

Stefan Tcherepnin
PRESS



Top Ten
By Stefan Tcherepnin

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TOP TEN

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A writer and performer of acoustic and electronic music, Stefan Tcherepnin is a 2008–2009 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellow in Music Composition. He has recently performed at the Kitchen and the Knitting Factory in New York and at the Rose Art Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts.

1

LE CYCLOP (THE CYCLOPS)

My first visit to France took me to Fontainebleau, where I studied composition at the American Conservatory. About an hour away, deep within the forest, was *Le Cyclop*, a monstrous mirrored sculpture conceived in 1969 by Jean Tinguely and executed in collaboration with Niki de Saint Phalle and at least a dozen other artists. The structure, with its accumulations of gears and levers, seems to possess a metallic circulatory system. A heavy metal ball rolls throughout the skull's various inner chambers, activating mechanical processes along the way that cause its frame to rock and sway. While exploring the interior of this colossal cranium, one is surrounded by the unsettling sound of steel scraping steel, accompanied by the oversize marble's warbling roar.



Jean Tinguely, *Le Cyclop (The Cyclops)*, 1969–89, mixed media. Installation view, Milly-la-Forêt, France, 2008. Photo: Simone Pacini.

2

ALEKSANDR NIKOLAYEVICH SCRIBIN

When I was a kid and thought classical music was boring, my father introduced me to the music of Scriabin. This turn-of-the-century Russian composer's innovative approach to dissonance and harmony, culminating in the creation of a "mystic" chord, emanated from his compliance with idiosyncratic, self-imposed principles. Many of his works contain "secret harmonies" that do not appear in the written scores.

6

THE CALLIOPE

I especially admire Fats Waller's expressive calliope interpretation of the tune "Lenox Avenue Blues," which can be heard playing in the distance throughout David Lynch's film *Eraserhead*. Somehow, the weird sonority of the steam-powered pipe organ—generally associated with novelty spectacles such as carnivals and circuses—is at once charming and grotesque, soothing and unsettling. Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey made some significant recordings using an electronically simulated calliope. The strangely whimsical yet transfixing nature of his playing makes me suspect that he used his music as a vehicle to gain direct access to people's minds.



Lithograph of a circus poster showing a calliope by Gibson & Co., 1872

7

NORA SCHULTZ, "AS IF SCALES" (REENA SPAULINGS FINE ART, NEW YORK)

"I've been here fifteen minutes and still see no art!" Upon hearing this enthusiastic statement from a bystander at Schultz's opening, I realized the artist had succeeded, if only for a moment, in making work that exists only as "thought energy." Over the course of the exhibition, pipes, ropes, and boat-docking supplies were rearranged and replaced. For a later performance in the gallery, Schultz, assisted by a few volunteers, revealed these materials' unexpected functionality, transforming, for instance, a wooden bench into an amplified seesaw printing press. The resulting "prints" of crushed charcoal on sheets of cheap plywood were eventually assembled by the performers into a three-dimensional replica of the bench. In the end, what had materialized was not only "art" but also a new notion of what we should be looking for.

9

MANOREXIA (THE STONE, NEW YORK)

One of my first LPs was Wiseblood's 1985 hot-rod death chant, *Motorslug* (Wax Trax!). I eventually found out that the mastermind behind this recording was J. G. Thirlwell, better known for his projects under the name Foetus. Last September, I caught his chamber-music project, Manorexia, at John Zorn's venue, the Stone. The program—consisting of eight pieces scored for two violins, viola, cello, percussion, piano, and (the composer's) laptop—exhibited Thirlwell's rare musical sensitivity, fluency in extended instrumental techniques, and keen ear for orchestration.



J. G. Thirlwell, May 2003. Photo: C. Taylor Crothers.

10

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CHANCE OPERATIONS

This 1963 book, published by poet Jackson Mac Low and composer La Monte Young, made a significant contribution to the evolution of music composition, though it is often overlooked or entirely disregarded. Its entirely performable contents include word-based and graphic scores by Young, John Cage, Toshi Ichihyanagi, Terry Riley, and Christian Wolff, along with Henry Flynt's essay "Concept Art" and Dick Higgins's exercise in reading mirror-image texts. In a way, this anthology achieves in book form what Tinguely's *Cyclop* does with materials in space—so many intensities and ideas sewn together and acted on in different ways.