

San Francisco Tape Music Festival
Program Notes for Friday, January 30, 2009

Visit <http://sfSound.org/tape> for links to more information about the composers and their work.

Pierre Schaeffer :: *Étude Aux Sons Animés* [1958 - 4:12 - stereo]

Études aux sons animés is one of three short works Pierre Schaeffer composed in 1958 representing attempts to create a purely “musical” *musique concrète*, without surrealistic and anecdotal effects, based on qualities intrinsic to sounds – the same qualities described in his experimental “solfège” of sounds, the theory of which is embodied in his *Traité des Objets Musicaux*. Pierre Schaeffer's own deeply felt ambivalence for the music that he invented became one of the dominant characteristics of his creativity and thought. His approach was as much that of a scientist or engineer as it was a composer or musician, creating what we refer to today as “experimental music.”

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, in particular *Le Service de la Recherche* (The Research Service) which he directed from 1960 to 1975. He was a thinker and researcher whose ideas had applications in audiovisual communication and, most directly, in music.

Although his compositional output was limited, some of the first *musique concrète* studies (referred to as “the primitives”) in 1948 are still as fresh and challenging as when they were produced. The 1948 premiere radio broadcast of Pierre Schaeffer's *Études de Bruits* (Concert of Noises) serves now as it did then, 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.

In 1967, Schaeffer was awarded the *Prix Charles Cros*. In 1982, he was awarded the *Grand Prix de l'Académie du Disque Français*. In 1976, he was awarded the *Grand Prix des Compositeurs de la SACEM*. In 1990, he received the *Prix MacLuhan*.

- based on an article by Michel Chion, in *Larousse de la Musique*, 1982

Dugal McKinnon :: *Catalogue with Analogues* [2005 - 11:37 - stereo]

Catalogue with Analogues is a reworking of multi-channel music for solo dancer composed in 2000. The present work's primary layer of materials – the catalogue – is pure *musique concrète*, exploring the possibilities for a music of the ‘raw’. Relationships between objects in this layer are established analogically, by similarities both direct and indirect. These, along with a secondary layer of materials providing soft embellishments of the ‘catalogue’, are the analogues the title refers to.

Dugal McKinnon is a composer of electronic, instrumental and multimedia work, as well as a sound artist and a writer on contemporary music. Recent projects include: multi-channel interactive soundtracks for Ourspace, a long-term exhibit at Te Papa (Museum of New Zealand); *Geophony*, a multichannel sound installation based on sonification of real-time seismic data streams (commissioned by the Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, NZ); the soundtrack for *Spacebaby*, a film by London Fieldworks, premiered at the Whitechapel Gallery (London); *Strane e sconosciute vie*, a short acousmatic work for the Orpheus 400 CD (DEGEM, 2007); *Hoax Rifts*, for percussion and string quartet, premiered by Arnold Marinissen and the Zapp Quartet (TROMP Festival, Eindhoven, 2006).

Upcoming projects include: a piano duo for Pestova (CAN/NZ) and Meyer (LUX); a work for the Lunapark ensemble (NL); curating *Microtopias*, an exhibition of headphone music for the Adam Art Gallery; and two chapters on the electroacoustic music of New Zealand, for publication in 2009.

Dugal holds a PhD in composition from the University of Birmingham (UK), where he studied under Jonty Harrison and performed with BEAST. His doctorate was completed while on a DAAD Stipendium at the TU-Berlin. As an undergraduate he studied with John Young, Jack Body and Ross Harris, completing a BMus (First Class Honours) and a BA in literature and critical theory at Victoria University of Wellington, NZ.

Dugal teaches sonic art and composition, as well as the history and theory of sonic art, at the New Zealand School of Music (Wellington, NZ).

Janis Mercer :: *Amsterdam* [2007 - 3:02 - stereo]

Citytudes is a series of short electronic tape works where the source material is taken from the town or city in question. For *Amsterdam*, rondo form is used to contrast human- with machine-made sounds, and stationary with moving sounds.

Janis Mercer is a pianist/composer, living in San Francisco. She has performed solo and chamber music concerts throughout the U.S.: highlights include solo concerts of Anthony Braxton's piano music at the Knitting Factory in New York, Anton Webern's piano music at New Music Circle in St. Louis, and commissioned and non-commissioned works at University of Illinois' Sound One Festival. She performed Brian Belét's *Four Proportional Preludes* for SCI on Capstone, and her performance of Paul Rudy's Church Keys was selected for inclusion in New Music Circle's *Season Highlights I 2002-04* CD. As a composer her works have been broadcast and performed in The Netherlands and Austria and she presented an evening of her electro-acoustic music at roulette in New York in 2007. *Beloveds* is available on einklang records and a CD of her chamber music is being released on Centaur Records.

