirit of Bali: its dances, its rhythms and, above all, an explosion of life, simple and candid. The ending is the traditional signature of many Balinese pieces, a loving homage to this marvelous people from whom I learned so much.’ Like Schoenberg, he foreshadowed his own death: in the work he left unfinished a narrator, whose name is Claude, meets a young man and is stabbed to death. Exactly this happened to Claude Vivier, in Paris, in 1983.

[22:08 Steve Reich, ‘Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ’ (excerpts), 1973]

This 1973 composition by the American minimalist composer Steve Reich is scored for glockenspiels, marimbas, vibraphone, women’s voices and organ exploring two simultaneous rhythmic processes: out-of-phase duplication in the percussion, and counterbalanced shortening and lengthening of phrases between the percussion, organ and voices.

[23:19 Fred Lane, ‘Meat Clamp Conduit’, 1989]

An extraordinary collection of people from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, gathered for a concert in 1975 under the name Ron ‘Pate’s Debonairs. The programme featured anarchic renderings of big-band standards, noise improvisation and surreal songs with unconventional arrangements. It was a musical conception that had no nearby reference in the 20th century musical canon. Fourteen years later, their singer, Fred Lane, wrote and recorded *From the One That Cut You*, an album featuring many of the same people, that concentrated on the dark Las Vegas aesthetic.

[24:30 The Sauter-Finegan Orchestra, ‘When Two Trees Fall in Love’ (excerpts), 1954]

An American swing band that came late to the party, formed in 1952 by Eddie Sauter, who had studied at the Juilliard school, and Bill Finegan, educated at the Paris Conservatory – both of already experienced big-band arrangers. Their distinction was their eccentricity, both in their arrangements and in their use of unusual instruments, especially classical orchestra instruments. The band lasted for five years and made a lot of quietly unusual records. Not jazz, not lounge, not serious, not bachelor pad and not quite comic – though a little of all of these to bridge the strange aesthetic of the period and the curious status of the new hi-fidelity recording market. Joe Venuto plays the marimba.

[25:42 Olivier Messiaen, ‘Chronochromie, Antistrophe II’ (excerpt), 1960]

Music as coloured time. Olivier Messiaen, one of the greatest composers of the 20th century completed this, his second large orchestral work, in 1960, a tone poem that depicts a timeless world of mountains and birdsong, accomplished through analogy and the manipulation of musical durations. The entire work is constructed in more or less static blocks, inhabited by the low hum of bassoons and tubas, massive chords and transcribed birdsong in the percussion and woodwinds.

[27:37 Gong, ‘Percolations: Part 1 & 2’ (excerpt), 1976]

Gong was founded in France by Daavid Allen and Gilli Smyth in 1967 and, for some years, was one of the more original and convincing European bands of the



[Fred Lane *From the One That Cut You*, 1983]

period. This recording is from much later in their career, when virtually all of the original members had left and the new de facto leader, drummer Pierre Moerlin, had taken them into a more or less straight ahead jazz-rock direction. A classically trained percussionist, Moerlin was also a member of Les Percussions de Strasbourg.

[28:34 Louis Frank Chiha, 'Gypsy Love Song', 1924]

Another popular hit from Louis using the Leedy Vibratone Bells.

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 termegacorp@dial.pipex.com with subject: Probe Me.

03. Links

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04. Credits and acknowledgments

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake. Special thanks to Dave Petts, Bob Drake, Jonas Vogensen, Massimo Simonini, Evan Parker, John Coxon.

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