

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 and collaborators 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. In *Once Upon a Time in CA* an insider documents the free and wild spirit of the experimental music and impro scene in the 80s in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Curated by Chris Brown

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Chris Brown is a composer, pianist, and electronic musician, who creates music for acoustic instruments with interactive electronics, for computer networks, and for improvising ensembles. Collaboration and improvisation are consistent themes in his work, as well as the invention and performance of new electronic instruments. Recordings of his music are available on Tzadik, Pogus, Intakt, Rastacan, Ecstatic Peace, SIRR, and Artifact labels. He teaches at Mills College in Oakland, California where he is Professor of Music and Co-director of the Center for Contemporary Music (CCM). <http://www.cbmuse.com>

INTERRUPTIONS #2

Once Upon a Time in CA

A spaghetti western about experimental music on the West Coast in the 1980s.

starring:

THE HUB – The Original Computer Network Band

John Bischoff

Chris Brown

Scot Gresham-Lancaster

Tim Perkis

Phil Stone

Mark Trayle

with:

Tom Nunn, instrument-builder

David Poyourow, instrument-builder

Jack Briece, composer

Laetitia Sonami, electronic musician

William Winant, percussionist

Peter Kuhn, clarinetist

Larry Ochs, saxophonist

Richard Marriot, clarinetist

Magdalen Luecke, saxophonist

Todd Manley, percussionist

and **The Rotary Club**: Brian Reinbolt, Kenneth Atchley, Sam Ashley, Ben Azarm, Jay Cloldt and Barbara Golden.

with a nod to: **Sergio Leone**

01. His-story

Just as the struggle for the Western U.S. in the late 19th century revolved around the construction of the railroad, the struggle for global domination was waged around the development of the new electronic communication technologies during the late 1970s and 1980s in Silicon Valley. It was a free-wheeling time for start-ups run out of garages by a bunch of do-it-yourself geeks and venture capitalists. Hanging around its edges and feeding off the surplus of its aircraft and electronics industries, a gaggle of music experimenters were dreaming of a future where technology might enable new kinds of musical freedom – freedom from orchestras and scores, freedom from scales and temperament, freedom from the academy, freedom from the music business, and, most of all, freedom for noise. Free improvisation was the lingua franca where jazz musicians, junk percussionists, instrument inventors, and computer hackers could come together to play. It was within this rag-tag musical stew that six idealist musicians, seduced into computer programming, connected their primitive 8-bit microcomputers into a network in search of complexly beautiful, automated behaviors. They were inspired by the home-brew orchestra of Harry Partch, the indeterminacy of John Cage, the electronic noise of David Tudor, with side helpings of the mysterioso of Captain Beefheart and the sonic ritual of Sun Ra. Living within a hippie backwash nirvana philosophy but confronted by the reality of wars launched from their own backyards into El Salvador and Nicaragua, their music was a quixotic swords-into-plowshares fantasy morphing uncontrollably into shouts of joy and rage. Lest there be any doubt that this was still the Wild, Wild West, in 1978 one politician climbed through a window into San Francisco's City Hall carrying a loaded handgun, shot its mayor and recently elected gay supervisor pointblank, and was later acquitted of first-degree murder for both crimes based on the 'Twinkie' junk-food diminished capacity defense. The AIDS



[Chris Brown playing the Chromatic Wing]



[Tom Nunn playing the Earwarg]



[THE HUB – left to right: Tim Perkis, Scot Gresham-Lancaster, John Bischoff, Mark Trayle, Chris Brown and Phil Stone]

epidemic emerged to cut a swath through the arts community, fueling both its paranoia and intensity. The Disney cult lured ever in the background, an implacable siren of pop. Still, the beauty of chaos remained a passionate quest that promised an escape from too much control, and not enough nature. Can musical life arise from industrial waste? Does harmony exist within the interactive chatter of cane reeds, bronze rods, computer algorithms, and resonating streams of electrons?

This podcast presents one insider participant's movie of this once-upon-a-time musical scene. Excerpts from public performances, home and garage recording sessions, and parking lot sound installations are mingled like so many strands of pasta, sprinkled with bits cheese from a Sergio Leone soundtrack to provide epic flavor. Moments of coincidence among impossible sonic bedfellows created the sauce. The recipe for this California home-grown dish follows....

02. Playlist and credits

00:06 Scot Gresham-Lancaster 'Allegory of the Beached Whale' (1982)

Subtitle: 'Concious Suicide or Driven Mad by Parasites?' With a rash of cetacean beachings in the spring of 1982 the composer was inspired to consider what would be the motivation for these mammals. Inspired by the J.G. Ballard short story *The Drowned Giant*, the feeling was that these beachings were some immense comment on the relationship of humanity to the oceans of the world. The explanation that these animals were 'driven mad by parasites' did not satisfy.

