

## 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

### PDF Contents:

[01. Playlist](#)

[02. Notes](#)

[03. Links](#)

[04. Credits and acknowledgments](#)

[05. Copyright note](#)

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 #24.2

## 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 follows a variety of toys as they strut their stuff on rock stages, movie soundtracks, concert halls, galleries and recordings.

### 01. Playlist

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

[00:09 Lexa Walsh interview (excerpt), 2009]

Made in Ljubljana by Slovenian news media while Lexa was there on an artist residency at the Museum of Transitory Art.

[00:57 Carl Reinecke, 'Kinder Symphonie Op.239' (excerpts), 1897]

Born Danish, in Altona – which later became German – Reinecke began composing at age of seven, making his first public appearance at twelve. After moving to Leipzig, he studied with Mendelssohn, Liszt and Schumann and became Court Pianist for Christian VIII, in Copenhagen. Then he moved to Paris, then Cologne – where he taught at the conservatory – continuing to move around taking a series of high profile jobs, before retiring to concentrate on composition. He published some three hundred works. His toy symphony follows an established tradition and incorporates quotes from various other works.

[02:05 Pascal Comelade, 'Dali's Car' (excerpts), 1994]

French performer, composer and arranger who started working with electronics in the seventies before specializing in toy instruments when he established the Bel Canto Orquestra in the early eighties. He is responsible for a large and impressive body of recordings, virtually all of which employ toys. This is his version of Don Van Vliet's classic instrumental.

[02:49 Toychestra, 'Bollyshag' (excerpts), 2002]

Formed in 1996, Toychestra fell into working with toys while working on a commission from a women's festival of experimental music in San Francisco. They started out playing conventional instruments but soon found toys more interesting. At first they composed by improvising, formalising the bits that worked. They have continued to work and tour, in one form or another, ever since.

[04:48 Martin Klapper/Roger Turner, 'Krach!' (excerpts), 1998]

A Czech composer and filmmaker, now resident in Denmark, Klapper is both a musician and a visual artist who works mostly in the fields of collage, assemblage and mixed media. In musical contexts he generally surrounds himself with toys and everyday clutter. He's worked with a long list of improvising musicians, but perhaps his most successful duo has been with the immensely inventive and innovative British percussionist Roger Turner, whose list of accomplishments is too extensive to detail here.

[06:03 HK Gruber, 'Frankenstein!!' (excerpt), 1976-7]

Heinz Karl Gruber is an Austrian composer, conductor, bass player and singer, a leading figure of the so-called Third Viennese School. His 'Frankenstein!!' – a 'pandemonium for chansonnier and orchestra, after children's rhymes by H.C. Artmann', was premiered by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, in 1978 – conducted by Simon Rattle, with Gruber himself as the vocal soloist. Of the many toys that feature in the work he wrote: 'Artmann's demystification of heroic



[Judy Dunaway]

villains or villainous heroes finds a musical parallel in... the persistent alienation of conventional orchestral sound by resorting to a cupboard-full of toy instruments. However picturesque or amusing the visual effect of the toys, their primary role is musical rather than playful – even howling plastic horses have their motivic / harmonic function’.

**[06:52 Sugarconnection, ‘Untitled track’ (excerpts), 1994]**

When long-time German collaborators Frank Schultz and Axel Otto met the American toy virtuoso Anna Homler in 1993, they quickly found they shared a penchant for sitting in cafés eating cake – hence the name they adopted when they started to work together. Anna and Axel both used toys, Anna exclusively.

**[08:01 Pascal Comelade, ‘El Misteri del Triangle del Vermut’ (excerpts), 2009]**

**[09:25 Warren Burt, ‘Three Inverse Genera’ (excerpt), 1989-90]**

Warren Burt is an extraordinarily prolific American-born composer best known for text-based or electroacoustic music and installational sound art. He is now based in Australia. Tuning forks were the basis of early toy pianos and here Warren uses them in their raw state – it’s one of many pieces he made with tuning forks – this is for four players, each with a set of tuning forks pitched to a 19-tone system. It was recorded in a barn so you may hear some external bush noise.

