

Jems: Journal of Experimental Music Studies — Reprint Series

Following a Straight Line: La Monte Young

Dave Smith

Originally published in Contact no. 18 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 4-9. The following article has been amended and essential facts updated with the full support and assistance of La Monte Young especially for this Jems Reprint. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author. Jems original upload date: 21 June 2004.

Through the few pieces of his I've heard, I've had. . . utterly different experiences of listening than I've had with any other music [John Cage].¹

I am wildly interested in repetition, because I think it demonstrates control [La Monte Young].²

He really goes to great lengths to control as much as possible, and to focus the attention on what remains uncontrolled [George Brecht].³

It's not a question of 'there's so little to hear': there's so much to hear [Howard Skempton].⁴

La Monte Young's *Composition 1960 No. 7* consists of two notes, B and F# at the bottom of the treble clef, written as semibreves with ties: this notation is accompanied by the instruction 'to be held for a long time'. *Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) to H.F.* (April 1960), popularly known as *X for Henry Flynt*, requires the performer to repeat a loud, heavy sound every one to two seconds as uniformly and as regularly as possible for a long period of time.⁵

The important words here are 'repeat', 'held' and 'for a long time'. (In 1963 Young organised a five-hour performance of the open fifth piece.) Performing, or witnessing a single activity extended in time, we begin to appreciate aspects and ideas that would otherwise remain hidden. In the open fifth piece we hear pitches additional to those notated: combination tones appear singly or in small groups. The mind constantly refocuses as the listener's attention is drawn by different elements and transformations of the sound. And the acoustics of an enclosed performance space ensure varied perceptions in different parts of the room.

The superhuman demands of *X for Henry Flynt* require total concentration on the part of the performer and a commitment to do the best job he can:⁶ ultimately a mentally rewarding experience. But what of the audience? Cornelius Cardew wrote that the interest of the piece lies in

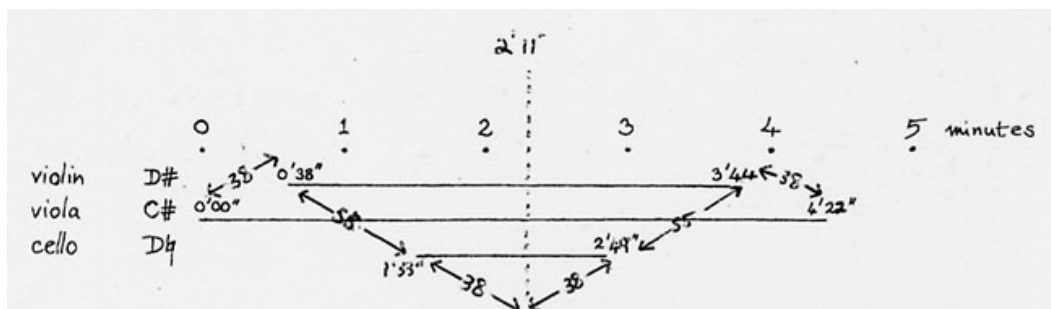
- (1) Its duration, and proportional to that:
- (2) the variation within the uniform repetition.

(3) the stress imposed on the single performer and through him on the audience... These elements occur rather *in spite of* the instructions, although naturally they are the *result* of them. What the listener can hear and appreciate are the *errors* in the interpretation. If the piece were performed by a machine this interest would disappear and with it the composition.⁷

Composition 1960 No. 7 emphasises the harmonic series through the purity and reduction of material and points to Young's later work with precisely-tuned sinewave drones and voices. On the other hand, *X for Henry Flynt* is most often realised in the form of forearm clusters on a piano. The composer was reported to have performed it by driving a hammer into a bucketful of nails amplified with a contact microphone, or by beating a large frying-pan with a wooden spoon:⁸ in other words, using sounds traditionally regarded as of indefinite pitch. (Young's music, however, negates the existence of indefinite pitch.) These two pieces bear a fundamental relationship to all of his output (and indeed to much English and American experimental music of the last ten years).

