

Viðtal við Suzanne Ciani 6. september 2021 í gegnum Skype

Ó:

Can you tell me a little bit about the San Francisco Tape Music Center and how you got into the Modular Synthesizer world?

S:

The San Francisco Tape Music Center when I encountered it was housed at Mills College, so it had begun in San Francisco, and then it was moved to Mills Collage which is not far from the University of California at Berkley. It was not part of the school, not part of the College in other words there were no music classes given it was just housing for that institution. I would go there and technically you had to pay five dollars an hour to have access to the instruments. I did sometimes pay but it was very open there were not a lot of people using it and the door was open pretty much. I did spend quite a bit of time there, I could work late into the night without being disturbed. They had a Buchla 100 I think it was the first one and they had a Moog modular and then they had a lot of army surplus parts, stuff that you could reconfigure and reuse. About the same time because this was during my school time I was getting a master's degree at the university, my master's degree was in traditional composition but meanwhile, I had discovered it, how did I discover it? Well just true the grapevine, sometimes you don't discover things that are right in your backyard, when I was in Boston at college I wanted to study jazz but I didn't know where it was I didn't know about Berklee if I would have known about Berklee my whole life would have been different but I didn't. Fortunately, I went to the west coast and I found the Tape music Center and I found Don Buchla because he lived there.

Ó:

Were you able to record what you were doing at the Tape Music Center?

S:

I did record and some and some of these recordings have been released on finders keepers some of those early experiments. So yes I did record there I also got I think was a Revox tape recorder and I had my studio in my garage so I did record some early things. It was usually on two tracks, quarter inch.

Ó:

In your composition, you think a lot about space, movement, and immersive audio in your performance. What kind of a feeling are you trying to get when you are using space in a quadraphonic setting that you perform in. What is the purpose of it?

S:

Right from the beginning for my experience, I worked in quadraphonic because Don Buchla made a module the 227 that allowed the manipulation of the movement of the sound. For Don Buchla, this was an obvious thing that electronic sound should move. It was his concept that he made possible with his modules. The other aspect of it was the voltage-controlled spring reverb, the reverb was pretty primitive but very effective and he designed it so you could move the sound closer and further away. You could move the sound in various ways voltage-controlled movement and the paper towards the end some of the ideas for spatial movements, discreet movements, continuous movement, random movement. How movement in space is a rhythm and the beauty of the Buchla that movement was integrated with the rhythm of the music. You generate the movement just like any other parameter.

Ó:

Were there any other effects units you were using with the Buchla in those days?

S:

No that was it.

Ó:

What about today, I know that you have a relationship with Eventide you have a few H9's that you have modified. Can you tell me a little bit about how you are using the H9's today?

S:

The modification gave my H9 a controlled voltage input, I can assign the controlled voltage to any number of parameters in the H9 but the one that replicates the old spring reverb the most is just the mix on the output of direct to the processed signal. I can have a controlled voltage move that so that will affect the space.

Ó:

Are you sequencing the CV or do you use a Lfo ?

S:

I use a sequencer output, for the spatial control I use various voltages, I use a random fringed voltage, I use an envelope voltage which is a cycling envelope so it might be a curve, I use a small sequencer I have a five-stage sequencer. That allows me then to apply that to the space. This sequencer has on it a slope function, if it has no slope then the motion is very crisp, discrete. If it's sloped it gets more continuous. I of course change the pattern by changing the number of stages or changing the voltage I mean to set up a circle you just need two outputs that are the same say four stages, you get low, high, low low, low high, high high, low high and that gives you a circle, provided that they are both on four stages. In the earlier days, I had a much bigger system I played a 200 that was huge but I wasn't touring the world. I had lots of sequencers and I had one that was just used for spatial modulation. I missed that so I had a tiny sequencer made just for that.

Ó:

What is your master clock for the Buchla Concerts?

S:

I use two different clocks, not at the same time, I have a sequencer clocked that is also driving the small sequencer and that drives a sample and hold random voltage on every pulse and I can use that for what's happening over here (points at the 204 Quad Spatial Director) and then the other thing is the MARF just take the pulse output of the MARF and I bridge it and I put it into the stop-start of the sequencer and now the MARF is in control. So if I hit go on the MARF now that is driving the sequencer so if I stop on the MARF it stops the sequencer. Those are the two possible driving forces.

Ó:

I have been thinking a lot about the composition, there are these four-row sequences that you sequence into the MARF how did you come to these four rows how did you compose them? I know you start with a C in unison so it's easy to tune it so that was like practicality but the melodies are four rows and each row is a cord. What was your inspiration what were you trying to accomplish with the composition before it goes into the MARF?

