

## Curatorial > INTERRUPTIONS

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.

With this new series we make the most of the vast musical knowledge of the artists and curators involved in the Ràdio Web MACBA project, to create a series of 'breaks' or 'interruptions' in our Curatorial programming. In à-la-carte-music format, our regular curators will have carte blanche to create a purely musical experience with only one guiding parameter: the thread that runs through each session must be original and surprising. This series begins with *Pastoral V.2*, a 60 min DJ session curated and mixed by Jon Leidecker.

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Jon Leidecker was born in 1970 in Washington D.C. to two physicists. Since 1990 he has performed appropriative collage music under the pseudonym Wobbly, aiming for extended narratives spun from spontaneous yet coherent multi-sample polyphony. Selected recent works are freely available online: <http://detritus.net/wobbly/>

# INTERRUPTIONS #1

## Pastoral V.2

*Pastoral V.2* is a layered 60 minute DJ set, which underlines the history of those classic works of electronic and Musique Concrète which sought to mimic and extend the voices and sounds of our pastoral landscape.

### 01. Introduction

The emerging medium of electronic music found its way to a wider public audience in the 1950's, accompanied by descriptions of the sounds as inherently unearthly, fantastic, or cold and inhuman. These associations were partially encouraged by the dissemination of the medium as sound effects for science fiction films and television shows, as spearheaded by Louis and Bebe Barron in their score for the film *Forbidden Planet*. But electronic musical instruments also possessed the ability to closely emulate and extend the voices of the animal world to a greater degree than any acoustic musical instrument. A gated tone oscillator or untempered synthesizer gives a player a better chance at creating melodies that sound like birdsong than any violin or flute in history, save perhaps a recording of a flute that's been sped up several octaves. *Pastoral V.2* is a layered 60 minute DJ set curated to underline the history of those classic works of electronic music which sought to mimic and extend the voices and sounds of our pastoral landscape, an approach which could be moving closer to the heart of the medium's inherent potential than the more commonly held perceptions of these sounds as expressions of the inhuman or alienated aspects of industrial culture.

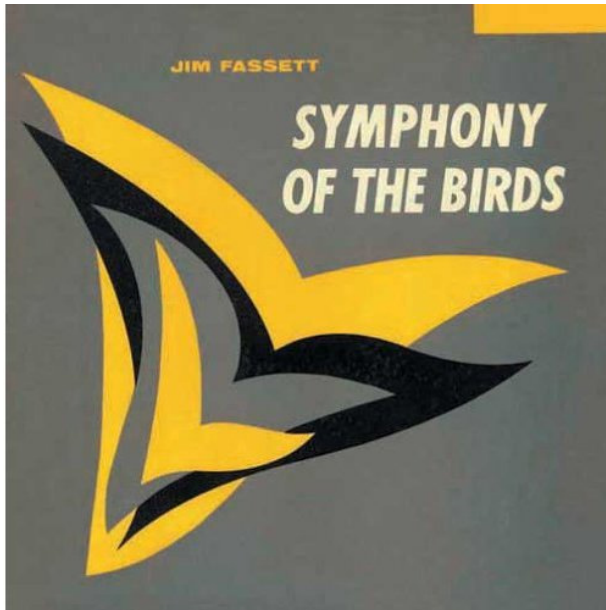
### 02. On 'Pastoral V.2'

By Jon Leidecker

#### The beginnings: Pierre Schaeffer and Louis and Bebe Barron

In 1949, a year after his 'Études de Bruits' established the genre of Musique Concrète, Pierre Schaeffer's 'La Flute mexicaine' took a recording of a simple improvisation on said instrument and layered it with reverb and varispeed tracking. The very instant Schaeffer fades in the recording at twice its original speed, it begins to resemble birdsong. The following year, Schaeffer composed 'L'Oiseau RAI' for Italian radio, taking a recording of actual birdsong and playing it back at half and then quarter speed, and surely enough, the slowed trills reveal a recognizable tune, at first seemingly played on a flute, then sounding like the efforts of a human whistler. Schaeffer was the first to experiment with using the tape recorder as a means to shift the listener's experience to a different time scale that rendered aspects of animal expression more comprehensible.

