

Paul Lansky

Homebrew

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|----------|---|----------------|
| 1 | Table's Clear | (18:02) |
| | <i>Jonah and Caleb Lansky, kitchen percussion</i> | |
| 2 | Night Traffic | (10:14) |
| 3 | Now and Then | (12:22) |
| | <i>Hannah MacKay, reader</i> | |
| 4 | Quakerbridge | (13:16) |
| 5 | The Sound of Two Hands | (10:29) |
| | <i>Paul Lansky and Jim Moses, hands</i> | |
| | Total Time | (64:56) |

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While violins and pianos are sublime vehicles of musical thought, people have often listened with musical ears to the sounds of wine glasses, crickets on a summer night, the wind in the trees, steps on the pavement, bird song, speech, conch shells, church bells, etc., and composers from Monteverdi to Messiaen have tinkered with worldnoise in their music. Until recently, however, it has been difficult to capture sounds of the natural world and take them into our composition workshops. But now, with the convergence of recording and computer technologies, we have the ability to play these 'instruments of the world' as never before.

The five pieces on this recording are attempts to view the mundane, everyday noises of daily life through a personal musical filter. There are no other-worldly sounds used here, just the comings and goings which greet our ears as we make it through the day. With the assistance and intervention of computer technology, these pieces modestly try to make the ordinary seem extraordinary, the unmusical, musical. They try to find implicit music in the worldnoise around us.

Table's Clear

Musicians have always looked at the dinner table with greedy ears (pardon the metaphorical confusion), but it's hard to treat bottles and glasses as if they were percussion instruments. Benjamin Franklin tried, and failed, with his Glass Harmonica. *Table's Clear* is a digital exploration of this domain – here nothing is breakable and we can play as fast and hard as we like. The piece had its origin one evening after dinner in October, 1990, when my two sons, Jonah and Caleb (ages 14 and 9 at the time) took our kitchen apart, recording the sounds of everything they could find which would make noise (including themselves). I ran the tape machine and Hannah ran for cover. I then transferred all the sounds to my computer, spent a few months working, and came up with this piece. *Table's Clear* begins and ends with fairly plausible sounds

of kitchen paraphernalia being struck, while in the middle it weaves through various surreal, almost gamelan-like ensembles, creating dream-like states from which we finally awake, only to be reminded of our own awkward physical limitations.

Night Traffic

The sounds of traffic are probably among the most explicitly unmusical noises we can imagine – music to no one's ears. Even so, there is a kind of randomness, violence, and rhythmic intensity (and great Doppler shifts!) which draw upon and excite all sorts of musical perceptions. *Night Traffic* is a musical filter on the noises of a local four-lane highway recorded one night in 1990. The imposition of slowly shifting harmonies and timbres creates large-scale musical shapes which attempt to impose some order and sense on this chaos, while explicating whatever implicit music there is in the movements of these large violent machines. I got the idea for this piece from a former student, Eric Forte, whom I taught when I visited the California Institute of the Arts in 1987. Eric did a wonderful piece called 5: a quiet and simple processing of U.S. 5, which runs past Cal Arts. I decided to see what my more high-strung sensibilities would come up with if I dealt with this sort of material, and *Night Traffic* is the result.

Now and Then

Common wisdom has it that it is never too soon to read to children. Even before they can speak they enjoy the regular, soothing patterns of speech – it must be a kind of music to them. We regularly read to our children and *Now and Then* is a musical encapsulation of the sound of this activity. Here my wife Hannah MacKay reads several dozen phrases, typically found in many children's stories, and all of which refer to time – hence the title of the piece. They thus form a kind of story with no content, merely the chronological underpinnings of one. I supply musical continuity and decoration (Jonah and Caleb again supply some percussion) and our memories of the sound of this

special kind of speech-music take care of the rest.

Quakerbridge

is based on the sounds of people going about their business in a local suburban shopping mall, shortly after Christmas. The great variety of arbitrary human sounds and acoustic spaces I encountered as I wandered around trigger musical events while large-scale harmonies provide a musical continuity and context for the experience. Recordings of real-world sounds, like photography, create a nostalgic ache in that they almost capture events which are, in reality, gone forever. *Quakerbridge* tries to find the music of the experience of this nostalgia.

The Sound of Two Hands

uses what are probably the first percussion instruments, our hands. Here, sampled claps are turned into large claps, thundering claps, small claps, tiny claps, with various tunings and harmonies, and they all participate in a complex rhythmic exercise. I like to think of this piece as a combination of low and high technologies (perhaps a high-tech version of Steve Reich's *Clapping Music*). It was written in celebration of the 80th birthday of John Pierce, a wonderful man, and one of the founders of computer music (as well as satellite communication and many other advances).

Technical Notes

These pieces were all created on a NeXT computer during 1990-91, using my software package Cmix, and a variety of NeXT-based signal processing, mixing and editing applications. Sounds were transferred digitally, to and from Digital Audio Tape using the Singular Solutions AD64/X.

– Paul Lansky

Paul Lansky was seduced by the musical potential of computers when he was a graduate student at Princeton in the mid 1960's (he is now Professor of Music there). Abandoning a promising career as a French Horn player (Dorian Wind Quintet, 1965-66) for less certain realms of composition, he found that creating his own sounds on the computer was not unlike performing. During the 1970's his interest in computer music shifted from "the search for new sounds" to the use of the computer as a kind of aural camera on the sounds of the world, and since that time he has written a number of pieces which use computer technology to find new music in familiar places. Many of his pieces study speech, *Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion, As it grew dark...*, *Idle Chatter*, *Smalltalk*, *Late August*, *Word Color*, while others, as on this recording, deal with sounds of the world, and some use folk and ethnic music: *Guy's Harp*, *Not So Heavy Metal*, *Folk-Images*, *Listening-In*. It is his fundamental contention that while computers may be able to create worlds of new sounds, nothing is ultimately as interesting as the sounds of the world around us – sounds which have some physical relation to the ways in which we go about the business of living.

Hannah MacKay studied acting at the High School of Performing Arts and with Lee Strasberg. She has worked in movies, television, commercials and radio, and has been the "voice" in most of Paul Lansky's vocal pieces. He swears, however, that he didn't marry her for her voice, although he's sure glad she has such a nice one.

Jonah and **Caleb Lansky** are doing time in the Lansky house until they emerge from childhood, which is coming all too rapidly. Occasionally they express mild interest in their father's music, and sometimes even smile.

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