Young started working with long sounds in 1957⁹ (in the octet for Brass) but his interest in them dates from much earlier. He remembers the sound of the wind in the chinks of the Idaho log cabin in which he was born in 1935. In his childhood he was fascinated by continuous environmental sounds, particularly those of motors, power plants and telephone poles. The 'dream chord' (made up of the pitches G-C-C sharp-D) on which some of his pieces are based is the chord he used to hear in the telephone poles.¹⁰

The Trio for Strings (1958) is based entirely on different spacings and transpositions of selected pitches (usually three at any one time) from the 'dream chord'. The opening is given in Example 1.



Example 1: Opening, *Trio for Strings*

My timings are approximate since they are taken down from a recording, but the overlapping of notes in time seems to be carefully structured throughout the work as does the order of pitches (which is related to twelve-note procedures). But these are incidental aspects. What is more noticeable is that the 48-minute *Trio* is played entirely without vibrato, mostly pretty quietly and with very slow bowing. The sculptural qualities of the sound are reinforced in performance by the statuesque appearance of the players. The timbres are devoid of colour and the notes are played not 'as individual "parts"' but as contributions to a chordal unit whose components are of different durations'.¹¹ These chordal units are separated by silences lasting up to 40 seconds.

Young was probably not aware of the early works of Christian Wolff which explore similar territory. The only pitches in Wolff's *Trio* for flute, clarinet and violin (1951) are two superimposed perfect fifths (E-B-F sharp), and the *Duo* for violins (1950) uses two adjacent semitones (D-E flat-E). Wolff's desire was to create as much diversity as possible within the severe pitch limitations he had imposed, e.g. through varying combinations of instruments, dynamics etc. Like Young's *Trio*, the *Duo* is slow, mostly quiet and played without vibrato. There is a similar emphasis on harmony at the expense of melody; another of Wolff's works that is interesting in this respect is *For Piano I* (1952) in which nine widely-spaced pitches are arranged in 'constellations' of sound separated by up to 18 seconds of silence.

Significantly, both Wolff and Young relate their early work to Webern, drawing attention to that composer's habit of repeating pitches only at the same octave placement for a section of a work. A European composer might understand this as a means of maintaining and increasing tension (e.g. see Jean Barraqué's remarkable Piano Sonata of 1950–52). The two Americans found that for them it created stasis.

Young spent most of the 40s and 50s in Los Angeles where he received his education.¹² Some of his early musical ambitions lay in jazz (he had been playing saxophone since the age of six or seven) and he played regularly with, among others, Billy Higgins and Don Cherry. At the same time, he was studying at Los Angeles City College with Leonard Stein, Schoenberg's assistant, and eventually decided to devote himself more to 'serious composition', although to this day he holds an exceptional regard for such jazzmen as Eric Dolphy and John Coltrane.

But the late 50s was a time of discovery for Young and he was deeply impressed by the drone-dominated liturgical chant, Gagaku and Indian classical music that he heard. Then in 1959 he attended Stockhausen's composition course in Darmstadt where, ironically enough, he discovered Cage's indeterminate music. The results of this experience were immediate.

Vision (1959) is a work for eleven instrumentalists spread around a darkened auditorium. Eleven sounds (or complexes of sounds) are heard in 13 minutes. The duration and spacing of these sounds are calculated by the performance director with the aid of a random number book or telephone directory. Unusually, the sounds are not constant but 'complex and changing'.

Poem (1960) is scored for chairs, tables, benches or anything else that can be dragged across a floor. Again, random numbers are used by the performance director, this time to determine the number of events, their durations, the points at which they begin and end and the length of the composition. The composer specifies that the sounds should be as constant and as continuous as possible, but 'what is actually perceived is the uncontrolled and unintended deviation which arises from the impossible attempt to achieve a constant sound' (Michael Parsons),¹³ a clear relationship with *X for Henry Flynt*. Parsons goes on to point out that 'sounds of the kind specified in *Poem*, sometimes regarded as an affront to the ear, can actually be quite beautiful if one concentrates on listening to them'. Certainly the sounds can at first seem offensive and objectionable. But after a time 'the mind slowly becomes incapable of taking further offense, and a very strange, euphoric acceptance and enjoyment begin to set in.... After a while the euphoria...begins to intensify. By the time the piece is over, the silence is absolutely numbing, so much of an environment has the piece become' (Dick Higgins).¹⁴