Louis and Bebe Barron are critical figures in electronic music. Bebe's 'Heavenly Menagerie', dating from 1950, is probably the first piece of electronic music composed in the United States, and would have certainly been used for this mix on the basis of the title alone if it had ever seen a commercial release (the vast archive of recordings of the Barrons' early experiments remains in the garage of Louis' second wife, inaccessible to archivists). The title underlines Louis' interest in Cybernetics as defined by Norbert Wiener, the study of information flow and organization in both animal and machine systems – the differences as well as the similarities between them. Wiring electronic oscillators together, and routing their outputs back into their inputs in various ways, the Barrons designed self-playing electronic feedback instruments that would generate sounds that would seemingly expressively evolve with a will of their own. The result were instruments that the Barrons would interact with more than control. The sounds were as unpredictable as the circuits were unstable, and indeed, sometimes the feedback would overload to such an extent that the circuits would reach critical mass,



[Jim Fasset *Symphony of the Birds*, 1960]



[Louis and Bebe Barron]

burning out with spectacular death cries – these electronics were as mortal as any other voice. Their work on the sound design for the legendary 1956 science fiction film *Forbidden Planet* is as filled with soundscapes suggesting gardens teeming with alien life as it is with overt sound effects for spaceships taking off, or industrial power generators running amok. But the visuals of the film proved to have more of an associative impact on the way the sounds were perceived than the lifeforms audibly dwelling within them.

Jim Fasset's meticulous Musique Concrète tape editing for his late 50's work *Symphony of the Birds* prefigures traditional modern keyboard sampling in many ways. Released a few years after the horrific 1955 christmas novelty single 'Jingle Bells' by the Singing Dogs, but with far more of an ear for the inherent abstraction in birdsong, Fasset edited brief notes and melodies out of recordings of various species, and then used razor blades and magnetic tape to conform them into traditionally western musical forms, varispeeding the bird 'notes' into equal temperament melodies & harmonies. But in the more evocative moments, once again the birdsong is slowed down to a human scale of time to reveal idiomatic melodies beyond easy transcription, and layered into textures that although surreal, still have a clear connection to the natural world.

#### Improvements in Recording Technology

The 1960's saw a gradual improvement in recording technology, allowing composers to retain higher degrees of fidelity while manipulating & transforming their source materials. Musique Concrète experiments such as 'Capture éphémère' by Bernard Parmegiani and 'Altisonans' by Karl-Birger Blomdahl had greater degrees of convincing realism available to them for their soundscapes. Oskar Sala used his ancient Mixtur-Trautonium to create the sound design for Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film *The Birds*, but the newly emerging Buchla synthesizer also naturally seemed to lend itself to the clicks and whines of insect communication in the works of Morton Subotnick and Pauline Oliveros.

In 1970, sound recordist Irving S. Teibel initiated his commercially successful and wildly influential 'Environments' series of field recordings on Atlantic Records. Each album side offered a 30 minute long excerpt of ambient 'natural sound' with titles such as 'Psychologically Ultimate Seashore', 'Optimum Aviary' or 'Dusk in the Okefenokee Swamp'. Dozens of copycat releases of 'natural' field recordings followed in the wake of this series – unedited, natural sounds made available to the listener on the same vinyl format usually reserved for musical compositions, narrowing any apparent perceptual difference between them. And in 1972, Wendy Carlos leveraged the success of her platinum selling *Switched-on* albums of classical music performed on the Moog synthesizer by having Columbia Records release the 90 minute long *Sonic Seasonings*, each side of the two record set evoking the sounds and sensations evoked by each of the year's seasons. Field recordings of birds and insects mingle freely with completely synthesized simulations of the same, and the few traditional melodies that do emerge are usually mixed in a support role, continually drawing the listener's attention back to the natural soundscapes in the foreground. These highly visible releases on major record labels paralleled R. Murray Schaefer's writings on the concept of Acoustic Ecology and his founding of the World Soundscape Project, which in turn reflected the slowly increasing public visibility of the Environmental Movement, and its influence on the creation of legislation for environmental standards in the US such as the Clean Water Act & the Endangered Species Act through the 1970's.

