

EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES BY TODD DOCKSTADER

SM3434



SIDE I  
Band 1: PIECE 1  
Band 2: PIECE 2  
Band 3: PIECE 3  
Band 4: PIECE 4  
Band 5: PIECE 5  
Band 6: PIECE 6  
SIDE II  
Band 1: PIECE 7  
Band 2: PIECE 8

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

# EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES BY TOD DOCKSTADER

SM 3434

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COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

SM 3434

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# Eight Electronic Pieces

## by

# TOD DOCKSTADER

### SIDE I

Band 1: Piece #1  
Band 2: Piece #2  
Band 3: Piece #3  
Band 4: Piece #4  
Band 5: Piece #5  
Band 6: Piece #6

### SIDE II

Band 1: Piece #7  
Band 2: Piece #8

### NOTES FOR "EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES"

by Tod Dockstader:

July 30, 1961

The old battles over the use of the term music in elec-  
tronic music have given place to new ones over the  
term electronic. Electronics are now generally  
accepted as a means to musical ends. But just what  
is "electronic" and what is not is hotly argued by the  
composers now working in the technique. The Ger-  
mans and Dutch have been insisting on the purity of  
their electronic music by using only oscillators as  
sound sources. To the French, such insistence on  
purity is a typically Germanic fanaticism; they prefer  
natural sound sources (concrete). The Americans  
have generally taken a middle ground, and this  
promises to be the most fruitful - a combination of  
oscillator and natural sources. The eight pieces in  
this album represent this combination. The fine  
"Poeme Electronique" of Edgar Varese is a com-  
bination in his "Kontaktes." So the combination  
technique suggests it may become the international  
style in electronic music, as the serial technique of  
composition has in orchestral music.

Why combination? Each source of sound has its  
limits and advantages: pure oscillator sounds are  
usually dry, harsh, sharp, limited in timbre and  
without much harmonic complexity - they can, how-  
ever, be controlled much more easily than natural  
sounds and can produce any tune the composer wants.  
Natural sounds have their own "tunes" and are dif-  
ficult to control, but they have a great range of  
timbre - just a dropped plate has all kinds of har-  
monics to explore. To realise these harmonics,  
however, a natural sound must usually be trans-  
posed electronically into a concrete sound. This  
process abstracts the sound enough to make it

usable in a piece of music. Music that uses only  
these transposed sounds is called Musique Concrete  
from the French, who claim to have invented it -  
although the first work in this technique was done  
in Russia long ago in the adventurous days of For-  
malism, before such activities were banned as  
not being in the public interest. This concretiza-  
tion of sound involves slowing down or speeding up  
the recorded sound through several generations  
of tape, filtering it, adding various kinds of echo -  
a process that often takes the bite out of it, so it  
lacks the cleanness and impact, the presence of  
pure oscillator sounds which can be used directly  
from the oscillator with little or no doctoring.  
Music must have both range and definition, and in  
a sustained electronic piece, both of these sources  
are needed. Each source has its own general  
sound, a perspective that becomes monotonous if  
unrelieved. Oscillator sound is usually small and  
close up - a string quartet sound - while concrete  
sound is usually large and distant, a little veiled.  
A simple example of both is to be found in the first  
part of the eighth piece on this record: the gong  
which starts the piece is a natural sound - a  
concretized saucepan hit - while the tempo series  
laid over it is electronic. In this case, the two dif-  
ferent perspectives have been blended somewhat  
with added echo. Echo doesn't affect concrete  
sound much - such sounds have their own acoustics  
built in - but it does soften the sharpness and  
flatness of electronic sound, giving it a little "room"  
to sound in. An example of this effect is the little  
oscillator tune which starts the first piece - with-  
out echo it would sound flat and dead. Thus, the  
electronic composer has to provide his own hall  
along with his own orchestra.

In listening to this music, it is usually impossible,  
and most pointless, to sort out the sources as  
electronic or concrete. It is their use, their  
arrangement, upon which the success of these pieces  
as music depends. Varese calls his electronic work  
Organized Sound, and the term indicates the im-  
portance of organization in this new music. The com-  
poser is confronted with a potential orchestra of  
thousands of instruments, and control is a major  
struggle. Building a piece is like improvising with  
a huge orchestra, recording as you go. Something  
starts, develops, and you're never sure of where  
it's going or how, even if, it will end. In the early  
pieces on this record (numbered in order of compo-  
sition, one to six) I simply set two or three tapes  
of sounds going at once - chance combinations,  
accidental themes, chaos - all were recorded. Then  
I sat down and edited the half-hour result into three  
or four or five minutes, into something that seemed



to be a "piece." This process led to a gradual disenchantment with the novelty of my sounds, and this disenchantment led to greater control from the start. A sound had to work into the piece under way, or it would be excluded before it got in. So, the seventh piece is much less cut up than the sixth was, and the eighth was not cut into at all, except to join the sounds and passages into a time relationship.

