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When The Beatles announced in 1966 that they would no longer be touring, their stated reason was that they could no longer "reproduce" their music in a live concert setting. Specifically, they cited their use of special studio effects and the impracticality of touring with the orchestral personnel whom they used on the recordings. The end of touring for The Beatles represents a milestone not only for that legendary pop group, but for the history of twentieth century music as well. And pop artists as well as fine artists have used this technology to change the course of modern music—and modern art. To better understand the oncoming slew of art-smart recordings, a little brushing up is in order.

During the years since *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, studio technology has kept pace with the fast track of the computer world. When The Beatles quit touring, the technology that allowed multiple overdubbing of voices and instruments depended upon simple tape recording equipment; today it would be considered garage band technology. These days, any band worth its press package tends to have an arsenal of digital electronics. Digital electronics are the result of computer technology that didn't exist as the British invaded twenty years ago, and they've drastically changed the course of music.

Modern music is characterized not so much by any particular time signature or tonal scales as it is by the working method through which the final product is realized. Few contemporary composers write their music in conventional musical notation: few indeed can read music. Most pop composers create their work on tape, building layer upon layer, track upon track, much the same way a sculptor or a painter works; the process of creating involves an interactive relationship between the materials and the idea with which the artist begins.

"It's rather like making a drawing or painting which you start with no specific idea other than to begin to have fun with the brush or the color and to let it just happen," explains the multi-media artist Jonathon Borofsky. For many years now, Borofsky's shows have included not only paintings and drawings, but huge sculptures of figures hammering and chattering away, and ping pong games that visitors are encouraged to play. "About five years ago, six, maybe seven years ago—I'm not even sure—it became clear to me that sound was becoming increasingly important in my exhibitions. Some examples: the ping pong table where people would be playing ping pong and you could hear the energy of the ball hitting the table, and the people excitedly playing within the whole context of the exhibition; or the hammering men which

have these motors which have a certain whine to them and were hammering all around the room. And I realized how important those energy sounds were to the complete fulfillment of the exhibition. Hence I began to develop ideas that would fulfill the idea of sound installations." One of the earliest was a tape piece called *Sounds of the World* that includes tape-recorded sounds of many varieties, separated by brief moments of silence.

New recording technology now makes it possible to use literally any sound at all as "music." Borofsky's new recording, out this past fall, uses sounds—of pebbles being thrown into a bucket, sheets of metal of various gauges being thrown onto different areas of a floor, and a spinning bicycle wheel slowed down in the recording process—as musical components in the songs. Contrary to the traditional idea of accurately reproducing real sounds, high technology has been used here to distort them. According to Ed Tomney, his collaborator on sound works, the only traditional musical sounds on the entire album (released only as a cassette tape) are guitar and voices. And even these instruments have been electronically treated. Citing the common practice of pop record producers to double and quadruple guitar parts—by having the player run through them several times and layering them one on the other—the end result, he claims, is not entirely unrelated to symphonic music.

"Go to Avery Fisher Hall and see easily 60 violins, arms going up and down. They're doing the same thing—doubling parts in many instances. It's an acoustic space, and it's an acoustic instrument being transmitted through an acoustic space. It's interesting how it's a way of emphasizing elements of the music. Sometimes laying down one layer of one 'character' is not enough. The whole issue with tape is that you have control over the time event because you can hit 'STOP,' go back and reorganize," says Tomney. "A lot of new music that we've been working on and that I've been working on—a part of my approach is that I want to create a visual picture with the music. I like that idea very much. To me, it's one of the most attractive things about music—that it's a referential medium like reading. It makes you refer to images in your mind."

The cassette by Tomney and Borofsky features a number of different types of "songs." The track that features the pebbles, sheet metal and bicycle wheel, entitled *We*, presents a vision of everyday life through the eyes of the dogs in the neighborhood. "We wanted to create this character of creatures or entities—almost an archaeological entity—that has watched civilization for many years and just gives you these observations. We decided to use the image of the dog—like

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the dogs on the block just watching you and watching life go by and commenting on it," Tomney explains. On this track the "sounds from the world" are barely recognizable as such; they suggest something other-worldly in their inscrutability. For another track, however, they have used the sounds of roaring jet engines and people screaming, conjuring up a more literal image of a bombing. The piece was inspired by the bombing of Tripoli. Another track takes its form from the old radio drama genre, an artform which, at least before the advent of television, required the listener to visualize the people and places suggested by dialogue and sound effects.