By the late 60's, David Tudor had transitioned away from a successful career as the foremost pianist of modern music in the mid-20th century to electronic composition. Following a similar interest in Cybernetics to that of Louis and Bebe Barron, in whose studio Tudor had helped Cage realize his early tape compositions in the early 50's, David Tudor quickly identified feedback as the intrinsic voice of electronic music, the one new sound that had not existed before the invention of the speaker and the microphone. Yet, just as Barron had discovered, this new sound seemed like an expressive voice, a living sound that shared many characteristics with insect calls and birdsong. I'd have a tough time trusting any list that attempted to name the 10 enduring masterpieces of electronic music that failed to include Tudor's *Rainforest*, an installation piece



[Rachel Elkind & Wendy (née Walter) Carlos]



[Cluster]

in which dozens to hundreds of mundane objects such as chairs, lamps, oil barrels, metal sheets, etc., are outfitted with small transducer speakers and microphones, creating a loop that causes the objects to resonate in loud sympathy with the circuits' feedback. The resulting panorama suggests a chorus of voices being freed from our inanimate industrial environment, leading us back towards a closer engagement with what we might otherwise assume ourselves hopelessly estranged from.

#### The Natural Avant-Garde

If the early pieces on this mix are safely distinguishable from their animal origins, by the time we come to pieces by Wendy Carlos & Luc Ferrari, it can become difficult to confidently distinguish between the unaltered recordings of bird and insect calls and their transformations. Improvements in microphone design allow us to record and hear sounds that are too quiet for the unaided ear to pick up, revealing natural vocal sounds & vocabularies that, to our astonishment, are already somewhat familiar to us from the previous sixty years of research accomplished by electronic music. The location recordings of Douglas Quin in *Antarctica*, of Anna Ramos & Roc Jiménez de Cisneros' ultrasonic recordings of city bats' sonar signals in Barcelona, and of André-Jacques Andrieu & Bernard Dumortier's isolated recordings of individual insect calls are, on first impression, so close to familiar works of electronic synthesis by David Tudor, James Tenney, Iannis Xenakis or even the occasional abstract moments on early Kraftwerk albums as to convince the listener that they are listening to electronic music instead of an unaltered acoustic recording. In the final third of this mix, unaltered recordings of animal communication are juxtaposed with purely synthesized works explicitly to challenge such preconceptions. This is less done out of a desire to deceive than a way to prompt a higher and more alert state of listening.

#### Nature, Sound Art, and the Sacred

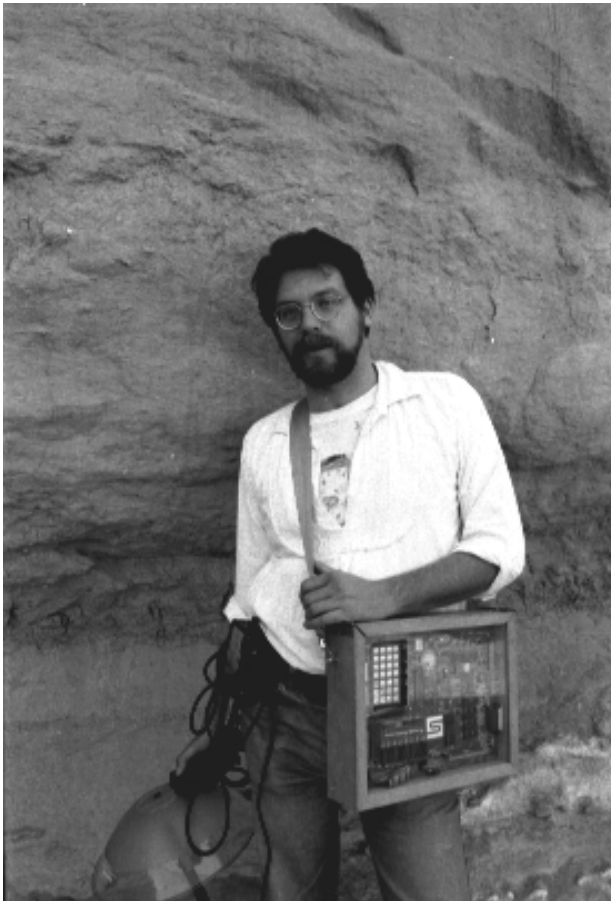
It's not surprising that those individuals involved in Sound Art, a term used to define aesthetic works that lie somewhat beyond the traditional definitions of music, frequently find their work intimately bound up with nature and the ecology. The second you step beyond ritual worship, or the notion of the Composer as the source of the voice speaking to you through music, one is instantly confronted with the wider environment. Composer and author David Dunn's long engagement with the issues pursued by the various works in this overview are reflected in his article 'Nature, Sound Art, and the Sacred', where he notes the dangers of expanding the materials of music to include all sounds merely for the sake of enjoying them as aesthetic objects: "When Cage expressed that the emancipation of music required the use of all sounds as a resource for composition, he unfortunately was also establishing a precedent for the exploitation of 'sound' as a decontextualized commodity that could be defined and manipulated by a set of cultural codes called music... The expansion of *music* becomes synonymous with an additive process of simply commandeering new phenomena into its cultural framework." Dunn's work with sound art is an attempt to make available new ways of unmediated listening into one's environment, to hear the intelligences in the sounds that are normally tuned out as merely speechless or meaningless. His piece 'Mimus Polyglottos' is a recording of a square-wave oscillator improvisation being played at a city mockingbird, and the bird's excited engagement with the sound, echoing and interacting with it on equal terms. "Whereas humans often reject aspects of technology as something evil compared to the rest of nature, the bird does not. To my ears, the mockingbird is just as fascinated by the sound made by these dancing electrons as by another bird."