I had 12,000 feet of taped sounds when I started my first piece; I now have four times that amount to work with. Existing as they do, at random on reels of tape, they are little more than a unique sound-effects collection. Only organization: selecting, mixing, cutting - can turn them into music. Electronic music must be listened to, finally, not for the novelty of its sounds, but for the sense of its composition - its ideas. The novelty will wear off in time for the listener as it did for the composer. If it doesn't, the piece has failed the listener as music, or he has failed the piece. If the novelty of a jet plane in a piece of music continues to be its chief interest for a listener, he has shut himself in with people who play the "Pines of Rome" only for the nightingale in it. These new sounds are exciting, but they shouldn't obscure what the composer is trying to do with them. A composer working in this new way is taking chances, if he's any good. A composer who plays a traditional toccata on a square-wave oscillator, using it as a substitute for an organ, is taking no chances; much electronic music today is simply using new instruments to play old musical ideas, using the novelty of the new sound to make the piece "modern." But a composer who deals with wind, rifle fire, water, jets, is flirting with chaos; the excitement of his music lies in his control of this near-chaos, as the excitement of Stravinsky's "Sacre" is held in his control of an orchestra that constantly strains toward chaos. These new sounds demand new ideas from the composer willing to wade into unknown regions. It is appreciation of chances taken and results gained that the listener must try for.

It seems unlikely to me that electronic music will ever replace the traditional orchestra, as some critics and composers have feared. Even when it has been designed to supplant the orchestra, it suffers in comparison with the live sounds, and the combination is usually cumbersome: the orchestra plays, then sits in resentful silence while a loudspeaker roars and whispers fuzzily. But the speaker can't roar as loudly or whisper as quietly as can the orchestra, and until tape recording and reproducing is improved dramatically, resulting in much wider dynamic range and signal-to-noise ratio, electronic music can't match, much less replace, the clear voice of the orchestra. Electronic music is recorded music - it exists only in a recording. The cuts on this record are not performances that have been recorded - they are the performances; you perform the piece when you play it on the phonograph. No recording of more than a few instruments can compare with the real thing. Electronic music can compare favorably only with other recorded music. The few successful combinations of electronic and live music have involved only a few live instruments, playing with, not in between, the taped sounds. Perhaps the future of recording - the use of thermo-plastics instead of magnetics, for instance - will change all this, but until then the orchestra has nothing to fear from electronic music. The traditional orchestra still holds worlds of new sound for the composer

willing to explore it. Webern's "Six Pieces for Large Orchestras" has been around for over fifty years as an example of such new exploration, yet few composers have even tried to duplicate the adventurousness of this work.

Perhaps the orchestra itself is responsible for its fears of obsolescence. A large orchestra is a conservative body; it is governed and administrated. New works submitted to it by unknown composers must pass a long gauntlet of administrators before acceptance for performance - a discouraging process for young composers who want to work on a large scale. Most of the new music being performed today is chamber music, sometimes involving only a solo percussionist. So, too, it is difficult for the new composer, whose ideas are unorthodox, to get his work recorded. Record companies, with a few brave exceptions, release only oft-performed works: the catalogue lists eleven collections of Kreisler, two of Varese, one of Webern. Electronic music offers a way out of this stalemate: the new composer can compose - record - perform (one process) works of large scale and unorthodox ideas. He becomes administrator and conductor: the performance will match exactly his concept, and there are no worries about other interpretations. All that stands in the way to realization is the technical aspect. But this is a mountainous difficulty for most composers; put them in a room with a lot of machines and they only want to get out. But the machines can be learned in a much shorter time than it took the composer to learn the techniques of traditional music. The composer who wants to do an electronic piece must either become also a good technician, or have the assistance of a creative technician - and there are more of these around than most composers think. Many of the best mixers and tape editors in recording studios are also musicians who read and know music. And the composer who begins his work with a technician can, if he will learn as they go along, soon be doing his own mixing and editing. This new man - the composer-technician - is in the best position to realize the full potential of electronic music, and the control so necessary to the work.

Europe has been quicker to realize aid to composers who want to work in electronics than has America. Electronic works are often commissioned by radio stations and record companies, who supply their facilities and technical assistance to realize the commissioned piece. NWDR and Deutsche Grammophon in Germany, Philips in Holland, RTF in France - all have been assisting composers with electronic works for years. But in America this kind of aid is difficult, if not impossible, to come by. With the only electronic center - that at Columbia University - limited in its ability to accommodate more than a selected few composers, the independent composer must turn to record companies and radio stations for facilities - and these have shown no interest in such sponsorship. Yet here they have a unique opportunity to originate new music for air or disc. In the same way an orchestra commissions new works for live performance in its hall, they can commission works for their station or record label, works that would exist in no other way - and as aid, they can offer use of facilities they already have. In my own case, I had use of the facilities of the Gotham Recording Corporation in New York City, and as composers acknowledge more traditional grants and aids, I would like to acknowledge the aid this studio has given me toward realizing these eight pieces.





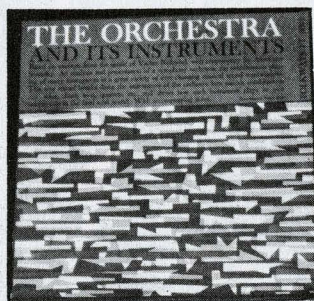


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**EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES**

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**SIDE 1**

**SC 3434 A**

- Band 1. PIECE #1
- Band 2. PIECE #2
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- Band 4. PIECE #4
- Band 5. PIECE #5
- Band 6. PIECE #6

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**EIGHT ELECTRONIC PIECES**

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**SIDE 2**

**SC 3434 B**

Band 1. PIECE #7

Band 2. PIECE #8