



## Curatorial > VARIATIONS

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.

'Variation' is the formal term for a musical composition based on a previous musical work, and many of those traditional methods (changing the key, meter, rhythm, harmonies or tempi of a piece) are used in much the same manner today by sampling musicians. But the practice of sampling is more than a simple modernization or expansion of the number of options available to those who seek their inspiration in the refinement of previous composition. The history of this music traces nearly as far back as the advent of recording, and its emergence and development mirrors the increasingly self-conscious relationship of society to its experience of music. Starting with the precedents achieved by Charles Ives and John Cage, VARIATIONS will present an overview of the major landmarks in Sampling Music, following examples in twentieth century composition, folk art and commercial media through to the meeting of all those threads in the present day.

Curated by Jon Leidecker.

PDF Contents:  
[01. Transcript](#)  
[02. Acknowledgments](#)  
[03. Copyright note](#)

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/>

# VARIATIONS #3

## The Approach

As the sixties came to a close, the progressive optimism of World music collages were met and tempered by a new strain of self-examination and critique. Composers shifted away from using obscure, generic, or safely public domain sources for their pieces, and began to work with instantly recognizable samples from commercial pop music on a much wider scale. As the focus turned from global to cultural, Utopian visions gave way to a pragmatic sense of musical research and development. This episode documents the collages of the seventies that began demolishing the distinctions between art and popular music, from concrète to dub to disco to the attention-deficit-disordering world of FM radio.

## 01. Transcript

Hello. This is Jon Leidecker, and welcome to the third episode of VARIATIONS, tracing the history of appropriative collage in music.

The genre of musical collage had been well established by 1968, though most composers were still stopping well short of using popular music for a source. Fair game to sample from public domain classical or distant examples of foreign folk music, but musicians hesitated before mixing the worlds of high and low art. This divide evaporated by the end of the sixties, perhaps following the lead of The Beatles and progressive pop bands who were already mixing modern classical with rock. We begin this episode in Paris with a sequence of works created at GRM studios, the birthplace of Musique concrète, music organized from recorded sounds, such as trains, kitchenware or a squeaky door. Crossing the line over into using recordings of other works of music, Bernard Parmegiani created two collages, including the film soundtrack *Pop'eclectique*. In his work 'Du pop à l'âne', the seeming aim is to collide pop and art musics until those boundaries collapse. Stockhausen and The Doors, jazz and Messiaen, bongo drum circles and Stravinsky all trade off riffs, in circles and layers. The title is a play on the popular french expression 'passer du coq à l'âne' – to go from a rooster to a donkey.

### Bernard Parmegiani 'Du pop à l'âne', 1969

Luc Ferrari's *Music Promenade* from 1969 was assembled from field recordings of music played in public spaces and the attendant crowds. Folk music, factory sirens and bits of a Strauss waltz are beat-matched to the rhythm of a military parade. A busy day downtown, but – which town? Ferrari's recordings were made on location in Austria, Germany, England, France and Portugal, and layered into one coherent sound image.

### Luc Ferrari 'Music Promenade', 1969

Ferrari was already at work on his signature piece, which birthed an entire genre of field recording concrète, where the 'music' comes simply from unaltered recordings of the natural world. 'Presque Rien' (Almost Nothing) telescopes the day in the life of a small seaside village down to a twenty minute suite, which evolves with much the same logic as any abstract piece of music. Music happens when found sounds are left to speak for themselves.

Francois Bayle's 'Solitioude' begins with a classic illustration of Musique concrète. Two individual sounds form the loud instrumental chord at the beginning. Only when the two sounds are then played separately, you realize... that isn't a horn section, those are police sirens. Samples of the rock band The Soft Machine are mixed with field recordings from the 1968 riots, in which the left nearly took Paris. The lines between the sounds of the new rock concerts and active revolution are juxtaposed, and the result is music.



[François Bayle, Pierre Schaeffer, Bernard Parmegiani]

#### François Bayle 'Solitioude', 1969

Keen ears may have noticed brief samples from the 1968 album *We're Only in It for the Money* in the last two pieces, paying return tribute to Frank Zappa's concrète splice-heavy critique of pop culture. And while I'm not sure if this is intentional, I like to hear that opening police siren blast as a concrète cover version of a very familiar sound image given us by The Beatles.

#### The Beatles 'A Day in the Life', 1967 (fragment)

It's even in the same key.

