



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 #21.2

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, Asian instruments find their way into all sorts of unexpected situations, both at home and abroad.

01. Playlist

00:00 Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978

00:06 Film historians speak about Toru Takemitsu and Tan Dun on the Brazilian television series *Music Behind The Scenes*, 2002

02:03 Johann Sebastian Bach / Desperadoes Steel Orchestra, 'Toccata and Fugue' (excerpt), 1970

Steel pans, a unique product of Trinidad, are idiophones – pitched percussion instruments – and are played with rubber-tipped sticks. Originally beaten out of discarded 55-gallon oil-drums, they are now crafted using sheet steel to reproduce the entire pitch-range of a classical orchestra. Desperadoes Steel Orchestra, also known simply as Despers, founded in 1947, remains one of the great Trinidadian steel bands, whose repertoire covers calypso, Latin, jazz, film music, popular tunes and, as here and in the main programme, whatever can be made to work from the Western classical repertoire – sometimes played in calypso form and sometimes (at formal concerts, festivals and competitions) as accurately and close to orchestral renderings as possible.

03:52 Dorothy Ashby, 'The Moving Finger' (excerpt), 1970

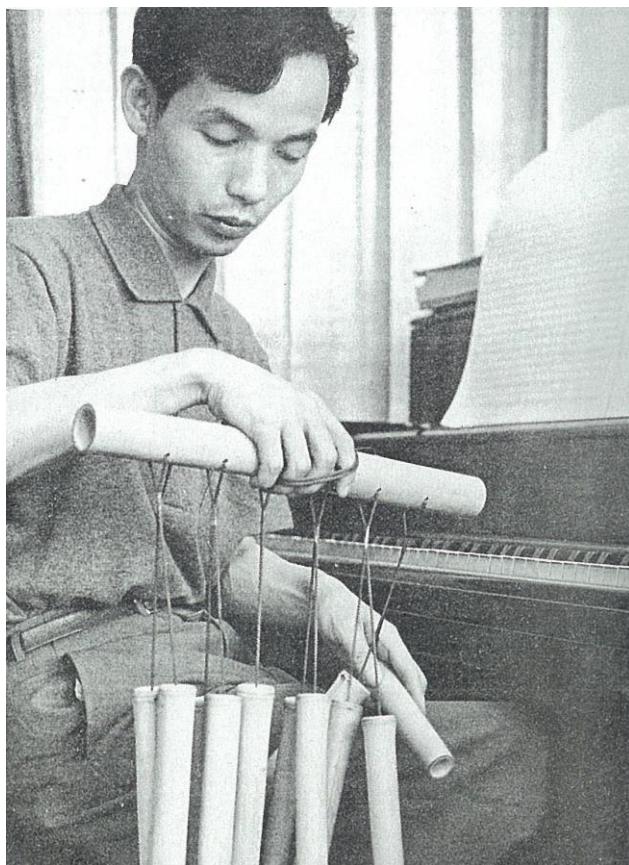
Perhaps the most notable (and least recognized) of all the jazz harpists, certainly one of the earliest, active from 1952, Ashby played with Ed Thigpen, Richard Davis, Stanley Turrentine, Louis Armstrong and Woody Herman – and in her own trio – before forming, with her husband, the Ashby players – an African-American community theatre group for which she wrote all the music and played piano and harp. Under her own name she made eleven exceptional records between 1957 and 1984, adapting the harp to jazz, bebop, soul and r&b styles. In the late sixties she settled in California where she worked pop sessions with the likes of Stevie Wonder and Billy Preston. This excerpt is taken from her 1970 LP *The Rubaiyat of Dorothy Ashby* on which she also plays the Japanese koto, an American jazz first to the best of my knowledge. The mbira solo is played by the great jazz cellist and composer Fred Katz.

