

ASTRA 2006

5 pm Sunday 5 November
Reading Room, Fitzroy Library
in association with the City of Yarra

CATHERINE SCHIEVE

ATTUNEMENTS
ROCK AND LIGHT TRACING

WITH WARREN BURT

compositions, drawings,
performances, environments

ATTUNEMENTS, ROCK AND LIGHT TRACING

an installation/performance

designed by

Catherine Schieve, composer-painter-performer

performed with

Warren Burt, composer-performer

Illawarra acoustic spaces, instruments, drawings, Free Music Machine

ATTUNEMENTS

[*attunement*: adjust to, harmonize with, adapt to, acclimatize to, assimilate]

The idea of the *Attunements* project is to meet and "play into" an environment with one's own sound, so that the performed sound melds with and speaks to the existing sound world in an encompassing and non-virtuosic way. Currently I am working between the forest escarpment, ocean coast, savannah bushland, and steel mills of the Illawarra (Wollongong) region, playing Shruti Boxes (Indian reed drone instruments), Balafon (West African marimba), Ecuadorian shaman's drum, and other non-western instruments. The result is a collection of encounters and "playings with" these distinctive acoustic spaces; and a gathering of different worlds into one concert space. A large floor drawing was prepared in the days preceding the performance.

AVIARY

Aviary is a work commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for the reconstructed Cross-Grainger Electric Eye Tone Tool 2, a machine designed by Warren Burt which closely emulates the structure and function of the original photocell controlled machine built by Percy Grainger and Burnett Cross in the 1950s. This version of the machine has 7 oscillators. The pitch and loudness of each of these oscillators can be controlled by diagrams painted on a plastic sheet which rolls over the photocells. Aviary has two layers - one made by flicking paint brushes in front of the photocells, capturing in sound the action of making the score, and a live performance score, which is a large painting which is rolled across the photocells in real time, making glides, swoops, and dramatic twittering musical gestures.

HARBOUR SYMPHONY

Composed during the Sound Symposium, Newfoundland, Canada, for the resounding horns of the ice-breaking ships, ferries, fishing boats and pilot boats of St. Johns Harbour, and the echoes and resonance off the harbour's granite cliffs. The Harbour Symphony project was initiated in the mid 1980s by composers Paul Steffler and Don Wherry, and since then has become a beloved institution. Each day during the Sound Symposium, ship captains play their boat horns in patterns specified by the composer of that day's piece. The actual sounding performance depends on the number of boats available, and their positions in the Harbour, which is so large that sound takes about 7 seconds to cross it. To write a Harbour Symphony is to compose echoes and resonance on the largest scale possible.

ROCK AND LIGHT TRACING

is a visual score composed for version 2 of the Grainger Free Music Machine and premiered at the 2006 Sound Symposium. This Free Music Machine uses light sensors to convert light-blocking patterns on transparent plastic to computer-generated sound; in this case, sine waves. *Rock and Light Tracing* was composed combining found lines and tracery from the granite surfaces of Enchanted Rock, Central Texas, with the slate stone around Newfoundland, Canada. The score is passed freely and theatrically in the air above the light sensors, creating complex shadows and sound patterns.

PROGRAMME

Continuous layered surrounding of
environmental sounds
environmental performances
graphic scores
light-controlled synthesizers
non-virtuosic non-western instruments
floor drawing
improvisatory drawings installed in space

AVIARY (2003)

graphic score – Free Music Machine

ATTUNEMENTS (2005-6)

HARBOUR SYMPHONY (July 2006)

St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada
recorded boat horns and harbour resonances

ROCK AND LIGHT TRACING (2006)

graphic score – Free Music Machine

Catherine Schieve *instruments*

shruti boxes (India)

balafon (Guinea, West Africa)

shaman's drum (Ecuador)

gong (SE Asia)

plexiglass flutes (custom-made, Catherine Schieve)

Warren Burt *sound*

light-controlled synthesizers

(Version I after Percy Grainger's Free Music Machine)

(Version II, extended construction by Warren Burt)

Michael Hewes *sound support, recording engineer*

Catherine Schieve first gave a concert for Astra 21 years ago in Elm Street Hall, North Melbourne – involving real-time painting and an ensemble of instrumental performers, at Astra’s contemporary festival in the 1985 season. This was at the time of her first visit to Australia, as a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Melbourne following her postgraduate studies at UC San Diego. In the years since then, her activities as cross-media artist, teacher and writer have taken her through a wide span of residencies and academic positions, including the University of Iowa (1987-90), Escola Graduada De São Paulo, Brazil (1997-2000), Colorado Mountain College (2000-02) and Bard Institute For Writing And Thinking in New York State (1992-2004). She currently lives in the Illawarra region of NSW, whose various environments of coast, savannah and forest, steel mills and a large Hindu temple, have entered into her work, as evident in this concert. In May 2006 she had a solo painting exhibition at the Long Gallery, University of Wollongong.

Catherine Schieve’s blend of live instruments and technology, visual and environmental elements is the product of a longstanding individual interest, distinct in method and motivation from the conventions of ‘multi-media art’ as it has developed in recent years. In the book *Audible Traces: Gender Identity and Music*, edited by Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley (Zürich and LA 1999), Schieve writes of her approach:

Movement, attention and the quality of time taken to pass through space have always been the most powerful physical sensations for me in the process of making sonic or visual expressions. Everything I make seems to be in motion within and in interaction with a space or environment. The act of drawing, mark-making, leaving a trace is for me performance or dance. As a musician, the act of sound-making is also drawing ... I now also like to explore Places: densely populated voice places where celebratory and ritual activity happens, land surfaces, body surfaces, rock surfaces...

Warren Burt’s contributions to Astra concert go back to 1979, and include a work for choir and accordion with his scientifically constructed tuning forks, performed in the 1986 concert in the dome of the State Library (in which Catherine Schieve played accordion). He first came to Australia in 1975 to help set up the Music Department at La Trobe University. During that time he also was involved in forming the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre, and the New and Experimental Music show on radio station 3CR. In the following decades he worked in all parts of the country as an influential figure in Australian new music, with broad contacts to practitioners in the fields of visual arts and dance. He performed his music in Europe, North America and Japan, and taught for extended periods at the University of Illinois. Most recently, he has been based at the University of Wollongong, and his recent performances and commissions have included Radio Namings for Austrian Radio ORF, After Sea Pieces, for the Astra Choir, and Hands and Samples, for Grainger Free Music Machine, for the Sound Symposium, St John’s, Newfoundland, Canada, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

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Chair: Anna Gifford Manager: Bobbie Hodge Musical Director: John McCaughey
PO Box 365, North Melbourne, Victoria 3051, Australia ABN 41 255 197 577
Tel: (3)9326 5424 email: astra@connexus.net.au web: www.astramusic.org.au