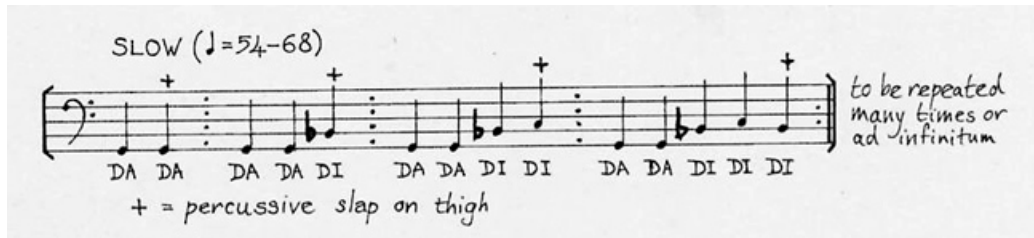
Young tests this theory even further in *2 Sounds* (1960), which dates from a period of close collaboration with Terry Riley. One sound is made by scraping a tin can over a pane of glass, the other by scraping a drum stick around a gong: both tin and gong were close-miked. The sounds were recorded on separate tapes which are started at different times. Merce Cunningham has been using this version for his 'Winterbranch' ballet since 1964.

In 1960 Young won a travelling scholarship enabling him to study electronic music with Richard Maxfield in New York (where he has lived ever since). He became one of the leading lights of the Fluxus movement which included figures such as George Brecht, Henry Flynt, Dick Higgins, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik. Since this time he has been a free-lance composer, performer, lecturer and teacher.

1960 also witnessed the creation and performance of several short verbal pieces. Some encapsulate fundamental ideas, e.g. *Composition 1960 No. 10*, 'Draw a straight line and follow it' and No. 9, the score of which is a horizontal line on a card. For Young the line is a condensation of any one obsessional activity, e.g. marathon running, strict Catholicism, playing a chord for two and a half hours on a piano accordion,¹⁵ or sighting with plumb-lines and drawing along the floor with chalk (Young's realisation of *No. 10*). Of the other *Compositions 1960*, two are concerned with sounds (?) of nature: turning a butterfly loose (*No. 5*) or building a fire (*No. 2*). (Young: 'Isn't it wonderful if someone listens to something he is ordinarily supposed to look at?') *Nos. 3, 4, and 6* point to a fascination with the audience as a social situation. Nothing is *scheduled* to happen in these pieces, but in *No. 4* the auditorium is in darkness and *No. 6* involves the performers acting as an audience.

Young related his *Compositions 1960* to Cage whose later works 'were generally realised as a complex of programmed sounds and activities over a prolonged period of time with events coming and going. I was perhaps the first to concentrate on and delineate the work to be a single event or object in these less traditionally musical areas'. As with Cage's *4'33"*, much depends on them being presented in a live concert situation. There is also a parallel to (and doubtless an influence from) certain Oriental philosophies. Nicolas Slonimsky has stated that: 'The verbal and psychological techniques of Zen can be translated into music through a variety of means which may range from white noise of (theoretically) infinite duration to (theoretically) instantaneous silences.... In the composition of instrumental music, Zen expands perception of the minutest quantities of sonic material and imparts eloquence to moments of total impassivity...'¹⁶ As a devoted gesture to the concept of the single event, Young wrote all his *Compositions 1961* in a singular manner: each of the 29 compositions instructs the performer to 'Draw a straight line and follow it'.

Death Chant (1961), written on the death of a friend's child, is a notated piece for male voices with optional carillon or bells. The heavy, deep, regular singing relates it to Tibetan chanting. The construction of the excerpt below shows a similarity with the additive processes of Philip Glass and Frederic Rzewski (See Example 2).

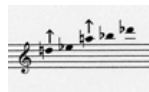
Ex. 2: Additive process from *Death Chant*

Since 1962 there has been more emphasis on series of works of considerable length, as well as improvising long concerts with The Theatre of Eternal Music, a group he founded in the same year. In its early days the group included John Cale (three- and four-string viola drones, sarinda, gong), Tony Conrad (violin, bowed guitar, mandolin), Angus MacLise (hand drums) and Marian Zazeela¹⁷ (voice); a little later Terry Jennings (soprano saxophone), Dennis Johnson (voice) and Terry Riley (voice) joined the group. In *Sunday Morning Blues* (1964) Young performs on soprano saxophone against drones sustained by Cale, Conrad and Zazeela, and MacLise's drumming. A recording I heard was about 28 minutes long: Young spent the whole time cascading up and down a slightly varying series of notes as fast as possible in five-second bursts. Example 3 is typical.



