

PROGRAM NOTES
SFTMC @ Mills College
November 9, 2009

Pierre Schaeffer :: *Étude pathétique [Étude aux Casseroles]* (1948/71, 4m - stereo)

Pierre Schaeffer (French, 1910-1995) is known primarily as the father of *musique concrète*, but he was also an excellent writer, pioneer and veteran of radio, and founder and director of many special projects within the French national radio. Composed completely on turntables, *Études de Bruits* (Concert of Noises) was one of Schaeffer's first *musique concrète* studies (referred to as the primitives). *Étude pathétique [Étude aux Casseroles]* (Study on Pots and Pans), the final etude of the four, serves now as it did in the 1948 premiere radio broadcast: as the best introduction to this entirely new musical form.

Pierre Schaeffer's theoretical work, the foundation of which he developed while working at Radiodiffusion Française, was published in 1966; his *Traité des Objets Musicaux*. It remains the seminal treatise of *musique concrète*. His goal and research was to define a solfège of the sound universe based on the perception of sound and to question many previous notions about music, listening, perception, timbre, sound, etc. In 1958, within the structure of the French national radio, he formed the *Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (GRM), which continues today. GRM was at first mobilized to conduct group research into its founder's ideas.

Jonty Harrison :: *Unsound Objects* (1995, 13m - stereo)

One of the main criteria in Pierre Schaeffer's definition of the "sound object" was that, through the process of "reduced listening", one should hear sound material purely as sound, divorced from any associations with its physical origins - in other words, what is significant about a recorded violin sound (for example) is that particular sound, its unique identity, and not its "violin-ness". Despite this ideal, a rich repertoire of music has been created since the 1950s which plays precisely on the ambiguities evoked when recognition and contextualisation of sound material rub shoulders with more abstracted (and abstract) musical structures. But as these structures should themselves be organically related to the peculiarities of individual sound objects within them, the ambiguity is compounded: interconnections and multiple levels of meaning proliferate. The known becomes strange and the unknown familiar in a continuum of reality, unreality and surreality, where boundaries shift and continually renewed definitions are the only constant...

One of the most recognized composers of acousmatic music, composer **Jonty Harrison** (born 1952) is the Director of BEAST (Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre) and the Electroacoustic Music Studios in Birmingham, England. For ten years he was Artistic Director of the Department's annual Barber Festival of Contemporary Music. He plays an active role in the musical life of Britain, serving on a number of committees, as well as making conducting appearances with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (most notably conducting Stockhausen's *Momente* in Birmingham, Huddersfield and London) and the University New Music Ensemble. His music can be found on the *empreintes DIGITALes*, *NMC*, *Merlin* and *Centaur* labels.

Kent Jolly :: *Holding Pattern* (1998, 8m - stereo)

Holding Pattern was made using two bells and a saxophone sample. I had a particular image in mind when making this piece; a long pier stretching out into a fog covered lake at night. It is very still and calm. The first half of *Holding Pattern* directly evokes this image to me, and the second half is a reflection on that.

Kent Jolly (Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, 1970) studied electronic music at the Art Institute of Chicago (BFA 1994) and Mills College in Oakland (MFA 1996). He is a founding member of the

San Francisco Tape Music Collective and has created numerous works for tape, including *Mirrors* (1994), *Holding Pattern* (1998), *Cymbal* (2001), *Bellbox* (2003), and *Sleep Walker* (2007). He currently is employed as an Audio Director for Maxis/Electronic Arts, working on the popular video games *Sim City*, *The Sims* and *Spore*. He lives in Berkeley, California.

Cliff Caruthers :: *Cupido's Suitcase* (2009, 7m - stereo)

Cupido's Suitcase - Someone is walking along the beach.. Someone is packing their things. Someone has a story to tell, but the theater is dark. Real life and fantasy mix; she lies to herself, dreams nightly of a suitcase she can live in, and always forgets by morning.