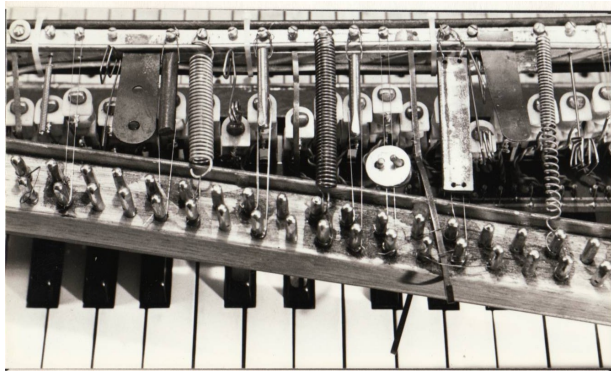
Recorded June, 1982, Mills College Center for Contemporary Music, Oakland. Scot Gresham-Lancaster (Serge Modular Synthesizer augmented by D-seq pulse generator program – written by Darrel Johansen – on Synertek SYM 6502 single board computer), Richard Marriot (Serge processed Contrabass Clarinet), Magdalen Luecke (Serge processed Tenor Saxophone) and Dudley Brooks (Serge processed guitar from a live performance at the Ice House in Pasadena in Aug. 1979). <http://scot.greshamlancaster.com>

01:48 *Confluence* was a free improvisation group with one important rule: 'if you didn't build it, you can't play it'. The group was formed in San Diego around 1976 by David Poyourow, Tom Nunn and Prent Rodgers. Taking advantage of its close proximity to southern California's military industrial complex, their building materials often came from abundant aircraft and electronics surplus outlets in Southern California. Among these were hastalloy and stainless steel sheet metal, bronze brazing rods, plywood and hardwoods, piezoelectric contact mics, and plastic balloons. In 1978 Rodgers left the group and Poyourow and Nunn moved to San Francisco area joined by Chris Brown, where they gave concerts for a couple of years before disbanding. Tom Nunn has since continued to work most closely in this way: <http://www.edgetonerecords.com/nunn.html>.

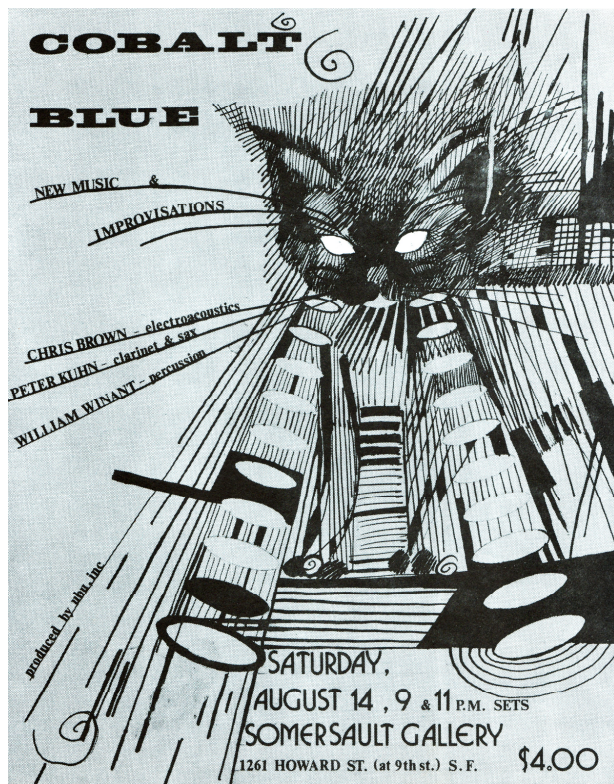
This recording session from November 29, 1980, took place in the assembly room of Gumption, a Haight-Ashbury high school, and featured a newly built FET-based automated gating circuit that rhythmically switched sounds of the electroacoustic instruments through homemade signal processing circuits and speakers.

02:36 Free improvisation by Peter Kuhn (clarinets and saxophone), William Winant (percussion) and Chris Brown (piano and electroacoustic instruments, including Gazamba – an electric percussion piano –, Hot Lunch – an amplified friction board made from a plastic lunch-tray –, and Chromatic Wing – sheet metal plate with bronze brazing rods –). Miles Memorial Playhouse, Santa Monica, May 28, 1983. Produced by the Independent Composers Association of Los Angeles.