Top line: soprano saxophone (La Monte Young)

Drones: voice (Marian Zazeela), bowed guitar (Tony Conrad) and viola (John Cale)



are predominant pitches used in this example. Pitches with upwards arrows (D natural and A natural) are alternative, microtonally flat fingerings for Eb and Bb.

Ex. 3: Transcription from *Sunday Morning Blues*¹⁸

This wild, tense tremoloing recalls the most electrifying moments of Eric Dolphy and (more especially) John Coltrane, who 'used to construct modes or sets of fixed frequencies upon which he performed endlessly beautiful permutations' (Young), often above one-note or one-chord continuums. In addition the music is given an incredible tautness by MacLise's hard, fast, metreless hand drumming. Some of the early work of the Velvet Underground (in which both MacLise and Cale were involved) is a logical extension of what Young was doing at this time.

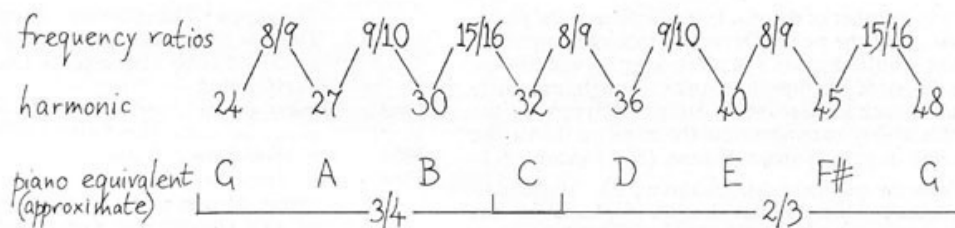
Other works commenced during this period included *Studies in the Bowed Disc* (1963), the subject of which is a four-foot steel gong made specially by the sculptor Robert Morris.¹⁹ A section of this work (*The Volga Delta*) was recorded in 1964 and is concerned with sustaining chosen sound elements with double-bass bows. It sounds a bit like distant aeroplane engines with certain pitches booming through above the rest.

In 1964 Young abandoned the saxophone in favour of singing. He commenced *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys*,²⁰ a mammoth work which has gradually been unfolding through the years with new sections and subsections performed on each public occasion (sometimes lasting up to eight hours a day). Each section has its own title: the main one has been *Map of 49's Dream The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery* (1966-). (49 is a pet turtle.) Other sections have even longer and more fanciful titles, e.g. *The Obsidian Ocelot, The Sawmill, and The Blue Sawtooth High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer Refracting The Legend of The Dream of The Tortoise Traversing The 189/98 Lost Ancestral Lake Region Illuminating Quotients from The Black Tiger Tapestries of The Drone of The Holy Numbers* (October 1965).

The basis of the music is sine-wave, vocal and instrumental drones (usually no more than three pitches at any one time). Young improvises vocally on these drone frequencies in rhythmically free fashion, sliding from note to note at varying speeds. The vocal style seems to have close associations with Indian models, but in reality stems more from his earlier work. The effect of the sound is more akin to Greek Byzantine chant or even the Temiar Dream music of Malaysia, some of which is based entirely on the same three notes that Young often uses: D, G and A. 'Although the piece may sound pretty much the same each time, each performance is quite different' writes Young, and beneath my generalised description of the music lie some pretty complex theories. Previous work with drones had led him to investigate intonation: the longer a harmonic interval is sustained, the more precisely one tunes it. Also, a perfect fifth in just intonation yields overtones that are stronger and more numerous than those of the acoustically imperfect fifth in equal temperament. He began to explore ways of controlling which overtones would be present within a complex of different drones and their associated combination frequencies (*The Two Systems of Eleven Categories* deals with this research).²¹ Consequently only certain frequency combinations are chosen for each performance. However, the duration and point of entry of a frequency is decided by each individual during the course of the performance. This places great demands on each musician who 'must know exactly what everyone else is playing, he must hear at all times any other frequency that is being played and know what it is'.

