

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 #18.2

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. In this auxiliary, batchelor pad hi-fi stereo exotica whips off its kitschy disguise to reveal a revolutionary core, abandoning boring documentation for a hyperreal exploration of novel timbres, impossible spatialities and radical fragmentation. This is where recording technology finally becomes aware of itself as an aesthetic rather than as a purely technical medium.

01. Playlist

00:00 Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

00:05 Bell Telephone Laboratories, stereo test, June 1, 1934

One of a number of stereo experiments conducted at around this time. Employees Ted Collins and Harley Henning – along with inventor Arthur C. Keller – are here heard testing the stereo technique that Keller and Rafuse would finally patent in 1938. Not the first stereo recording, as is so often claimed. Alan Blumlein's EMI stereo patent had been granted five years earlier (he had made his initial experiments in 1931 where he developed a double, angled, microphone configuration, stereo cutting head and single-groove recording). A year later (1932), also at Bell, Harvey Fletcher had been probing a number of stereo possibilities, including a 'wall of sound' system involving an array of up to 80 microphones strung in a line across the front of an orchestra. A 1932 recording of Stokowski conducting Scriabin's 'Prometheus: The Poem of Fire' was made in this way and is probably the earliest surviving (intentional) stereo recording. This system, however, like those going back to the nineteenth century, involved the use of two cutting heads, two parallel grooves and two separate playback styli.

01:40 Jimmy Carroll Percussion Ensemble, 'Happy Little Woodpile' (excerpt), 1953

This cheerfully racist title comes from a quietly groundbreaking LP released in 1953 on the legendary Cook label – run by audio engineer and inventor Amory Cook – the first to produce commercial stereo records in 1952. Jimmy Carroll was an arranger, famously for the 'Bird With Strings' sessions, as well as for countless pop artists, including Patti Page, Marlene Dietrich and Rosemary Clooney. This album has the distinction of being one of the first all-percussion records made in stereo (and was originally pressed on translucent maroon vinyl) though it has little else to commend it.

02:44 Askell Másson, 'Konzertstück' for snare drum and orchestra (excerpts), 1982

Askell Másson is an Icelandic composer who has written for all manner of conventional resources, and several pieces for snare drum. Played here by Matthew E. Bauer.

04:21 Juan García Esquivel, 'Baia', 1960

Self-taught Mexican pianist, composer and bandleader whose use of unusual instruments, eccentric and constantly shifting orchestrations, mastery of radical stereo placement and flair for intelligent kitsch made him the greatest of what would later be dubbed the batchelor-pad hi-fi arrangers. A perfectionist, he was a master of colour and placement, famously on occasion using two separate, highly coordinated ensembles set up in separate locations to achieve total sound separation. Highly influential on many of his peers, and on fellow visionaries such as Brian Wilson.

07:07 Leo Addeo and His Orchestra, 'Stumbling', 1961

Leo Addeo was an Italian American musician employed as an RCA in-house



[Arthur Lyman]

arranger throughout most of the fifties and sixties, who specialized in Hawaiian music but also produced a string of marimba band hits. Ocarinas, pedal steel guitar, accordion, organ, muted trumpet and bass do the heavy lifting on this track, which was made for the *Stereo Action* series released by RCA to promote hi-fi stereo and claimed: '*Stereo Action* is a new concept of music in motion; a new dimension in recorded sound. *Stereo Action* brings you unmatched fidelity through the full sound spectrum, plus the exciting new illusion of sound in motion. Soloists and entire sections of the orchestra appear to move thrillingly back and forth across the room. *Stereo Action* is musical movement so real your eyes will follow the sound'.

08:26 Arthur Lyman, 'Taboo' (excerpt), 1958

Born in Hawaii, Arthur Lyman, aka The King of Lounge Music, was an American jazz vibraphone and marimba player. In 1954 he met the pianist Martin Denny who offered him a job which found them both playing at The Shell Bar in the Hawaiian Village, where Denny made his foundational exotica hit, 'Quiet Village' (see main programme). Lyman split off in 1957 to form his own faux-Polynesian band and continued in similar vein for the next 40 years. In the good years he recorded over 30 LPs and 400 singles, getting three gold discs. *Taboo*, the first record he made after leaving Denny, remained in the Billboard chart for over a year, and eventually sold over two million copies.

