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

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

PROBES #7.2

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. This auxiliary investigates preparations for percussion and extended techniques for piano.

01. Playlist

00:00 Programme icon
Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

00:06 Henry Cowell, comments (excerpt), possibly in 1922
Taken from the spoken programme notes to Smithsonian/Folkways' Henry Cowell, *Piano Music*, 1993.

01:12 Tony Buck, 'Solo' (excerpt), 2007
Australian percussionist and improviser at work; in fact a composite quartet of himself at work, entirely acoustically, with drumheads damped with small cymbals, an mbira, a saw blade and some small bells.

02:30 Sergey Khismatov, 'Cymbals Quartet' (excerpt), 2009
For bowed cymbals. www.khismatov.com

04:00 Slapp Happy/Henry Cow, 'Excerpt From The Messiah', 1974
It's common practice to modify (or prepare) instruments in a recording studio in order to achieve fairly natural sounding but in fact highly designed and un-natural sounds. The drums here are taped and have cloths and books resting on them, the bass drum head is damped with a large metal ashtray, and the cymbals are muted with other, smaller, cymbals - and a chain.

05:06 Brian Ferneyhough, 'Bone Alphabet' (excerpt), 1991
A fiendishly difficult piece that doesn't specify the percussion instruments to be used but asks the player to use seven different sound sources that are distinct and capable of a wide range of dynamics. Each is given its own narrative, all of which are then scrambled and interspersed with one another, the player having to manage the resulting tangle like an acrobat.

**07:34 Helmut Lachenmann, 'Serynade' (excerpt), 1997-8**
Rarely performed because of its extreme difficulty, this piece works on two levels, one overt, the other covert; overtly, clusters are sounded in the conventional way while, covertly, other sets of keys are depressed silently that sound a countermelody of ghostly harmonic echoes induced in the open strings, which in turn are controlled through a highly complex set of routines for the pedals.

09:01 Emerson, Lake & Palmer, 'Take a Pebble' (opening), 1970
Introduction of a song written by Greg Lake in which keyboardist Keith Emerson uses the Cowell Aeolian Harp technique, silently depressing the keys and playing the strings with a guitar plectrum.

09:42 Henry Cowell, comments (excerpt), possibly in 1922
Taken from the spoken programme notes to Smithsonian/Folkways' Henry Cowell, *Piano Music*, 1993.
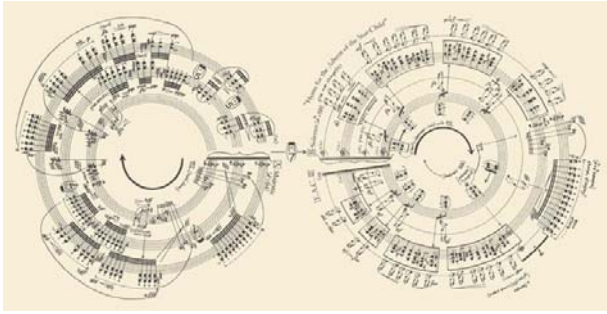
[George Crumb, "Twin Suns" Score]

10:20 Werner Heider, 'Fauststück' (excerpt), 1970
Literally, piece for the fist. Played here by the composer.

12:04 George Crumb, 'Twin Suns – Gemini' (excerpt), 1972
The master, more explorations inside the piano.

14:19 Stephen Scott, 'Minerva's Web' (excerpt), 1985
Ten players around one grand piano with threads and miniature bows.

16:15 George Crumb, 'Music of Shadows (for Aeolian Harp) Libra', 1972

16:40 George Crumb, 'Ghost-Nocturne: for the Druids of Stonehenge (Night-Spell II) Virgo', 1973
A great deal of dexterity is required to play this piece which involves a lot of hand string-damping and the manipulation of two glass tumblers to pitch-bend while, on occasion, vocalizing and – from a standing position – still negotiating complex pedal work.

18:40 Rick Long, tenor bowed psaltery, tune busked by Long, 2010
The psaltery is a venerable instrument of the zither family, with its roots at least in ancient Greece, and known in its familiar form from the early Middle Ages. The bowed psaltery is a recent adaptation built to a similar pattern. This one has thirty strings and is being played with two bows.

20:19 Cor Fuhler, 'MP' (excerpt), 2009
Piano with all manner of preparations and ebow. Cor Fuhler is a Dutch improviser, composer and instrument builder.

23:07 Horatiu Radulescu, 'Astray' (excerpt), 1983/4
For Sound Icon – that's the piano on its side, played with threads - and six saxophones

25:17 George Crumb, 'The Phantom Gondolier (Scorpio)' (excerpt), 1972
For which the pianist has to wear thimbles on two fingers with which to moderate the strings – and, at points, to sing.

28:12 Bob Ellis, 'Roscoe' (excerpt), 2010
A highly unorthodox autoharp technique that eschews chordal playing for picked and strummed fiddle melodies. Played on a modally tuned mini-autoharp.

29:19 Programme icon
Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

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.

Notification
If you want to be notified when a new probe goes up, please mail rermegacorp@dial.pipex.com with subject: Probe Me.

03. Credits

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake.

04. Acknowledgments

With thanks to Tony Buck, Sarah Cahill, Bob Drake, Charles O'meara, David Moss, Maggi Payne, David Petts, Keith Rowe, Bill Sharp, Andrey Smirnov and Robert Zank.

05. Copyright note