The sound is amplified to a high, but not uncomfortable, level. This ensures that the bass is heard proportionally louder and that the higher overtones are strengthened, making combination tones more audible. Young's carefully chosen amplification systems are placed so that the audience is totally surrounded by the sound. Performances are given in a darkened room illuminated by red and green lighting and a series of calligraphic slides (the work of Marian Zazeela) superimposed from four projectors.²² These slides are focused and defocused so slowly that it is virtually impossible to see them change, and yet they obviously do. Zazeela speaks of colour ranges of red and green in different superimpositions producing or suggesting many different colours, a visual parallel to some of Young's techniques.

Young is deeply interested in the psychological effects of his music. The presence of drones means that the ear (and therefore the brain) is activated in the same way over a period of time and a psychological state can be induced. Also, harmonically related intervals (i.e. intervals related in whole number frequency ratios) are apparently more congenial information for the brain. On the question of intonation, the composer points out that the major scale is most rationally and musically represented in the octave 24–48 in the overtone series (see Example 4).



Ex. 4: Harmonic range for major scale

The major scale can be seen to be derived from ratios of 2, 3, 5 and their multiples. Indian music, however, also uses ratios of 7, 11, and 13: these intervals are considered harmonically over a drone and not melodically. 'The mere fact that they have the means to classify the moods of the different ragas, in whatever poetic way, means they have something that has almost disappeared from Western music. Sure, you had a few romantics who talked about the moods of various scales or chords. But for every romantic you had a hundred imperialists who were just writing notes.'

This takes us some way towards understanding the composer's fascination for the Kirana singing of Pandit Pran Nath, whom he first heard in 1967. Young was greatly impressed by the precision of his tuning (in order to produce and sustain a mood, it is necessary to repeat each pitch at exactly the same frequency). Evidently the admiration was mutual since Pran Nath invited Young to become his disciple in 1970. The composer agreed provided that he could continue with his own work. Since then, he has often accompanied Pran Nath on tamboura, and so has Terry Riley on tabla.

Meanwhile he has presented *The Well-Tuned Piano* (1964, but not performed publicly until 1974, possibly because of tuning difficulties), a work lasting three hours. The piano is retuned to conform to the harmonic series; the title is an

obvious jibe at Bach. ‘He then plays a series of partially improvised rhythmic and melodic variations, using what he calls “permutation combinations between the individual fingers, which I place over particular combinations of notes.”’²³ *Sunday Morning Blues* demonstrates a similar procedure.

Frequency ratios between any two notes can be represented as whole number relationships. The number of intervals at Young’s disposal is infinitely greater than on an ordinary piano. The smallest he uses can be expressed by the ratio 63/64: just over an eighth of a tone. Using a limited number of these intervals at any one time probably explains (1) the reported gradual alteration of timbre (‘the sound seems to change from zither to lyre to sitar to orchestra of mandolins to choir’)²⁴ and (2) the planned emotional responses that are different for each part of the work. The music is more rhythmic and less static than is usual with Young; certainly it is one of very few pieces written since 1961 that is not based on drones.

Lastly, there are the *Drift Studies* (1964–) for two or more ultra-stable, precisely-tuned sine-wave drones. The recorded version offers a whole range of psychoacoustical effects to the armchair listener. In time, however, the pitches will ‘drift’ slightly, despite the accuracy of the equipment. Among other things this causes the volume of each pitch to drift as well. Between September 1966 and January 1970 Young had turned his house into a continuous sound environment. He consequently studied the effects in great detail.

Information concerning his present work is hard to obtain. This is partly explained by the fact that the rigorous standards by which he controls sound are reflected in his attitudes towards giving concerts, making recordings and earning money. It’s understandable enough why he used to insist (and perhaps still does) that others who play his work must pay in inverse proportion to the duration of a piece (\$300 for seven minutes, \$25 for 24 hours was once quoted). It’s less understandable why he should demand fantastic sums for the dissemination of his work. It puts him in the position of being a relatively unheard major composer, almost a Sorabji of our time.

