



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 #4.2

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. The fourth auxiliary continues to look sliding pitches, concentrating this time on its use in popular music, before moving on to wholly un pitched probes that begin to map the many aspects of differentiated noise.

01. Playlist

01 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

02 Karlheinz Stockhausen, fragment from the lecture 'Four Criteria of Electronic Music', 1972

The beginning of Karlheinz Stockhausen's May 1972 lecture at the Oxford Union.

3. Jimi Hendrix, 'And the Gods Made Love', 1968

04 Robert Dick, demonstration video, recent but date unknown

Flautist Robert Dick introduces his invention for flute: the glissando headjoint, a moveable mouthpiece, controlled by the player's lips and head. Connected to...

05 Andy Scott, 'KBM', played by Andy Findon (excerpt), 2011

Using Robert's glissando headjoint.

06 Blind Willie Johnson, 'Nobody's Fault but Mine', 1928

Johnson (1897-1945) made 30 commercial studio tracks in five separate sessions for Columbia Records between 1927-1930, many using a knife or bottleneck – like hundreds of his contemporaries – part of the basic language of the blues. www.principalchairs.com/flute/gilss-or-not-gliss

07 Karlheinz Stockhausen, fragment from the lecture 'Four Criteria of Electronic Music', 1972

Also from the May lecture to the Oxford Union.

08 Hannes Coetzee, title unknown, ca. 2003

Coetzee uses both hands on the guitar, which is played horizontally just below his jaw, so that he can play the melody with a spoon held in his teeth. This piece would otherwise be impossible for a single guitarist to play. There is a story told about Beethoven who, when told by a pianist that an 11 note chord – with one note far from all the others – was impossible to play, demonstrated – using 10 fingers and his nose – that it could.

09 Roy Smeck, 'Steel Guitar Rag', 1937

Leroy Smeck (1900-1994) was an American guitarist whose skills were developed on the vaudeville circuit and who set the standard for a whole generation of steel players. I chose this track because it's a classic showcase, technical and imaginative, for the instrument.

10 Lloyd Green And Jeff Newman, 'Look at Us', 1995

A live recording from the International Steel Guitar Convention which is held every Labour Day weekend in St. Louis. The late Jeff Newman and the great Lloyd Green trade choruses on a Vince Gill composition.



[Blind Willie Johnson]

11 Pete Drake, 'Forever', 1966

From the film *Second Fiddle to a Steel Guitar*. A prolific straight session player and pedal steel celebrity, Drake became famous for his use of a talk-box combined with a pedal steel guitar, making several – essentially novelty – albums in the sixties. The sound of the guitar was directed through a plastic tube into Drake's mouth and, as he played, he formed the words of the song so that the sound of the guitar would be modulated by his mouth cavity. Then a microphone picked up and amplified the result. It was essentially an organic timbre controller with a limited range – and so quiet as only to be useful for studio recordings. The idea was not entirely new. Alvin Rey had explored a similar principle using a throat microphone in 1939, and even earlier, the Sonovox, which used small loudspeakers attached to a performer's throat, was used in the movie industry to modulate various sounds by altering the shape of the mouth cavity.

12 Mike Perlowin, 'Stravinsky's Firebird Suite' (excerpt), 1909-1910

Arranged and performed by Mike Perlowin in 1997. Perlowin, a maverick of the first water, has made it his mission to get the pedal steel guitar accepted by a snobby classical musical world. To this end he has adapted and translated works from the classical repertoire with a skill and imagination close to genius. Of course the snobs took no notice. This is the 'Berceuse', leading to the finale, and I do recommend you find and listen to the whole thing. www.perlowinmusic.com

13 Tetuzi Akiyama, 'Future Circuit' (excerpt), 2002

In 1986, Professor Kuniharu Akiyama ran a project to reconstruct six of the intonarumori, the Uluiatore, the Crepitatore, the Scoppiatore, the Rombatore, the Stroppicatore and the Ronzatore, at the Tama Art University in Tokyo. Six years later, six musicians from the Japanese experimental and improvisation community gave a concert using these replica instruments, each of them preparing a new piece. This one, written by guitarist Tetuzi Akiyama, was performed by an ensemble that comprised himself, Otomo Yoshihide, Toshimaru Nakamura, Sachiko M, Taku Sugimoto and Atsuhiko Ito. Connected to...

14 David Bedford, '18 Bricks Left on April 21st' (excerpt), 1967

A composition for two electric guitars played, in parts, with milk bottles. Bedford, who was both a fully paid-up member of the postwar British avant garde composer community, and a member of Kevin Ayres' band The Whole World (alongside Lol Coxhill, Robert Wyatt and Mike Oldfield) used many unconventional resources in his formal works, which are quite often harmonically static, pursuing instead effects created by the movement and interplay of timbres and textures.

15 Yefim Golyshev, 'Antisymphony'

A Dada group performance – part reconstruction, part tribute, featured in the *Noises and Whispers*¹ exhibition – of Yefim Golyshev's 'Antisymphony', a musical circular guillotine, for pots, pans and kitchen utensils, originally performed by Hannah Höch and others at a Dada soiree in Berlin, in April 1919. Connected to...

16 György Ligeti, 'Lux Aeterna' (excerpt), 1966

For 16 solo singers. Free of discernable melody or rhythm, this work's focus is on shifting timbres and micropolyphony. Connected to...

17 György Ligeti, 'Violin Concerto, movement 2' (excerpt), 1990-1992

Another work of shifting timbres and harmonics that also mixes standard and Just Intonation tunings² (one of the violins and one of the violas in the ensemble are tuned to natural harmonics and, at points, the entire brass section plays in natural and not equal tempered intervals). The ocarinas too are justly tuned.

18 Karlheinz Stockhausen, 'The Helicopter Quartet', from *Mittwoch aus Licht*, part of the 7-day opera *Licht* (excerpt), 1992-1993

Raw power, delivered in the form of untamed mechanical noise, entangled in aesthetic human emulation... transformation... and amplification, each participant wielding its own inchoate mass. For our times, this is one work that can still meaningfully be described, especially when experienced live, as sublime.

19 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978



[From left to right: György Ligeti, Lucas Ligeti, Mrs. György Ligeti, Conlon Nancarrow, and Michael Daugherty at the ISCM World Music Days in Graz, Austria, 1982]

¹ Organised by the Sculpture department of the Faculty of Fine Arts, San Carlos, in Valencia, it ran between December 2004 and January 2005.

² Ligeti was much influenced by Harry Partch's writing and probes, as he was by another American/Mexican maverick, Conlon Nancarrow. Ligeti will appear often in this series.

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.

Notification

If you want to be notified when a new probe goes up, please mail termegacorp@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, Jon Leidecker, Rene Lussier and Mike Perlowin.

05. Copyright note

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