
Department of Music | Stanford University



presents

Jonty Harrison

electroacoustic music

CCRMA Stage | Monday, January 10, 2011, 8:00 pm

CONCERT PROGRAM

Klang (1982)

Unsound Objects (1995)

Streams (1999)

— *intermission* —

BEASTory (2010)

Undertow (2007)

Internal Combustion (2005-06)

All compositions by Jonty Harrison

Sound diffusion by the composer

PROGRAM NOTES

Klang (1982), 2 channels, 9'00

As well as the immediate concern with 'sound', the title also reflects the onomatopoeic nature of the family of sounds providing the raw material for the piece – sharp, metallic attacks with interesting resonances rich in harmonics. The starting point was the discovery of two earthenware casseroles, from which two kinds of material were recorded in the Electroacoustic Music Studio of the University of East Anglia during the summer of 1981: attack/resonance sounds made by tapping the lids on or in the bowls, and continuous rolling sounds made by running the lids around the insides of the bowls. Different pitches resulted from the various combinations of lids and bowls, and different qualities of resonance emerged according to the attack position; very close microphone placement maximised the movement within the stereo image. Other related material was also used, both 'concrete' (such as cow-bells, metal rods and aluminium bars) and electronically generated (analogue and digital). The final impetus for the piece came when the composer was invited by János Décsenyi of Magyar Rádió to work in the Radio's Electronic Music Studio in Budapest.

Although continuous, *Klang* falls into six short, fairly clearly defined sections: Introduction; Development 1 (duet); Development 2 (interruption of duet; increase in complexity towards first climax); Development 3 (relatively static section); Development 4 (proliferation of material from Development 3 into glissando structures; build-up to second (main) climax; slow release to:) Coda.

The listener can trace the development of the material from raw statements of casserole sounds (Introduction), through more complex, highly transformed events (Developments), and back to the opening sound-world (Coda). The most obvious transformation technique is mixing, using only slightly transposed versions of simple sounds; other

techniques include filtering and, most importantly, *montage*. This is the principal means of controlling the timing and rhythmic articulation of the material and its organisation into phrases.

Klang was commissioned by MAFILM and composed in the Electronic Music Studio of Magyar Rádió in 1982. It was awarded Second Prize in the Analogue Category of the Bourges International Electroacoustic Music Awards in 1983 and in 1992 was awarded a *Euphonie d'or* at Bourges as one of the twenty most significant works from two decades of the Bourges Awards. It has been performed and broadcast in many parts of the world, including at the 1984 ISCM World Music Days in Toronto, Canada. It appeared on vinyl on the UEA record label and is available on CD on NMC (London) and on *Evidence matérielle*, Harrison's second 'solo' CD on the *empreintes DIGITALes* label (Montreal).

Unsound Objects (1995), 2 channels, 13'00

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...

Unsound Objects was commissioned by the International Computer Music

Association and first performed at the 1995 International Computer Music Conference in Banff, Alberta, Canada. It was composed in the composer's studio and in the Electroacoustic Music Studios of the University of Birmingham. Along with four other acousmatic works, it is available on *Articles indéfinis*, a 'solo' CD on the *empreintes DIGITALes* label (Montreal); a further revision (1996) appeared as part of the CDCM collection on Centaur (Baton Rouge, LA).

Streams (1999), 8 channels, 16'11"

Streams: the image which comes most immediately to mind is that of water – turbulent, troubled, restless, at the mercy of wind and terrain, flowing onward to the sea – itself turbulent and in constant motion. Evaporation, clouds and rainfall complete the cycle, which is always renewing, always moving...

Streams: the primary sound sources are drawn from the turbulent points of confluence of water, earth and air (liquid, solid, gas) – river, sea-shore and rainfall. This gives rise to behaviour such as trickling, bubbling, pattering (like drums? Look out for a mysterious Irish visitor!) and the overriding rise and fall of perpetual wave motion, which seems to have become a model for the structure of the whole piece...

Streams: of data, of consciousness and, most importantly, of perception – the ability to link often disparate elements together and understand, hear, that they are part of one line, one 'stream of thought', distinct from other (possibly coexisting) parallel or contrapuntal streams. The multi-channel tape medium (which I used here for the first time in a work for tape alone) assists in the streaming processes, but also emphasises the agitation of relentless motion...

Streams was commissioned by the Sonorities Festival, Belfast, with funds from the National Lottery and Sonorities. The piece was composed in the Electroacoustic Music Studios of The University of Birmingham, UK.

BEASTory (2010), 12 channels, 8'10"

– to Scott Wilson

Based on the sounds of the BEAST system when it is **not** actually performing (i.e. when it is being stored, transported, set up or taken down), this short piece is an initial attempt to explore the fuzzy boundary between composition and performance made available by a large loudspeaker system (BEAST), controlled by flexible and sophisticated software (BEASTmulch – largely written by my colleague and friend, Scott Wilson). The recordings were made on BEAST gigs and, with the assistance of Julien Guillamat, in the 'BEAST store' (hence the awful title – sorry!).

