

Details

December 1991

MUSIC

Playlist

What's spinning on campus

D.J. Jim Haynes

WOBC 91.5 FM OBERLIN COLLEGE
OBERLIN, OH

Nirvana Nevermind (DGC LP)

Negativland U2 (SST 5")

Puff Tube Emergency Peanut (Scat EP)



Various Artists Aerial Vol. 3 (Aerial LP)

Autumn Fair Glaciers and Gods
(Independent Project 10")

FOR THE DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND ENJOYMENT OF UNUSUAL SOUND SOURCES

EXPERIMENTAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

VARIOUS ARTISTS: **The AERIAL ISSUES 1-3**

Audio magazine available on cassette or CD from Nonsequitur Foundation, P.O. Box 15118 Santa Fe, NM 87506.

The Aerial is a non-profit "audio publishing venture" that releases beautifully packaged, high quality compilations on CD and cassette. Each release centers around innovative experiments in sound accompanied by complete and informative liner notes detailing the background of each artist and his/her contribution to the release.

Each issue of *The Aerial* contains pieces focusing on home-made instruments, unusual sound sources, and expanded techniques for standard instruments. Although there are too many pieces of interest to detail here, I have singled out a couple from each issue.

The Aerial #1 includes an incredible improvisation by the Lost Souls for "Home-made bass recorder, fiddle, and voice", a piece for voices, gourd guitar, and gourd saxophones by the Floating Concrete Octopus, and a tape cut-up of door, water, click and pin-ball sounds by Stuart Sherman. A few spoken word pieces and interesting extended vocal works are also welcome additions to this release.

The Aerial #2 includes David Dunn's "Chaos and the Emergent Mind of the Pond" which is a surprisingly active piece of mixed sounds recorded below the surface of a pond. Annea Lockwood composed a beautiful piece for didgeridoo, voice and conch shell which is particularly effective, and Christopher Shultis composed and performed "motion/less" for vibraphone, piano interior, almglocken, stainless steel bowls, and wind gong.

The Aerial #3 begins with a long-string piece by Ellen Fullman (see EMI Vol. I #2). Nicolas Collins' "trombone-propelled electronics" (a sampling unit that is modified by the slide of a trombone and is amplified through a speaker mounted in the trombone's bell) makes two appearances, and Tom Guralnick's (not so) mobile saxophone unit (see EMI Volume VI #3) gets out and stretches its legs for a while too.

The Aerial outshines most compilation projects of its kind by successfully finding the balance between variety and continuity. All three of these releases incorporate a wealth of fascinating approaches to the creation and modification of sound without ever lingering too long at any particular style, sound or approach.



THE AERIAL: A JOURNAL IN SOUND, #3. Produced by Steve Peters. Distributed by the Nonsequitur Foundation.

Ellen FULLMAN: *Staggered Stasis*. Marc BARRECA: *Messier Crosses the Blue Line*. Nicolas COLLINS: *Tobacco Fonio*. Peter CUSACK: *Dandelion Clock*. Tom GURALNICK: *Over Time*. Johanna BEYER: *IV for Percussion*. Zae MUNN: *Interface*. Myra MELFORD/Marion BRANDIS Duo: *Three Interludes*. William HOOKER: *T² . Dream Red*. Lesli DALABA: *Core Sample (Sylvan)*.

The notion of a "journal in sound" has great appeal and great value to music, analogous to the appeal and value of small literary journals. As with a literary journal, the Aerial (in any of its first four volumes) is a great place to poke around checking out new stuff, doing a certain amount of skimming (a CD remote control is almost indispensable here) occasionally encountering some real finds.

Editor/producer Steve Peters has a distinct point of view, always an asset in curating collections of this sort. His selections tend to fall into the following categories: 1) Layers of text, often in different languages, with the general theme of the search for meaning in the electronic Tower of Babel; 2) Sound effects pieces featuring street noises, underwater sounds, the composer practicing his phonemes, etc. This type has lots of electronic raindrops-on-the-roof or listen-to-the-overtone-change. The liner notes generally explain the fascinating way these unremarkable sounds were recorded. 3) Homemade talk-radio pieces in which the creator rants into a tape recorder (the most egregious of which is Bern Porter's *The Last Acts of St. Fuckyou*, on Aerial #1). 4) Miscellaneous pieces of, well, music; that is, pieces with some interesting components of pitch and rhythm. All four volumes have their musical mudpies, but there are no warmed-over academic concoctions or mass-produced musical hamburgers.

The most unusual item in The Aerial #3 is *IV for Percussion*, a 1935 work by a Cowell student named Johanna Beyer. Unearthed and performed by Essential Music, it's a fresh miniature by this totally unknown composer. Tom Guralnick's *Over Time* shapes its saxophone loops over a very attractive eight minutes. Zae Munn's *Interface* for viola and marimba is tender and elegant, spacious but in no way mindless. The improvising duo of Myra Melford and Marion Brandis (mostly flute and piano, somewhat jazz-influenced) is glittering in sound and sparkling in invention.

The sound is generally excellent, varying somewhat with the quality of the submitted tapes. The booklets have plenty of useful information, including artist addresses, though much of the text is hard to read because it is printed over photos and other graphics. (Remember the old *Source* magazine? that's the general look.) I chose to list #3 in the headline because it seems to me the strongest volume so far, but the whole series should be in all serious libraries of new American music. [Available from Nonsequitur, Inc./PO Box 2638/Santa Fe, NM 87504.] Scott Wheeler

THE AERIAL: A JOURNAL IN SOUND

Steve Peters, producer. Nonsequitur Foundation, P. O. Box 2638, Santa Fe, NM 87504, U.S.A.

