



Curatorial > INTERRUPTIONS

This section proposes a line of programmes devoted to exploring the complex map of sound art from different points of view organised in curatorial series.

With **INTERRUPTIONS** we make the most of the vast musical knowledge of the artists and curators involved in the **Ràdio Web MACBA** project, to create a series of 'breaks' or 'interruptions' in our Curatorial programming. In à-la-carte-music format, our regular curators have carte blanche to create a purely musical experience with only one guiding parameter: the thread that runs through each session must be original and surprising. Morten J. Olsen's mix for the **INTERRUPTIONS** series presents an extreme, complex and long journey into drumming, to discuss out loud Olsen's most personal theories coming from his very own personal experience and background. As Morten puts it, possibly, 'a long and painful listening experience of percussion oriented music'.

Curated by Morten J. Olsen

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Born in 1981 in Stavanger, North Europe, experimental musician and producer, sometimes composing, once in a blue moon involved in other arts. Studied drumming from an early age and moved to Amsterdam to study institutionally in 2001. Spending most of the time simply arguing with his teachers he moved on to pursue the freedoms of Berlin in 2006. He has been influential in both the noise-rock scene as well as in the realms of more conceptual operations involving improvisation. He moves freely within and around the frames of experimental music and works with a sound palette that encompasses the history of orchestral percussion, electronic music, silent music and noise music albeit recently his main focus has shifted towards the fringes of club music and Fluxus techno. He has performed and toured extensively – most notably with the bands **MoHa!** and **Ultralyd** and later with **N.M.O.** (Naturkunde Museum Ostkreuz) and **The Pitch**.
mortenjolsen.tk

INTERRUPTIONS #19

The possibility of drumming

One can easily compile a list of tags to describe a mix, but the real question is whether the list comes after the mix, or whether all those items in the list were already in the author's practise/background to begin with. Or maybe it's a bit of both? Innate music, innate rhythms, universal grammar, YouTube-anthropology, vestigiality, rudiments, Swiss mercenaries, acid techno and other elemental forms of expression. Norwegian drummer Morten J. Olsen (of N.M.O and MoHa! fame) delivers a true tour de force of a mix in which he manages to connect all those more or less distant dots, in order to share his very unique views on percussion music.

01. Summary

The possibility of producing a mix

I was asked if I would be interested in looking into drumming as a point of departure for the possibility of producing a mix. I thought about it and replied that I was planning to further investigate the phenomenon anyway – so I said yes – but also, that lately I had been thinking about the idea of innate music. The reply to that was very positive and it seemed especially relevant as Anna Ramos (who gave me the commission) had recently had a baby. At the same time I wasn't exactly sure what innate music meant – and at present I wonder even more. I imagine it relates to the origin of music and cultural universals¹ and that music is a capacity that we're born with, perhaps much like language – i.e. corresponding to the theory of universal grammar.² Realising that this idea is far too large a project for me to take on in this mix I'll aim a little lower instead, and try to keep it simple.³ I'll try to look mostly into drumming, which, after all, I do know something about already – albeit on a personal level as a drummer and not as an anthropologist nor a musicologist or psychologist. And despite the fact that I'm a drummer, drumming and percussion music is not something that I was ever overly interested in: only recently have I become generally more interested in anthropology and the history of drumming and also in alternative approaches to basics – basic expressions and basic techniques. This means, essentially, looking at the history of what I know in a different way than I have been, and in a different way than I was taught. By comparing new fields (new fields to melike YouTube-anthropology⁴) with earlier influences and looking back at what I have been investigating over the years, which is pretty eclectic and stylistically diverse, I've made something that, in my early days, I might have considered a long and painful listening experience of percussion oriented music.⁵

The possibility of drumming being the original music

Macaque monkeys drum on objects in a rhythmical way to show social dominance⁶ and the drum is the oldest known instrument in the world.⁷ I would think it's uncontroversial to say that rhythmic drumming and hitting things, perhaps with voice outbursts to go along with it, belong to our most fundamental forms of expression. Also that it is something that was present already at the earliest stages of human development. Perhaps it even preceded language, although that might be controversial. It is for sure very often the main accompaniment of dance, another elemental form of expression. As there are no known cultures on the planet without dance nor music, it's likely that they're both not only elemental, but also universal, even innate forms of expression, i.e. not only instinctual like song and performance appear to be to a bird of paradise, but hardwired as to the fact that they grow wings and humans grow arms.⁸ However it is at the same time arguably drumming and hitting things, that really saved us (the West) from 'classical' music's hegemony and finally got us out of not only the tyranny of tonal music, but also the tyranny of the fixed pitch that we (in the histories we're taught) have enforced upon ourselves. The 'equally' tempered