05:53 Clive Bell & David Ross, 'Recovery Suite' (excerpt), 2014

David Ross, drummer with the Kenny Process Team and serial improviser, is here playing a customized analogue oscillator, which he calls a drosscillator. He is also a music therapist and runs improvised music workshops for adults with special needs and dementia. Clive Bell is a composer and writer who plays a range of Eastern and Western wind instruments. He studied shakuhachi in Japan with the master Kohachiro Miyata, and applies it – along with other Eastern and Western wind instruments – in both traditional and unexpected formations: he was the shakuhachi player on Karl Jenkins's album *Requiem*, the Harry Potter and Hobbit soundtracks, is a noted improviser, and worked for over a decade with Jah Wobble. He composes for film, TV and theatre.

07:04 Minoru Muraoka, 'Take Five' (excerpts), 1970

After studying classical shakuhachi from an early age, Muraoka went on to adapt his playing to more popular and traditional enka repertoire and, by 1967, had



[Toru Takemitsu]

moved into jazz and rock – fused still with traditional instruments and scales. This version of Paul Desmond's jazz classic, taken from Muraoka's 1970 LP *Bamboo*, is a perfect illustration of his hybrid aesthetic. After releasing a mini-snowstorm of records in the sixties and seventies, he slowly shifted his attention from music into teaching *qigong* breathing techniques. When Herbie Mann (who'd been coming to Japan since 1964, and playing 'Japanese cane flute' for a decade or more) came to Japan in 1974 to record the LP that was eventually released as *Gagaku and Beyond*, it was Muraoka and his ensemble that Mann and his group collaborated with. (There's a track from this album heard in PROBES #20).

08:25 Toshio Hosokawa, 'Wie Atmen im Licht' (excerpts), 2002

Born in Hiroshima in 1955, Hosokawa studied formal composition in Tokyo before continuing his studies in Germany with Isang Yun and Klaus Huber. He also participated regularly in the Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. Though rooted in the Western compositional method, and mostly composing for conventional Western resources, Hosokawa incorporates Buddhist and traditional Japanese ideas in all his work ('Music is the place where notes and silence meet', he once famously said). In its rhythmic proportions 'Wie Atmen im Licht' is oriented around the breathing pattern of Zen meditation: very slow breathing in, very slow breathing out – and mixes traditional (sho) and modern Western (accordion) instruments.

10:23 Toru Takemitsu, 'Antistrophe' (excerpts), 1979

Born in 1930. A remarkable figure; essentially, an autodidact who mastered Western composition, pioneered electronic and tape music, was a founding member in 1951 of the Jikken Kobo (experimental workshop: a group of avant-garde artists, musicians, designers, choreographers, film-makers and photographers who distanced themselves both from academia and Japanese tradition) and was closely associated with Fluxus and the New York School. His impressive list of works includes several hundred concert pieces, over ninety film scores and some twenty, mostly theoretical, books. 'Antistrophe' is the sixth part of *In an Autumn Garden*, the expansion of a work originally commissioned by the National Theatre of Japan for traditional gagaku orchestra in 1973. Takemitsu spatialised the music, dividing the orchestra into four separated parts, introducing elements taken from Byzantine and Indonesian music while working, as always with timbre and colour. Gagaku but not gagaku; a fascinating probe.

12:37 Drum'n Koto Trio, untitled recording (excerpt), 2013

Trio formed by Canadian bassist Chris Jennings, who moved to France in 2000, and thereafter worked extensively in jazz and world music ensembles. One of many.

13:33 Fuka Vincente, 'Tempura Soul' (excerpt), 2004

Taken from an LP compilation that purports to be a collection of recordings by bands entertaining American troops in Vietnam, or by G.I.'s or a mixture of both, but for which I can find no dependable provenance. There's no doubting however the unfamiliar mix of Western and oriental sounds and instruments.

14:56 God of Shamisen, 'Tower Storm Attack' (excerpt), 2008

A Californian band fronted by Kevin Kmetz, apparently the first foreigner to win the honorary Daijo Kazuo Award at the Tsugaru Shamisen Championship Competition in Kanagi, Japan. In 2008 he released the CD *Dragon String Attack* in Japan, from which this track is taken. There seem to have been no more albums since.

16:25 Toshio Hosokawa, 'Sakura fur Otto Tomek (sho)', 2011

17:44 Helmut Lachenmann, 'Sho' (excerpt) from his opera *The Little Match Girl*, 1990-96

A composer celebrated for his radically unorthodox approach to Western instruments uses a sho here in an uncharacteristically orthodox manner.