Olivia Block / Kyle Bruckmann :: *Untitled* [2008 - 6:16 - stereo]

Olivia Block and Kyle Bruckmann planted the seeds for this collaboration shortly after the latter moved to Chicago in the late 90s. Work finally began in earnest in 2003 before Kyle moved to the Bay Area, and has continued gradually ever since via mail and internet. This excerpt is a portion of Part III of a larger work that will be released later this year on either/OAR records. Overarching concerns include the intersection of environmental sound with acoustic instrumentation and the evocation, dissociation and transformation of physical space.

Olivia Block is a contemporary composer and sound artist who combines field recordings, scored segments for acoustic instruments, and electronically generated sound. Her recorded work seeks to introduce and ultimately reconcile nature with artifice in the realms of music and sound. In the process, "organic" sound becomes subtly processed, digitized, and abstracted; "inorganic" sound becomes self-replicating and animate; and "musical" elements such as chamber instruments are defamiliarized from their traditional associations, freeing them to participate in the larger aesthetic possibilities of sound. Block works with recorded media, chamber ensembles, video, and site specific sound installations. Block has published recordings through Sedimental and Cut. In the September 2008 she joined the sound department faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Kyle Bruckmann's creative work spans a dizzying aesthetic range, from a traditional Western classical foundation into genre-bending gray areas encompassing free jazz, electronic music and post-punk rock. International touring and appearances on more than 40 recordings have led to his recognition as "a modern day renaissance musician" and "a seasoned improviser with impressive extended technique and peculiar artistic flair."

Since moving to San Francisco in 2003, he has performed with the SFS and other ensembles throughout the region while joining forces with the Stockton Symphony, Quinteto Latino, and new music collective sfSound. From 1996 until his westward relocation, he had been a fixture in multiple sectors of Chicago's thriving experimental music underground, with frequent collaborators including Jim Baker, Jeb Bishop, Olivia Block, Guillermo Gregorio, Fred Lonberg-Holm, Robbie Hunsinger, Ernst Karel, and Michael Zerang. Ongoing affiliations include EKG, the "rock" monstrosity Lozenge, and the quintet Wrack.

Bruckmann earned undergraduate degrees in music and psychology at Rice University in Houston, studying oboe with Robert Atherholt and achieving academic distinction as a member of Phi Beta Kappa. He completed his Masters degree in 1996 at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he studied oboe performance with Harry Sargous and contemporary improvisation with Ed Sarath.

Vladimir Ussachevsky :: *Linear Contrasts* [1958 - 3:46 - stereo]

Linear Contrasts was realized at the Columbia Tape Music Studio. The work uses sound sources recorded on magnetic tape and then altered by the use of various techniques including speed variation and feedback between multiple tape recorders, filters, reverberation, and a device known as the *klangumwandler*, which alters the ratios between the harmonics of given tones. In 1976, this piece was remixed by the composer from the original materials.

Vladimir Ussachevsky (1911-1990) is one of the pioneers of electronic music. Born to Russian parents in Manchuria (now Inner Mongolia, China), Ussachevsky emigrated to the United States in 1931 and studied music at Pomona College in Claremont, California, as well as at the Eastman School of Music. His early neo-Romantic works were composed for traditional instruments, but in 1951 he began composing electronic music.

After serving in the U.S. Army Intelligence division in World War II, he joined the faculty of Columbia University, teaching there until his retirement in 1980. Together with Otto Luening, Ussachevsky founded, in 1959, the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in New York City. While acting as head of the Electronic Music Center Ussachevsky specified the ADSR envelope in 1965, a basic component of modern synthesizers, samplers and electronic instruments.

Thom Blum :: *Combustible* [2009 - 9:30 - 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>

Ashley Bellouin :: *Black Hole* [2009 - 7:13 - stereo]

A black hole is the evolutionary endpoint of a star that is 10 to 15 times as massive as the sun. After undergoing a supernova explosion, this star may leave behind a burned out stellar remnant that ultimately caves in on itself. The star eventually collapses to the point of zero volume and infinite density, creating what is known as a "singularity". As the density increases, the path of light rays emitted from the star are bent and eventually wrapped irrevocably around the star. Any emitted photons are eternally trapped into an orbit by the intense gravitational field. The overwhelming magnitude and formidable force of the black hole inspired the creation of this piece. *Black Hole* was composed using the Moog IIP synthesizer and the original Buchla Box housed at Mills College, along with prepared piano and Max/MSP.

From 2003-05 **Ashley Bellouin** attended the San Francisco Art Institute in the New Genres department. In 2007 she received her BA from Mills College, where she studied Art History and Music. Ashley's audio work was recently featured in the 12th Annual Santa Fe International Festival of Electroacoustic Music, Santa Fe, NM, the 7th Annual International Women's Electroacoustic Listening Room Project, San Jose, CA, and ElectroMediaWorks '08 in Athens, Greece.

