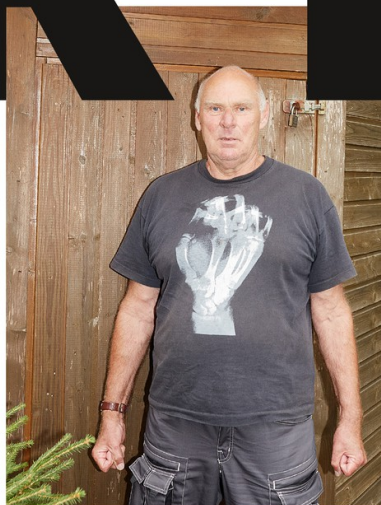


WIRE

ADVENTURES IN SOUND AND MUSIC | INDEPENDENT SINCE 1982



FAUST

THE LEGEND CONTINUES
+ La Düsseldorf | Moebius | Amon Düül



THE WIRE 452 | OCTOBER 2021
£5.95 | 9 770952 068120 10



MARY LOU WILLIAMS | ELLEN FULLMAN × THERESA WONG
id m theft able | Thomas Köner | They Hate Change
+ 36 pages of reviews: Sone Institute | Purbayan Chatterjee | Keith Rowe
Van Der Graaf Generator + festivals galore

Invisible Jukebox

Each month we play an artist or group a series of records which they are asked to comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they are about to hear. This month it's the turn of

Theresa Wong × Ellen Fullman

Tested by each other. Photography by Jack Bool

Ellen Fullman and Theresa Wong met in the fertile music scene of the San Francisco Bay Area in 2006, and found resonance in each other through their shared visions of music, performance and visual art. They married in 2017 at San Francisco City Hall, next to the smiling statue of Harvey Milk.

Fullman grew up in Memphis, and moved to Kansas City to study sculpture; in 1978, she crafted a skirt of metal and guitar strings which was designed to make sounds as she walked. After a spell in Minneapolis, she moved to New York to pursue a vocation as an experimental musician. She has been developing her Long String Instrument since the early 1980s, which encompasses the study of just intonation tuning theory, a compositional practice centered on string harmonics, graphic notation, and instrument design and fabrication. Her work has recently received a Gerbode Foundation's Special Award in the Arts for her collaboration with The Living Earth Show and a Guggenheim Fellowship in Music Composition.

Originally from upstate New York, Wong is a composer, improviser, cellist, vocalist, and multimedia artist engaged in a host of experimental practices. Her recently commissioned works include *As We Breathe*, an installed song for Long Beach Opera's 2020 Songbook and *She Dances Naked Under Palm Trees*, for pianist Sarah Cahill's project The Future Is Female, which was performed at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 2020. In 2018, Wong founded the record label fo'c'sle. Her collaborators include Fred Frith, Chris Brown, Annie Lewandowski, Frantz Loriot and John McCowen.

The pair's joint release *Harbors*, released on Room40 in 2020, explores an orchestration of shifting drones, aberrant melodies and glistening atmospheres. The recorded work was a result of composing, performing and revising the composition over a period of four years, reverberating spaces around the world in Denmark, Australia and the US.

The Jukebox took place in Berkeley, California, where Wong and Fullman live and work.

Theresa Wong tested by Ellen Fullman

Stefano Scodanibbio "Oltracidansa"

From *Oltracidansa* (Mode) 2011

Theresa Wong: Stefano Scodanibbio's *Oltracidansa*. I just love this piece so much.

Ellen Fullman: What do you love about it?

TW: All the textures, techniques and vocabulary that he's unearthed from the contrabass are so rich. I've always felt so much connection to Scodanibbio's sound. There's something ancient and very primordial about the way he uses noise, and this piece just really moves me. I don't know why – it's hard to put my finger on it.

EF: Can you try to put words to what it is?

TW: I think it has to do with the way that we have resonance with people as well as things, places and colours. I don't know if you can put a word to it, but I definitely feel it. For example, why is this particular groaning sound, that is playing as we speak, so expressive? Even though it's just a very abstract noise...

EF: It almost sounds vocal, but it's not angry or frustrated or mean – just somehow evocative of being alive on the earth.

TW: It makes me think about how certain animal sounds and sounds in nature can be very expressive, and how sounds have sentience. The same sound on a particular instrument can have a different sentience depending on who's generating it. It's as if the spirit behind it is different, the intention. The whole of vibration that we are, goes into that sound, you know?

Fred Frith "Mondays"

From *To Sail To Sail* (Tzadik) 2008

TW: This is Fred Frith and it's from *To Sail To Sail*. Is it "Life On Venus"?

EF: It's the next track, "Mondays".

TW: This is one of my favourite albums. Meeting Fred and studying with him at Mills College was pivotal for me. It's interesting that he doesn't perform that much on solo acoustic guitar. The techniques and material exploration on this album are so vast. The combination of noise, melodies and rhythms speak really as songs to me, and I feel at the heart of his work are song forms. As a classical musician, this wasn't so much in my background, but when I got back into music after not playing for about ten years, it was really through an epiphany that I could make songs, and also improvise.

EF: When did you first hear his music?

TW: At the Venice Biennale in 2003 when I was

living there working in the field of design. Fred was playing solo electric guitar and honestly, I was a little confounded by his performance, which I think is a good thing. I wasn't as moved in the way that I have been hearing him subsequently, but it was more like, wow, this is really interesting – I don't quite understand it. I was curious to know, *what is this about?*

EF: What was it like to study with him?

TW: I think one of the key things about many of the important teachers I've had is not really what they 'teach' you, it's what they do as artists that inspires you to be able to find your own voice. For example, Fred is a songwriter, improviser, composes pieces for ensembles, makes music for film and dance, and is very much in tune with how music fits into a larger context of all art forms. Simply having such an open mind and expansive practice gave me that example, to say you can do all of these things – forge your own way, in whatever feels the most personal to you. It's a creative life. That's what Fred inspires, and I'm grateful for his presence in my life.

Sean Meehan "Magazine Cowbell"

From *Magazine* (Cowbell Solo) (No label) 2021

TW: Is this *Sectors For Constant*?

EF: Close.

TW: Is it Sean Meehan?

EF: Off the top of your head do you have any ideas?

TW: [Pause] It's *Cowbell Solo*! I haven't heard this album yet. When I first heard the sound I thought it was like a woodblock or a cowbell. And then I thought of Sean just guessing from the silence, because I was going to play one of his pieces for you. One thing that really struck me from his interview with John McCowen in *Sound American* was his interest in spaces that have ambiguity or aren't quite defined. He has explored marginal spaces in New York and created something – either made a film or put on an event and turned a completely unexpected place into a performance somehow. And I think his music does that too. The way he uses silence, and the way he places sound in that silence, is like creating these weird liminal spaces in our experience. When we're listening, we're suddenly not quite sure where we are. Is this music or not?

EF: What's your feeling when you hear this?

TW: I'm suddenly aware of the physical space I'm in and my understanding of everything around me is suspended.

EF: That brings in the outside world, like, for example, we just heard the train whistle. It brings me into listening to the wind blowing and what's going on outside, because you are hyper-aware, waiting for

Theresa Wong (left) and Ellen Fullman in Berkeley, California, August 2021



the next recorded sound, and then you apply that to the acoustic sound around you. What is it about Sean's way of life and approach to his art that inspires you and your own practice?

TW: Sean always brings a surprising perspective, whether we're walking down the street or talking or in the way he treats people or thinks about music. In everything, he's thinking creatively and differently, and there's this beautiful kindness in his intention, and that is so important and part of who he is. It's not just kindness, but I would say active kindness. Approaching things with care and questioning.

EF: And taking action. Not to mention humour. That's the other thing I wanted to say.

TW: Yeah, the idea of a cowbell solo, the way he presents it on his website! [laughs]

Gabby Wen

"Banyan's Dream"

From *A Posteriori* (Bandcamp) 2021

TW: This is Gabby Wen's new album – she's playing guqin and reciting a poem she wrote. Hearing this feels like hearing a memory. And she points to the depth of loss and anger over what is happening politically and culturally in China. I'm so glad to have Gabby in our world and in our neighbourhood now. Being from Toisan and Shenzhen, she's one of the few people that I can share both worlds of experimental music and the Cantonese language. For me, these two worlds rarely ever meet. And she happens to play one of my favourite instruments, the guqin, which is one of the oldest instruments that's been documented.

EF: At least 3000 years.

TW: It's so exquisite and reminds me of the blues. I love how you and I discovered this coincidence with the qin while working on *Harbors*. We created our score based on two sets of notes on the cello: the pitches that you press on the fingerboard at nodal points, and the resulting pitches of the harmonics or flageolets at those points. When we looked in the book *Musical Mathematics* by Cris Forster, we saw a diagram of how the music of the qin is created, and it was exactly the same. I thought, oh my goodness, what I'm doing on the cello is channeling something in my DNA, it's a genetic

predisposition. Whether that's true or not, it's a beautiful connection to this ancient music that I love.

Frantz Loriot

"Through Restless Rains"

From *While Whirling* (Thin Wrist) 2021

TW: This is Frantz Loriot's new solo viola album. I think this is one of my favourite tracks. I don't know what the name is.

EF: "Through Restless Rains".

TW: I love how all the titles make a complete poem.

EF: So, Frantz is French-Japanese, but he lives in Switzerland now. Tell me about your collaboration with him, and how you relate to each other?

TW: We met in Paris in 2005 through [bassist and improviser] Joëlle Léandre, and from our first musical meeting there was an immediate kinship. Later, he moved to New York for a few years so we would connect there and play together. I think having an Asian background and being European, there is a duality that we both really understand. But it's implicit, you know, we hardly ever talk about it. It's just certain things that somehow you get.

EF: Unlike most Americans, you've learned languages and can speak German and Italian and have spent a lot of time living in Europe. How has that influenced the way you think about your identity as an artist?

TW: I think there's an underlying fact that you see things in a lot of different ways. It's multiplicity. From the day you're born, you're hearing at least two languages and exposed to different realities. I often think of the simple question: what do people eat for breakfast? It's the simple notion that you wake up and you give yourself fuel. How do you do that? There are so many ways, not just one. Just being Chinese-American, you're confronted from the beginning that you're different. And the crux of so many conflicts today is the inability to accept that someone is different and does something completely differently than you do. And how can you deal with those differences? So, I think being immersed in so many cultures during my life has given me a certain plasticity in the way I see things, because my experiences have often contradicted each other.

EF: With Frantz, you're both bridging multiple cultures and can take that for granted. Does that give you an added element of comfort?

TW: Maybe comfort isn't the right word. But perhaps there's a certain way in which we both listen, or engage with material culturally that transfers into the music. Perhaps it's contradiction that is implicit. But also, there's a kinship in how we approach our instruments and our process of improvisation. We're both exploring the physicality and materiality of these wooden boxes. In this album, you feel the transformation that occurs when someone puts their laser-focus on a sound and goes so deeply that it transforms that sound. Suddenly you hear it in a new way. The depth of concentration opens your ears to what that instrument could be, what sound and music could be.

Terry Riley

"The Gift: Echoes Of Primordial Time/Mongolian Winds"

From *The Gift* (Weltfreude) 2018

TW: This is *The Gift* by Terry Riley performed by Halvcirkel Quartet.

EF: What do you find compelling about this particular performance?

TW: Well, it was truly a gift when we had a visit from two members of the quartet a few years ago, Mika Persdotter and Nicole Hogstrand. It's both the performance and of course, the composition, which is just a masterpiece. String quartets are a challenging medium for me because first of all, when you have four instruments of similar timbre, the clashiness of equal temperament gets amplified. Then there's the extreme overuse of vibrato, which I can't stand. But this performance is so stunning in its austerity, because they're letting the resonance of the tones breathe – letting the tones *be* without doing a ton of shit. I also love the glissandi, which are present in qin music as well. In Western classical music it's often considered a no-no because it means you're not landing on the intonation. But in so much other music, from classical Indian singing to country music, there's such subtlety and emotion expressed through glissandi, it can move you to tears. But they also worked closely with Terry to develop their performance and you can hear how they're listening in a very special way. There's a give and take which feels like they're improvising together. They're not executing a score, they're giving the music.

Ellen Fullman tested by Theresa Wong

Phill Niblock

"Feedcorn Ear"

From *Touch Five* (Touch) 2013

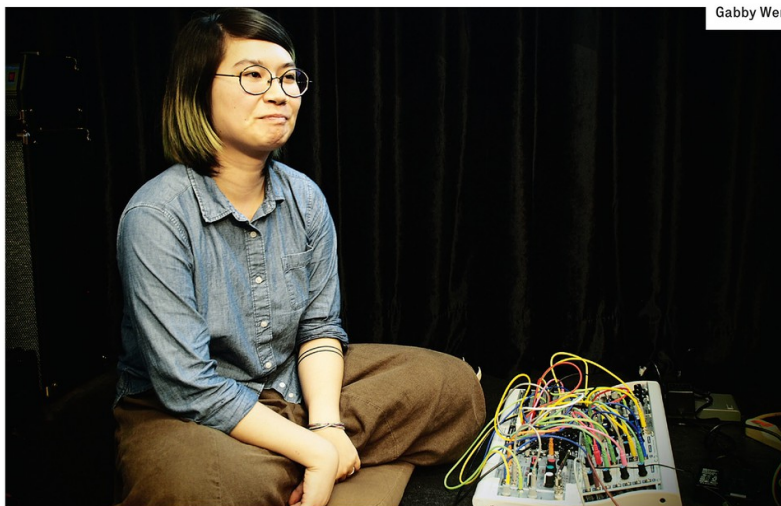
EF: Phill Niblock. It's your favourite piece of his, I don't know the title of the album but it's on *Touch*.

TW: The title of the album is *Touch Five* and the piece is called "Feedcorn Ear". That's an anagram of Arne de Force, the cellist playing on this.

EF: Well, he's from Indiana, isn't he? [laughs]

TW: Tell me about your relationship with Phill.

EF: He was one of the first experimental composers that I met. I was 23, living in Minneapolis/St Paul, and performing at New Music America 1980 at the Walker Art Center. But I don't remember meeting him, only that he had a camera around his neck and that he came to



Gabby Wen

Shuyuan Feng

my performance.

TW: This is when you did your *Metal Skirt* piece?

EF: Yeah. I got to know Phill better when I moved to New York in 1981, I was a regular at his concert series at Experimental Intermedia. I always found the way he works with recordings in his composing to be exciting, taking the acoustic world into electronic production.

TW: So you installed your instrument in his loft?

EF: Several times. There was one concert that was a near disaster. First of all, Phill doesn't like to move anything in his space, so that wasn't good. And then I used the columns in the loft to wrap nylon straps around and anchor the string tension. And I won't mention names but my collaborator accidentally dropped a microphone stand on my strings that caused the structure of my instrument to rotate around the column and the installation collapsed. Knowing just how much work it is to finesse the whole thing together, I went back to the kitchen where Phill was making dinner and I said, 'Well, I don't think there can be a concert tonight because this accident just happened', and Phill said, 'The show must go on.' I didn't get any dinner, I just had to get it together.

TW: That's tough love. Christian Kobi told me one of my favourite stories about Phill. He had invited Phill to have a piece performed at the Bern Minster Cathedral, and the nearby residents started calling the police because they thought the organist had a heart attack and keeled over onto the keys [laughs].

EF: Phill has inspired so many people and he's a connector, he's introduced so many people to me and his whole approach to his concert series is a place for people to connect. I love his productive energy. It makes me happy just to have him as an example. "Feedcorn Ear" has such a rich timbre and expansive atmosphere. Recently I was listening to it while sharpening Japanese kitchen knives and a Chinese cleaver. I had learned how to use a Japanese whetstone for sharpening my woodworking tools. I looked at my hands in the natural light, wind blowing outside, and suddenly I was transported and felt like I was in Phill's film, *The Movement Of People Working*.

Phillip Arnautoff

"Soliloquy: A Ritual Of Communion With Vibrating Strings"

From *Soliloquy: A Ritual Of Communion With Vibrating Strings* (Periplum) 2001

EF: That's another Phil. Phillip Arnautoff, who sadly passed away in April, a composer that I met when I lived in Seattle. He was a reclusive and eccentric person and I visited him regularly to listen to him perform his works and talk about music. This piece is called *Soliloquy: A Ritual Of Communion With Vibrating Strings*. I can really relate to that title, because it's very much about the physical resonances which he conjured in his tunings. I just want to say something about his performance of this piece, which I found astonishing and just fun. It is performed on a Harmonic Canon modelled after Harry Partch's instrument. In designing the canon tuning, which is totally flexible – it's just strings on a box – the composition process begins with bridge placements and tunings. Bridges divide the strings creating tunings on either side. They might have holes cut in them allowing some strings to pass through, and are of varying lengths. What was so wonderful for me in observing his performance is that the melodies in the piece are so naturally executed

because he is strumming across groupings of strings, up and down, and around and through these bridges, like the path of a pinball.

TW: The choreography of the plectrum in the piece, which is so much what your work is about, the trajectory through the instrument...

EF: Yes. He sequenced adjacent string tunings so that as he strummed across, the melody played out. And he told me that one time in his introduction to a live performance, he strummed the instrument and played, what to anyone's ear who is not used to just intonation, might sound incoherent or strange, and said, 'Pretty soon you're going to be whistling that tune.' Laughter ensued but by the end of the concert, people understood what he meant.

TW: I like that about his pieces. When I listen to this album, there might be a strange phrase that sounds very puzzling, but then when it repeats, it becomes familiar and you recognise it through this repetition. Just as in learning a language – you hear a phrase that you don't comprehend but if you hear it over and over, it begins to make sense.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

"Didn't It Rain? Live 1964"

YouTube

EF: Sister Rosetta Tharpe. I read *Shout, Sister, Shout*, an incredibly detailed and compelling biography written by ethnomusicologist Gayle Wald that resulted in Sister Rosetta Tharpe's induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame after being largely forgotten for decades.

I am very attracted to African-American music generated in the Deep South, all stemming from the gospel influence and going into blues and soul. Gayle Wald made connections with Sister Rosetta Tharpe's music to the birth of rock 'n' roll. She pointed out that in the Church of God in Christ, the congregation members were known to each other as holy rollers, participating in a cathartic, spiritual practice of singing and speaking in tongues. This way of experiencing music, and experiencing the Spirit, to experience visceral physicality, and to come together in a transformative ritual, is what was so attractive to the younger generation in the 1950s and 60s and was the model for what became the rock concert.

TW: You can see in the video for this the physicality of her performance and how she wields her electric guitar. That style is really the origin of so many rockers who came after her. I see a parallel with your work in the extreme physicality, but in an entirely different way. How does the idea of spirit play a role in how you create music?

EF: In my music spirit manifests as my discovery of what is already existing beyond myself and my excitement to share that with others. It's the feeling of being in awe of nature, which is spiritual for me.

Umeko Ando

"Rewrew"

From *Ihunke* (Pingipung) 2018, rec 2001

EF: Umeko Ando, but I don't know which piece it is. It's the album that you have, the more pure one. It's not the one with the photo of her walking with the old man, *Upopo Sanke*.

TW: This is *Ihunke*. I think it's the earlier album she did with Oki Kano.

EF: I was introduced to Umeko Ando's music when

I was performing at Super Deluxe in Tokyo in the Roppongi neighbourhood, the modern section of Tokyo popular with foreigners. Super Deluxe was where a lot of touring musicians performed. I had just arrived in Japan and had never been there before. I was installing my instrument for three days or so, isolated from the outside world, in a dark, windowless space. Super Deluxe had a nice pan-Asian cafe and there were people working during the day preparing the food for the night. They played The Grateful Dead non-stop every day and it was driving me out of my mind. So I went over to a guy in the kitchen and asked, 'Don't you have some Japanese music that you can play? I've just arrived in Japan and have had no experience of being here.' And *Upopo Sanke* is what he put on. Later, I received a fellowship and went back to Japan. I proposed to study tonkori, the Ainu string instrument played on the album. I had no idea where to begin to find someone to teach this to me. I just kept poking around among all the musicians and I was able to find Tomoko Tomita, a koto player and a self-taught ethnomusicologist who documented and preserved Ainu music, traditionally passed down through oral tradition. Her Ainu teachers took her on as a student in the 1950s because their own children were not interested in learning the music. Tomoko Tomita has recently published *Tonkori Pieces & Performance Method* and has become a resource for younger generations of Ainu people who want to recover their cultural heritage.

TW: The trance-like rhythm that is very much a pillar of Ainu music is so interesting. We learned from her that people would all gather for a ritual and strum these repetitive patterns in unison, sometimes through the night. Her teachers demonstrated how they could play lying down and even continue to play while asleep.

EF: It sounds so simple, yet it's so appealing, there's such a sweetness in the intention. When I hear it, I like how it makes me feel. I've been really inspired by this, not directly, but somehow by the feeling of it in my work with the box bow tool.

Ongo Ensemble

"Ndraje Balendro, Initiation Song"

From *Central African Republic: Banda Polyphony* (Smithsonian Folkways) 1976

EF: I just had it labelled as "African Horns" but recently was able to locate the release info.

TW: This is one of the first albums that you shared with me. What about it is moving to you?

EF: This album was introduced to me by Werner Durand in Berlin in 2001. He has a huge record collection and played these tracks for me. The hocketed sound is an African form, trance inducing but also so poignant and happy. It makes you want to move. I'm intrigued by what can happen with hockets, where each performer plays a small segment that when layered can produce an effect that you wouldn't guess could happen. I'm currently composing music for my box bow instrument that way. I have been composing with this form during the pandemic. I've been holed up in the studio, without much communication with others, just dreaming of a day in the future and hoping that this music that I'm writing can produce a joyful movement in an audience when we really feel more comfortable gathering together in live concert settings. I hope we can dance and move and just experience some joy. ☐