



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 #10.2

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 wonders what the human voice can't do.

01. Playlist

00:00 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

00:05 Britney, 'Girl Pig Squeal', YouTube post, 2008

00:34 Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, 'Halloween Spooks' (excerpt), 1962

In 1959, Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks, who had already set texts to jazz compositions decided to try to replace all the parts in the Count Basie band with voices – a choir a different singer assigned to each instrument. Annie Ross was drafted in to help coach them. It didn't work, but the three of them realised that by multi-tracking (a relatively little-used technique at the time) they could do all the parts themselves. Success kept them together and, adding a rhythm section, they transcribed – and wrote words for – jazz instrumental compositions, and – more unusually – solos.

01:45 Ken Nordine, 'Looks Like It's Going To Rain', 1957 (excerpts) with part of 'Anytime, Anytime', 1957

American voiceover and radio artist Ken Nordine began to record his own texts, some dark – some humorous, many a disturbing combination of the two – set to music, in these cases by the Fred Katz group, but also using sound effects, electronic effects and studio processing in 1957, in what became known as Word Jazz albums, though that hardly does them justice. One-of-a-kind.

04:46 Chris Mann, 'Watching Words Change Meaning' and 'Any Questions' (excerpts), 2001

An Australian composer, poet and performer, resident in New York since the eighties, who worked with Cage, Gaburo, Lockwood, Buckner, Polansky and others.

06:26 Tom Thum, beatbox live at TED talk in Sydney (excerpt), 2013

For solo voice in real time, using a microphone but no other electronic aids.

07:37 John Cage, 'Song Books', sung by Cathy Berberian (excerpt), 1970

In 1970 Cage was commissioned to write two sets of songs for Cathy Berberian and Simone Rist. The I Ching determined that there would be ninety different solos requiring some fifty different methods of composition and a wide range of techniques, many more theatrical than musical. "The best form of government is no government at all" paraphrases Thoreau's *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*. The performer should raise "either the black flag of Anarchy or the flag of the Whole Earth" before singing it.

09:51 The Trashmen, 'Surfin' Bird' (excerpt), 1963

The Trashmen were an American surf rock band. This famous single was released in 1963 and got to No. 4 on the Billboard Hot 100. It was a combination of two R&B hits by The Rivingtons: 'Papa-Oom-Mow-Mow' and 'The Bird's the Word'. Although The Rivingtons successfully sued for plagiarism, it's this record and not theirs that is remembered.



[Maja Ratkje]

11:01 Vinko Globokar, 'Corporel' (excerpts), 1984

Vinko Globokar was a Franco-Yugoslavian ex-jazz trombonist turned contemporary composer who worked extensively with improvisation and extended techniques. *Corporel* is officially a percussion piece in which the performer uses his or her own body to produce sounds, some of which involve vocalisation.

11:34 The Mills Brothers, 'London Rhythm', 1967

"No musical instruments or mechanical devices used on this recording other than one guitar", as it said on the first 1934 recording by the group. The bass, tuba, brass section, cornets and muted trumpet are all sung. An impromptu trumpet imitation (substituting on the spot for a lost kazoo) had won the four brothers a talent contest in the twenties and they went on to work up a whole programme in which they sang the band as well as themselves. In a long career they were immensely successful, recording over 2,000 songs and selling of 50 million records.

13:49 Juxtavoices (excerpt), 2013

A large choir of mixed trained and untrained voices based in Sheffield, who perform structured but pitch-free pieces arranged and finalised through improvisation, in rehearsal.

14:57 Roy Hart, 'A Personal Journey' (excerpt), 1968

From a recording made in 1968 on a revox in an empty squash court, pressed by the Roy Hart Theatre as a 7" single in an edition of 100 copies.

16:41 Lambert, Hendricks & Ross, 'The King' (excerpt), 1958

18:49 K-Space, 'K-Kosmos' (excerpt), 2006

An improvising trio formed formed in 1996 (in Tuva) by English multi-instrumentalist Tim Hodgkinson, Scottish percussionist Ken Hyder, and Siberian percussionist and throat singer Gendos Chamzyryn.

20:46 Spike Jones & His City Slickers, 'William Tell Overture' (excerpt), 1947

Under the cover of comedy the late, great Jones and his confederate musicians explored all manner of extended techniques and unorthodox applications without anybody particularly noticing.

21:19 Spike Jones & His City Slickers, 'Hawaiian War Chant' (excerpt), 1946

22:25 Spike Jones & His City Slickers, 'The Jones Laughing Record' (excerpt), 1946

23:18 Oscar Brown, 'But I Was Cool' (excerpt), 1960

Oscar Brown had begun writing texts for jazz instrumentals some years before Jon Hendricks, but was better known for his original compositions, many of which were political, satirical and highly theatrical (he also wrote a number of plays and musicals).

24:11 Maja Ratkje, 'Insomnia' (excerpt), 2002

Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje is a Norwegian singer. This is from her first solo CD.

25:40 The Mills Brothers, 'It Don't Mean a Thing' (excerpt), 1967

27:17 Tiny Tim, 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips' (excerpt), 1968

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



[The Mills Brothers]

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

03. Credits

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

04. Acknowledgments

With thanks to Bob Drake, Philippe Glandien, Bill Sharp, Dave Petts, Chuck O' Meara, Chris Mann, Nick Shimmin and Jon Rose.

05. Copyright note

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