

## The Video Archive of the Electroacoustic Music

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*The Video Archive of the Electroacoustic Music* began in 1996 out of our desire to capture a first-person history of the pioneering composers, scientists, and engineers from 1950 to present. Age and illness have since claimed several interview subjects and many other potential subjects. Luciano Berio, Earl Brown, Herbert Brün, David Lewin, and Iannis Xenakis have all died in recent years, underscoring the urgency of this work.

The archive currently comprises about 50 hours of digitally recorded interviews, primarily on American subjects, across a broad spectrum. Bebe Barron is a self-taught composer who collaborated with John Cage, filmmaker Maya Deren, and choreographer Merce Cunningham. David Smith was one of the designers of the MIDI protocol. Mel Powell performed with Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller and then established studios at Yale and CalArts. At Bell Laboratories, John Pierce was instrumental in the creation of computer synthesis and launching the first telecommunications satellites, and also coined the word *transistor*. Pierce's association with author Arthur C. Clarke led to the singing computer, H.A.L., in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

I was fortunate to be part of the last generation mentored by the founders of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center. These associations lend an intimate quality to many of the interviews.

*Max Matthew, Bell Laboratories:* I had the idea that if we could digitize speech...and get it into the computer, that we could simulate the new telephones...then, we went to a Dika Newlin concert....John [Pierce] looked at me and said, "The computer could do better than this, why don't you write a program?" So I went away and wrote Music I, which did not do better....And I guess the real question, which I often ask, is why at that time we didn't give up and forget the whole thing. There were two reasons. One was a mathematical theorem of Claude Shannon's, which basically proved that...any sound that the human ear could hear could be made this way....The other thing was the encouragement of a number of very, I think, perceptive musicians and composers...Edgard Varèse, Vladimir Ussachevsky, and Milton Babbitt.

*Dave Smith:* Sequential was the first, technically to ship a MIDI synthesizer in December of '82; then at January of '83, at the NAMM show, Roland brought

over their JP6 and they plugged it into the Prophet 600, so it was the first MIDI connection, and it worked!

*Bebe Barron:* For a wedding present somebody gave us a wire recorder, so we were indeed very lucky when we were able to obtain the very first tape recorder in the world...in about 1949...we shot off to New York, moved to the Village. Anyway, we started a recording studio. We built almost all the equipment ourselves because there wasn't any to buy, really. And it turned out the studio became something of a center. John [Cage] brought... Stockhausen, Edgar Varèse. Lou Harrison was around a lot. He gave a name to our first piece...the *Heavenly Menagerie*.

The collecting process uses qualitative research methodology. Each interview subject is asked the same roster of questions, ranging from the biographical to the musical. One set of questions focuses on the relationship between scientist and composer. Other questions explore the subject's musical or technical influences

Interviews are at times organized to capture groups of individuals associated with particular studios. Studios are communities, and the story of any individual artist reflects the aesthetic and technical choices of the studio directors, engineers, and the other artists working in the facility. The early studios were also large musical instruments—each with its own idiosyncrasies. Thus, the history of the studios, both as technology and as artist subculture, is intertwined with the history of the music.

Scholarship on this branch of music has barely begun, yet precious source material is quickly disappearing with the deaths of key innovators. For many subjects, these interviews are the only extant primary source material.

As Milton Babbitt recounted in his interview, virtually every musician of note who came through New York in the 1950s and '60s visited the Columbia-Princeton EMC, including Stravinsky and Shostakovich. This environment was the catalyst for some of the first convincing and fully conceived electro-acoustic compositions, including the series of ten *Synchronisms* pieces by Mario Davidovsky. The stories of other studios, notably the San Francisco Tape Music Center are just as rich in personal and professional detail.

The current archive includes approximately 50 hours of unedited interview material in miniDV format. From these materials, a number of short edited

excerpts have been produced for educational purposes. A comprehensive archive would necessarily contain many hundreds of hours and grow each year.

The mission of this archive is to be as inclusive and broad as possible, and no omission (or inclusion) should be interpreted as an indication of an agenda. The collection of such materials is an open-ended process. As funding and time allow, we seek to make additions and welcome suggestions for additional subjects. We also appreciate contributions of interview materials. Mechanisms to provide access to the archive are being developed; until then please send inquiries regarding licensing and scholarly access to [eric@ericchasalow.com](mailto:eric@ericchasalow.com).