

Curatorial > PROBES

In this section, RWM continues its line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view, organised into curatorial series.

Curated by Chris Cutler, **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

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

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, p53 and The Science Group, 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 consistently in successive projects 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 &c.) The Artaud Beats and The Artbears Songbook, and turns up with the usual suspects in all the usual improvising contexts. As a soloist he has toured the world with his extended, electrified, kit.

Adjacent projects include commissioned works for radio, various live movie soundtracks, *Signe de Trois* for surround-sound projection, the daily year-long soundscape series *Out of the Blue Radio* for Resonance FM, and p53 for Orchestra and Soloists.

He also founded and runs the independent label ReR Megacorp and the art distribution service Gallery and Academic and is author of the theoretical collection File Under Popular – as well as of numerous articles and papers published in 16 languages. www.ccutler.com/ccutler

PROBES #20

In the late nineteenth century two facts conspired to change the face of music: the collapse of common-practice tonality (which overturned the certainties underpinning the world of art music), and the invention of a revolutionary new form of memory, sound recording (which redefined and greatly empowered the world of popular music). A tidal wave of probes and experiments into new musical resources and new organisational practices ploughed through both disciplines, bringing parts of each onto shared terrain before rolling on to underpin a new aesthetics able to follow sound and its manipulations beyond the narrow confines of 'music'. This series tries analytically to trace and explain these developments, and to show how, and why, both musical and post-musical genres take the forms they do. In **PROBES #20**, we look at the exotic imports that made arguably the most significant impact on Western music – ideas and instruments from India, which brought with them not only new sounds and tunings but also radically new ideas about music itself.

01. Transcript. Studio version

[Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978]

[Tambura]

Of all the exogenous musical cultures that impacted on Western music, it was Indian classical music that brought the greatest changes in both thinking and playing, across all forms of western music – from Messiaen and La Monte Young¹ to John Coltrane and The Beatles.

[Tambura]

When India gained its independence in 1948, the British Nationality Act gave its former subjects the right to live and work in the United Kingdom. This fact, and Britain's desperate need for labour after the Second World War, brought significant numbers of immigrants from both the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, amongst them the violinist John Mayer, who arrived from Calcutta in 1952 to study composition at the Royal Academy of Music. To help pay his way, he took a job as a violinist with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, but his main ambition was to compose and, in particular, to bring classical Hindustani, and Western orchestral music together, in a practical form. His groundbreaking 'Dance Suite for Sitar, Flute, Tabla, Tambura and Symphony Orchestra', premiered by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in 1958, earned him an instant reputation as a man to watch.² Although this was the first time Indian and European classical instruments had been united in a formal composition, its impact remained limited, because it was neither recorded nor was it performed again elsewhere. This is why it has often been overlooked and why so many sources still credit the American composer, Alan Hovhaness as author of the first work for sitar and symphony orchestra – in spite of the fact that Mayer's work predated it by some 12 years. And, as it happens, Hovhaness' piece, though written in 1969, wasn't actually performed until 2008.

I said that Mayer's 'Dance Suite' wasn't recorded, but it turns out, happily, that that's wrong, and there are still fragments of a private recording in Mayer's personal archive that his son, Jonathan Mayer, was able to unearth for this programme. This is the first time this music been heard, outside the family, for 60 years.

[John Mayer, 'Dance Suite for Sitar, Flute, Tabla, Tambura and Symphony Orchestra' (excerpt), 1958]

In 1965, Ahmet Ertegun, the Turkish founder and president of Atlantic Records, heard a short composition Mayer had written for a one-off jazz compilation, and was so impressed that he proposed Mayer unite his Indian ensemble³ with the British jazz quintet led by Jamaican saxophonist, Joe Harriott. Both men agreed,



[Max Roach]

and their double quintet, later rechristened Indo-Jazz Fusions, released its first record in September 1966. Here's an excerpt from 'Raga Megha'.

[The Joe Harriott Double Quintet, 'Raga Megha' (excerpts), 1966]

Of course the sitar was already quite well known to the general public by this time, because George Harrison had used one in John Lennon's song 'Norwegian Wood', the year before. And this is almost certainly why Ertegan made his proposal to Harriott and Mayer in the first place. I won't play 'Norwegian Wood' – its too well known, and Harrison was just getting to grips with the instrument when he made it – but here's 'Love You To', recorded a year later for the LP *Revolver*.