[Some of the YouTube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS]

tuning system has been with us (in the West) for, at best, 500 years⁹ and is perhaps another example of what Dave Phillips calls an error of continuation, an error that spans centuries.¹⁰ It's a battle that continues to this day, and, as is often the case, the course of this development seems to be taking place by reinvestigation too. An example of that phenomenon, i.e. early developments of something assisting its later self through a period of stagnation, could be Anton Webern's investigations into the polyphonic music of the low countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and how he used that as a tool to develop new music in the beginning of the twentieth century. In a way something similar happened with drumming, and this to a much wider extent and with far more severe repercussions.

Noise, drumming, machines and vestigiality

Noise and drumming are in my opinion closely linked to each other, both consist mostly of non-fixed-pitch sounds, and drum machines and other ways of sequencing noise-based sounds serve as a simple bridge between the two. While Varèse's 'Ionisation' (written in 1929-1931 – among the first pieces for concert hall percussion alone) claims reference to natural sound, physical phenomena and the Italian futurists rather than drumming, he's definitely using drummers. It seems the non-pitched revolution was in the air at the time and by 1939 John Cage's Henry Cowell-inspired 'First Construction (in Metal)' was using ethnic percussion and simple fixed rhythmic structures in the new academic music. And while encouraged listening, field-listening, i.e. sound walks or field-recordings, amplified near-silence, electro magnetism or radiation could be an even more primal form of expression than drumming (possibly on a similar level as various forms of noise music) assisted silence must be the lowest, and yet the most profound form of them all.

At the same time, if we look at it from an outside point of view, from the point of view of an alien, it seems there is no actual need for music at all. I've heard it being called cheesecake, Robin Hayward mentioned it, quoting someone I don't know, maybe it means we like it but it doesn't serve a clear purpose for survival? At first this may seem like it goes against an idea of a universal grammar of music, but, in fact it works quite well considering we are equipped with many traits and tools that we are not quite sure anymore what they are needed for, i.e. they have lost their original function (these include the tailbone and the appendix, Darwin's tubercle – which is a piece on 10% of the population's ears, and also goosebumps) – and music? Or is it rather that we haven't discovered its true function, yet? Anyway this phenomenon is called (human) vestigiality.¹¹ Incidentally, the same phenomenon is called 'rudiment' in Germanic languages.

And then we are right at the core of where my mix is going: 'In percussion music, a rudiment is one of a number of relatively small patterns which form the foundation for more extended and complex drum patterns.'¹² Wikipedia continues: 'The term "rudiment" in this context means not only "basic", but also fundamental. While any level of drumming may, in some sense, be broken down by analysis into a series of component rudiments, the term "drum rudiment" is most closely associated with various forms of field drumming, also known as rudimental drumming.'

Military communications¹³

"The origin of snare drum rudiments can be traced back to Swiss mercenaries armed with long pole arms. The sound of the tabor (portable snare drum played with one hand) was used to set the tempo and communicate commands with distinct drumming patterns. These drumming patterns became the basis of the snare drum rudiments. [...] The first written rudiment goes back to the year 1612 in Basel, Switzerland, but the cradle of rudimental drumming is said to be France, where professional drummers became part of the King's honor guard in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The craft was perfected during the reign of Napoleon I."



[Some of the YouTube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS]

02. Tracklist commentary with some connections and/or the occasional anecdote

That brings me to the warm up of the warm up of the mix, which is an excerpt of a bowed cymbal piece I made in collaboration with seven other percussionists in Berlin. It is called 'Rodeleros' which means "shield bearers" and I play it here at the same time as a piece from my *Bassdrum* album called 'Pure Tone Attraction'. After that, another track from the same album called 'Ideologically Justified' 'Rubble' continuing the build up before it really starts with a warning for war: 'Le Réveil au Bivouac'.

Drumming has historically been used for military communications in quite concrete ways, and while these are now replaced by all sorts of seemingly more efficient tools, in a sense, back then it worked as a form of cryptography.