Reviewed by Anthony J. Gnazzo, 3840 Elston St., Oakland, CA 94602, U.S.A.

The Aerial, as described in producer-editor Steve Peters's introduction to *Aerial 1*, (*AER 1*) is "a journal in sound, an ongoing series of compilations to be published on a regular basis. . . . A place where different kinds of sounds that seem to go nicely together can do so". The journal is published quarterly.

The 32 selections in the first three volumes are, for the most part, original works produced, assembled, arranged or performed by their authors-composers.

The stylistic spectrum is broad with representative examples of text-sound, work for radio (*Hörspiel*), minimal drone electronics, warped blues, collage, 'start/stop' 1950s avant-garde, free improvisation, noise music (albeit mild), process pieces, documentary sound, sequencing, sampling and a couple of pieces that might be considered academic.

The instrumental combinations (or should one refer to them as sound sources?) are not those typically encountered on the insert cards of a compact disc (CD). Included are sources as diverse as solo cricket (Westerkamp: *AER 2*), komungo (a zither-like Korean instrument) (Kim: *AER 2*), long-string instrument (Fullman: *AER 3*), trombone-propelled electronics (Collins: *AER 3*), as well as dijeridoo, conch shells, gourds, synthesizers and the ever-present drum machine.

As one might expect, a collection as broad ranging as *Aerial* is certain to present a major quality-control challenge to the producer. Peters has done a good job of balancing the content of the individual volumes.

Malcolm Goldstein's "querneraq; our breath as bones" and Rich Jensen's "Folly" (*AER 1*) stand out as works for solo voice. Both are virtuoso pieces even though they inhabit opposite ends of the stylistic spectrum. Goldstein's is a tightly organized text-sound work; Jensen's, a stream of con-

sciousness improvisation. Also notable in *AER 1* are Jerry Hunt's "Balabon (string)" and Christine Baczkewska's "Day of the Dead". Other familiar names on this disc are author-composer Richard Kostelanetz, performance artist Stuart Sherman and poet Bern Porter.

Even though LaDonna Smith and Davey Williams's "Green Song" (*AER 2*) nearly continues too long, this parody of a warped blues vamp has a wonderful feel to it. Other familiar names on this disc are saxophonist Jon Raskin, composers Bob Davis, Jin Hi Kim and Annea Lockwood and environmental sound artist Hildegard Westerlamp.

The excerpt from Ellen Fullman's "Staggered Stasis" (*AER 3*) for her hybrid long-string instrument (wooden resonators fitted with long piano strings) is the most striking 'minimal' piece in the entire set of three CDs. A continuous drone, this piece restricts itself to an extremely narrow range, yet successfully explores a microworld of subtle nuance within this range. Another familiar name on this disc is composer Nicolas Collins.

Nonsequitur Foundation also publishes *What Next? Recordings*, a series of CDs and cassettes exploring environmental sound, interactive electronics, new instruments and improvisation.

A 1-year subscription to *The Aerial* can be obtained from: Nonsequitur Foundation, P. O. Box 2638, Santa Fe, NM 87504, U.S.A., for \$40.00 (CD) or \$30.00 (cassette), add \$10.00 for overseas subscriptions.

LEONARDO
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OPTION

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● **THE AERIAL #3: A Journal In Sound** It's a great idea to accompany musical journalism with recorded examples; helps avoid the "writing about music is like dancing about architecture" syndrome. The Aerial takes it one step further, being an audio journal (also on cassette) of music, language, and audio art, accompanied by a booklet with background on the artists and the selections. #3 includes a variety of composed/improvised/experimental/whatever instrumental works. The experimental end is represented by Ellen Fullman's long string instrument (washes of sound from long piano strings attached to resonators and stroked by rosin-covered hands) and Nicolas Collins's digital processing tricks (deconstructed Andean brass band and a duet with guitarist Peter Cusack). Saxophonist Tom Guralnick's live-electronic solo, William Hooker's drum solo, and the Myra Melford/Marion Brandis Duo form the improvising contingent, while J.M. Beyer and Zae Munn offer composed concert music. Contributions from Marc Barreca (computer-controlled digital sampler and synthesizer), and Lesli Dalaba (overlapping sampled trumpet solos) fill out the collection. Both the booklet and the CD are beautifully produced, and subscriptions are available. (Nonsequitur, Box 2638, Santa Fe, NM 87504) — Mark Sullivan



THE AERIAL - A JOURNAL IN SOUND N°1, 2 & 3

Cette compilation tente de "regrouper, harmonieusement, différents types de sons". Elle se veut aussi "espace de rencontres pour des musiques, des langages sans regard sur une quelconque rentabilité commerciale ou reconnaissance académique". Il n'y a donc pas de thèmes ou de genre musical définis. Les contributions, toutes originales, dépendent uniquement des artistes sélectionnés. Contrairement à ce que l'on pourrait penser, l'ensemble n'est pas sans unité comme c'est, hélas, trop souvent le cas sur certaines compilations (d'où le nom, peut-être, de journal sonore: une sorte de programme radiophonique comme nous avons rarement l'occasion d'en entendre). Des musiques prenant comme base un environnement défini (forme d'écologie sonore) aux musiques improvisées, en passant par des démarches plus expérimentales ou des performances multi-média, ces trois CD's sont l'occasion de découvrir de nouvelles approches et conceptions sonores par des musiciens et non-musiciens plus ou moins connus. Sans oublier que chaque CD est accompagné d'un magnifique livret de plus de vingt pages et tout en couleurs.

Jérôme NOETINGER