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On *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*

By Christopher DeLaurenti

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“Beethoven and Wagner have stirred our hearts and nerves for many years,” wrote Luigi Russolo in his 1913 manifesto, *The Art of Noises*. “Now we have had enough of them...” Indeed, music in the 20th century effloresced and then exploded with new ideas and techniques as well as into countless subgenres through new social, technological, and political relations. *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music* (Continuum) attempts to corral the major and minor trends in adventurous music—and generally succeeds. This cannily collected anthology of seminal music writing includes the obligatory pioneers and almost-pop icons: Luigi Russolo’s *The Art of Noises: Futurist Manifesto* and John Cage’s *The Future of Music: Credo*, along with probing pieces by Karlheinz Stockhausen, media theorist Marshall McLuhan, *musique concrète* inventor Pierre Schaeffer, Brian Eno, Glenn Gould, William S. Burroughs, and others.

Yet *Audio Culture* doesn’t just rely on old, probably dead, white fogies. Co-editors Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner range boldly and widely, embracing Noise (*The Beauty of Noise: An Interview with Masami Akita of Merzbow*), soundscape listening (*The Music of the Environment* by acoustic ecology pioneer R. Murray Schafer), Minimalism, (Steve Reich’s *Music as a Gradual Process* and *Thankless Attempts at a Definition of Minimalism* by Kyle Gann), glitch (Kim Cascone’s *The Aesthetics of Failure: ‘Post-Digital’ Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music*), sampling (Chris Cutler’s landmark *Plunderphonia*), and collective music-making (*A Scratch Orchestra: Draft Constitution* by Cornelius Cardew and *Improvised Music After 1950* by George Lewis). A short, helpful preface offering biographical and contextual information precedes every selection. A passel of quotes opens each of the book’s nine sections, which include Modes of Listening, The Open Work, Minimalisms, and Improvised Musics.

Audio Culture passes the test of a good music book: it’s easy to read, insightful, and inspiring. We hear music makers, including John Zorn, Ornette Coleman, Anthony Braxton, and Earle Brown, in their own words while theorists Jacques Attali, Kodwo (pronounced *Kojo*) Eshun, and Umberto Eco among others rhapsodize with very little jargon.

Rich with appendices, the back of the book is also rich. The glossary, ample and rewarding, affirms the book’s scope. The following entries appear consecutively — Analog Synthesizer, Atonality, Avant-Rock, Bauhaus, Beat Juggling, Breakbeat, Breakbeat Science, Charivari, Clusters, Computer Music, Conduction... With at least 20 entries per chapter, *Audio Culture* boast an excellent discography and bibliography, too. The chronology follows the curve and complexity of history. Early entries teem with names and places while recent years (the chronology ends in 2001) focus on trends and events. It remains too soon to select great or even emblematic creators.

My only minor gripe is that the book should have included illustrations. I shouldn’t have to exhume my copy of the obscure and short-lived magazine *Music* to peruse the illustrations of

sutured LPs sabotaged CDs discussed by Christian Marclay and Yasunao Tone in *Record, CD, Analog, Digital*. I wish the editors had included an essay or two on software: coding as composing, the current infatuation with real-time processing, the use of pirated software and its occasional institutional implementation, etc. Also missing are instrument inventors (most glaringly absent is Harry Partch) yet nonetheless *Audio Culture* belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in listening and sound making.