S:

The nature for me of electronic music is Counterpoint, so in the cookbook, I specify four precise sequences. That was just because I wrote a paper at a sudden time and wanted to give an example but I'll think you see that in my WBY concert that it was not as literal as those four sequences but how I would get the counterpoint is that I would have the sequencer running and I could experience, I had the sequencer going into the MARF external input and I could put quantize on the MARF so that made it very easy to tune from the sequencer you know you could just dial in a pitch and so the original lines weren't done outside of the 200 system they were just done experimentally in the system you know play with it until it sounds like a good line, then add a second line make sure it works both as a line and against the first line horizontally. Usually, because the MARF has only two outputs, one CV on the first one and one CV on the second one right two simultaneous controllers you are only hearing a note from two sequences at any time, but the MARF because you can dial in A, B, C and D these sequences can then be reconfigured, so that you take one note from A the next note from B the next note from D the next note from A. It is a family of pitches it's not necessarily right, you can use them in a ridget way but you can also access what I call it the three-dimensional sequencer.

Ó:

It's a little like serialism if we think about it?

S:

Yes, it is a combination of counterpoints because things are always moving. I don't think as much harmonically I'm not thinking of the vertical lines I'm thinking more horizontal. In those days you had much more control over the sequence than I have now because I'm using a digital sequencer and those pitches aren't accessible. But in the 200 witches is what you hear in the concerts 1975 I could interact with the sequencer I could give it a range, go from here to there, I could ask it to jump and every stage had a pulse. Also going into the MARF not only could you quantize the pitch that comes in but you could slope it. I use that now too, there is a wonderful section on the album *Improvisation on Four Sequences at Festival Antigal*. There is kind of a section there called the Jungle, you hear a lot of things going up and down that's the slope on the MARF. It's the very same sequence going in but if you listen you will hear the same sequence, moving around in register, different octaves but it's there. Sometimes it's sloping from one stage to the other and sounds like birds or whatever. So these are

compositional techniques available in the analog but you do need the hardware. My MARF today was built by Roman Filipov a Russian and I have three of them because I wanted a backup for my concerts but every single one of them is different, I cant just plug another one in.

Because I love this module so much and find it essential for performing because it gives you hierarchical control over your raw materials your sequential materials. The Buchla company before the pandemic hit we were going to make a SCARF, Suzanne Cianni Multiple Arbitrary Function Generator and I started working on that design but then I got sidetracked doing my archives so I didn't go forward with that but if you can find somebody to help you make a MARF you have to do it.

Ó:

You Also use the MARF as an audio source, the sting patch is the MARF itself. How do you go about playing it ?

S:

You know the weird thing is I haven't been able to reproduce that sound yet. My descriptive notes were not adequate in a way, I haven't spent a lot of time trying to replicate it but its one of the most impressive uses of the MARF it's just surreal because there is a degree of randomness that gives so much life to the bowing sound, it has a real bowing sound. Randomness is a major component.

Ó:

I want to ask you about the source of uncertainty, you told me about how you use it in the string patch and you use it for the spatial movement. What are you using it for more in your patch?

S:

Here you can see the MARF moving and you see it moving randomly, I have two outputs A and B and they are both doing the same thing. A is stuck here on 1, B is moving but they are on external so it doesn't matter where that moves it's looking at sequence A. Now I can use this random position as an overlay so I can scroll around here and I'll put a new octave in. On one on the MARF, I have sequence B on two I have mostly sequence A with random Octave transpositions. That's one use of random.

Ó:

You are mostly sending out random CVs?

S:

I have the pulse of the sequencer going into the 267 and it generates on each pulse that it gets a random sample and holds the output. I can control the excursion on it, for instance, if I wanted to go narrow I turn the external cv knob down, and now it's hardly moving at all. Selecting the stages of the MARF. If I turn it all the way up it has a much bigger jump. You can specify the probable range of change. You have a lot of control in Buchla for specifying random voltages they are not chaos controlled random. What I'm using is the stages of the MARF so everything is in the same sequence but it's changing the stages. Another use of this is to randomly alter waveshape. I have a sequence running, on the MARF there is a row called interval time, and that is usually used for a time but it's not used for a time now because it's not running under its own clock it's driven by nr.1. The sliders are free so I use them to waveshape. That takes a two-stage sequence and that gives it a whole new life, it adds a layer of randomness. Randomness is really powerful because machines can repeat themselves but it gets boring really fast. So if you can add a layer above that and you can do that with the MARF. There are ways to do it without the MARF certainly as long as your clocks are tight together and the motion is integrated into the rhythm. I care very much that this body of knowledge that Buchla made available that it continues so um really happy that you care about the MARF.

Ó:

You talk about your relationship with your modular system, is it just the time you spent with it? Can you tell me a little bit about your feelings towards your instrument?

S:

When I had the Buchla in the day I never turned it off, it's like alive. Even today I never turn it off, it's a living being I just feel that way I don't know if it's logical or not but I like to keep it on. I think that when you work in a close relationship with an instrument that shows signs of life right, my piano does not talk back to me but the Buchla does it communicates. It says this is where I am, this is my voltage, this is what I'm doing now you know it's communicating. That was a Don Buchla concept because he thought of it as a performance instrument. A lot of people didn't think of these as performance instruments they thought of them as studio

instruments for recording. It's a special little pocket that you are willing to spend the time it takes to get familiar with the patch.