But perhaps he is less concerned with worldly realities. He used once to subscribe to a 25-hour day. And he has said, ‘If people could meditate more, this would automatically lead to a change of the political situation’. I just can’t see that happening, somehow. He will probably be playing parts of *The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys* throughout his life, but rumour has it that he is only accompanying Pran Nath these days, as well as occasionally performing *The Well-Tuned Piano*. Whatever is happening, La Monte Young is sure to be following the straight line that he started drawing 20 years ago.

I shall conclude with a note on the influence that Young has had upon other musicians. Young’s music has had a fair amount of impact, even in Britain, where he has never played. Among those with whom he has worked, Terry Riley and John Cale are deservedly the best known. The soprano saxophone figures in Riley’s drone-laden *Poppy Nogood and the Phantom Band* (1970)²⁵ owe something to Young as well as to Coltrane. Riley has also worked with just intonation. Cale was surely responsible for much of the material on the first two Velvet Underground albums (1967 and 1968)²⁶: think of the viola drones, the repeated clusters of *I’m waiting for the man*, the uniform cluster-glissandi and increasingly manic one-note obsession of *Sister Ray*. Cale, a Welshman, also gave the first British performance of *X for Henry Flynt* in 1964.

Terry Jennings’s *String Quartet* and *Piano Piece* (both 1960) are both based on the ‘dream chord’. The Quartet has many other similarities with Young’s *Trio*. Tony Conrad’s album with Faust (*Outside the Dream Syndicate* of 1972)²⁷ is predictably laden with violin drones and heavy, repetitive bass riffs. As for other American composers, Steve Reich and Philip Glass are obviously working in analogous fields and their music needs no introduction. Robert Erickson’s *Oceans* (1971) for trumpet(s) and bells is a beautifully spacious harmonic series work, but Charlemagne Palestine’s *2 perfect 5ths a major 3rd apart reinforced twice* (1973) seems to be little more than a cheap imitation.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück IX* (1954, revised 1961) was once described by Cardew as a ‘weak, aesthetic version’ of *X for Henry Flynt*.²⁸ (Did Stockhausen revise the work after hearing the Henry Flynt piece in 1961?) And *Stimmung* (1968) is an infinitely less absorbing work than Young’s *Tortoise*. But the work of Christer Hennix,²⁹ a Swede, is to be taken more seriously. He seems to have beliefs and aims very close to those of Young and the style of his renaissance oboe playing is said to owe much to him too. I’ve heard one ear-splitting, distortion-ridden, primaeval-sounding piece that was fantastically exhilarating.

For the Scratch Orchestra ‘it is only necessary to specify one procedure, and the variety comes from the way everyone does it differently’.³⁰ The ethics of *X for Henry Flynt* extended to amateur group performance was a radical step initiated by Cardew’s *The Great Learning* (1968–70). Other examples are Parsons’ drone-based *Mindfulness of*

Breathing (1969) for low and suitably slow bass voices and Howard Skempton's *Drum No. 1* (1969) ('Any number of drums. Introduction of the pulse. Continuation of the pulse. Deviation through emphasis, decoration, contradiction.') is often lengthy and always exciting. Most of Skempton's works, though, are fairly brief. Pieces such as *September Song* (1968) possess the remarkable ability to concentrate the mind on the nature of the sound in a short space of time (see Example 5).



Ex. 5: Howard Skempton, *September Song*. © Oxford University Press 1996, from *Collected Piano Pieces*. Reproduced by kind permission

Otherwise the musical relationships with Young tend to be in pieces of far greater length. Volume is less important, except in works such as John Lewis's *Klavierhammer* (1974), a frenzied, 20-minute, double-octave barrage of sound (compared by a friend to Chinese water-torture). Tuning is even less important, although Brian Dennis cheerfully relates his work based on the harmonic and sub-harmonic series back to Young's perfect fifth. Dennis had a spell of experimenting with microtones before he started writing these pieces ten years ago.

