

Improv:21: Ellen Fullman: Sympathetic Resonances



Identifier

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Description

Derk Richardson interviews composer and inventor of the Long String Instrument (LSI), Ellen Fullman, at the Red Poppy Art House, in San Francisco, on February 18, 2009, as part of the ROVA:Arts Improv 21 series of informances. Fullman describes her evolution from a visual artist to musical instrument builder, improviser, composer, and collaborator with various other avant-garde ensembles. Fullman states that her journey of musical discovery began with her impatience at learning traditional instruments, saying that as soon as she got good at them she became bored with their sound. This led her to designing her own instruments, one of the first of which was a skirt made from sheet metal with amplified guitar strings attached to the front and back of her shoes, and which produced sound as she walked. Fullman then went on to experiment with various metal contraptions, eventually culminating with the Long String Instrument, which consisted of a series of strings often 30 or more feet long.

Developing the LSI as a performance instrument logically led her to explore just intonation and other alternative tuning systems, for which her instrument was almost uniquely suited, as well as experiments with a variety of different types and gauges of strings, each of which produced its own distinctive timbre. From these humble beginnings Fullman, who had no formal training in musical theory, began to compose for the LSI, while also developing a variety of forms of notation and playing practices, many of which involved synchronizing the movement of many players as they walked up and down the instrument's length.

Her next challenge was to learn how to play more softly (so as to more easily collaborate with other musicians), expanding her harmonic range, increasing her use of overtones, perfecting performance techniques, and acquiring additional textures and timbres. In the 1990s she began performing with Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening Band and studying Indian vocal music, both of which led to a growing appreciation of the spiritual nature of music, the need for greater concentration while performing, and recognition of the beauty of even a single note. However Fullman would never be satisfied with simply playing the part of a droning tambura in a

band, and she has continued her evolution as composer and musician, including combining her interest in singing and Delta Blues to produce an album based on American folk music, and several recent collaborations with musicians and electronic composers, exploring the sympathetic resonances that arise when playing the LSI with other instruments or forms of amplification.

Musical Selections

Street Walker, for amplified metal skirt [excerpt] (ca. 1980) (1:48) -- Longitudinal Vibration Installation at the Terminal NY Show [excerpt] (1983) (1:00) -- [unidentified Long String Instrument music] (2005) (1:00) -- Staggered Stasis [excerpt] (1987-89) (1:55) -- TexasTravelTexture (ca. 1994) (6:58) -- No Home (3:53) / Woody Guthrie [arr. by Ellen Fullman and Konrad Sprenger (a.k.a. Jörg Hiller)] -- Stratified Bands: Last Kind Words, for LSI and string quartet [excerpt] (2001-02) (2:45) / Ellen Fullman -- [unidentified sample of box-bow instrument music] (0:21) -- [example of sympathetic resonances with LSI and electronics] (1:49) / Ellen Fullman and Zachary James Watkins

Artists

ROVA:Arts (features)
Deep Listening Band (features)
Kronos Quartet (features)
Richardson, Derk (features)
Fullman, Ellen, 1957- (features)
Jacobs, Nigel (features)
Gould, Elise (features)
Oliveros, Pauline, 1932-2016 (features)
Dempster, Stuart (features)
Gamper, David, 1945- (features)
Hiller, Jörg, 1977- (features)
Sprenger, Konrad, 1977- (features)
Harrington, David (Violinist) (features)
Sherba, John (features)
Dutt, Hank (features)
Culp, Jennifer (features)
Watkins, Zachary James (features)