[The Beatles, 'Love You To' (excerpt), 1966]

Other strands were coming together in America. The 1917 Immigration Law had imposed an Asiatic Barred Zone that severely limited all immigration from India but, in 1965, new legislation saw numbers dramatically increase. In the same year, the Museum of Modern Art hosted the Living Arts of India festival in New York. The American violinist, Yehudi Menuhin, invited Ravi Shankar to perform, but for family reasons Shankar declined, and proposed his brother-in-law, the Bangladeshi sarod player Ali Akbar Khan, instead. It turned out to be a busy and disproportionately influential visit. On arrival, Khan's trio – sarod, tabla and tambura – made a national television appearance, introduced by Menuhin, who gave a short talk about the instruments and the musical form. Then, on the day before the MoMa concert, they recorded the world's first Indian classical music LP.⁴ La Monte Young said that when he heard the opening six-second tambura drone on the radio, he had to run straight to a record shop to buy the LP and subsequently, as we know, he made the exploration of drones and overtones central to his own compositional work. And finally, the trio's two public performances were very positively reviewed, with special note taken of the music's improvisational affinities with jazz.

A year later, Ravi Shankar was himself on tour. His American concerts, although modestly attended, were packed with avant-garde jazz musicians, while in Britain, he performed for the first time with Yehudi Menuhin with whom he also recorded an LP, released in 1966 as *West Meets East*. It was this experience, and in anticipation of future collaborations, that Menuhin commissioned a suite for sitar, violin and orchestra from the Armenian/American Composer, Alan Hovhaness. But although Hovhanes wrote the piece, Menuhin and Shankar never got round to performing it and it remained on a shelf for 40 years before it was finally recorded, with different soloists, in 2008. It's a persuasive work, and no short excerpt can do it justice, but... here's a sample.

[Alan Hovhaness, 'Shambala' (excerpts), 1969, first recorded in 2008]

While Ali Akbar Khan was making his New York debut, one of Ravi Shankar's ex-students, the master Hindustani sitarist and tabla player, Harihar Rao⁵, was studying in the ethnomusicology department at UCLA. And teaching sitar privately, on the side. Jazz trumpeter Don Ellis came to study with him, and in 1964 they co-founded The Hindustani Jazz Sextet – a mix of saxophone, piano, vibraphone, bass, drums, trumpet, sitar and tabla. The vibraphone player was Emil Richards – who we'll meet again in another programme.

So, two years before the Mayer/Harriott double quintet, The Hindustani Jazz Sextet was playing high profile concerts in California and opening for the Grateful Dead, but again – because they were never recorded – they had little wider impact. Fortunately for us, three previously unknown recordings of a 1964 concert at the Lighthouse Cafe were recently uploaded to YouTube, so we can have some idea of what they sounded like. This is 'Bombay Bossa Nova'. Which is not really a bossanova, of course, since it's all in 21/8.

[The Hindustani Jazz Sextet, 'Bombay Bossa Nova' (excerpts), 1964]

In the mid seventies, the peripatetic Bavarian rock band, Embryo – another group who seldom receive the attention they deserve – made several trips to India, one of them lasting for nine months – where they met and worked with the tabla virtuoso Trilok Gurtu – who later became a fixture in the East-West jazz



[Ali Akbar Khan]

community – and the Karnataka College of Percussion, both of whom owe their careers outside India to this meeting. Embryo also experimented with a wide variety of exotic instruments. And here's a brief excerpt from 'New Ridin'', made in 1975, which features a fine, and well integrated, sitar solo by co-founder and guitarist Roman Bunker.

[Embryo, 'New Ridin' (excerpt), 1974]

When Ali Akbar Khan had come to New York, it was to perform Indian classical music. That was his only interest. And when he returned in 1965, it was to teach.

By 1967, he had established his own Ali Akbar College of Music in California, to which he invited, over the years, virtually every prominent name in North Indian music. Intrigued by the spiritual and improvisational aspects of the discipline, the saxophonist – and fellow academic – John Handy enrolled to study. The two men found they had a lot in common and, after some private sessions, decided to perform together at a Berkeley jazz club. This was the first time any Indian classical musician had improvised in public with a jazz musician, and it led to an invitation to perform at The Monterey Jazz Festival, after which the two men continued to work together whenever their schedules permitted. It was a unique meeting of styles. Here's the beginning of 'Ganesha's Jubilee Dance', from the LP, *Karuna Supreme*, which they recorded in Germany, in 1975.