10:02 Juan García Esquivel, 'Adiós, Mariquita Linda', 1961

With the master at the piano.

11:30 Audio Fidelity Stereodisc, Stereo Demonstration Record (excerpt 1), 1957

'Audio Fidelity Records, originator of the world's first stereophonic phonograph records (November 1957) now proudly presents its unrivalled conception of a demonstration record for both the hi-fidelity industry and the stereo-minded public. In this highly entertaining and unusual record are contained a number of sounds and musical selections that are perfect examples of extraordinary stereophonic hi-fidelity. As you listen note that the "Frey Curtain of Sound Technique" had been used wherever practicable [Sidney Frey was founder and president of the company and something of a maverick in the business, the Curtain of Sound was mystification]. Note also the distinctiveness, remarkable clarity and realism...' One of the scores of such titles, released by all the labels, to explore, showcase and sell stereo hi-fi players and discs.

11:51 The Three Suns, 'Danny's Inferno', 1962

A popular nightclub trio and recording act formed in 1939 by two brothers Al Nevins (guitar) and Morty Nevins (accordion) with their cousin, Artie Dunn (electronic organ). In the hi-fi stereo era they reinvented themselves, with the help of extra musicians and Al's genius for intelligent left-field arrangements, and knocked out a string of successful records including a fair number of real gems.

13:39 Audio Fidelity Stereodisc, Stereo Demonstration Record (excerpt 2: zoo), 1957

14:28 Mel Henke, 'Woman in Space' (excerpt), 1962

An American jazz pianist, Chicago bandleader, composer, arranger and successful jingle writer, Henke released the now notorious *La Dolce Henke* in 1962, a mélange of advertising music, sound effects, moans, whoops and dubious locker-room humour.

15:31 'New Dimensions in Sound', RCA film, 1957

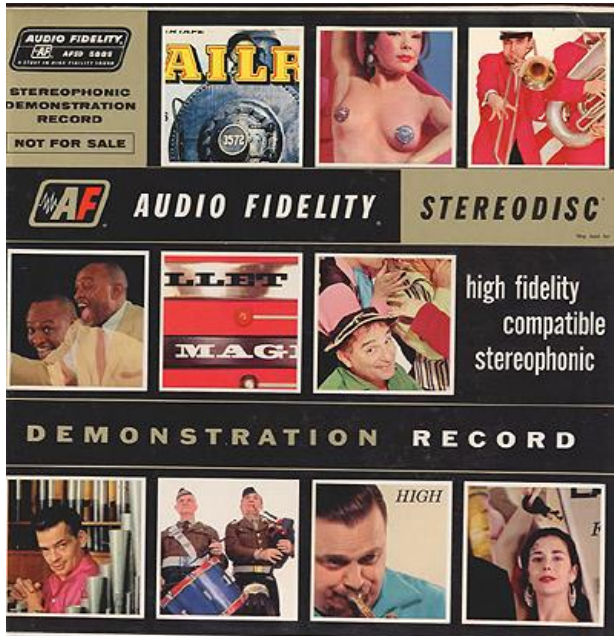
Made by the RCA Victor Corporation to introduce high fidelity stereo, and their new player, to a wider public, or at least in schools.

16:25 Dean Elliott and his Big Band, 'Lonesome Road' (excerpt), 1962

17:52 Dean Elliott and his Big Band, 'You're the Top' (excerpt), 1962

Primarily a cartoon composer (he scored for 'Mr. Magoo', 'Tom and Jerry', 'Bugs Bunny' and others) Elliott – working with sound effects virtuoso Phil Kaye and a substantial orchestra – made the legendary 1962 LP *Zounds! What Sounds!*.

19:21 Audio Fidelity Stereodisc, Stereo Demonstration Record (excerpt 3: bagpipes), 1957



[Audio Fidelity Stereodisc]

20:09 Martin Denny, 'Buddhist Bells', 1958

American piano-player, composer and collector of exotic instruments – which he used to add distinction to a musical composite that combined Polynesian, oriental and Latin elements. His now legendary invention, or discovery, at The Shell Bar in Hawaii, of what was subsequently marketed as 'exotica' (a label adopted from the title of his first record, in 1956) was told – in his version – in the main programme. So here, just for the sake of scholarship, I should add that Arthur Lyman, a member of Denny's band at the time, and who later became a rival bandleader, tells the story differently (and less convincingly) implying that in fact the initiative had been his.