Peter Kuhn began improvising in Santa Cruz, California; then moved in the late 1970s to the Lower East Side of New York City, where he made recordings with musicians including Perry Robinson, Frank Lowe, Phillip Wilson and Lester Bowie. In the early 1980s he moved back to Southern California. The Los Angeles Times has described William Winant as 'one of the best avant-garde percussionists working today.' <http://www.williamwinant.com>



[Detail of Gazamba, percussive tone generators and keyboard]



[Cobalt Blue concert poster]

05:44 THE HUB (1987)

THE HUB in rehearsal at Mills College, Oakland, October 13, 1987. Recording and interview by Jim McKee. THE HUB is a computer network music band which since the mid-1980s has been exploring the use of electronic data exchange to create interactive computer music. Like the legendary League of Automatic Music Composers, its predecessor in the San Francisco Bay Area, THE HUB is a collective of composer/performers who build their own software and hardware instruments. By connecting these instruments in networks they have discovered new ways of combining compositional and improvisational approaches in their music. *Boundary Layer* (Tzadik), a retrospective box set of their recorded music was released in 2008. Members of the group are John Bischoff, Chris Brown, Scot Gresham-Lancaster, Tim Perkis, Phil Stone and Mark Trayle.
<http://hub.artifact.com>

06:02 Mark Trayle 'Sunset Debris' from *Power and Light* (1985)

Analog and digital electronics, tapes, electric guitar. From cassette of recording made at Antenna Audio, San Francisco, 1985. <http://adagio.calarts.edu/~met>

07:40 Chris Brown and David Poyourow 'Vid's Lala' (1980)

Original electroacoustic instruments, including Hot Lunch and Punctuator (amplified friction and percussion boards). Los Angeles, 1980.

08:50 Jack Briece, 'Arousing Wind and Thunder' (1984)

Piece for four amplified portable Casio synthesizers. From *Heterophonious Fool* (1984) cassette release. Briece's wide-ranging concerns as a composer included speculative metaphysics, the musical instruments and sensibilities of ancient cultures, technology, ritual and improvisation. In 1973 his music began to incorporate the then newly developing videotape medium. Jack Briece died of AIDS in Aptos, California at the age of 43 on March 26, 1988.
<http://composers.com/jack-briece>

09:45 Chris Brown (right channel) and David Poyourow (left channel)

'SummerJam' (1981)

Original electroacoustic instruments and homemade electronics, recorded July, 1981 in Los Angeles.

12:16 Chris Brown 'Wild Boys'

Based on text from the W.S. Burroughs' novel. Chris Brown: voice, piano, live electronics.

14:16 Mark Trayle 'In Memoriam Sgt. Rock' (1985)

Hybrid homemade digital and Serge analog synthesis. From cassette of recording made at Antenna Audio, San Francisco, 1985.

16:00 Jack Briece 'Seventh Heaven' (1984)

Piece for four amplified portable Casio synthesizers, from *Heterophonious Fool* (1984) cassette release.

18:16 THE HUB (1987)

First rehearsal of 'Vague Notions of Lost Textures', by Gresham-Lancaster, at Mills College, Oakland, October 13, 1987.

25:03 Laetitia Sonami 'Oh Balihi-Wadou' (1980)

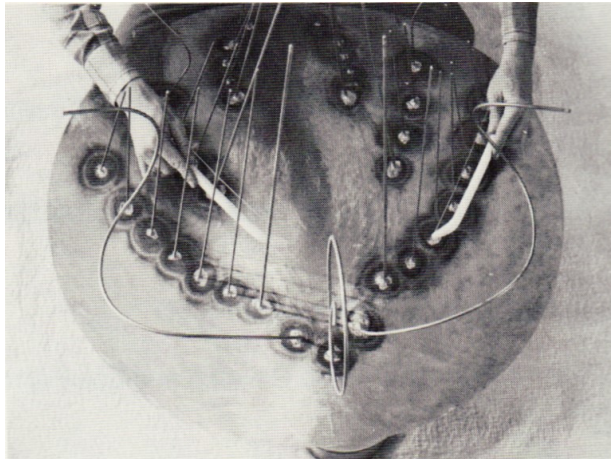
A Yamaha Portasound PC-100 programmed with prepared cards for the melody, processed through some homemade filters controlled by some divider circuits. Laetitia Sonami is a composer, performer and sound installation artist who designs and builds her own instruments. <http://www.sonami.net>

26:15 Chris Brown 'Insect Love' (1983)