[John Handy, Ali Akbar Khan, Zakir Hussain, Yogish Sahota, 'Ganesha's Jubilee Dance' (excerpts), 1975]

And of course, almost uniquely of all exotic instruments, sitars found their way into a huge number of pop records. Everyone from the Rolling Stones to The Monkees, the Box Tops to The Kinks, the Lemon Pipers to Elvis Presley found a place for one somewhere. At least while the fashion lasted. But I'd like to return to the Incredible String Band, since they played almost nothing but exotic instruments – on which, amazingly, both of them seemed interchangeably proficient. There's nothing Indian, or even exotic about the way Mike Heron uses the sitar here; it's just the right colour, and it fits the song.

[The Incredible String Band, 'Nightfall' (excerpt), 1968]

And in case you thought I was making it up about Elvis, here he is singing the country standard 'Snowbird'.

[Elvis Presley, 'Snowbird' (excerpts), 1971]

The moment passed. After a few years of intense exposure, the sitar fell back out of sight. But here's one late anomaly. This is Gabriel Roth, alias Bill 'Ravi' Harris, from a CD that mixes sitar with late sixties funk, and although its fanciful sleeve-notes date it back as a great lost album from the days of fading psychedelia – because it wouldn't make sense to make a record like this today – it was in fact made – to the best of my knowledge – in 1996, just for the hell of it. This is Ravi and the Prophets playing The Meters' 'Cissy Strut'.

[Ravi Harris And The Prophets, 'Cissy Strut' (excerpt) 1996]

It wasn't just sitars, of course, tablas also found their way into a number of hybrid contexts; and since they were virtuoso instruments and difficult to play plausibly without study, it tended to be classical master players who were inducted into various hybrid projects. Here is Zakir Hussain, for instance, who we heard already with John Handy and Ali Akbar Khan, this time playing in guitarist John McLaughlin's Shakti.⁶ This is from 'La Danse de Bonheur'.

[Shakti, 'La Danse de Bonheur' (excerpt), 1976]

Or here, much later, in 2000, when the American bassist and producer Bill Laswell linked tablas and electronica in his *Tabla Beat Science* project, again featuring – in fact formed around – the tabla player Zakir Hussain. Laswell, like Don Cherry and Herbie Mann, The Incredible String Band and Mickey Hart, was wildly catholic in his influences, and probed and mixed all manner of musics to bring widely different disciplines together. For this project, he started by



[Pharoah Sanders]

recording Hussain alone, and then composed electronic beats around him. As the idea took shape, he invited three other tablists – his long-time collaborator, the British born Karsh Kale, the Indian Trilok Gurtu who, after Embryo had worked, amongst others, with Oregon, John McLaughlin, Don Cherry and Terje Rypdal, and the Londoner, Talvin Singh, himself a central player in the fusion of Indian classical music with drum'n'bass; he'd already worked with Björk, Sun Ra, Madonna and countless others, including Laswell himself – Singh had invited Laswell to play on his own Mercury prizewinning CD, *OK* the year before. The result of all Laswell's labours was *Tala Matrix*. Here's an excerpt from the track *Palmistry*, featuring Karsh Kale and Zakir Hussain.

[Tabla Beat Science, 'Palmistry' (excerpts), 2000]

The Italian-American saxophonist Charlie Mariano cut his teeth in the Stan Kenton Orchestra, and then worked with Quincy Jones, Shelley Mann and Charlie Mingus. In 1967, he was invited to Kuala Lumpur to work with the Malaysian radio orchestra and there, at a Hindu temple, he heard for the first time a nagaswaram – that's a Southern Indian double-reed instrument, not dissimilar to the Iranian and North Indian shenai. He stayed on to study for six months after his radio engagement was completed, and subsequently returned every year. When he joined Embryo in the mid seventies he found the instrument a perfect fit – and here it is on 'Parvati's Dance', taken from one of Mariano's own releases *Helen 12 Trees*, recorded in 1976.⁸

[Charlie Mariano, 'Parvati's Dance' (excerpts), 1976]

And here's its North Indian counterpart, the shenai, in fact two of them, which George Harrison uses on the track 'Microbes', taken from his unjustly neglected 1968 soundtrack for the film *Wonderwall*, released a decade earlier.