My favorite of these pieces are indeed the ones that are less interested in conforming these sounds towards traditionally 'musical' ends than in following their lead, to new harmonic and structural forms that lie outside of what has come to be a very constrictive definition of 'music': the glorified self-expression of the individual composer. The search for 'new sounds' has become a deadening cul-de-sac that can not overcome the audiences' jaded presumption that it pretty much already knows exactly what it is that it is listening to – i.e. 'music'. As electronic composer Tim Perkis puts it, "Among all human art-making activity,





[Hildegard Westerkamp]



[David Dunn]

electronic music forms the strongest analog to this primordial role of hearing in human orientation and survival", opening our ears back up to lost states of deep listening to the natural world. After several weeks of immersion in these pieces while preparing to perform this mix live, I took a day trip to Pinnacles National Monument, a slab of rock that was thrust one thousand feet upwards out of a fault line during a volcanic eruption in Southern California roughly one million years ago. At the apex, after several minutes of what initially seems like silence, you can slowly begin to hear the animal life quietly rustling about the surrounding canyons for miles in every direction; the variety of birds, insects, and animals, the natural chains of reverberation set off by individual calls, and the interaction of both the sounds themselves and the lives producing them. Listening for several hours, it has to be said that most of the human efforts assembled in this mix could not possibly hope to compete with this kind of experience. But those works framed and opened my ears to the environment that is still available to anyone on that rock, which in the long run I believe is the most any kind of art can aspire to.