Elsewhere in Europe, other countries sick of importing their psychedelic music from London and the US were hard at work on developing their own scenes. In this respect, German kids were lucky to have Stockhausen as a local, and the original lineup of the pioneering rock band Can included three of his students: Irmin Schmidt, Holger Czukay, and David Johnson. In fact, Johnson was the tape editor for Stockhausen's 'Hymnen', and you can hear his voice in 'Region 2' – he's the one whispering 'We can go yet a dimension deeper'.

Czukay had been taking notes on pieces like 'Hymnen' and 'Telemusik', and in a tape of Can's first concert, you can hear Czukay improvising with shortwave radio recordings. In 1968, Johnson surreptitiously gave Czukay the keys to Stockhausen's WDR studio, where he assembled the world music collage *Canaxis* with Rolf Dammers. On the title track, Japanese Koto, Tibetan horns and Aboriginal drones are processed well out of recognition. But on the album's other piece, the map melting concept is obvious through listening alone: two Vietnamese vocalists solo atop of a loop of renaissance choral music by Pierre de la Rue for a spiraling eighteen minutes. Recorded in 1968, released in 1969, here's 'Boat Woman Song'.

#### Holger Czukay & Rolf Dammers 'Boat Woman Song', 1968

Jon Appleton's 'Chef d'oeuvre', released in 1969, is a bizarre pop art abstraction made entirely out of an advertisement for Italian food substitute as sung by the Andrews Sisters.

#### Jon Appleton 'Chef d'oeuvre', 1967 (under narration)

In 1970 Finnish artist J.O. Mallander released the LP *Decompositions*, a collection of malfunctioning turntable playbacks and loops pressed back onto vinyl. Here's an excerpt from 'In Reality'.

#### J.O. Mallander 'In Reality', 1970

Not every dad would respond to their infant son's fondness for the sound of a skipping record by giving them a second turntable, but minimalist composer Tony Conrad did just that in 1973, and recorded the results as his son created shifting loops out of two copies of his favorite song, Donny Osmond's 'Puppy Love'. Released on CD thirty years later, I like to think of this less as a 'my kid could do this' statement, and more as a document of early seventies fun living, and a further link between minimalism and early collage music.

#### Thunderboy (Ted Conrad recorded by Tony Conrad) 'Let My', 1973 (under narration)

The focus of this series is on music made from recordings, but it's worth noting that by this point, the collage aesthetic was having an impact on composers still working in the medium of sheet music.

John McClure (narrator on Columbia Masterworks 7" promotional single Music of our Time): 'Even historic masterpieces of music can serve as the raw material. Composer Lukas Foss dreamed of torrents of Baroque sixteenth notes washed ashore by ocean waves, sucked back again, returning ad infinitum. Here is how Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic translated Lukas Foss' dream, Phorion, into music.'



[Glenn Gould]

**Lukas Foss 'Phorion', 1968 (under narration)**

The third movement of Luciano Berio's 'Sinfonia', in which a section of Mahler's second symphony is constantly interrupted by dozens of fragments of pieces by other twentieth century composers, creating a patchwork overview of all of the major techniques and advances of modern orchestral art music.

**Luciano Berio 'Sinfonia' (third movement), 1969**

Richard Trythall's 'Omaggio a Jerry Lee Lewis', from 1975, uses gates and filters to impose entirely new rhythms onto the original song. But even chopped, the voice remains at the center of the piece.

**Richard Trythall 'Omaggio a Jerry Lee Lewis', 1975**

Ruth Anderson's State of the Union Message is a linear tape cut-up of TV commercials made in 1973 in which voices are edited to say things that they did not originally say, but which perhaps are carefully closer to the actual truth.

**Ruth Anderson 'SUM (State of the Union Message)', 1973**

Anderson's earlier companion piece 'DUMP' is a collage of pop, folk and world music, an intuitively layered memory of a life spent in the twentieth century. Here's the conclusion of Ruth Anderson's seldom heard composition from 1970.

**Ruth Anderson "DUMP", 1970**

Glenn Gould: 'Our present day record devotees are already, as a breed, an extraordinarily self-reliant lot. They have opportunities for analytical judgement which afford them a responsible role in the recreative process. This responsibility exists because of the physical circumstances through which the listener can control and modify the nature of his experience. Forty years ago, the listener had the option of turning the switch which said 'on and off', and if he had a particularly up to date machine, perhaps, modulating the volume just a bit. Today on the other hand, a quite extraordinary variety of controls are available. All of which are designed to encourage the preferential conditions which the listener can impose upon the performance that he hears. And the quasi-analytical controls that the current hi-fi bug is offered are as nothing when compared to the participational possibilities which the listener will have at his disposal once the current techniques of electronic music have been appropriated by the home listening device.'

