



## 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 #12.2

## 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 is the auxiliary in which harpsichords boldly go.

### 01. Playlist

#### 00:00 Programme icon

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

#### 00:09 Sylvia Marlowe (excerpt)

From an Armed Forces Radio Service show in which Harry James introduces the harpsichordist Sylvia Marlowe. She's playing a modern Pleyel harpsichord.

#### 01:43 Toru Takemitsu, 'Rain Dreaming' (excerpt), 1986

Born in Tokyo in 1930, and largely self-taught, Takemitsu ranged widely across experimental, aleatoric and highly tonal techniques, with an instinctive genius for timbral organisation. He would happily combine Japanese and Western instruments and different musical vocabularies, although his main work was firmly in the western tradition. In music for over 100 films, he demonstrated a fluid familiarity with a wide range of musical genres and conventions. He wrote two concert works for the harpsichord.

#### 02:51 Luciano Berio, 'Rounds' (excerpt), 1964/5

The score for 'Rounds' consists of a single page which is first played in the normal way and then turned upside down and played in inverted retrograde (the work is centred on C#, which retains the same position on the staff in both orientations). After that, the score is restored to its starting position and played again, this time faster.

#### 03:47 Bartosz Kowalski, 'Klawituda' (excerpt), 2010

Polish composer and arranger who has written several pieces for old instruments. This piece won the W. Landowska composers competition in 2010.

#### 05:01 Jukka Tiensuu, 'Arsenic and Old Lace' (excerpt), 1990

Played by the Finnish composer and harpsichordist (born 1948) on a microtonally retuned harpsichord.

#### 06:36 Paul Whitty, 'Seven Pages' (excerpt), 2008

Performed by Jane Chapman and processed in real time by Whitty. This work is derived from Ligeti's 'Continuum', but the strings have been removed from the instrument so that only the sound of the mechanism can be heard.

#### 08:09 George Gruntz, 'Danza Danza Fanciulla Gentile' (excerpt), 1965

An arrangement of the vocal work by Francesco Durante (1684-1755) the exact date of composition of which is not recorded. Gruntz made a number of jazz arrangements of baroque music for the modern harpsichord. The no-prisoners solo in this one sounds almost like Sun Ra.

#### 09:34 Juan García Esquivel, 'Bella Mora' (excerpt), 1959

Mexican composer and arranger (born 1918) who made hi-fi stereo space-age bachelor pad music his own. A master of exotic instrumentation, radical stereo placement and super hi-fidelity, he worked brilliantly – if kitschily – with colour and spatialisation; he also understood and exploited the possibilities offered by



[Juan García Esquivel]

recording technology with a visionary élan. If he is commonly overlooked (he is), it is because of the snobbery of critics who thought music had to be serious and either high-minded or unpopular. There are clearly strong, though seldom investigated, affinities with the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson who was very familiar with Esquivel's work; both used a similar range of exotic instruments and both often scored harpsichords for their tone and colour.

**10:47 Elaine Comparone (excerpt), 2009**

Busy American harpsichordist, founder and director of Harpsichord Unlimited, a non-profit organization dedicated to stimulating interest in the harpsichord and teaching audiences about the instrument, its history, and its music.

**12:13 George Harrison / The Beatles, 'Piggies' (excerpt), 1968**

A harpsichord had been set up for another session in studio one at Abbey Road and the Beatles' subbing producer Chris Thomas (George Martin was on holiday) suggested Harrison use it for the song he was recording. Harrison suggested Thomas play it, which he did.

**13:02 Catherine Christer Hennix, 'The Electric Harpsichord' (excerpts), 1976**

Swedish composer Catherine Christer Hennix (born 1948) studied with La Monte Young and Pandit Pran Nath. This live improvisation was performed on keyboards tuned in Just Intonation and then run through looping devices similar to those used by Terry Riley. In spite of the title, the instruments she used were, in fact, three manual tuned Yamaha keyboards.

**15:25 Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks / The Beach Boys, 'Wonderful' (excerpt), 1966**

Wilson often used harpsichords for their unique sonority, sometimes mixed almost inaudibly behind other instruments. This song, originally written with Van Dyke Parks for the abandoned *Smile* album, eventually surfaced, in a version without the harpsichord in 1967 on the LP *Smiley Smile*. Parks was not credited. This is the original version on which, unusually, Wilson played the harpsichord himself. He also took the main vocal part.

**16:36 Frank Martin, 'Eight Preludes for Piano', 1948/9**

A good example of piano repertoire adapted for harpsichord. Martin was a Swiss composer, born in the late nineteenth century.

**19:49 The Incredible String Band, 'Beyond the See', 1968**

Another group that used harpsichord for colour – and to exploit its timbral affinity with their general string aesthetic. This song, written by Mike Heron, is also here for its model indifference to perfection and tidiness; it's a ramshackle mess of pure musicality, thrown off like a trimmed fingernail – to its great advantage. There's a lot to be said about this, but not here.

**22:03 Jerry Lee Lewis, 'Seasons of My Heart' (excerpts), 1965**

The only other song on which Jerry Lee uses a harpsichord, proving that when you got, you just got it.

**24:01 Iannis Xenakis, 'Oompha' (excerpts), 1989**

Xenakis wrote five pieces for the harpsichord, all of them for the great virtuoso and champion of the modern instrument, Elizabeth Chojancka. 'Oompha', for harpsichord and percussion, was the last written and remains the least regarded and least performed; indeed some critics are quite sniffy about it, probably because it is simple and very human. It's a dance piece. The percussion part calls for flower pots, bongos, tom-toms and a gran casa.

**25:50 György Ligeti, 'Passacaglia Ungarese' (excerpt), 1978**

Written to be played in quarter comma meantone, this is the last of Ligeti's three groundbreaking pieces for the instrument, and was dedicated to, and premiered by, Eva Nordwall in 1979.

**27:48 The Doors, 'Love Me Two Times' (excerpts), 1967**

The music was written by the band, the words by guitarist Robby Krieger. Ray Manzarek plays the harpsichord. A good choice of instrument.



[Luciano Berio]

**29:06 Scott Joplin, 'Maple Leaf Rag' (1899) played by Elizabeth Chojnacka (excerpt), 1994**

Elizabeth takes a rest from her labours. Another successful transposition from piano.

**Programme icon**

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

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## 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.

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## 03. Credits

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake.

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## 04. Acknowledgments

With thanks to Bob Drake and Dave Petts.

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## 05. Copyright note

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