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Pauline Oliveros
MATRIX 59

Pauline Oliveros and Carol the Elephant, San Diego Zoo, 1974
Photograph: Fred Lonidier

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An Evening of Sonic Meditations with Pauline Oliveros
Saturday, May 3, 1980 in Tapestry Hall at the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Including The Witness (1979), commissioned by Joseph Celli with assistance from the Kaplan Fund and the American Music Center. Joseph Celli, oboe and English horn; Malcolm Goldstein, violin.

This concert was organized by Arthur Stidfole.

Pauline Oliveros was born in Houston in 1932. She first wanted to be a composer at the age of sixteen and originally studied the accordion and French horn. In 1952 she went to San Francisco, studied there with Robert Erikson, and worked as a freelance musician. She was involved with group improvisation from 1957 on and worked at the San Francisco Tape Center (1961-66). Her association with pianist David Tudor and dancer-choreographer Elizabeth Harris, beginning in 1963, reinforced her interest in the manipulation of sounds, musical and nonmusical, and in collaborative performance. In 1966 she was appointed director of the Tape Music Center at Mills College, and in 1967 she began teaching electronic music at the University of California at San Diego.

Oliveros wrote her pre-1963 music for conventional instruments using neither serialism nor indeterminacy. This music grew out of the freedom of sound she had gained in group improvisation: "I simply listened until I heard the next sound to write down." Later she explored mixed media, often using dancers, actors, live players, film, lighting, and tape music. Disliking the "visual vacuum" at performances of tape music alone, she began to make use of theatrical material, often improvised. From about 1966 her interest turned to multichannel tape interacting with live situations and theatrical forms. Her works of this type are long, often containing repeated and extended sonorities that are usually gradually altered. A reviewer's description of her pre-1963 pieces applies equally well to these later works: They unfold "without pretension, as a dramatic and unrestrained gesture through simple materials." Many of these works (e.g., I of IV) were composed directly on tape in real time (rather than through precomposition processes and synthesis), thus achieving a living musical process rather than a reworking of previously prepared raw materials. She is also concerned with live electronic performance in which electronic sounds or other sounds modified electronically are generated during performance. These sounds are dealt with instrumentally in keeping with her preference for "staying out of the studio and getting onto the stage." Unlike many mixed media composers of the late 1960s, her work shares with several West Coast contemporaries an unpretentious synthesis of diverse sonic and theatrical elements without sensationalism and blatancy, relying more on a relaxed inventive temperament and a good-humored love of life.

SONIC MEDITATIONS

INTRODUCTION I

Sonic Meditations are intended for group work over a long period of time with regular meetings. No special skills are necessary. Any persons who are willing to commit themselves can participate. The Ensemble to whom these meditations are dedicated has found that non-verbal meetings intensify the results of these meditations and help provide an atmosphere which is conducive to such activity. With continuous work some of the following becomes possible with Sonic Meditations: Heightened states of awareness or expanded consciousness, changes in physiology and psychology from known and unknown tensions to relaxations which gradually become permanent. These changes may represent a tuning of mind and body. The group may develop positive energy which can influence others who are less experienced. Members of the Group may achieve greater awareness and sensitivity to each other. Music is a welcome by-product of this activity.

INTRODUCTION II

Pauline Oliveros has abandoned composition/performance practice as it is usually established today for Sonic Explorations which include everyone who wants to participate. She attempts to erase the subject/object or performer/audience relationship by returning to ancient forms which preclude spectators. She is interested in communication among all forms of life, through Sonic Energy. She is especially interested in the healing power of Sonic Energy and its transmission within groups.

All societies admit the power of music or sound. Attempts to control what is heard in the community are universal. For instance, music in the church has always been limited to particular forms and styles in accordance with the decrees of the Church Fathers. Music in the courts has been controlled through the tastes of patrons. Today Muzak is used to increase or stimulate consumption in merchandising establishments.

Sonic Meditations are an attempt to return the control of sound to the individual alone, and within groups especially for humanitarian purposes; specifically healing.

Each Sonic Meditation is a special procedure for the following:
1. Actually making sounds
2. Actively imagining sounds
3. Listening to present sounds
4. Remembering sounds

Because of the special procedures involved, most all of the meditations are available to anyone who wishes to participate regardless, or in spite, of musical training. All that is required is a willing commitment to the given conditions.

Sound making during the meditations is primarily vocal, sometimes hand clapping or other body sounds, sometimes using sound producing objects and instruments.

Sound imagining is encouraged through the use of various questions designed to trigger auditory fantasy. Individuals are then asked to share what was heard inwardly, with members of the group using any means to describe the experience. Conditions given for listening to present sounds are intended to expand awareness of the auditory environment, both within and without of the individual.

Auditory memory is also encouraged by trigger questions with subsequent sharing of these memories in the group. Some of the medita-
tions involve body movement as well. The term meditation is used simply to mean dwelling with or upon an idea, an object, or lack of object without distraction, or divided attention.

Healing can occur in relation to the above activities when 1) individuals feel the common bond with others through a shared experience. 2) when one's inner experience is made manifest and accepted by others. 3) when one is aware of and in tune with one's surroundings. 4) when one's memories, or values, are integrated with the present and understood by others.

In process a kind of music occurs naturally. Its beauty is not through intention, but is intrinsically the effectiveness of its healing power. This may be felt by the group, and the music relates to the people who make it through participation and sharing, as a stream or river whose waters offer refreshment and cleansing to those who find it.


The Witness for virtuoso instrumentalist(s)
by Pauline Oliveros

The Witness is an exploration of some attentional states, or modes possible during performance. The piece is in 3 continuous parts, each part reflecting a particular state or mode.

I - The performer is instructed to pay attention exclusively to his or her own sounds. Each sound made must be unique, or unrelated to past, or future, sounds in this section. This means that the performer must be open to his, or her own imagination and focus on the realization of the sounds which are imagined.

II - The performer is instructed to pay attention exclusively to sounds which are made by a partner or partners and to react to these sounds spontaneously. This means that the performer changes focus from reproducing imaginary sounds to responding instantaneously, triggered by openness to the external world.

III - The performer is instructed to pay attention to all sounds, internal and external including ambient sounds as if he or she were a third party witnessing the sounds as one unified pattern. The performer tries at times to gain leadership and at times to be a part of their sounds. This means expanding one's attention to a wide open state which is continually inclusive with all action spontaneous.

The Witness for virtuoso instrumentalist(s) - may be played as a solo, duo or ensemble. Commissioned by Joseph Celli with assistance from the Kaplan Fund and the American Music Center. First Performance by Joseph Celli and Malcolm Goldstein at the Lennox Arts Center, Lennox, MA, August 17, 1979.

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1980