19:11 Tan Dun, 'Concerto for Zheng – Part 4' (excerpt), 1999

One of China's most internationally celebrated contemporary classical composers, Tan first studied at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where he met –



[Tan Dun]

and was influenced by – Toru Takemitsu, George Crumb, Alexander Goehr, Hans Werner Henze, Isang Yun... and Chou Wen-chung – with whom he went on to study in New York. In a large body of work composed for concert hall, opera stage and film (his music for Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* won him an academy award for best original score in 2000) he routinely mixes Western orchestral and traditional Chinese instruments, non-instrumental sound resources (such as paper, water and stone) with audiovisual technologies and elements drawn from oriental theatre. This concerto, an amalgam of Chinese, Tibetan, English and American musical traditions, is a re-arrangement of his 1999 *Pipa Concerto* which, in turn, was based on his 1995 *Ghost Opera* for string quartet, pipa, water, metal, stones, and paper, which the virtuoso pipa player Wu Man described as a '...giddy merging of traditions... a leapfrogging through music history in which cultural integration is effortless. No single work more exemplifies Tan's range which extends from uncompromising experimentalism to populism.'

20:39 Tan Dun, 'Concerto for Zheng – Part 2' (excerpt), 1999

21:39 Toru Takemitsu, 'Seppuku' (excerpt), 1962

Apart from his impressive repertory of contemporary concert music, Toru Takemitsu wrote music for over ninety films, ten of them for director Masaki Kobayashi, including this – *Seppuku* – an historical drama set in 1630 (released in the west as *Harakiri*), scored for Western orchestra, prepared piano, donkey's jawbone and – prominently – Japanese biwa, played here in a very non-traditional way – a blend of atonal strumming and fragments of popular folk melodies. It was the first time he'd introduced a traditional Japanese instrument into any of his compositions.

22:55 Artist and song unknown (excerpts) recording date also unknown, but before 2007

A clip taken from an unidentified programme on Central China television, one of countless examples of Western MOR rock/Chinese traditional mash-ups (very often, like this one, played by attractive young women).

23:44 Hsu Nami, 'Mimosa' (excerpts), 2007

An American East coast new fusion rock band formed in 2005 and named after its Taiwanese-American front-man Jack Hsu, who substitutes amplified ehu (a two-stringed Chinese violin) for the usual shredding metal guitar. An early song, 'Rising of the Sun', featured as the entrance theme music for the Chinese Basketball team at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, leading to lots of work for the band in China and Taiwan.

25:12 Chih-Fang Huang, 'Double Concerto for Pipa and Shamisen, Majestic Mountain, Still Water', 2012

Chih-Fang Huang is a contemporary Taiwanese composer who regularly fuses Western, Japanese and Chinese instruments and traditions.

26:57 Tan Dun, 'Ghost' (excerpt), with Wu Man and Kronos Quartet, 1994

28:34 Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky / Takeshi Terauchi and the Bunnys, 'Swan Lake' (excerpt), 1967

We heard a lot from him already, but more is always a good idea; Terauchi (aka Terry), born in 1939, made his first record in the late fifties, playing rhythm guitar in the country & western group Jimmy Tokita & The Mountain Playboys. In 1962 – the year the ventures first came to Japan – he formed his own band, The Blue Jeans, adopting the new eleki style; after which his output was prodigious for many years. In 1966 he formed The Bunnys, who made a number of pretty great records and then, two years later, he went back to the Blue Jeans – who are still at it today. Although little known in the west, Terauchi has to be rated one of the few really great masters of the guitar instrumental on the ground of his unerring sense of sound and arrangement, his prodigious playing style and prescient raw power.

Gregorio Paniagua, 'Anakrousis', 1978



[Hsu Nami]

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

03. Links

www.tandun.com
www.facebook.com/HsuNamiRock

04. Credits and acknowledgments

Recorded at Studio Midi-Pyrénées. Engineered by Bob Drake. With thanks to David Petts, Charles O'Meara, Clive Bell, Yumi Hara and Jonas Vognsen.

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