

Kevin Concannon, "Channel to Showcase Different Kind of 'Stringed' Instrument," *Boston Globe*, May 7, 1986, p. 66.

# Channel to showcase a different kind of stringed 'instrument'

By Kevin Concannon  
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There'll be a different kind of concert at the Channel Saturday and Sunday when Dutch sound artists Paul Panhuysen and Johan Goedhart perform one of their amplified outdoor string installations as the final presentation of Sound Art at Mobius, a two-year series of sonic art events.

Panhuysen and Goedhart will run strings from high on the sides of buildings in the Fort Point Channel area down to the ground, creating a work that is at once architectural, sculptural, conceptual and musical. After stringing the buildings, they will perform an improvised concert, playing the strings and singing, to be broadcast from loudspeakers on boats floating in the water.

Trained as visual artists, the collaborators have been building and performing string installations around the world since 1982. Panhuysen has also been director of an art school and curator of two museums in the Netherlands. Speaking from New York via the strings of New England Telephone, he recently described his rather circuitous approach to sound art.

"I worked later on as a visual artist on urban planning teams," he said. "Since '68 I got involved with music, but more from the point of view of a visual artist because there is in music a lot of proportion. The string goes one octave up if you divide it in

two; there are all kinds of proportions which are quite clear proportions, which are used in a similar way in visual arts and architecture. That's where things seem to connect for me. I'm still working more from the visual point of view than from what I hear."

Using materials that include steel, brass, cord, nylon, fishing line and dental floss, Panhuysen and Goedhart have built most of their 40-odd string installations indoors. The parking lot at the Channel will be the fifth outdoor site commissioned. Even at outdoor sites, it is the manmade environment to which the artists react. The more interesting the site with which they work, Panhuysen explained, the more interesting the resulting installation and performance.

For many practitioners, sound art is synonymous with the term "site-specific." New York artist Liz Phillips, whose "Windspun for Lynn" has sang its celebration of the wind from that city's harbor last month (it closed Friday), works with the environment as well. While Phillips installs most of her sound works in urban environments, she is more attuned to the natural landscape, particularly the speed and direction of the wind.

Windspun, which enjoyed its most recent incarnation at Lynn's new North Shore Community College campus through the touring program of the New England Foundation for the Arts, has been presented at several different locations, including the 1985 Whitney Biennial Exhibition in New York. Yet it reflects a distinctly individual quality in each new manifestation. Phillips builds each installation out of essentially the same components: a couple of wind anemometers (spinning cups that measure wind speed), a weathervane and a custom-built synthesizer/sound system. The speed and direction of the wind, as determined by the meteorological equipment, control the output of the synthesizer. Phillips not only adjusts the placement of this equipment but programs the different "voices" in the synthesizer to react to the specific environmental factors.

In both cases, however, the artists seek to transport their audience into an intensified perceptual framework. By trying to make us, in a sense, see with our ears, they work toward different ends with

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— Sound artist Paul Panhuysen

different "subjects," using sound as a plastic material, mixing in a little of this, peeling back a few of the layers and otherwise manipulating the material of sound. For some, including Panhuysen and Goedhart, the visual element must hold equal importance to the piece or, better yet, prove the sum greater than the total of its parts.

Mobius Sound Art curator Richard Lerman, himself a practitioner of the unusual-artform, sees an essential analogy between a microscope and microphone: the amplification of little sounds into larger-than-life experiences. Earlier this spring he performed in Houston's Astrodome in conjunction with the New Music America festival, using several performers around the field, all "playing" amplified soda straws, proportionately altered in pitch as they are cut down with scissors during the performance. Lerman has also incorporated the wind into his own work by wiring mesh and screens of all types for sound. He has even wired sheets of metal, which he "plays" with a blowtorch. Lately he has been intrigued by spiders' webs "At one point, a simple examination of spiders' webs revealed this incredibly beautiful structure," he explained, "and it struck me that some of those animals must be hearing things on that web — they respond to vibrations."

Lerman is currently busy with logistics for the "web of sound" Panhuysen and Goedhart will be installing at Fort Point. Performances will take place Saturday and Sunday in the parking lot outside the Channel from approximately 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.