### 03. Playlist

- 00:04 Jim Fasset 'Explanatory Comments (by Jim Fasset)' 1960
- 00:16 Pierre Schaeffer 'L'Oiseau RAI', 1950
- 01:16 Jim Fasset 'Symphony of the Birds. First Movement', 1960
- 02:55 Louis and Bebe Barron 'Love at the Swimming Hole', 1956
- 03:29 Pierre Henry 'Spirale', 1955
- 03:54 Daphne Oram 'Bird of Parallax', 1962-72
- 04:38 Martin Denny 'Jungle Madness', 1958
- 05:14 Daphne Oram 'Food Preservation', 1964
- 05:27 Francois Bayle 'Trois rêves d'oiseau – Triste', 1963
- 06:23 Oskar Sala 'Seagulls / Melanie Attacked', 1963
- 07:18 François-Bernard Mâche 'Sopiana', 1982
- 08:27 Leo Kupper 'Automatisms Sonores', 1967
- 09:18 Pauline Oliveros 'Alien Bog', 1967
- 10:27 Jozef Malovec 'Orthogenesis', 1967
- 10:53 Karl-Birger Blomdahl 'Altisonans', 1966
- 11:08 Karlheinz Stockhausen 'Marsh Ducks Quack the Marseillaise', 1967
- 12:03 Bernard Parmegiani 'Capture éphémère', 1967
- 14:29 Eliane Radigue 'Epsilon = a = b = a + b', 1969
- 15:27 David Tudor 'Sliding Pitches in the Rainforest in the Field', 1973
- 16:32 Alvin Lucier 'Bird and Person Dying' 1975
- 18:41 Wendy Carlos 'Summer', 1972
- 20:05 Péter Eötvös 'Cricket Music', 1970
- 21:22 Delia Derbyshire 'Birdsong', 1964
- 23:49 Cluster 'Rote Riki', 1974
- 25:21 Kraftwerk 'Morgenspaziergang', 1974
- 25:53 Cluster 'Dem Wanderer', 1976
- 26:12 Morton Subotnick 'Until Spring', 1976
- 26:35 Luc Ferrari 'Presque rien no. 2', 1977
- 27:18 Beaver & Krause 'Walking Green Algae Blues', 1970
- 27:43 Annea Lockwood 'World Rhythms', 1975
- 28:11 Trevor Wishart 'Red Bird', 1974
- 28:21 Kraftwerk 'Morgenspaziergang', 1974
- 28:59 David Dunn 'Mimus Polyglottos', 1976
- 29:24 Priscilla McLean 'Dance of Dawn', 1974
- 29:29 Ann McMillan 'Gateway Summer Sound', 1978
- 29:41 Beatriz Ferreyra 'The U.F.O. Forest', 1986
- 30:06 Ariel Kalma 'Osmose: Message 18.10.77', 1978
- 30:37 Knud Victor 'Images 2', 1972
- 30:46 Conrad Schnitzler 'Electric Garden', 1978
- 31:18 John Cage 'Bird Cage', 1972
- 31:38 Ann McMillan 'Gateway Summer Sound', 1978
- 32:13 Jean C. Roche 'Oiseaux du Venezuela', 1973
- 32:23 Hosono & Yokoo 'Roof Garden - Rebel Attack', 1978
- 33:46 Hildegard Westerkamp 'Cricket Voice', 1987
- 38:03 Jean-Claude Risset 'Sud', 1985



[Jon Leidecker (photo by Joe Gerhardt)]

- 38:34 David Dunn 'Chaos & the Emergent Mind of the Pond', 1991
- 40:15 Iannis Xenakis 'Gendy3', 1991
- 41:59 Roc Jiménez de Cisneros and Anna Ramos 'Ultrasonic Recordings of Bats Outside Sagrada Familia', 2009
- 42:18 Michael Prime 'Insectivorous Bats', 2007
- 42:38 David Tudor 'Neural Synthesis No. 8', 1994
- 43:16 Gum 'Cicada Material', 1990
- 43:25 Big City Orchestra 'Dog (Animal Religion)', 1988
- 43:38 Jacques Lejeune 'Solitude de Blanche Neige dans la forêt nocturne', 1975
- 44:37 Blevin Blectum 'David and Justine 47<sup>th</sup> and San Leandro', 2004
- 44:44 Hecker 'Stocha Acid Zlook', 2003
- 44:59 Messiaen 'Feuillets inédits No. 3', 1988
- 46:18 Nuno Canavaro 'Plux Quba 7', 1988
- 48:15 Delia Derbyshire 'Birdsong', 1964
- 48:26 Q.R. Ghazala 'Rejoice', 1995
- 48:26 Francisco López 'Addy en el País de las Frutas y los Chunches 2', 2003
- 48:57 Graeme Revell 'Nature morte (Still Life)', 1986
- 49:57 Tod Dockstader & David Lee Myers 'Pterygota / Assembly', 2004
- 50:42 David Lee Myers & Thomas Dimuzio 'Uncertain Symmetry', 2002
- 52:52 Wendy Carlos 'Summer', 1972
- 51:50 Laeticia Sonami 'Night', 2010
- 52:36 Hildegard Westerkamp 'Cricket Voice', 1987
- 53:23 Douglas Quin 'Aurorasong', 1994
- 54:48 Douglas Quin 'At the Sea Ice Edge', 1998
- 54:32 Bernard Fort 'Étude Solitaire', 1995
- 55:41 André-Jacques Andrieu & Bernard Dumortier 'Entomophonia', 1994
- 55:57 Annea Lockwood 'World Rhythms', 1997

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## 06. Copyright note

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