Cliff Caruthers has been composing electroacoustic and experimental music since 1995. He continues to search for direct and tangible relationships to complex technologies, creating narrative soundscapes and psychologically charged atmospheres from recordings of real and imagined environs. His work has been featured at the Society for Electroacoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS), the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival, The San Francisco Tape Music Festival, Deep Wireless 2006, Noise Pancakes, Quiet American's Field Effects series, and the Prague Quadrennial 2007. Since moving to Oakland in 2000, Mr. Caruthers has established himself as a preeminent sound designer in the Bay Area, working with Berkeley Repertory Theater, Cutting Ball Theater (associate artist), American Conservatory Theater, Aurora Theatre Company, Crowded Fire (company member), San Jose Stage Company, Marin Theatre Company, California Shakespeare Theater, and as resident sound designer at Theatreworks. He is also pleased to be a part of the San Francisco Tape Music Collective.

Matt Ingalls :: *Sonatina* (2009, 9m - four channels)

Sonatina was composed with the same approach i take in my solo clarinet improvisations: i start with some motives and an idea of how to develop them but as i progress, i let the piece take charge with the direction to go in next. All the source material in the work is unprocessed acoustic recordings, with the addition of an FM synthesis instrument i designed in Csound.

Matt Ingalls (b. 1970) is a composer, clarinetist, and computer musician from Oakland and is a graduate of Mills College. He is the founder and co-director of the San Francisco Tape Music Collective and its parent organization, sfSound. Before focusing on making music instead of entering competitions, Matt received the *Deuxième Prix* (Catégorie Humour - Puy) in the 1994 *Concours International de Musique Electroacoustique de Bourges* and was the first recipient of the *ASCAP/SEAMUS Commission and Recording Prize*. Matt is also well known for his computer music software. He created the Soundflower audio routing tool for cycling74 and his Csound version for Macintosh, MacCsound won an Electronic Musician Magazine "Editor's Choice Award" in 2004. Matt currently works as the lead programmer for GVOX. <http://sfSound.org/matt>

Paulina Sundin :: *Electroclips* (2001, 3m)

In *ELECTROCLIPS* I am combining, traditional western song harmony with EAM-aesthetics. The harmonic progression of the piece is based on the 18th century Swedish folk song "Liksom en herdinna högtidsklädd". The idea was to see if I could use the song harmony as a foundation for an electro-acoustic piece without the harmony becoming too obvious to the listener or interfering with the listener's perception of the piece as being EAM.

Paulina Sundin is one of the few Swedish female composers to devote herself purely to electro-acoustic composition. Her music has been played and broadcast all over the world. In 1999 she was chosen by the Rotary Foundation to be their goodwill ambassador in England where she is currently pursuing post-graduate research at the University of East Anglia in Norwich.

Pippa Murphy :: *Caspian Retreat* (2002, 10m)

This is the first of three pieces, inspired by oceanic mythology from Persia, India and Europe. *Caspian Retreat* explores the beauty and complexities of contemporary life in a land steeped in ancient art, culture and music; a land rich in colour, smell and sound. Using recordings collected from the Caspian Sea and the city of Tehran, Iran, *Caspian Retreat* journeys into the mysticism of ancient and modern Persia..... It was written at a time when Iran was announced by Bush to be one of three countries on the axis of evil.

Pippa Murphy is an independent composer living in Edinburgh, Scotland. She has composed for radio broadcasts, theatre shows and sound diffusions. She has devised and facilitated many community education projects, including composition workshops for university students & professional artists at the Fadj International Film & Theatre Festival Iran, and asylum seekers in Glasgow and Salford, and primary school children in 'Sonic Postcards'. She completed her BMus, MA and PhD at Birmingham University. She has been a member of Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre(BEAST) for 12 years and is vice-chair of Sonic Arts Network.

Thom Blum :: *Combustible* (2009, 10m - 6 channels)

Combustible - Intricate combinations of combustible materials (fuels, oxygen and ignitions) are put in close proximity sparking processes, in the early phases of the piece, that sputter and die out leaving trails of heat and exhaust. The combinations become more efficient and volatile and begin to propel semi-stable processes that strive to connect and evolve. But after a few false steps, this theater self-destructs, blowing itself to smithereens. Then nothing; an interlude in a void. But this vacuum gets penetrated and smashed then filled and pulverized, only to make way for new combustible combinations and processes to flourish.