[George Harrison, 'Microbes' (excerpt), 1968]

And of course there's Alice Coltrane, effortlessly synthesising her western and eastern influences in 'Journey in Satchidananda', written for a jazz trio, harp, tambura and small percussion, recorded in 1970.

[Alice Coltrane, 'Journey in Satchidananda' (excerpts), 1970]

And here again, the great Pharoah Sanders, a long-time associate of John and Alice Coltrane's, whose exotic importations are often downplayed, because of the impact he made in other, more mainstream, areas. But, for several years in the seventies, Sanders drew freely on whatever instruments took his fancy, creating unique musical environments, one LP at a time. This excerpt is from *Wisdom Through Music*, made in 1973.

[Pharoah Sanders, 'Village of the Pharaohs' (excerpt), 1973]

I think it's fair to say that what black jazz musicians drew from Africa and North Africa in the twenty years between 1956 and 1976, tended to be more ideological and timbral than deeply rooted in African tradition, but that those drawn from India were almost always anchored in the disciplines indigenous to the music itself. Indian music had a lasting and profound impact on Western Music in nearly all its forms. But influence is a topic for another programme, here we are trying to stay with instruments. So I'll close this circle by coming back briefly to the drums. Here's Per Tjernberg, a Swedish percussionist and globalist, using a free mixture of the world's percussion to animate a 9/8 marimba ostinato.

[Per Tjernberg, 'Okay' (excerpts), 1994]⁹

And I said I would return to Emil Richards – he was the vibraphone player in Ellis and Rao's Hindustani Jazz Sextet, who went on to collect on his travels – and learn to play – an enormous variety of the world's percussion, which he then introduced into every imaginable musical context.¹⁰ In constant demand as a session player, he wound up working with everyone from Marvin Gaye to Frank Zappa, Frank Sinatra to Charlie Mingus, Henry Mancini to The Beach Boys. He was also a close friend – and played many concerts with – microtonalist Harry Partch, as well as being a member of the infamous Wrecking Crew – the elite first-call LA session musicians who played anonymously on almost everybody's



© Andy Freeberg

[Don Cherry]

hits in the sixties. Over the last 60 years, he's appeared on thousands of recordings, including some 1400 film soundtracks.¹¹ If you needed exotic percussion, Emil Richards was the man to call. And everybody did. Here he is, playing, uncredited, on one of the most radical pieces of stylistic and instrumental pop collage to come out of the sixties, a record sadly often overlooked because serious commentators are embarrassed by its form and especially its texts. Written by Mort Garson, another man with an extraordinary CV, which is well worth looking into, it brings together not only percussion instruments from all corners of the globe, but a rock rhythm section, a harpsichord and the first appearance on record of the Moog modular synthesiser – played here by Paul Beaver.¹² The thing that makes *Cosmic Sounds* really remarkable is that it was recorded in real time. Richards apparently had to set up islands of percussion all round the studio, and then run from one to another as the song progressed. I'll play an excerpt from 'Pisces' because it includes the water chimes; four large brass discs that Richards had specially made, that are played by being struck and then lowered into tubs of water to create a distinctive metallic glissando.

[The Zodiac, 'Pisces' (excerpts), 1967]

And this is from his own *Journey to Bliss* LP, released in 1968, the third in a series in which he probed Indian inspired irregular metres and played multiple percussion instruments, piled up in layers.

[Emil Richards, 'Hot Fudge Sundae' (excerpt), 1968]

Before we move on, I just want to mention two critical figures, both of them students of many and different disciplines. The first is Don Cherry, who became increasingly marginalised because he was considered too eclectic and hard to categorise; the second, Herbie Mann, who was sidelined because he was thought to be too much of a populist.

Don Cherry's studies were wide ranging, the most eclectic of his generation. Over a lifetime he brought African, European, Arabian and Asian instruments – as well as aspects of their musical discourses – into a unique synthesis. At the same time he moved from being a member of the jazz avant-garde aristocracy – working with all the leading figures of the sixties new thing – to being a respected but marginalised maverick playing programmes of wild and unpredictable diversity. We heard him in Probes 17 working with western instruments and the Balinese gamelan, something almost no one else has successfully achieved. This excerpt is from 'Mahakali', which ends up as a raucous rockfest but starts, as you'll hear, very sedately¹³.