20:30 Igor Stravinsky, 'The Rite of Spring', 1929 recording accidental stereo

Leopold Stokowski made the first American recording of 'The Rite of Spring' in 1929. In the eighties, two collectors noticed that some copies of the 78 RPM release sounded slightly different from others. When they played both variants simultaneously (electronically synchronised) they discovered accidental stereophony. In hindsight the mechanism was clear: it had been normal practice in the twenties to make simultaneous safety backups of any important recording, and sometimes the second turntable was set up in a different location from the first. For some reason the backup recording as well as the primary recording had been used as a pressing master. Once discovered a search amongst other pre-stereo recordings turned up quite few similar cases.

21:30 Tony Burrello, Tom Murray, 'There's a New Sound', 1953

Burrello was an American jazz pianist and songwriter who, in protest against what he saw as the dire state of affairs in popular music, set out with another composer, Tom Murray, to make the most horrible record he could. They then released on their own label, The Horrible Record Co. (slogan: 'If it's a Horrible record, it's bound to be a hit') in an edition of 500 that had been destined only for DJs – just to make their point. Within weeks they had orders for over 100,000 copies, unintentionally confirming their hypothesis. Another explanation might be that public interest was symptomatic of an inchoate, emergent, trend in popular music to explore novelty in any form (serious or frivolous) as hi-fi, stereo and more flexible recording techniques made new, strange and unfamiliar sounds more possible to achieve and more attractive to listen to: bolstering an aesthetic in which the *sound* was as much or more of a draw than the song.

23:49 Juan García Esquivel, 'Blue Christmas', 1959-62

26:11 Juan García Esquivel, 'Carioca', 1961

27:43 Enoch Light and the Light Brigade, 'Speak to Me of Love – Cha Cha' (excerpt), 1960

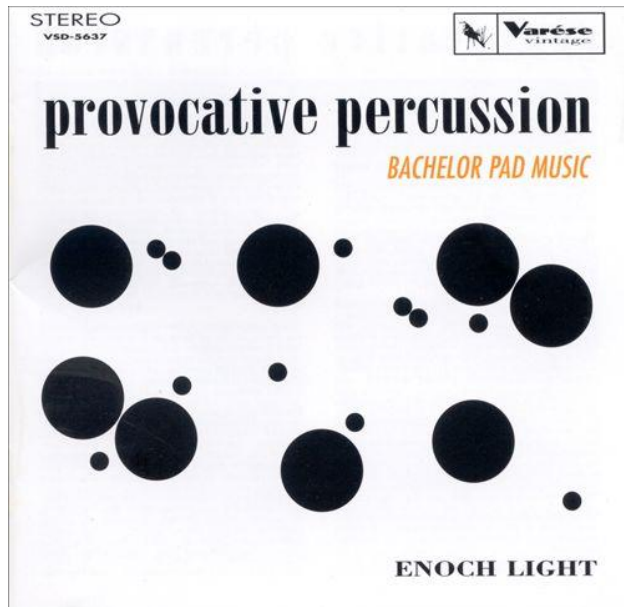
An American musician and bandleader who trained classically as a violinist and went on to front various sorts of dance bands throughout his life. More unusually, especially in the late fifties and early sixties, he pioneered a number of novel recording technologies and procedures, becoming famous for his perfectionism and the use of ping pong stereo (the extreme and artificial placement and movement of sound), hugely influencing popular music production across the board. He also upped the stakes in packaging, introducing gatefold sleeves, using contemporary art (rather than scantily clad women) on his covers and including substantial technically biased notes to accompany every release. While his production was startling for the time, his music was sterile and conventional. It would take an Esquivel to marry verve and imagination with these exacting production techniques.

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

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



[Enoch Light]

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 termegacorp@dial.pipex.com with subject: Probe Me.

03. Credits

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

04. Acknowledgments

Heroes of the revolution: thanks to David Petts, William Sharp and Irwin Chusid.

05. Copyright note

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