Thinking about that TCF came to mind and that's what you hear together with the continued french snare drum rudiments. Back to early drumbeats of war in a Haitian war dance called Nago, eventually grouped with Dungeon Acid, a Swedish drummer hailing from Haiti. Then bringing us to the English speaking military tradition with a US Navy band and on to an example of a symbiosis of these different styles of war beats turned into celebration in the 'Picnic with Napolian' (Napoleon again) Strickland & The Como Drum Corps. Combining some of the elements we had so far gets us to a track from N.M.O's release 'Nederlandse Maatschappij Ontwikkeling', which translates as 'Dutch society development' (N.M.O is a project I'm working on with Rubén Patiño).

Heading back out into the field and the Mundari naked straight bodies of the South Sudan we get something that quite reminds me of Powell's 'A Band' for The Death of Rave label. I wonder what actually happens as you jump from war to celebration to funeral to club – sometimes it sounds pretty much like the same thing – or maybe it's even more primal than the assignment of a function to it.

The next track is from a 7" Kjetil Brandsdal from Noxagt gave to me, something allegedly from Burundi – where drums are divine. Crossing back to the UK and jamming fingers with Barnt in this exciting drum-driven track that is at the same time pretty weird. Continuing in the UK with Pearson Sound which I think has a very refined idea about drums and drumming, then heading to the US again with Max Roach waltzing away with 'The Drum Also Waltzes' from his first solo record called *Drums Unlimited*. Gerry Hemingway, to me best known for playing with Anthony Braxton in his most classic quartet has also made a couple of solo records. This album is called *Trance Tracks* and it is drum kit music with a very systematic approach, very polyrhythmical and excellently executed. Staying with the polyrhythmical, odd meter, yet minimal stuff, we jump to Finland and Mika Vainio's project Ø and 'Throb-s' from the 1996 album *Oleno*.

Staying with the pioneers of techno and alienation here's Thomas Bangalter's 'Rectum' from the soundtrack for the movie *Irreversible*. For me the interesting part here is the placement of the drums: sounds like a messed up version of the napoleonic war preparations, marching and real low verbed out in the mix. Other than that, the eerie siren-y main sound sounds almost exactly like Dopplereffekt's 'Gesamtkunstwerk' – which I don't know the story of, but instead of showing you I'll play a different track of theirs, called 'Rocket Scientist'.

The siren, which is considered percussion in the orchestra, brings me to another french invention that I've already mentioned (one of the first concert hall compositions for percussion ensemble alone) namely 'Ionisation' by Edgar Varèse. It's played by Ensemble Intercontemporain and conducted by Boulez – not sure if that's the best version. It's known that Frank Zappa got interested in experimenting with music through Varèse, and I wonder what J Dilla got interested in when he found the sample of Zappa saying 'go get your girlfriend and you're gonna dance like you never danced before'.

Anders Hana was my guitar/synth playing counterpart in MoHa! for quite some years. Now he moved back to Stavanger and started playing drums himself. He's getting good, as I'm sure you can tell: Brutal Blues' 'Skjold' (which means 'shield', incidentally).



[Some of the YouTube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS]

Back to something that should do, at least it did, a few years ago, on the dance floor, *Claptrap* by Joe. Mixed in is a track from a duo of two Japanese drummers, Tatsuhisa Yamamoto and Muneomi Senju, from the album *A Thousand Mountains* and then an excerpt from the debut concert of the percussion group Glück, which consists of five of the most prominent percussionists in the European improvised music scene.

J Dilla is considered a virtuoso beatmaker that took inspiration and used samples from all over the place including folk drumming and early electronic music. His 'Won't Do' is abruptly broken off by Grisey's piece 'Stèle' for two bass drums before some more sweaty slimy stuff that is Delroy Edwards' *Slowed Down Funk Vol. 1*.

Before this really gets out of control I'm breaking it again with one of the few, perhaps the only Mathias Spahlinger electronic piece, 'Störung', from 1975. It's not directly connected to drumming, but on the Edition RZ record it's the track before a nice gong piece called 'Entlöschung', but 'Störung' means disturbance or intrusion, or even interruption, which is the title of this series, and so the story goes, and then the Grisey piece surfaces again.

To continue, we shortly go to ultra dry Nicolaus A. Huber's 'Clash Music' that hints towards some other metal music which is the following proper gamelan, Tirta Sari from Peliatan, Ubud before going back to America and Philip Corner's properly slowed down Gamelan in 'Barcelona Cathedral'.