**[10:55 Kyle Gann, ‘Charing Cross’ (excerpt), 2007]**

Kyle Gann is an American professor of music, critic, composer and a leading champion – and historian – of the so-called maverick fringes of contemporary music. His own work tends to the microtonal, employing just-intonation and often involving electronics. He is also much concerned with the exploration of polymetrics – by way of loops, ostinati and isorhythmic extrapolations that move in and out of phase – and he utilises rhythmic techniques derived from hopi, zuni and other Native American musics. In short, he’s an experimentalist and a prober. ‘Charing Cross’, he writes, ‘moves among chords based on the 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th harmonics, as well as on the tonic and on 15/14 (a virtual 17th harmonic, though actually slightly more exotic). Using software that let me add microtones freely as I went along, I ended up with 39 pitches to the octave. The opening bass line started ringing in my head as I was sitting on a bench at the Thames near the Charing Cross underground station in London, and I commenced composing the piece on a napkin at the closest outdoor Italian restaurant’.

**[12:12 Colleen et les Boîtes à Musique, ‘A Bear Is Trapped’, 2006]**

Colleen, aka Cécile Schott, is a French composer and performer, now based in Spain, mostly associated with electronic or ambient music. Her 14-track EP Colleen et les Boîtes à Musique began life as a radio programme for the Atelier de Création Radiophonique de France Culture, for which she took the opportunity to work exclusively with music boxes, mostly antique – and some large enough to play, like mbiras, with the fingers. The ambiguous and nuanced signification of music-boxes on film soundtracks was an important inspiration – and in the radio version she uses evocative snatches of film dialogue, unfortunately absent in the recorded version, for copyright reasons.

**[14:01 Rhian Sheehan, ‘La Boîte à Musique’ (excerpt), 2013]**

Rhian Sheehan is a music producer and screen composer from New Zealand responsible for copious scores for mainstream films, television shows, documentaries, advertising and 360° Full-dome Planetarium shows. He has also made albums of atmospheric instrumental music. This track is from one of them.

**[15:45 Judy Dunaway, ‘For Chorus With Balloons’ (excerpt), 1999]**

Judy Dunaway is an American composer, improviser and creator of sound installations. Between 1990 and 1995 she mostly played guitar and sang with the Evan Gallagher Little Band before, in 1995, deciding to concentrate her energies on the balloon – an instrument last revived in the sixties and then forgotten again. It became her main instrument and she became its main exponent with over 30 balloon works now in her catalogue. Here she makes the most of simultaneous vocal glissandi in which you can hardly tell the singers from the balloons.

**[16:53 Ricardo Arias and Jim Denley, ‘Untitled’ (excerpt), 2011]**

Ricardo Arias is a Colombian improviser, currently living in New York, who plays what he calls the bass balloon kit – which includes a very large latex balloon. He



[Maciunas Ensemble]

is Associate Professor at the Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá. Jim Denley is an Australian wind-player and improviser.

**[18:51 Pascal Comelade, 'Sequences Païennes. Séquence 1' (excerpt), 1979]**  
An early production in which Pascal uses layers of plastic toy saxophones.

**[19:40 John Zorn, 'Enoken' (excerpts), 1985]**  
Here's another stalwart of the classical toy symphony – the bird call – in fact a whole range of them here, put to a rather more non-literal use by composer and virtuoso saxophonist, John Zorn, in the mid eighties when he was using bird calls as an integral part of his improvising set-up.

**[21:22 Toychestra, 'Sittin' Pretty', 2002]**

**[21:59 Frank Pahl & Klimpereï, 'Ladies Kisses' (excerpt), 2001]**  
Frank Pahl is a Michigan-based musician and composer, who works in several styles, including 'toy pop', or music made with toys.

**[23:46 Pierre Bastien, 'Mysteriana' (excerpt), 1988]**  
French composer and instrument builder and member, in the late eighties, of Pascal Comelade's Bel Canto Orchestra. In 1987, he decided to dedicate himself full-time to his growing orchestra of Mecanium – musical automata made with Meccano parts and powered by gramophone turntables or electric motors to play a wide variety of percussive and stringed instruments. These are usually accompanied in performance by a human player (or players), but are also often set up as installations on their own. Here Pierre plays the cello while the Mecanium take care of piano and drums.

