



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 #1.2

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 further at microtonal divisions based on equal temperament.

01. Playlist

01 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

02 Hymn to the Moon Goddess Nikkal

In the early fifties cuneiform tablets dating from around 1800 BC were identified that describe Babylonian scales and lyre tunings, one of which gives the score for a complete song. Professor Anne Kilmer and others interpreted these texts, with some agreement, and much disagreement. Kilmer and Richard Crocker made a boxed LP that documented their careful interpretation of the tablet and subsequent reconstruction of the instruments, tunings and performance of the song, of which this is an extract.

03 Iphigenia at Aulis. Performed by the Kerylos ensemble.

Reconstructed from Papyrus 510 (University of Leyden), one of a very few surviving Greek scores, this is from Euripides' last tragedy *Iphigenia in Aulis* written for the Great Dionysia in 405 BC. In his time, Euripides was celebrated as a composer of genius and this reconstruction – from a damaged papyrus – tries to approximate the original sound using reconstructed instruments and tuning. For more information about what is known and surmised of ancient Greek music see the excellent *Ancient Greek Music*¹ by Martin Litchfield West.

04 Mozart, 'Fantasie. D Mi', 1782. Performed by Enid Kathan

Played here in an early keyboard tuning – ¼ comma meantone – in which the harmony of the 3rds is perfectly consonant but wolf tones² appear elsewhere.

05 Ben Johnston, 'Suite for Quarter-tone Piano. Movement II: Etude' (excerpt), 1977. Performed by Phillip Bush

Ben Johnston studied with Harry Parch, Darius Milhaud and later John Cage. This piece, aside from quarter tones, explores serial technique and six-against-five polyrhythms. More information at: composers21.com/compdocs/johnstob.htm

06 Easley Blackwood, 'Gavotte, For guitar in 15-note equal tuning. Op. 33', 1970–80

Performed by Jeffrey Kust. See Below.

07 Easley Blackwood, 'Andantino, in 16-note equal tuning', 1970–80

Composer, author and music professor, Blackwood studied with Olivier Messiaen, Paul Hindemith and Nadia Boulanger. He has explored a huge range of unconventional equal temperaments – examples of the equal division of an octave into all the numbers between 16 and 24 are explored on his 1980 LP *Twelve Microtonal Etudes for Electronic Music Media*. He is also the author of *A Practical Musician's Guide to Tonal Harmony and The Structure of Recognizable Diatonic Tunings*. More information at: www.bruceuffie.com/blackwood.html

08 Edvard Grieg, 'Glockengeläute' (excerpt), 1891. Performed by Enid Kathan

Well Temperament. This is in Coleman 11 tuning, a recent system, following rules proposed by Werckmeister in 1681.



[Gregorio Paniagua, *Musique de la Grèce Antique*, 1978]

09 John Corigliano, 'Chiaroscuro' (excerpt), 1997. Performed by Andrew Russo.

John Corigliano (who studied with Otto Luening, Vittorio Giannini and Paul Creston) works as a rule in conventional Western pitching. This more experimental piece, for two pianos tuned a quarter tone apart, was specially composed for the Dranoff International Two Piano Foundation in Miami.

10 Julián Carrillo, 'Misa a S.S. Juan XXIII. Kyrie' (excerpts), 1962

See below.

11 Julián Carrillo, 'Violin Concerto No. 1' (excerpt), 1949

One of the great neglected masters of twentieth century music, Carrillo is seldom mentioned today, even in his home country (Mexico), in spite of his great innovations and relative visibility (in 1930, his *Sonido 13 Symphonic Orchestra*, in which every instrument could micro-divide conventional pitches, was supported and conducted in North America by Leopold Stokowski). Now, shamefully, there is no CD of his works in print and performances are rare to non-existent. Both these pieces are in simple quarter tones. More information at: paginas.tol.itesm.mx/campus/L00280370/julian.html

12 Scott Crothers, 'Quarter-tone Music for Orchestra' (excerpt)

A hard man to track down, Crothers has a strong online presence with many quarter tone, sixthtone and other microtonal pieces, but I have so far failed to contact him. Scott – please get in touch!

13 Mildred Couper, 'Dirge' (excerpt), 1937. Performed by Anatoly Larkin and Carl Witt

A student of Nadia Boulanger, Mildred Couper began her experiments with quarter tones in the late twenties. Performed on two pianos tuned a quarter tone apart.

14 Don Ellis, 'Turkish Bath' (excerpt), 1967

Largely overlooked today, Don Ellis was a leading power (and an inspiration) in the late sixties, working inside the etiolated and financially compromised world of big band jazz with highly eccentric additive rhythms, oriental instruments and various experimental procedures – Soft Machine, for one, were inspired to explore complex time signatures as a result of exposure to his work. Quarter tone tuning and writing, electronic distortion and Don's customised quarter tone trumpet feature. He was also the author of *Quarter tones: a text with musical examples, exercises and etudes* published in 1975.

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Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

¹ Martin Litchfield West, *Ancient Greek Music*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992.

² Wolf tone: a howling sound arising from close dissonances, common to medieval rational tuning systems. These combinations were therefore avoided.

02. Credits

Curated and produced by Chris Cutler. Engineered and mastered by Bob Drake at Studio Midi-Pyrenees, Caudeval, France. Recorded with Studio Projects C1 microphone, home-made mic preamp built by EM Thomas, designed by Yasushi Utsunomia and a home-made compressor by EM Thomas. Edited with a PC and Samplitude Pro version 12.

03. Acknowledgments

With thanks to Bob Drake and Jon Leidecker.

04. Copyright note

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