

Classical music The playlist

The playlist: experimental music - Africa Express, Colin Webster, Rutger Zuydervelt, Laurie Spiegel and more

A funky version of Terry Riley's *In C*, a rare John Cage/Leonard Bernstein collaboration, an album of cello glissandi, and a project on 1950s telephone operators - consider your mind expanded

 A dial tone operator ... workers at a telephone exchange. Photograph: Don McPhee/Collect

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Africa Express presents ... Terry Riley's *In C* Mali

Its 1964 premiere in San Francisco - with wannabe composer [Steve Reich](#) pulse-anchoring the performance by punching out top C on a keyboard - heralded the onset of what would become known as minimalism. But far from being a relic of experimental music's past, Terry Riley's *In C* remains open to constant reinvention. This 50th-anniversary performance [pairs musicians from Mali \(Adama Koita, Bijou, Modibo Diawara, et al\) with Africa Express mainstays](#) such as Brian Eno and Damon Albarn, who collectively make good on Riley's invitation to journey through 53 melodic fragments, each musician progressing at their own pace. The profound clarity of the recording walks your ears inside an orgiastic heterophony of meshed-together lines. And this is the funkiest *In C* on the planet.

Colin Webster, Andrew Lisle, Alex Ward - Red Kite

Something wonderful freshly mined from the coalface of British free improvisation, saxophonist Colin Webster's new trio features Alex Ward (electric guitar) and Andrew Lisle (drums). Around the 5'21" mark, the musicians make a collective, split-second decision to dive from raggedly sustained drones - led by Webster's overblown, strained saxophone - into the unknown of shell-shocked, pointillistic exclamation marks and sonic burps. Free improvisation can feel like a mysterious art form looking in from the outside: rules that must remain unspoken, rituals unfolding with masonic secrecy. But the rhythm of free improv is listen, respond, listen, respond, and this improvised structure finds inscrutability working hand in hand with sound logic.

Rutger Zuydervelt - Sneeuwstorm

Colin Webster appears here, too, alongside fellow saxophonist Otto Kokke, their improvisations mulched into a soundscape by Dutch electronic composer Rutger Zuydervelt, who usually trades under the moniker Machinefabriek. Sneeuwstorm was assembled via a generative process. Zuydervelt asked Webster and Kokke to improvise over an electronic framework, and then their improvisations were cut up, folded in, looped and moulded around the sounds of Zuydervelt's electric guitar and other miscellaneous field recordings - layers of recorded history that are reflected in Zuydervelt's tiered, poly-temporal structure.

Laurie Spiegel - East River Dawn from The Expanding Universe

Chicago-born composer Laurie Spiegel turned her back on the New York modern composition scene when, during the early 1980s, she felt music that had once revelled in open-ended possibility was beginning to be filed into neat genres. A piece like East River Dawn, from her classic album The Expanding Universe could not have existed without the influence of early minimalist music, typified by Terry Riley's In C. But its chattering arpeggios, spawned and filtered electronically, speak with a harmonic clarity and voice that is entirely her own.

Oren Ambarchi - Live Knots

Live Knots finds Australian guitarist Oren Ambarchi reimagining Knots, the centrepiece of his [2012 album Audience of One](#), stretching its form and slipping discrete blocks of strings under his guitar's slipstream of harmonic overtones and intricately evolving drones - which either cushion the sound or throw it into harmonic crisis. Drummer Joe Talia keeps unobtrusive time, which, given that Ambarchi's guitar is hovering like a sound cloud, opens up an intriguing paradox: pulse normally gives music a heartbeat, but here pulse becomes subservient to time that is developing in extended, uncountable paragraphs.

John Cage and Leonard Bernstein - Atlas Eclipticalis

The story so far: Leonard Bernstein, who had been devising a whole season of avant-garde music for the New York Philharmonic's 1964 season, decides to go for broke by programming John Cage's Atlas Eclipticalis. The work requires his orchestral musicians to learn notes that apparently sit awkwardly on their instruments, which is bad enough, but when they realise their contributions might not even be heard because Cage is using chance procedures to switch their contact microphones on and off, Bernstein needs to quell a full-scale orchestral mutiny. Cage thoroughly disapproved of this awkward, nervy performance - but Bernstein's painfully patient and articulate introductory speech is all the more remarkable when you consider that his own stylistic sympathies lay firmly somewhere between bar lines and key signatures. A slice of experimental history more often talked about than actually heard.

The Recedents - Wishing You Were Here

The Recedents - Lol Coxhill (saxophones, electronics, voice), Mike Cooper (guitars, electronics, objects) and Roger Turner (drums, percussion, electronics) - were a British free-improvisation trio with a history that stretched back to the early 1980s. The group came to a sad end in 2012, with the death of Coxhill; but their razor-sharp counterpoint of instrumental brilliance, pitched against bawdy humour, proffered an alternative view of a music that could, given even half a chance, feel po-faced and earnest. *Wishing You Were Here* is a new five-CD box set that might rescue the reputation of a group that has been unfairly footnoted.

John Lely - The Harmonics of Real Strings

This is music of process, rather than arrival. British composer John Lely asks cellist Anton Lukoszevieve to produce seamless glissandi by gradually sliding up the full length of a string, soft finger pressure being the order of the day. There are four strings on a cello and four separate realisations featured on this new CD released by the Another Timbre label. Although nothing much “happens”, Lely and Lukoszevieve immerse listeners in sound, as the concentration necessary to trace the path of the glissandi opens ears to other nuances of timbre and touch.

Aura Satz - Dial Tone Operator

Aura Satz has described herself as an artist who works with sound - not to be confused with a “sound artist” - and one of her preoccupations is exploring how sounds might be prised away from, or work independently of, their source. Dial Tone Operator is from her project about female telephone operators of the 1950s, exploring how their work connecting voices from disparate parts of the UK was eventually usurped by the automated telephone signal. This brief piece consists of entirely familiar sounds - but lines get crossed, signals are interfered with and lines of connection are lost.

Amy Cimini and Katherine Young - Architeuthis Walks on Land

Chicago-based Katherine Young, or “bassoon colossus” as I once semi-flippantly referred to her in a review, improvises here with violist Amy Cimini, that basic viola and bassoon palette augmented with toy instruments and electronic gizmos that are used to erect walls of layered sound while bolstering their instruments’ basic capabilities. Young’s bassoon can rock and spew sound forth with the power of Jimi Hendrix’s wah pedal. The whole album is here; personally I’m drawn back to *The Assayers*, a rude chunk of visceral white noise, enough to challenge anyone’s stereotypical image of either instrument.