Thom Blum has been composing electroacoustic music since 1972. His works have been presented in concerts, festivals and radio broadcasts internationally. Recent performances include New Adventures in Sound Art's (NAISA, Toronto) Sonic Portraits, The Long Haul, sound installations at Cowell Theater (San Francisco), live soundscaping for Men Think They Are Better than Grass, by Deborah Slater Dance Theater (Yerba Buena Gardens esplanade, San Francisco), Medi(t)ations Australasian Computer Music Conference (Adelaide, Australia), and the Santa Fe International Festival of New Music (New Mexico). He is a member the San Francisco Tape Music Collective, dedicated to preparing and presenting spatial diffusions of fixed media (tape) music.

<http://www.thomblum.com> :: <http://www.myspace.com/thomblum>

Steve Reich :: *It's Gonna Rain* (1965, 17m - stereo, with 8-channel spatialization)

Steve Reich is one of the world's most famous living composers. He attended Mills College from 1961-63, studying with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud. Shortly afterward, Reich composed his first major work, *It's Gonna Rain*, with tape loops from a recording of a Pentecostal preacher at San Francisco's Union Square. A landmark in musical minimalism and process music, the composition was premiered at the San Francisco Tape Music Center in 1965. In an interview with Jason Gross in 2000, Reich spoke of this work:

The bone I had to pick with Pierre Schaeffer and that bunch was that if they were using the sound of a car crash, they had to lower it by an octave or speed it up by an octave, run it through a ring modulator or play it backwards. Why not hear that it's a car crash! These sounds that you're using in the original state have some kind of emotional resonance. We relate to them in various ways. If you bring them into the music, that brings in an emotional, theatrical meaning which is useful. It's worthwhile maintaining and building upon.

My idea was that I always wanted you to hear what the original sounds were. For *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come*

Out, that meant what the people were saying

.It was setting what they were saying in a way that was appropriate to the subject matter. *It's Gonna Rain* is about the end of the world. In those days, the voice was recorded in '64, you had the Cuban Missile Crisis and so it was very much a part of many peoples' thinking at that time. We were at the point where we could all turn into so much radioactive ash at any given time. So while this guy is preaching about Noah, it's not something abstract that has nothing to do with what's going on in your life.

It was also a time that was fairly difficult for me personally. So *It's Gonna Rain*, especially the second half of it, is very bleak. You're literally hearing the world come apart. Technically, it's been said many times, the discovery of the phasing process was within that piece. It happened with those two little Wollensack tape recorders I had (also used on *Phase Piece*). I made identical loops and I thought I would line them up in a particular relationship. Mainly with "it's gonna fall" on top of "rain" with the two channel result being "it's gonna... it's gonna... rain... rain..." with 180 degrees separation.

I put on headphones (which were stereo with each ear with a separate plug going into the two machines). By chance, two machines were lined up in unison. So what I heard was this unison sound sort of swimming in my head, spatially moving back and forth. It finally moved over to the left, which meant that the machine on the left was slightly faster passing in speed than the machine on the right. So the apparent phenomenon in your head is the sound moving to the left, moves down your left shoulder and then across the floor! (laughs) Then after a while, it comes into an imitation and then finally after four or five minutes, you hear "it's gonna... it's gonna... rain... rain..."

By the time it got that far, I thought to myself "this is unbelievable." Instead of a particular relationship, here is a whole way of making music, going from unison through all these contrapuntal relationships, all the way back to unison. All the possible relationships, rational and irrational, are there. So I immediately decided to experiment with just how fast that process should happen. Then in the second half of the piece, it got much more complicated, going from two then to four then to eight voices and never coming back together again, which is more in keeping with the text.

For tonight's presentation, we have reconstructed the phasing process and moved each individual loop to a separate speaker placement.