That takes a while. To help pass this time I've inserted two pieces that I recently reencountered, the first one 'Having Never Written a Note for Percussion' by James Tenney and 'Silver Streetcar for the Orchestra' by Alvin Lucier. Towards the end of the slowed down Gamelan a track that is bad for your health occurs: 'A Colleague Came to Your House and Punched You. Your Room Became Very Messy', from the Noxagt album *Brutage* (2014).

Now, to speed things up a little, something accumulative in a different pace with the by now classic percussion literature piece 'Rebonds B' by Iannis Xenakis moving on to part of Australian Anthony Pateras piece 'Mutant Theatre' that accumulates as well but in a more recognisable way, whilst maintaining a fairly similar sound world.

Brian Ferneyhough's 'Bone Alphabet' is considered one of the most difficult pieces to play ever written, and when I went to conservatory in Amsterdam I had a duo with fellow percussionist Matthias Engler that tried to play similar sounding music, but totally improvised. On this recording, all the drummers in the school were practicing in the basement underneath the hall we recorded in, in little cabins, at the same time – which makes for a funny recording that might accidentally echo the Bangalter piece from before. In the same school we were also exposed to Karnatic music, which is the South Indian classical music, possibly the tradition with the most sophisticated rhythmical concepts conceivable. What you hear is a so called 'Nadai Bhedam' sequence in *Tala 14* – a vocal demonstration of an exercise in systematic rhythmical progression.

And without going into any ragas now I'll instead go to something that seems inspired by the sound of the mridangam, an ancient percussion instrument from India, or perhaps the more northern, and better known tablas in the Acido release from last year, *Archaic & Refreshing – Outsider House Related*, 'Epic Groove Adventures' by S.P. Posse.

From this point onwards it gets more blurry as I was thinking that speech could be considered percussion and we have an encounter with another Morty and the prince of silence. Making something audible that you thought was inaudible. And again: intrusion. Interruption. Feldman: 'The King of Denmark'.

The next number is by Andy Kaufman, then Greg Stuart and Michael Pisaro's 'Ricefall', a traditional Norwegian snare drum piece played by Rolf Seldal and Peter Ablinger's 'Regenstücke Vol. 2'. ESG brings back the funk and Alexandre Babel adds the highs, women of a Baka tribe play water while Zohra Dagdaga belly dances it up, potentially from Algeria. Then come Hanna Hartman's cracking nuts, Raymond Scott's 'Toy Typewriter' and finally a full brain scan from an MRI machine.



[Some of the YouTube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS]

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_universal

² Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_grammar – and be sure to distinguish this from the esoteric idea of music being a universal language, which is something completely different.

³ Of course, in other ways this means more opaque and therefore complex.

⁴ YouTube-underground and YouTube-anthropology: a notion about YouTube is that the most commercial content, in Germany and also other countries, is blocked because of the inability to reach agreements with mechanical licensing and performance rights organizations like GEMA. Apparently 61.5% of the 1000 most viewed clips was blocked in Germany as of January 2013. That means that what you indeed can access could be considered underground since it's not important enough for the big league. YouTube has, like other commercial outlets, a top-down hierarchy when it comes to the framework, and the framework stays put even if the content is blocked, but the content itself is theoretically user-uploaded and in that regard potentially representing the grassroots. (Though since it's Google that owns it I'm sure it's more complicated). In any case it paves the way for an environmentally friendly way of doing musicology and anthropology, getting access to representative content of the user i.e. the people across the world and at the same time. You can be sure that commercial corporate influence will stay out of your way and that way you'll keep your integrity. About 95% of the music in this mix is available on YouTube. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blocking_of_YouTube_videos_in_Germany

⁵ Hanging out in the percussion department of a conservatory can get pretty tedious at times – it took me years to get over it – and I was only there for a relatively short time.

⁶ www.livescience.com/9728-monkey-drumming-suggests-origin-music.html

⁷ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum With reference to Chomsky talking about the language faculty.

⁸ Faruq Z. Bey Ratio'nal æsthetic, p. 34 paraphrasing N Lloyd Encyclopedia of Music, pp.590-1.