György Ligeti :: *Artikulation* [1958 - 3:56 - stereo]

Shortly after Ligeti left Hungary after the crushing of the 1956 uprising he came to Cologne and lived as a guest of Karlheinz Stockhausen. By Ligeti's own account, he was first introduced to the techniques of electronic music by Gottfried Michael Koenig in early 1957, who engaged him to work in the Studio for Electronic Music of the West German Radio Network. The first result was *Glissandi* (1957), a dense configuration of complex or pure sounds in continuous movements.

His second electronic piece, *Artikulation* (1958), is entirely based on "aleatoric" principles. Different types of material were put on tape and the cut-off pieces were put in several boxes. The selections of the different sound-patterns was left to chance operations. Their placement within the composition followed a rigid serial plan. He remained at the studio until 1959 and *Artikulation* was one of two pieces composed during these years (the other, *Pièce Électronique no.3*, was not realized into sound until some 40 years later), having its premiere in Cologne on 25 March 1958. The performance medium of *Artikulation* is a four-track tape and it explores the linguistic similarities of different kinds of sounds. The piece combines a multitude of electronic sounds in a highly disjunct style, which layered into a multi-level polyphony, become a synthetic conversation. The disassembled beginning uses a variety of inflections including high and low voices and some agitated interjections, their interactions creating the dialogue. The quiet gurgling heard in the opening of the piece can be traced throughout the entire work, at times being answered by rare, deep, and distant replies. The brief snippets of melody are provided by this same gurgling sound and, although fleeting, add yet another level of discourse. As the piece progresses, the phrase lengths shorten until mere fragments are all that remain along with more intense juxtapositions of the recurring material. The counterpoint that was discernible earlier in the piece dissolves as the conversation-like interactions alternate faster and faster. Subsequently, the use of musical space becomes more obvious and more effective. The acceleration of the musical line aids in what is actually the dying out of the imaginary conversation. Whereas some later works by Ligeti tend to be more static and calm, *Artikulation* is restless and animated. The "voices" never cease to communicate and the consistent overlapping textures create a "kaleidoscopic polyphony."

György Ligeti was an adventurer in form and expression and a great visionary of contemporary music. His richly varied output takes a special position in its musical quality and uncompromising individuality. Ligeti moved far away from aesthetic trends and methods all his life. He was characterized by fresh and unorthodox ideas, any form of dogmatism was foreign to his nature, his entire oeuvre is marked by radical turning points. Admired and hugely influential in the profession, the sensual accessibility of his music has won the hearts of audiences everywhere.

Born in Dicsöszentmárton, Transylvania, on 28 May 1923, the son of Hungarian-Jewish parents, he studied at the Klausenburg conservatory with Ferenc Farkas from 1941 to 1943, later (1945–49) at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest with Ferenc Farkas, Sándor Veress, Pál Járdányi and Lajos Bárdos. Very soon he developed the micropolyphony which became one of the most significant features of his music. In his early pieces, such as the a cappella choral work *Éjszaka Reggel* and his first successful work in the West, *Apparitions*, this style is already extremely distinctive. In December 1956, after the Hungarian Revolution, he fled to the west, for artistic and political reasons. Working as a free-lancer at the West German Radio electronic studios in Cologne (1957–58) he made an intensive study of the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel and Pierre Boulez, which found its musical expression in *Artikulation* (1958). This work, with *Atmosphères*, the orchestral work he created in 1961, brought Ligeti instant fame. In this piece, he worked almost completely without traditional melodic, harmonic and rhythmic parameters and concentrated on sounds with constantly changing textures. "Micropolyphony", he once described, "means such a dense tissue that the individual parts become inaudible and only the resulting intermingling harmonies are effective as a form."

After his intensive work in Cologne in the 1950s and the development of micropolyphony in the 1960s, Ligeti's personal style became simpler and more transparent in the 1970s. And as if wanting to withdraw from the predominant musical tendencies, he began to use tonal sounds again. He said: "I no longer listen to rules on what is to be regarded as modern and what as old-fashioned." His only full-length stage work *Le Grand Macabre* was inspired by the theatre of the absurd and is teeming with operetta-like wit and black humor. The composer wanted to communicate more directly with audiences: "Stage action and music should be dangerous and bizarre, absolutely exaggerated, absolutely crazy."