While it's fair to say that sound recordings were developed to document events in real time, preserving them, as photographs do, for a theoretical eternity, the ethereal nature of recordings inspires listeners to "complete" the picture visually. This instinctive leap of the imagination makes sound recording a natural alternative for performance artists as well. *The Uproar Tapes (Volume 1)*, recently released on Island Records, features performances by five artists and a novelist emerging from New York's downtown club scene. The inclusion of work by performance artist Karen Finley, whose outrageously vulgar act has fueled public infighting at the *Village Voice* recently, will put this record at the top of Tipper Gore's list as a great example of a record that will surely corrupt this nation's youth. Less controversial, and more pertinent to the subject at hand, are the selections by Ann Magnuson and David Cale, both of whom use different voices to create a variety of characters in a style of the old radio dramas.

Cale uses an atmospheric background of jazz saxophone to set the tone for his monologues on the theme of love. His one-man cast includes the president of a singles club and a character who can't get comfortable with a good relationship. Cale creates compelling characters as lovable as they are pathetic. He himself struggled for years to become a singer with no success, and sees his spoken vignettes as bearing a formal relationship to music, suggested on the record by the music against which his voice "plays." In the final passage of his monologue, the swaggering saxophone gives way to ambient electronic music that seems at first melancholy, progressing into a cheerier reverie evocative of the subtle but effective optimism with which the piece concludes.

In *Made for Radio*, Magnuson puts the listener in the role of involuntary button pusher, screeching across the radio band between porn talk show hostess "Tiffany LaFox," radio evangelist "Sister Alice Tully Hall" and Prince protege "Fallopia" in an hysterical examination of contemporary low culture. Her incisive characterizations of generic radio personalities are all the more devastating in their perverted perfection.

The dialogue between pop music and artists audio works has become increasingly prominent. Tomney, who currently works in a more adventurous and experimental mode—including audio installations of his own and with Borofsky, as well as work in Super-8 film—worked for several years as a rock musician, most notably as a member of The Necessaries. Borofsky himself fondly recalls his teenage years as a member of a folk group, The Rocky Cove Trio, playing clubs in Old Orchard Beach, Maine.

Borofsky is also featured on a new record entitled *Artsounds*. Producer Jeff Gordon (who organized *Revolutions Per Minute: The Art Record* for the Ronald Feldman Gallery a few years back) has gathered a wide spectrum of artists on this project, available in general and special limited editions, featuring original graphics by all of the artists. Painter Larry Rivers, a longtime jazz sax player, appears with his combo. Two members of the rock band The Tubes, Michael Cotten and Prairie Prince, contributed an electronic track called *Tiny Places*. And for what might well become an anthem for this new trend of "crossover" artmusic, performance artist Yura Adams has been paired with rock band Run DMC, who provide backing tracks for her song *Switch Fever*. "I've got switch fever; I'm a tech diva."

As with Gordon's last art music project, *Artsounds* will tour the museum circuit as an exhibition of graphics accompanied by Walkman-style headphones playing the audio tracks. The major difference between this and his last project is that *Artsounds* will benefit from the more formidable press and distribution efforts of Polygram Records.

While audio by artists has been around since the sound poetry recordings of Futurist and Dada artists in the early part of this century, these recent works suggest that the great advances in twentieth century music owe more to the pop music industry than to the tradition of art music itself. The collage style of Tomney/Borofsky is not all that different in principle from the overdubs and sampled sounds that have been a staple of pop music production since the Beatles. And Laurie Anderson's success, due largely to the appeal of her studio gimmickry, represents not the public's openness to new ideas, but their familiarity with and hunger for more electronic sophistication. The three-chord wonders of the pop record industry have depended upon the unstated equivalence of postmodernism and post-production.

In another sense, post-production is only one more component of consumer packaging—everything from visual presentation to press and marketing. *Artsounds*, while artistically and formally inconsistent, relies on the more peripheral aspects of packaging for its identity. Rock stars have been brought into the project in order to broaden the product's demographic base. Contributing artists are presenting as plainly as possible; there can be little doubt where their artness lies. No need to analyze the music for clues—the accompanying graphics clearly represent the "art" component. Intentionally, the whole project has been designed for easy reading.

Content and packaging are not, of course, mutually exclusive. And their confusion may well serve as much to expand public understanding as to confuse it. Ultimately, art music owes a lot to "commercial" work, and once the mechanisms of both are understood, one will be hard-pressed to substantiate the naive distinctions as they now stand.

Kevin Concannon produces radio broadcasts about artists and writes frequently about sound art and phonograph records by visual artists. He is based in Boston.