



PRESS RELEASE | DAVE HUNT - "SYRINX" - SOUND INSTALLATION AS PART OF A CONTEMPORARY ART PROGRAMME AT ST AUGUSTINE'S CHURCH, HAMMERSMITH

Dave Hunt - Syrinx

Exhibition: 17-22 September

Open House: 21-22 September - free tour of the church at 3pm

Syrinx, noun

1. A set of pan pipes.
2. ORNITHOLOGY. The lower larynx or voice organ in birds.
3. An electroacoustic composition.

Austin Forum is delighted to host "Syrinx", an audio installation composed by Dave Hunt, based on birdsongs. Some recordings have a sense of musical, dramatic or emotional expression. Nature, in its mystery, longevity, complexity, beauty and horror challenges our anthropocentric view of the meaning of "life".

In 2015, Pope Francis published the Encyclical Letter "Laudato Si" on care of our common home.

The text reminds us of the meaning of 'environment', as "a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it."

St Francis of Assisi was a major inspiration in Pope Francis's appeal to an ecological conversion, that saint known for preaching the birds, addressing them as "My brother birds" and calling them 'noble' among God's creatures.

Let's hope these birdsongs in our city church will invite us to nurture "an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith" and make us answer to Pope Francis' urgent appeal "for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet".

Dave Hunt's installation also coincides with Open House London, the world's largest architecture festival, giving free public access to 800+ buildings, walks, talks and tours over one weekend in September each year.

SYRINX - the exhibition

"Syrinx" grew from a request in April 2015 from light artist Chris Levine for a sound atmosphere to accompany an exhibition of his work at The Fine Art Society in Bond St. This followed several other collaborations with him and Max Eastley for the Eden Project. These had used natural sounds (birds, insects, weather), and recordings of Max's instruments and sculptures, which had been electronically processed. The aim was to produce something that is repeated (looped) but is complex enough, and long enough, that the repetition was not appreciable. It had to be bearable to those who had to hear it for long periods day after day. It was to be barely audible, almost subliminal, and based on birdsong. As an indication of what he wanted he gave a reference to a Justin Bieber song, which had been time stretched by a factor of eight using a computer program called "paulstretch".

The composition process starts with careful selection and editing of seemingly appropriate, interesting, and appealing sounds. Some recordings have a sense of musical, dramatic or emotional expression. One of these was a short section of a single clear recording of a blackbird, one of our most familiar birds.

Processing a sound can produce radical transformations of it with totally different associations, while somehow retaining the essence of the original. Some processing reveals things that are not appreciable before modification. Editing is fundamental to the whole process, being extensively used at every stage of composition. Extended compositions can be created from very few initial sound fragments. One switches continually from the microscopic timescale, working on individual short sounds to the macroscopic timescale, the structure of an extended piece. Work in one affects the conception of the other.

Extreme time-stretching of individual blackbird phrases with "paulstretch" produced slowly evolving textures of sound resembling organs, strings and choirs. Granular synthesis produced different sorts of textures. A few other bird and insect sounds were also processed to produce further sonic variation. The results were then carefully edited and tried one against another at different times. Some were rejected or reserved for later reevaluation. The various sounds were mixed together, some foreground, some as background or distant, and maybe subjected to further processing, to produce a variety of sketches. Each one is a piece that could perhaps stand alone. From these an outline structure is constructed, first a basic order, then seeing how one can flow or develop into another. Sometimes a cut or a pause seems right, at others some new material is needed to evolve from one to the next. There will be searches for new sounds to match or approximate what seems to be required. All very subjective. The sound itself suggests the direction of development.

This is a form of "Music Concrète", a term coined by Pierre Schaeffer to describe music composed from recordings of real acoustic sounds from any source, rather than electronically generated ones (Electronic Music). His early works used vinyl disc recordings, manipulated in various ways akin to DJ "turntablism". Magnetic tape recording, was much more flexible, allowing editing, speed and pitch alteration, and electronic mixing and processing. Part of the ethos is that sound is heard with its causes being unseen. A sound becomes an "object" in itself, disassociated from its original material source and meaning.

