

PENDULUM MUSIC

FOR MICROPHONES, AMPLIFIERS, SPEAKERS AND PERFORMERS

2, 3, 4 or more microphones are suspended from the ceiling by their cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion. Each microphone's cable is plugged into an amplifier which is connected to a speaker. Each microphone hangs a few inches directly above or next to its speaker.

The performance begins with performers taking each mike, pulling it back like a swing, and then in unison releasing all of them together. Performers then carefully turn up each amplifier just to the point where feedback occurs when a mike swings directly over or next to its speaker. Thus, a series of feedback pulses are heard which will either be all in unison or not depending on the gradually changing phase relations of the different mike pendulums.

Performers then sit down to watch and listen to the process along with the audience.

The piece is ended sometime after all mikes have come to rest and are feeding back a continuous tone by performers pulling out the power cords of the amplifiers.

Steve Reich 8/68

Steve Reich anlässlich der Wiederaufführung von „Pendulum Music“ durch „Sonic Youth“ 1999:

When it was done as a concert piece at the Whitney Museum in 1969, during an event of my music, it was 'performed' by Bruce Neuman, Michael Snow, Richard Sierra, James Tenney and myself. They pulled back their measured microphones and I counted off 4-4 and on the downbeat, they all let it go and sat down, including me. Then the microphones begin to 'whoop!' as they pass in front of the speaker because the microphones had been preset to be loud enough to give feedback when it's in front of the speaker but not when it swings to the left and the right. Over a period of ten minutes, which was a little too long for my taste, and as the pendulums come to rest, you entered a pulsing drone. Once it hit the drone, I would pull the plug on the machine and the whole thing ended. It's the ultimate process piece. It's me making my peace with Cage. It's audible sculpture. If it's done right, it's kind of funny.

Conceptually, it fits hand-in-glove with my other work. It's a **phase piece**, a **process piece**. It's the idea of a piece that runs on its own once you set it up and load it and you can walk away. It's a very provocative piece because it's not something you usually hear at concerts. So, it sits there as kind of a loner.

It's not a piece that needs to be done very often. I was not interested in recording (it). The Avant Garde Ensemble recording is very good - the pitch content becomes kind of a phase piece. They wisely did several versions and presented them all.

(Mitschnitt in der OHM-Sammlung "Gurus of Electronic Music" sowie nur der Ton auf https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-g_s1YtaHM.)

„Music as a Gradual Process“ by Steve Reich (1968)

I do not mean the process of composition, but rather pieces of music that are, literally, processes.

I am interested in perceptible processes. I want to be able to hear the process happening throughout the sounding music. To facilitate closely detailed listening a musical process should happen extremely gradually.

Performing and listening to a gradual musical process resembles: pulling back a swing, releasing it, and observing it gradually come to rest; turning over an hour glass and watching the sand slowly run through the bottom; placing your feet in the sand by the ocean's edge and watching, feeling, and listening to the waves gradually bury them.

Though I may have the pleasure of discovering musical processes and composing the musical material to run through them, once the process is set up and loaded it runs by itself.

As to whether a musical process is realized through live human performance or through some electro-mechanical means is not finally the main issue. One of the most beautiful concerts I ever heard consisted of four composers playing their tapes in a dark hall. (A tape is interesting when it's an interesting tape.)

It is quite natural to think about musical processes if one is frequently working with electro-mechanical sound equipment.

The compositional processes and the sounding music have no audible connection. Similarly in serial music, the series itself is seldom audible. (This is a basic difference between serial (basically European) music and serial (basically American) art, where the perceived series is usually the focal point of the work.)

The use of hidden structural devices in music never appealed to me. Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all. These mysteries are the impersonal, unattended, psycho-acoustic by-products of the intended process. These might include sub-melodies heard within repeated melodic patterns, stereophonic effects due to listener location, slight irregularities in performance, harmonics, difference tones, etc.

Listening to an extremely gradual musical process opens my ears to it, but it always extends farther than I can hear, and that makes it interesting to listen to the musical process again.

I begin to perceive minute details when I can sustain close attention and a gradual process invites my sustained attention. By "gradual" I mean extremely gradual; a process happening so slowly and gradually that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch -- you can perceive it moving after you stay with it a little while.

Several currently popular modal musics like Indian classical and drug oriented rock and roll may make us aware of minute sound details because in being modal (constant key center, hypnotically droning and repetitious) they naturally focus on these details rather than on key modulation, counterpoint and other peculiarly Western devices. Nevertheless, these modal musics remain more or less strict frameworks for improvisation. They are not processes. The distinctive thing about musical processes is that they determine all the note-to-note details and the over all form simultaneously. One can't improvise in a musical process -- the concepts are mutually exclusive. While performing and listening to gradual musical processes one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual.