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PHERME

## NICOLAS COLLINS



# REAL LANDSCAPE SEVEN PERFORMANCES OF DEVIL'S MUSIC

### Real Landscape

I find it very hard to justify making a sound - I would infinitely prefer to recycle an existing one. Most of my work is based on the adaptation and re-utilization of our culture's sonic flotsam. In most of my recent pieces, fragments of radio broadcasts and other found sound material are disassembled and reconstituted into a form that defies the inherent disposability of its elements. The recombined material lives on, if only for an instant, beyond its producers' expectations, and is fitted into a context unintended by its creators. Ensemble compositions use this re-worked material to suggest melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic motifs for players, who are asked to build a performance out of a limited - and often banal - vocabulary drawn from scraps of "musical wallpaper."

In "Devil's Music" snippets of live radio broadcasts are digitally sampled, looped, retriggered, reversed, and detuned. All the material is taken from FM, AM, and Shortwave transmissions occuring at the time of the performance. The equipment includes a radio, a small mixer, an ElectroHarmonix 16-Second Delay, and one or two ElectroHarmonix Super

Replays - inexpensive samplers that I have modified for this piece. The most significant change is the incorporation of "stuttering circuits" that retrigger and reverse the samples in response to the dynamics of the material coming off the air, thus defeating the annoying periodicity of digital delay loops and samplers. As the solo performer, I work with and against this quirky rhythm, influencing certain aspects of it without ever being in full control. I hunt through the radio bands for new material, listening to the performance with one ear while cueing the radio through a headphone on the other, searching for the right shard to drop in at the right time. I cut channels in and out of the mix, shift the balance, slur the tunings, overlay samples, and play with the few other variables that make up the limited range of this "instrument."

Devil's Music" is basically about three things. Rhythm: from the microscopic level of the stuttering that is beyond my control, to the timing of the voice changes that defines the structure of a performance. Landscape: the power of radio to generate a "sonic portrait" of the location and time of a performance. Ecology: making music out of the seemingly infinite palette of sounds already out there in the microwaves - from \$10,000 studio snares

to AM sportscasters, from easy listening strings to shortwave sputterings; sounds that might be ignored in context, but in isolation or juxtaposition take on a life of their own.

The title is a joint allusion to the piece's frenetic, almost rock 'n' roll rhythm (a friend once likened it to "an intro that never settles into a groove"), America's obsession with masked satanic messages of the sort that probably abound in this piece, and the sinful fact that all the material is stolen. Not even the use of radio itself, as an instrument in live performance, is original with me - I am following behind John Cage's "Imaginary Landscape," Karlheinz Stockhausen's "Kurzwellen," and many other composers who have made creative use of the medium.

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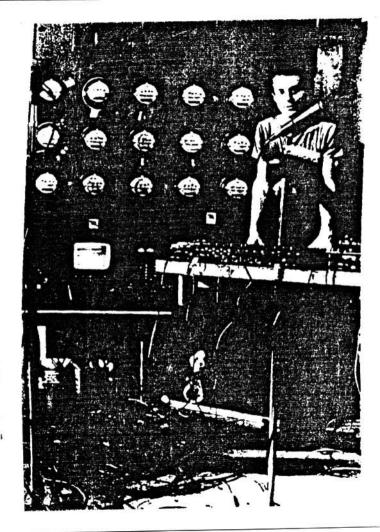
"Devil's Music" was first performed in April 1985, and has gone through several changes in performance style and structure and some minor technical refinements. An L.P. was released in 1986 on Trace Elements Records (Devil's Music, TE1013). A "concept album" of sorts, the A side is a manic mix of hip hop and spoken word, my idea of a dance record described by the Boston Phoenix as "a def jam broadcast from a disco on Mars." The B side is easy listening, sort of: New Age with a hiccup. Live performances of the piece have



Kadomsko Bonn REPU Czestochowa achen Malmedy Wie Baden Liberec Gary Zawiercie Jablonec S Someberg Kobienz Mladá Coburn Boleslav Schweintur Pardubice. Darms Darms Hora Domous Eck rastějov/ Rethenburg (Rilsen) Heidelberg Tabor Heilbronn Dinkelsbuth České Znojimo Kari Kansrahe Budejovice Stuttgart Strashourg St. Die //Shep Augsburg Bangka. Colmar Biberach Welsen Amstetten Neunkirche Salzburg Bad Isch Budapes Nicdere Tauern Nic dere aus Mnittelfold Székesfehery Denaujvaros AGYLENGYEL Kiskunfelegyhaza Carnic Alpa Cortina Bolzano Szekszárd Baja Szeged Koprivnica kapos ba Belluno Pécs Roveret + Bielovar. Bergamo Janda Sombor Virovitica Veriona Apatin Karlovac Pin Našice Vukovar Chioggia

been released on Tellus Cassette Magazine (Tellus #9: Music With Memory, 1985), Slowscan Cassettes (Slowscan #3, 1986), and Trace Elements Cassettes (Devil's Music/Teufelmusik, 1987).

"Real Landscape" is a compilation of recordings of seven recent performances of "Devil's Music." Six are from a European tour i did in February 1987: Kozgaz Jazz Klub (Budapest, Hungary), Ensemble Theater (Vienna. Hirschwirt (Erding. Germany), Austria). Captured Music Festival (Karlsruhe, Germany), Kulturkarussell (Stafa, Switzerland), Ohm 8/Jazz Now Bern (Bern, Switzerland). The seventh is from a concert I gave at the Alternative Museum in New York City in April. The title is a homage to the aforementioned work of Cage's. Where his was imaginary, my landscape seems very real: a sonic rambling around Central Europe and Downtown New York, with occasional glimpses over the horizon provided by the bouncing properties of radio waves.



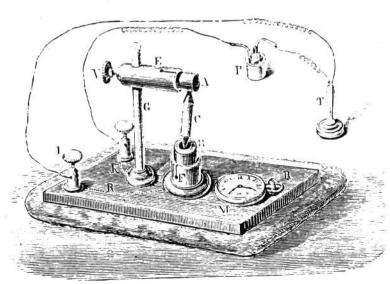
The 52 minutes on this tape were edited down from about two hours of music. Some of the performances appear in their entirety, while other sections cut back and forth between fragments of different concerts. Some of the edits are obvious, others are not so apparent, given the abrupt nature of many of the actual performance transitions. The tapes were cleaned up for mastering this cassette (reequalized, stereo balanced, compressed, placed in an artificial room), but no additional sampling was added. Each side is a more-orless continuous 26 minute piece, with certain formal conceits repeated within each side and between them. They can be listened to in their entirety in an attentive, linear fashion, but the listener should feel free to use the tape as a backdrop, or to "re-sample" by shuttling the tape, dropping in anywhere along my jagged path from Budapest to New York.

I've given dozens of performances of "Devil's Music" across the United States and Europe and I am still not bored with it. Every city's airwaves yield a fresh new piece: Top 40 may stay the same everywhere, but the hip hop in New York gives way to country music in Texas, while the DJ's whine slows to a drawl. When I finished editing this tape, I realized that the final product was dominated by spoken

word, with musical fragments appearing mostly as accents. As I listened to the tapes while cutting, it was <u>language</u> that conjured up the strongest sense of place. The complex rhythms of speech have always had a strong role in "Devil's Music," but in this project the words are also pins on a map.

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#### **BIOGRAPHY**

Nicolas Collins was born in New York City in 1954. He studied composition with Alvin Lucier at Wesleyan University. An heir to the David Tudor school of "home-made" electronic circuitry, and a pioneer in the use of microcomputers in live performance, he also makes extensive use of radio, found sound material, and "backwards" musical instruments in his compositions and sound installations. He has performed and exhibited throughout the United States and Europe as a solo artist, with his own ensemble, and in collaboration with Peter Cusack, The Downtown Ensemble, Bob James, Ron Kuivila, Christian Marclay, Elliott Sharp, David Tudor, and John Zorn. Records and tapes of his music have been released on Lovely Records, Trace Elements Records, Tellus, and Slowscan Cassettes. He has curated concerts and sound installations for PSI, The Clocktower, and The Kitchen.

#### Credits:

Cassette mastered at Airshaft Studio, New York City. Thanks to those who helped arrange the performances: Michael Fahres, William Hellerman, Gisela Porod, Tibor Szemo, Manfred Winter. banned PRODUCTION would also like to thank the Babo for left and right justification.