Last but not least, there is John White. The hour-long *Gothic Chord Machine* (1971) consists entirely of heavy open fifth chords. The hard, uncompromising sound and clashing chords of four reed organs bring to mind visions of an unvarying Arctic landscape. Michael Nyman has linked the vast *Cello and Tuba Machine* of 1968 (potential duration six hours) to Young's *Drift Studies*.³¹

Catalogue of works (incomplete)

1955:

Variations for string quartet

1956:

Five Small Pieces for String Quartet, On Remembering A Naiad,

1. A Wisp, 2. A Gnarl, 3. A Leaf, 4. A Twig, 5. A Tooth

1957:

Fugue in a minor for any four instruments

Prelude in f minor for piano

Fugue in f minor for two pianos

Fugue in eb minor for brass or other instruments

Variations for Alto Flute, Bassoon, Harp and String Trio

for Brass for two trumpets, two horns, two trombones, two tubas

1958:

for Guitar

Trio for Strings

1959:

Studies I, II, and III for piano

Vision for eleven instruments

1959–62:

Untitled works for piano ('an untitled rhythmic, chordal drone piano style of my own development')

1959–?:

Untitled works ('live friction sounds: gong on cement; gong on woodfloor; metal on wall')

1960:

Untitled works ('a collage improvisation of electronic and concrete sounds pre-recorded on magnetic tape')

Poem for chairs, tables, benches, etc.

Invisible Poem Sent to Terry Jennings (performed by Jennings on alto saxophone)

2 Sounds

Arabic Numeral (Any Integer) to H.F. (usually referred to as *X for Henry Flynt*)

Compositions 1960 Nos. 1-15 (1, 8, 11, 12, 14 not listed by Young)

Piano Pieces for Terry Riley Nos. 1 and 2

Piano Pieces for David Tudor Nos. 1-3

1961:

Compositions 1961 Nos. 1–29

Death Chant

1962–64:

Untitled works for soprano saxophone/ piano/gong, vocal drone, violin/guitar/lute and viola ('involving static permutation techniques of my own design applied to constellations of pitches over various stationary and movable drone combinations'; includes *Sunday Morning Blues*)

1962:

The Second Dream of The High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer (from *The Four Dreams of China*) for bowed strings or other sustained-tone instruments that can be precisely tuned

1963:

Studies in the Bowed Disc for four-foot steel gong; includes *The Volga Delta*

1964– :

The Well-Tuned Piano

1964–

The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys for voices, strings and drones etc. (including *Map of 49's Dream The Two Systems of Eleven Sets of Galactic Intervals Ornamental Lightyears Tracery*)

Drift Studies

I am particularly grateful to Hugh Davies, Michael Parsons and Keith Potter for valuable assistance in gathering information for this article. **2004: Special thanks to La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela for their suggestions and corrections to this update.**

Howard Skempton's *September Song* is published in *Collected Piano Pieces*, © Oxford University Press, 1996, and reproduced by kind permission.

Discography

The Tortoise, His Dreams and Journeys (23 minutes; recorded 1969)

Section of *Studies in the Bowed Disc: The Volga Delta* (21 minutes; recorded 1964)

Limited edition by Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Munich (virtually unobtainable)

2004: A few copies of *The Black Record* are still available from the MELA Foundation.

Section of *The Tortoise. His Dreams and Journeys* (39 minutes; recorded 1973)

Drift Study (39 minutes; recorded 1973)

Shandar 83 510 (available and recommended)³²

2004: For details of recordings of *The Well-Tuned Piano* and other works by Young see the Mela Foundation (<http://www.melafoundation.org/>).

Notes

¹ Interview with Roger Reynolds, December 1961, *John Cage* (London, etc.: Peters, 1962), p. 52.

² Conversation with Richard Kostelanetz, 1967. Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Young come from La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, *Selected Writings* (Munich: Heiner Friedrich, 1969), n.p. Other writings by Young include La Monte Young and Jackson MacLow, *An Anthology* (Munich: Heiner Friedrich, 2nd edition, 1970) and La Monte Young, *Compositions and Performances* (unpublished).

³ Michael Nyman, 'George Brecht: Interview', *Studio International*, Vol. 192, No. 984 (November/December 1976), p. 264.

⁴ In conversation.

⁵ The presumption has always been that instrumentation was unspecified for both works. Although the score specified piano or drumstick on gong, Young's 'works list now specifies: "piano(s) or gong(s) or ensembles of at least 45 instruments of the same timbre, or combinations of the above, or orchestra". In recent years La Monte has overseen ensemble performances of the work by different groups' [Young and Zazeela, email, 17 June 2004].

⁶ Significantly, *Composition 1960 No. 13* reads: 'The performer should prepare any composition and then perform it as well as he can'.