[Don Cherry, 'Mahakali' (excerpt), 1976]

Herbert Jay Solomon, on the other hand, known better as Herbie Mann, was never part of the avant-garde. A white, mainstream bop flautist, he released a string of popular records, mostly groove based, and notched up one hit after another. At the same time, he was a tireless explorer of what we now call world music, and supported a great number of very left-field performers, like Sonny Sharrock and Steve Marcus. First he was a pioneer of Afro-Cuban music, then Brazilian; he was an early adopter of the bossa nova – after which, influenced by Abdul Malik, it was music from the middle-east; and later still, Japan. Mann mostly mined for what could make into quasi-exotic easy listening, but he used the proper instruments and he worked with local musicians, and he based what he did on study and listening. He dumbed down enough, you could say, but he always left a seam of pure ore in place. This is from 'The Wailing Dervishes', a concert recording made in 1967, with Charles Ganimian, who we met in the last programme, playing the oud.

[Herbie Mann, 'The Wailing Dervishes' (excerpts), 1967]

And even more adventurously, from 1976, 'Mauve Over Blues', which was recorded in Japan with Minoru Muraoka and his New Dimension group, an ensemble that had been mixing jazz and Japanese traditional music since 1970.

[Herbie Mann, 'Mauve Over Blues' (excerpt), 1976]



[Emil Richards]

[Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978]

We'll be staying in Japan in our next programme, and then moving on to China.

¹ John and Alice named their son Ravi, after Shankar.

² And lost him his job as a violinist because the hierarchies couldn't deal with the inherent status dissonance.

³ Composed of sitar, tabla, tambura, flute and Mayer on violin and harpsichord.

⁴ Worldwide, it seems. Even in India only singles and EPs had been released until then, in spite of the long form of the raga. The LP was called *Music of India: Morning and Evening Ragas*; released by Angel records, a New York classical offshoot of the British company EMI.

⁵ Whose book *Introduction to Sitar*, published in 1967, sold over 500 copies in its first two weeks.

⁶ The other players here are percussionist Vikku Vinayakram and violinist Lakshminarayana Shankar.

⁷ The other players here are Jan Hammer, piano and Moog synthesizer; Jack Bruce, bass; Zbigniew Seifert, violin and Nippy Noya, percussion.

⁸ The other players here are Pharoah Sanders, soprano saxophone and percussion; Tulsí, tamboura; Colin McBeé, bass; Rashid Allí, drums and Majid Shabazz, bells and tambourine.

⁹ Includes: 2 Chinese wooden Toy *Cluickers*, Thai Wood Rattle, Brazilian Basket Rattle (Caxixi), Turkish Darbouka, Benin Talking Drum, Rotating Bronze Disc, Temple Blocks, Vibra-Slap, Chinese Opera Gong, 3 sizes of Log Drum, Flex-A-Tone, Office Lamp (metal spring), 3 Cowbells, 2 X Cuica Friction-drums, Brazilian 3-Tone 'Samba Whistle' (Apito), Egyptian Camel Bells, Low Pitched Opera Gong, Timbales, Cymbals, Cup Chimes and Triangle.

¹⁰ He says he began to collect in 1962, on a world charity tour with Frank Sinatra, with whom he worked over decades travelling in Sinatra's private plane, which he slowly filled with instruments - after which he never looked back. The collection of, eventually, some 2000 pieces is now mostly dispersed between the Indiana *Percussive Arts Society*, *Los Angeles Percussion Rentals* (<http://www.lapercussionrentals.com/instruments/categories/emil-richards-collection>) and into the private hands of film composer Danny Elfman.

¹¹ He says 2000.

¹² Released in May 67. I know there's dispute about this but Bob Moog's researches conform that *Zodiac Cosmic Sounds* was in fact the first.

¹³ Performers: Don Cherry - trumpet, bells, conch, flute, vocals, Michael Brecker - saxophone, Collin Walcott - sitar, Moki - tamboura, Ronald Dean Miller, Stan Samole - guitar, Lois Colin - harp, Cliff Carter - keyboards, Narada Michael Walden - piano, timpani, tom tom, Marcus Miller, Neil Jason - bass, Sammy Figueroa - congas, Tony Williams, Lenny White, Steve Jordan - drums, Raphael Cruz - percussion. Cheryl Alexander - vocals.

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

03. Acknowledgments

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