That was Glenn Gould, from his 1965 radio documentary 'Dialogues on the Prospect of Recording'. It dates from shortly before Gould retired from live performance entirely in favor of studio recording. In the accompanying text article, Gould defended his use of studio editing. He was less interested in recording as an authentic document of a performance than as an opportunity to create a collaged composition from different takes, using his performances as raw material. He began work on a series of radio documentaries where his approach to mixing was influenced by classical fugue composition. In this excerpt from his portrait of conductor Leopold Stokowski, the examples of music are woven in counterpoint to the content of his subject's voice, sometimes to the point of drowning it out. There are no soloists in a fugue. Weaving examples of folk music from around the world into the underlying fabric provided by the first movement of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony, this is 'But Has the Russian Artist Been Divorced from the West?'

**Glenn Gould 'But Has the Russian Artist Been Divorced from the West?', 1971**

Leopold Stokowski: 'But all countries have their folklore, the United States is rich in folk music, of the mountains, of the far West. I hope we shall guard that, and guard the spirit inside of it which made it, remarkable as melody and harmony and rhythm. The Americans today come from every land in the world, probably. And they gradually combined into one more or less clear conception of life. But there is very much differentiation within that conception, and it is a wonderful thing that in this vast land of North / South Central America, we have the culture

**MEET THE RESIDENTS**  
The First Album by North Louisiana's Phenomenal Pop Combo



[The Residents *Meet the Residents*, 1988]

of all the other lands on this small earth in which we live. And they are gradually combining, and forming, possibly, an entirely new conception of life, that may take many centuries... but it may be a larger, a broader, a deeper conception of life.'

The work of The Residents amplifies the most nightmarish qualities of the inescapable pop music hit parade, until the ugliness becomes almost beautiful. Their work goes well beyond parody. Their cover versions of sixties rock on their album *The Third Reich and Roll* were created by playing along to the original recordings on a multitrack, then erasing the original recording. Though sometimes, bits of the originals survive, and burst through.

In 1976 they created a single in which they covered The Beatles, and for the flip side, The Beatles covered The Residents – or rather, The Residents warped, looped and exploded recordings of The Beatles into something that sounded far more like a Residents record than anything the Beatles had ever released – excepting of course 'Revolution No. 9'. Here's 'Beyond the Valley of a Day in the Life'.

**The Residents 'Beyond the Valley of a Day in the Life', 1976**

At this point in the timeline, you'll notice that most of these collage works were studio only. Apart from John Cage's work with radios and pre-recordings in live performance, an inherently spontaneous approach that was soon followed by other artists like Stockhausen and Keith Rowe of AMM, there are few surviving documents of musicians improvising with collage in real time. When two members left on the eve of the 1976 tour, English progressive rock band Henry Cow found themselves unable to play all their rehearsed material. Making use of the BBC archives, they prepared three tapes. One tape represented the history of musical language from ritual to folk to present day, one represented the journey from youth to old age, and the final tape self-sampled the recorded works of the band itself. Each member controlled the volume of their tapes with foot pedals, allowing them to play the tapes as they played their instruments, reacting to all the sounds as they heard them. Here's Henry Cow, live in Trondheim in 1976.

**Henry Cow 'Live in Trondheim' (section five), 1976**

Rob Carey once said that his music as Orchid Spangiafora sounded best played back on cheap tape recorders with built-in speakers – the medium of their creation. But encountering a piece like 'Dime Operation' in 1978, which was pressed as a 7" single, only made these rambling, stuttering text cut-ups seem more inexplicable, especially as they made the rounds of independent record stores during the rise of punk. Mark Hosler was among the people to take a copy home, a year before he founded the group Negativland – more on them in the next episode, but for now, here's the beginning of 'Dime Operation'.

**Orchid Spangiafora 'Dime Operation', 1978**

The works featured so far in this episode may suggest that the 'real' work in collage was all being done at the periphery of public attention, an entire avant-garde affair. If mainstream pop in the seventies reflected a suddenly conservative world, aspects of collage were still being pushed forward in radical ways in the arena of dance music. In Jamaica, dub music producers' practice of filling the b-side with an instrumental entered abstract territory, using concrete techniques to create new versions that had little to do with the originals.