The majority of the sound and music we listen to now is by means of electronics: mobile phone, "iPod", computer, CD, vinyl, radio, TV, film, video, web-based distribution, or by amplified public address systems. Computers can now provide much more powerful music and sound production facilities than were previously available, with minimal investment. Working with sound has become democratized. Video production has been

similarly revolutionized. It is one of many audiovisual media. We have “sound art” and “sound design” to add to terms describing working with sound.

Two years after the Fine Arts Society exhibition I decided to rework what Chris Levine had used several times for different events into a more overt composition with more structure and development. Some synthesis was used to provide further bass sounds, a minimal extra choir sound, and percussion. New tools for audio processing were made in Max/MSP and used to create further modifications of the original blackbird calls. They are present, if unrecognizable, in various forms throughout the piece. A few chosen bird sounds were used as soloists in evocative sonic environments.

Soloists and Chorales (in order of appearance)

1. Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). - BBC Sound FX CD No.12, Track 1.
2. Slaty Bristlefront (*Merulaxis ater*). Brown Tinamou (*Crypturellus obsoletus*). Rufous-breasted Leafseraper (*Sclerurus scansor*). Buff-breasted Wren (*Thryothorus leucotis*). Organ Wren (*Cyphorhynchus arada*). All from a website of Brazilian Birds that seems to have ceased operation.
<https://www.metafilter.com/48475/Brazilian-bird-songs> <http://www.mma.gov.br/ingles/cgmi/cantoave/canto.html>
3. Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). - DOM Bruitages Vol. 12 CD CDVSM 38589. Track 63.
4. Skylark (*Aluda arvensis*). - Digifffects C03 Rural CD.Track 3.
5. Short-tailed Antthrush (*Chamaeza campanisona*) - From the above website of Brazilian Birds.
6. Herring Gulls. - Recorded by Dave Hunt at Lyme Regis.
7. Hoopoe Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*) (S.Morocco) - Auvdis “Les Plus Beaux Chants D’oiseaux” CD A 6117. Track 3. - Recorded by Jean C. Roché
8. Canada Geese. - Concocted from various goose honks by Dave Hunt.
9. Little Auk colony. - Recorded by Max Eastley in the Arctic.

Dave Hunt - the artist

Dave Hunt is an aging sound engineer/producer, in a form of semi-retirement, who has finally found time to do for himself what he has always wanted to do and done with others: “compose” electronic music.

Austin Forum / The Catholic Church and Modern and Contemporary Art

Austin Forum aims to reestablish a strong and creative relationship between the Catholic Church and the Arts. In the twentieth century, the Catholic Church invited its members to “read the signs of the times”. In response to that, Austin Forum is working with artists whose artistic expressions say something about the world and the human condition today. Austin Forum is delighted to announce the seventh installation of an Art programme in the church building at St Augustine’s, Hammersmith. Austin Forum celebrates the creativity and practice of emerging and established artists and invites them to engage and respond to the sacred space. Austin Forum invites them to enhance worship and contemplation in the church.

Visitor information

Admission: free

Opening times:

Monday-Friday: 9.40am to 11.40pm / 3pm to 7pm,

Saturday: 3pm to 4:45pm,

Sunday: 3pm to 5.30pm

Address: St Augustine’s church - 55 Fulham Palace Road - London. W6 8AU

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Nearest London Underground Station: Hammersmith

The title “Syrinx” was adopted, long before I was aware of its use by Debussy for a piece for solo flute.

If, as some say, birds are the living descendants of dinosaurs, their evolutionary inheritance is as long as life on earth. Nature, in its mystery, longevity, complexity, beauty and horror challenges our anthropocentric view of the meaning of “life”.

References

Justin Bieber “Smile” time stretched.

<https://soundcloud.com/mesieuepiescha/justin-bieber-u-smile-slowed-down-800>

“Syrinx” Claude Debussy https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEyKMI3yf_4

“paulstretch”, is a free Mac computer program <http://hypermammut.sourceforge.net/paulstretch/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birds_in_music

<http://chrislevine.com/>

<https://www.maxeastley.co.uk/category/works/installation/>

<https://www.edenproject.com/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Schaeffer

Curators

Curated by Fr Gianni Notarianni O.S.A. & by Marie Marin la Meslée.

Press information

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