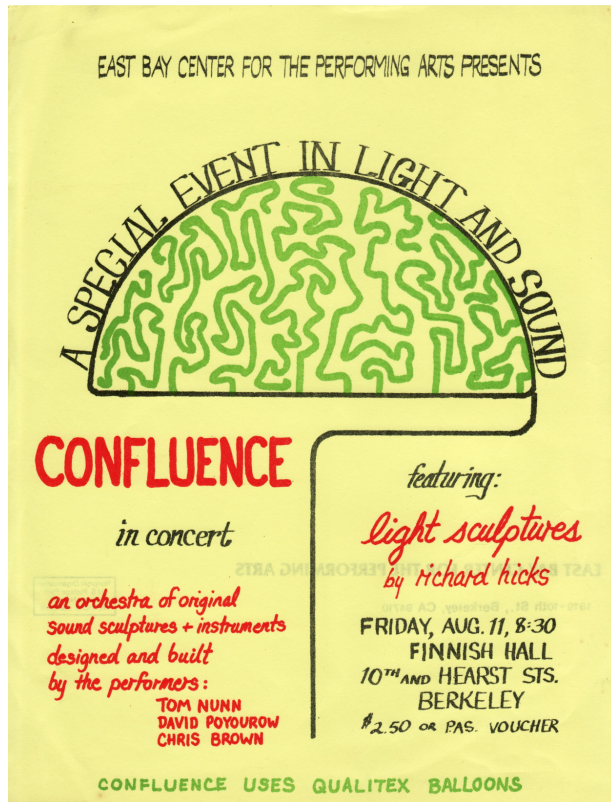
Overdubbed improvisations on Ice Queen, a 55 gallon steel drum with bronze brazing rods, and Nail Fiddle (bowed, iron nails), processed with a homemade, foot-controlled amplitude modulator and wah-wah pedal. San Francisco, 1983.

27:56 'Cyclone Music' (1986)

Outdoor, opening reception for Johanna Poethig's 'Cyclone Gallery', SOMArts, San Francisco, 1986. Electroacoustic Improvisation by William Winant and Todd Manley, found percussion, and Chris Brown, homemade electronics and



[Crustacean]



[Confluence concert poster]

electroacoustic instruments. From video documentaion shot by Toshi Onuki:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ky19WMbNLoc>

32:37 Tom Nunn, Chris Brown and Mike McGee 'Master Switch' (1980)
Tom Nunn and Chris Brown (original instruments), Mike McGee (tape delay and recording). Nunn plays the Wavicle Board, a large plywood sheet with various attachments including threaded steel rods, music wire, bronze brazing rods, nails, textured surfaces and springs. He also plays the Crustacean, a stainless steel plate with bronze rods welded to one side, resting on inflated balloons; the rods are bowed or struck to produce highly resonant tones, and the elasticity of the balloons support the plate to vibrate freely. Brown plays the Wire Choir, a collection of thick music wires twisted into distorted arch shapes and mounted on a maple soundboard – the wires are bowed or struck while being amplified with a hand-held, magnetic pickup. He also plays Wasservina, inspired by the Indian veena with stainless steel bowl resonators containing water that is swirled to modulate bowed or plucked string tones. 1980, Fresno.

37:09 Kuhn-Winant-Brown improvisation at Miles Playhouse, redux.

42:53 Larry Ochs (tenor saxophone); improvisation with THE HUB in concert at The Lab, San Francisco, 1987.

Recorded by Jim McKee for earwax productions, inc. Larry Ochs is a founding member of the ROVA Saxophone Quartet. <http://www.rova.org>

43:55 Chris Brown 'Rhythms for Drums' (1976)

Chris Brown and Doug Wieselmann (drums). Recorded in 1978 by Peter Kuhn for a series of radio broadcasts funded by the California Arts Council.

47:20 'Rota-League' (1982)

The League of Automatic Music Composers – John Bischoff, Tim Perkis, and Jim Horton – collaborated in the early 1980s with another Bay Area electronic band of composer/performers called Rotary Club, whose members included Brian Reinbolt, Kenneth Atchley, Sam Ashley, Ben Azarm, Jay Cloldt, and Barbara Golden. The Rota-League used an industrial timing wheel as a gating device to mix the output from all members of the group. This is probably a rehearsal recording made around 1982 somewhere in the San Francisco Bay Area.

51:19 'Allegory of the Beached Whale'
Continued.

53:32 David Poyourow 'Zoftig Harbingers'
Poyourow (original instruments: Wompeter Strings, Cerebral Float, Tape process), Chris Brown (Wasservina and Spiral Rotunda).

55:16 THE HUB (1987)

First rehearsal of 'Is it Borrowing or Stealing?', by Phil Stone, recorded at Mills College, Oakland, October 13, 1987.

56:54 'Arousing Wind and Thunder'.
Continued.

05. Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the artists involved.

06. Copyright note

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