Undertow (2007), 8 channels, 12'17"

Plunging beneath the waves we discover a world teeming with life and pulsing with energy. But we cannot hold our breath forever. (And not only that, there seem to be cars down here, masquerading as breaking waves!)

Undertow was composed in 2007 in the composer's studio and was premiered on 2 June 2007 as part of *Océan-Cité*, a civil spectacle by La Compagnie Pierre Deloche Danse, Lyon, France. It was commissioned by La Compagnie Pierre Deloche Danse. Thanks to Martin Clarke for additional sea recordings made in Shetland.

Internal Combustion (2005-06), 8 channels, 11'43"

Internal Combustion is the second piece of *ReCycle*, a series of four works based loosely on 'the elements': *Rock'n'Roll* (2004 – earth), *Internal Combustion* (2005-06 – fire), *Free Fall* (2006 – air) and *Streams* (1999 – water). Each piece in the cycle uses a slightly different configuration of 8 audio channels and explores different aspects and types of motion, trajectory and spatial organisation.

As its title suggests, *ReCycle* revisits many themes and sound types I have used in earlier works and listeners may also detect a sub-text of environmental concern running through much of my work since the 1980s. In *Internal Combustion*, I would like to think that the overt use of the sounds of car engines is an ironic underlining of this theme, but I must also confess to a dilemma here. The fact is I *like* cars, even though I fully acknowledge the increasingly devastating effect they are having on the environment.

In addition to recordings of car engines (many made using accelerometers as well as air microphones), other forms of transport (trains, planes, ships, bicycles, motor-bikes and a Basel tram) are sonically present in *Internal Combustion*. The work is in four sections (echoing the intake-compression-ignition-exhaust cycle of the 4-stroke internal combustion engine), separated by dramatic 'arrivals' and 'departures', and framed by more 'environmental' scenes (which include the sound of traffic as an unavoidable part of our everyday experience).

The piece was composed during a period of research leave made possible by the University of Birmingham and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK). It was finished in the Elektronisches Studio of the Musik-Akademie, Basel during a residency in the Atelier Zum Kleinen Markgräflerhof. I am especially grateful to my friend Erik Oña, the Director of the Studio and a former colleague at Birmingham, for his invitation to work well away from another curse of our modern environment – the ringing telephone! Thanks are also due to Keith Moule and Paul Rodmell for putting their vehicles at risk by allowing me to attach accelerometers to the engines and to two former doctoral students, Pete Batchelor and Daniel Barreiro, for their wonderful Max patches.

Jonty Harrison (born 1952) studied with Bernard Rands, David Blake and Elisabeth Lutyens at the University of York, UK, gaining his DPhil in Composition in 1980 and discovering the electroacoustic music studio along the way. Between 1976 and 1980 he lived in London, preparing electroacoustic material for a number of productions at the National Theatre and teaching studio techniques at City University. In 1980 he joined the Music Department of the University of Birmingham, where he is now Professor of Composition and Electroacoustic Music and Director of the Electroacoustic Music Studios and BEAST (Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre). Over the past 30 years he has taught a number of graduate composers from the UK and overseas, many of whom are now themselves leading figures in the composition and teaching of electroacoustic music in many parts of the world. He has made several conducting appearances with the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (most notably performing Stockhausen's *Momente*), the University New Music Ensemble and the University Orchestra. He was a Board member of Sonic Arts Network for many years.

As a composer he has won several awards (Bourges International Electroacoustic Awards; Prix Ars Electronica, Linz; Musica Nova, Prague; the Lloyds Bank National Composers' Award; the PRS Prize; an Arts Council Composition Bursary; a Leverhulme Research Grant and AHRB/C Research Grants), and received commissions from leading institutions and performers (Ina-GRM; GMEB, Bourges; the International Computer Music Association; MAFILM/Magyar Rádió; Electroacoustic Wales/University of Bangor, IRCAM/Ensemble InterContemporain; BBC; Sonorities Festival, Belfast; Birmingham Contemporary Music Group; Fine Arts Brass Ensemble; Nash Ensemble; Singcircle; Thürmchen Ensemble; John Harle; Harry Sparnaay; and Jos Zwaanenburg).

His music is performed and broadcast worldwide, and several works are available on two 'solo' CDs (*Articles indéfinis* and *Évidence matérielle*) and a DVD-Audio (*Environs*) on the *empreintes* DIGITALes label (Montréal), and on compilation CDs from NMC (London), Mnémosyne Musique Média (Bourges, France), CDCM/Centaur (San Francisco), Asphodel (New York), EMF (New York) and Collins (London).

http://www.electrocd.com/en/bio/harrison_jo/
<http://artsweb.bham.ac.uk/harrison/>

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<http://ccrma.stanford.edu/concerts/>