In the 1980s and 1990s, Ligeti expanded his musical horizons again, incorporating structural principles of African drumming music into his works: the fanatic of the intricate developed new complex polyrhythmic techniques. They form the basis of the three collections of his *Études pour piano* which are considered to be the most important piano music of the late 20th century. György Ligeti travelled a long road: from Romanian folk music and the tonal language of his fellow countryman Béla Bartók to his own cosmos of sounds. The mentor of a whole generation of composers, he wanted to "fuse the fear of death with laughter". Ligeti was honoured with all the world's major musical awards, including the Grawemayer Award, the Praemium Imperiale, the Ernst-von-Siemens Music Award, the Sibelius Prize, and the Kyoto-Prize. He died on 12 June 2006 in Vienna.

Aaron Ximm :: *Angkorsaway* [2009 - 10:01 - 8 channels]

Inhale, hold, exhale: every breathe taken in the Angkor complex in Cambodia rings with the improbably strident stridulations of the insects in the surrounding jungle. At sunset, a band plays over and with them at the foot of massive Phnom Bakheng, from the heights of which the towers of Angkor Wat are visible in the distance. Temporary shelter is found within a face-clad tower of the Bayonne, where we interrupt, but do not disturb, women in their devotions. On they sing. On. (Four recordings, made over a 48 hour period; no processing, only minor spatiotemporal dislocation.)

Aaron Ximm is a San-Francisco-based field recordist and sound artist. He is best known for his composition, installation, and performance work under the name Quiet American, much of which can be found at quietamerican.org. From 2001 to 2005, Aaron curated and hosted the Field Effects concert series, which, like his own work, sought to showcase the quiet, fragile, and lovely side of sound art, particularly that working with found sound and field recordings. He currently assists Jeremiah Moore in chairing Bay Area Sound Ecology, the local chapter of the American Society for Acoustic Ecology. (His One-Minute Vacation project, on a vacation of its own after the birth of his daughter, will reboot shortly.)

Paul Lansky :: *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion* [1978 - 22:21 - stereo]

Widely regarded as a landmark of computer music, *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion* is a journey to the inner world of poetry and speech. It was written in 1978-79 using IBM 360/91 and 3033 mainframe computers. It uses a technique known as Linear Predictive Coding, in addition to a variety of filtering and processing techniques.

Of his composition, Lansky writes:

Speech and song are commonly considered different and distinct -- as apples and oranges. It is my feeling, however, that they are more usefully thought of as occupying opposite ends of a spectrum, encompassing a wealth of musical potential. This fact has certainly not been lost on musicians: sprechstimme, melodrama, recitative, rap, blues, etc., are all evidence that it is a lively domain.

Six Fantasies is my exploratory journey through this terrain. Each of the fantasies attempts to musically transform a single reading by Hannah MacKay of a well-known poem by Thomas Campion, and to musically highlight some aspect of her speech: contour, vowels, resonance, articulation, consonants, etc., explicating the implicit music within. The final fantasy largely reproduces the original reading, and it is my hope that by the time this rolls by that her speech will sound like music.

Thomas Campion was, of course, both poet and composer, and whether he knew it or not, particularly sensitive to the musical spectrum spanned by speech and song. His poem *Rose-cheekt Lawra* was published in 1602 as part of a treatise entitled *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*. In this essay Campion, in a tradition of the time, attempts to construct a quantitative model for English poetry in which, as in ancient Latin and Greek, meter is determined by vowel quantity, rather than by accentual rhythm. The poem is a wonderful, free-wheeling spin about the vowel box. It is almost as if he is playing vowels the way one would play a musical instrument, jumping here and there, dancing around with dazzling invention and brilliance, carefully balancing repetition and variation. The poem itself is about Petrarch's beloved Laura, whose beauty expresses an implicit and heavenly music, in contrast to the imperfect, all too explicit earthly music we must resign ourselves to make. This seemed to be an appropriate metaphor for the piece.

*Rose-cheekt Lawra, come,
Sing thou smoothly with thy beawties
Silent musick, either other
Sweetely gracing.
Lovely formes do flowe
From concert devinely framed;
Heav'n is musick, and thy beawties
Birth is heavenly.
These dull notes we sing
Discords neede for helps to grace them;
Only beawty purely loving
Knowes no discord;
But still mooves delight,
Like cleare springs renu'd by flowing,
Ever perfect, ever in them-
selves eternall.*

Paul Lansky (b. 1944) is an electronic-music or computer-music composer whose pieces have involved the sounds of speech, of people going about their business, of machines and musical instruments--with the computer serving as an "aural camera" that transforms and repositions our perceptions of these sounds. A former student of George Perle, he is currently a professor of music composition at Princeton University, and in addition to his music is known as a pioneer in the development of computer music languages for algorithmic composition (see Real-Time Cmix). He is also a former student of Milton Babbitt and Edward Cone. In 2008 he announced that he has abandoned computer music to focus on composing for acoustic instruments.