⁹ Please check out Dave Phillips' mix and text for this INTERRUPTIONS series:

rwm.macba.cat/en/curatorial/dave-phillips-on-duration/capsula

¹⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_vestigiality

¹¹ de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudiment

¹² en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drum_rudiment

¹³ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_communications

03. Playlist / Digital sources

Morten J. Olsen, 'Pure Tone Attraction', 'Rodeleros', 'Ideologically Justified Rubble'

French drum corps

Previously available on YouTube

TCF

soundcloud.com/liberationstechnologies/tcf-54-c6-05-1c-13-cc-72-e9-cc-dc-84-f2-a3-ff-cc-38-1e-94-0d-c0-50-5c-3e-e8

Haiti Nago pou Ogou

www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFFo7meoYyc

Dungeon Acid

www.youtube.com/watch?v=37d5CvhdQEg

US Navy band

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Drum_-_Cadence_A.ogg

Como Drum Corps

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttOBf6jZhDk

N.M.O.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBKszhg3kgM

Mundari music

www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=0A5P2F_oUVM#t=227

Powell, 'A Band'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLd6zKp6BJo

Burundi Black

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLMHKjvWsd0

Barnt, 'Chapell'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=h21LdrwWoaE

Pearson Sound, 'Power Drumsss'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=_x8iewkwFh0

Max Roach

www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7ha2iuEti0



[Some of the YouTube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS]

Gerry Hemingway

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2C8bCcN3Hw

Ø 'Throb-s', 'Oleno'

Thomas Bangalter

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IMArVYkqZ8&list=PLJagQG2JmpSpvgkpK0Ss0aM3oOZ2kldvS&index=3

Dopplereffekt

www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8z5TMhI8ZU

Edgar Varèse

www.youtube.com/watch?v=TStutMsLX2s

Brutal Blues

www.youtube.com/watch?v=spHT6n0Uxkg

Joe

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihl6dkMg_Uk

Tatsuhisa Yamamoto & Muneomi Senju, 'A Thousand Mountains' (acoustic & synthesized drums and percussions)

Glück, excerpt from concert at Ausland, Berlin.

J Dilla

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeOpIxxlxxM

Grisey, 'Stèle'

Delroy Edwards

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpTB4dp6p1g

Mathias Spahlinger

Nicolaus A. Huber

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX8ToWLXtkw

Tirta Sari

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJngMRibJNl

Philip Corner, 'Barcelona Cathedral'

James Tenney

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd5WNTiwiU8

Alvin Lucier

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxkaZK-Vqdl

Noxagt

www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnArlx_OWf0

Iannis Xenakis

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKTF0o6wYhg

Anthony Pateras

www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwUat-viBJI

Brian Ferneyhough

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyedqvWwY5Y

Thai on Top

n-collective.com/files/thaiontop_bonesnfemmes_take1.mp3

Nadai Bhedam

www.rafaelreina.org/uploads/1/3/8/7/13873479/147_nadai_bhedam_seq_in_tala_14.mp3

S.P. Posse

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgJAi1EgNP4

John Cage and Morton Feldman in conversation

vimeo.com/101083340

Moton Feldman, 'The King of Denmark'

www.youtube.com/watch?v=OgMswbEkykk



[Some of the youtube videos that Morten J. Olsen used in this INTERRUPTIONS!]

Andy Kaufman

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLJ4NWNpt9o

Michael Pisaro and Greg Stuart

www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrpWZrLVsSI

Rolf Seldal, 'Sjuspringen'

Peter Ablinger

soundcloud.com/godrec/god-18-peter-ablinger-regenst

ESG

www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtMWnzf0x3E

Alexandre Babel

alexandrebabel.bandcamp.com/releases

Baka water drumming

www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7ba1CNOLiI

Zohra Dagdaga

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pqv5Eycr_V4

Hanna Hartman

www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIOCbGHaXPE

Raymond Scott

www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrY8XLT917o

04. Further reading

research.culturalequity.org/

05. Related links

Morten J Olsen

mortenjolsen.tk

N.M.O.

n-m-o.tk

N.M.O.'s Soundcloud

<https://soundcloud.com/n-m-o-5>

The Pitch

thepitch.tk

06. Credits

Recordings of YouTube videos put together in Pro Tools by Morten J. Olsen on two long snowy non electrified (diesel) train journeys in Norway, December 2014. Thanks to everybody involved, artists, uploaders and downloaders.

Special thanks to Stine Janvin Motland for listening through, Bryan Eubanks and Koen Nutters for looking over the text, and Anna Ramos for both. Many thanks to Rubén Patiño, Johnny Chang, Jonathan Saldanha, people who respond and O Tannenbaum.

07. Copyright note

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