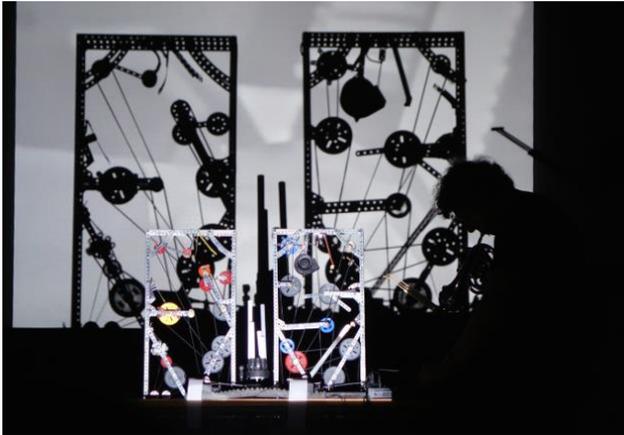
**[25:38 Maciunas Ensemble, 'Blowing' (excerpt), 1993]**  
The Maciunas Ensemble was founded in 1968 by three Dutch musicians, academics and sound artists: Paul Panhuysen, Remko Scha and Jan van Riet. They didn't rehearse or perform pre-conceived pieces, though they often listened to, and discussed, recordings of their previous improvisation before playing their next. Each session was recorded and their instrumentation often consisted of whatever was at hand. Panhuysen is quoted as considering their method akin to the oral tradition that powers folk music. For 'Blowing', bottles seem to have been to hand.

**[26:39 The Wackids, 'Killing in the Name', 2017]**

This French 'covers' trio from Bordeaux play toy instruments *with attitude*. For years they worked street festivals, bars, private parties and schools until, in 2009, they launched a programme spanning fifty years of classic rock history called, of course, *World Tour*. This brought them to larger stages – with the same toy instruments, now amplified. Their very dry humour, executive precision, exaggerated rock demeanor – and clear, clever, arrangements – have kept them in work ever since. This is their version of Rage Against the Machine's 'Killing in the Name'. And, since you ask, that strange high-pitched whistle-like instrument is an otamatone – a Japanese toy electronic synthesizer developed in 1998 that looks a little like a thin, miniaturised, white saxophone.

**[27:59 The Bottle Boys, 'Billy Jean' (excerpt), 2014]**

In September 2005, at a party at the Musicology Department of Copenhagen University, a few well-oiled musicians decided to rehearse for bit in a room with some half empty beer bottles and then entertain the room with a rendition of 'Lemon Tree', by Fool's Garden. Thus encouraged, they went on to refine the process – tuning the bottles and taping them together (like pan-pipes) and assigning different notes to different players. In 2006 they took their music to the street and, after three hours found themselves disproportionately richer. So instead of getting their deposits back on the bottles, they went home and arranged and practiced some more music. After a while they were booked for a corporate gig by Royal Beer – and a performance on national Danish television followed. Since then they've toured, put up youtube videos, played in Hong Kong, Malaysia and America, made more beer and soft drink commercials and done a bunch of corporate gigs and television performances around the world. All it took was a bit of bottle.



[Pierre Bastien]

[29:12 Pierre Bastien, 'Caravan', 1988]

That's Pierre on cornet, valve trombone, cello and organ and the Mekanium playing the mbira and angklung.

[30:52 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.

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.

---

## 03. Links

[motamuseum.com/category/residency](http://motamuseum.com/category/residency)  
[www.toychestra.com](http://www.toychestra.com)  
[www.kylegann.com](http://www.kylegann.com)  
[colleenplays.org](http://colleenplays.org)  
[www.judydunaway.com](http://www.judydunaway.com)  
[www.tzadik.com](http://www.tzadik.com)  
[www.pierrebastien.com](http://www.pierrebastien.com)  
[thebottleboys.com](http://thebottleboys.com)

---

## 04. Credits and acknowledgments

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake. With thanks to: Lexa Walsh, Peggy Monchaux, Pascal Comelade, Pierre Bastien, Anna Homler, Frank Schultz, Judy Dunaway, David Petts, Philipp Broder Jørgensen, Cecile Schott.

---

## 05. Copyright note

2019. All rights reserved. © by the respective authors and publishers. Ràdio Web MACBA is a non-profit research and transmission project.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders; any errors or omissions are inadvertent, and will be corrected whenever it's possible upon notification in writing to the publisher.