⁷ Cornelius Cardew, 'On the role of the instructions in the interpretation of indeterminate music', *Treatise Handbook* (London, etc.: Peters, 1971), p. xiv.

⁸ According to the composer and Marian Zazeela, 'The hammer and nails version is totally unknown to us, although it could be a misreference to the bucket of triangles stirred with a drumstick that was used to make a recorded sound at the time when 2 sounds was actually 3 sounds. La Monte later eliminated this sound from the work and codified it as 2 sounds because he thought the stirred bucket of triangles sounded too commonplace. The spoon on the frying pan was a version performed by Peter Yates. La Monte has made an archival recording of the forearm cluster on piano version and has performed it publicly with drumstick on gong (gong flat on the floor, not suspended)' [Email, 17 June 2004].

⁹ One interesting precursor is Yves Klein's 40-minute *Symphonie 'Monoton-Silence'* (1947-49) which consists of five to seven minute long D major chords separated by 44 seconds of silence.

¹⁰ This chord is the entire material for *The Second Dream of The High-Tension Line Stepdown Transformer* (1962). The work has been performed on two amplified violins. 2004: In 1991, Gramavision released a recording of the work performed by eight trumpets in Harmon mutes (now OOP).

¹¹ Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), p. 121.

¹² John Marshall High School, Los Angeles City College, Los Angeles State College and UCLA from which he graduated in 1958. He then spent two years in graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, the second year as a teaching assistant.

¹³ Michael Parsons, programme note for *Poem*, Fluxus retrospective concert, AIR gallery, London, May 23, 1977.

¹⁴ Dick Higgins, 'Boredom and Danger', *Source* No. 5 (January 1969), p. 15. Higgins is in fact referring to Erik Satie's *Vieux sequins et vieilles cuirasses* (1914), which ends with an eight-beat passage played 380 times and to *Vexations*. His comments are equally applicable to *Poem*.

¹⁵ As Howard Skempton did in the recent Fluxus retrospective.

¹⁶ Nicolas Slonimsky, 'Zen', *Music Since 1900* (London: 4th, revised, edition, Cassell, 1972), p. 1502.

¹⁷ Whom Young married in 1963.

¹⁸ The full title is "'12 I 64 NYC" the first twelve *Sunday Morning Blues*'. This recording consists of 3 'Sets': Set 1, the longest at 11'24", contains Ex 4. The phrase 'the first twelve' is explained by the composer as 'the name of the day as written in the calendar YEAR by Angus MacLise'. MacLise plays handdrums in Set 1 with Young, Zazeela, Conrad, and Cale.

¹⁹ Another special instrument is Walter de Maria's *Instrument for La Monte Young* (1965), consisting of an aluminium ball and trough, 'a sound sculpture for performance with amplification and acoustical design by La Monte Young'. The ball is gently rolled back and forth from one end of the trough to the other.

²⁰ Why tortoise? Whereas other creatures have been evolving with the passing of time, tortoises and turtles have remained essentially unchanged.

²¹ One way is through singing 'throat tones' and 'nose tones'. Try sounding a long note through your nose while slowly opening and closing your mouth and listen for the harmonics.

²² Referred to as *Ornamental Lightyears Tracery*.

²³ Robert Palmer, 'Lost in the Drone Zone (When La Monte Young says take it from the top he means last Wednesday)', *Rolling Stone*, February 13, 1975, p. 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Columbia MS 7315.

²⁶ *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (MGM Verve 2315 056) and *White Light/White Heat* (MGM Verve 710015).

²⁷ Caroline C 1501.

²⁸ Cornelius Cardew, 'One Sound: La Monte Young', *The Musical Times*, Vol.107, No. 1485 (November 1966) p. 959.

²⁹ 2004: Now Catherine Christer Hennix.

³⁰ Michael Parsons, as quoted in Michael Nyman, 'Believe it or not melody rides again', *Music and Musicians*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (October 1971), p. 28.

³¹ Michael Nyman, 'Hearing/Seeing', *Studio International*, op. cit., p. 234.

³² Obtainable in case of difficulty from Public House Bookshop, 21 Little Preston Street, Brighton, BN 1 2HQ, 2004: This bookshop no longer exists.