**King Tubby & Friends 'Dub Investigation', 1977 (under narration)**

And in Manhattan, the developing culture of the Discotheque began making an impact on the music. DJ Francis Grasso pioneered the practice of slipcueing – holding a record in place as the turntable continued to spin beneath it, allowing one to instantly begin a new record directly on the downbeat of the previous one. On his dancefloor, the beat never stopped. Then, the invention of varispeed turntables allowed him precisely match tempos between songs, allowing him to execute long crossfades between two songs, synced to the same rhythm. Soon he was juxtaposing entirely different records together for as long as two minutes. His signature mix combined the Latin drum break in Chicago's 'I'm a Man' with the spaced out middle of Led Zeppelin's 'Whole Lotta Love' – years before extended



[Mark Ford]

drum solos and orgasmic moaning became one of signature trademarks of disco. In other words, the collaged live mix performances prefigured and influenced the studio compositions. Buying two copies of songs with short drum breaks, DJ Walter Gibbons would use slipcueing to stretch out twelve or twenty-four second long drum solos into infinity, far beyond what anyone was used to hearing on actual records. DJ sets were taking on characteristics of live concerts; a good DJ would read the mood of his audience and change his performance accordingly. Gibbons' remixes pioneered the form of the single track 12" single, remaking songs entirely, and blurring the line between producer and composer.

The argument that DJs are not 'real' musicians because do not physically play the notes being heard misses a very simple point. The DJs skills require a new kind of musicianship. In trying to describe why Larry Levan was a star, many people answered 'because he knows how to tell a story'. The world's rising mountain of pop songs, a seemingly discontinuous heap of independent three to six minute long bursts, was being reassembled back into long form, coherent symphonies that would last for hours. DJs were assuming the role of conductors for the dancing crowds in New York City.

Pushing in the opposite direction was seventies FM radio. As the Top 40 splintered into different demographics, radio stations began formatting themselves for specific audiences. Drake-Chenault Enterprises were the pioneers of syndicated programming, selling hit playlists and automated DJ sets for every major genre. The station IDs had to grab the attention of the channel surfer by concentrating the widest variety of sounds that listeners could expect to hear into the space of a twenty second spot. From 1977, here is an interview with their chief engineer Mark Ford.

#### **Drake-Chenault Radio Documentary "Mark Ford Interview", 1981**

Mark Ford: You can do amazing things. For example, here's a nice drum track.

#### **Kraftwerk 'Metal on Metal'**

MF: ...and it's pretty impressive. But if you let it play for a long time, I don't know, it sounds kinda shallow, and you might want to have something else occur in it. So we look on the same album in which we got this rhythm track, and we find a musical track, further in on the album.

#### **Kraftwerk 'Franz Schubert'**

MF: But trying to synchronize the two together, we find that they don't match. One is a little quicker than the other. So you adjust the speed on either one, until they both synchronize, and that takes time, but you'll develop systems to do it. So we put them together, and then it sounds like this.

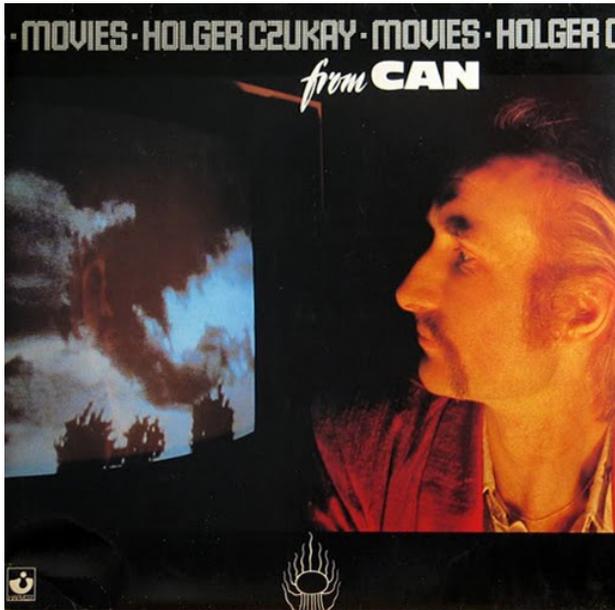
#### **Kraftwerk 'Franz Schubert' + 'Metal on Metal', beatmatched**

MF: Okay, we've built a pretty nice piece of music here, using a Moog rhythm track and a Moog music track. We have one more step to accomplish, and that is to get out of this somehow, and get into a piece of music. We want to start a music montage. One of the steps we accomplished before putting these two Moog pieces of music together, was to synchronize both of them to the introduction of a hit record. And we'll get into that hit record like this.

#### **Kraftwerk 'Metal on Metal' + Bee Gees 'Stayin' Alive', beatmatched**

Drake-Chenault's chief legacy might be the final hour of their 53 hour documentary 'The History of Rock and Roll'. Specifically, the 'Time Sweep', which presents several seconds from each number one US hit in chronological order, from 1956 to 1981. Scanning twenty-five years of music into 45 minutes seems like a can't miss concept, but music does not assemble itself, and Mark Ford's compositional editing makes the difference between a great idea and a work of art.

In the seventies a popular form of radio contests would splice a few micro-seconds from a handful of songs into a jumble, and offer prizes to



[Holger Czukay *Movies*, 1979]

listeners who could identify them all. A modern variant of the old game show 'Name That Tune' that upped the ante, asking listeners to 'Name Those Sounds'. The practice was even prevalent enough to be parodied in an episode of the TV comedy 'WKRP in Cincinnati', with its DJs attempting to create a contest so obscure that no one could possibly win it.

#### **WKRP in Cincinnati "The Contest Nobody Could Win", 1979**

Dr. Johnny Fever: Okay Mr. Pasola, for five thousand dollars, name these six songs!

Mr. Pasola: 'Too Wild to Tame', The Boys... 'Tumbling Dice', Rolling Stones... 'Y.M.C.A.', Village People... 'Danke Schoen', Wayne Newton... 'Straight on' by Heart... 'National Anthem' by Francis Scott Key.

Dr. Johnny Fever: Congratulations, Mr. Pasola. You just won five thousand dollars.

Unlike the other works in this series, these little moments of intensive density were being broadcast to millions of listeners. I myself remember hearing those contests and only wishing they went on longer, wondering where the stations were that could play music like that all the time. The forces that push the avant-garde forward often go invisible in hindsight, leaving only those who made their case formally as artists. But art is a spirit of the age, reflecting both the underground and the mainstream – it comes from everywhere.

We now return to the work of Holger Czukay, Can's bassist, engineer, and tape editor – the person who took hours of group improvisations and composed them into finished tracks. When Can bought a sixteen channel multitrack, they moved from improvising to laying down songs with parts, and added two new players. Replaced on bass by Rosko Gee, Czukay moved to shortwave radio and varispeed dictaphone, which he could rhythmically control by using a morse code tapper as a gate, tapping the shortwave rhythmically into the mix, adding vocals and radio sounds from around the world live. Sticking out like a homing beacon on their increasingly conservative albums is the track 'Animal Waves' from 1977.

#### **Can 'Animal Waves', 1977**

After that, Czukay left the group, using the band's studio to work on his own music at night, editing tapes that the band had not used. And now, filling in the gaps where solos would have been, were meticulously composed and arranged samples culled from hours of late night shortwave and television recording. Czukay's name for the album was 'Movies'.

#### **Holger Czukay 'Cool in the Pool', 1979**

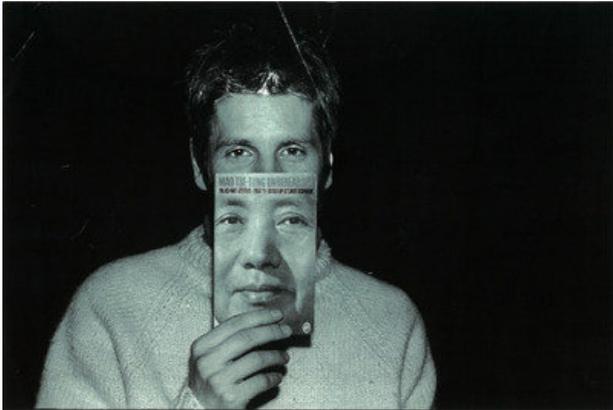
Czukay takes liberties with the internal rhythms of a Persian vocal line by setting them to a western 2/4 lilt. The result is the centerpiece of the album, 'Persian Love'.

#### **Holger Czukay 'Persian Love', 1979**

If this seems like an awkward moment to interrupt, it's because that sweep of melody which rises for two seconds out of nowhere is my favorite moment on the entire album. Interrupting Persia with a brief curve of Japanese Gagaku could seem like a gratuitous moment, but a musical connection on that level justifies itself simply by sounding right. And beyond the simple issue of sounding right, there is the underlying concept being illustrated that there are people who have never met who are already singing in tune. The hope contained within that idea is an illustration of the emotional core at the heart of this music. I'm Jon Leidecker, and this has been the third episode of VARIATIONS. Thanks for listening.

## **02. Acknowledgments**

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[J.O. Mallander]

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