

# RHYS CHATHAM

DRASTIC CLASSICAL MUSIC FOR ELECTRIC INSTRUMENTS  
April 17, 1981 8:30pm

electric guitars:

Jules Baptiste  
Craig Bromberg  
Nina Canal  
Rhys Chatham  
Joe Dizney  
Scott Johnson  
Robert Longo  
Ned Sublette

bass, electric guitar:

Michael Brown

drums & percussion:

David Linton

WILD ROMANCE (1980) for four electric guitars and drums. Craig Bromberg, Michael Brown, Rhys Chatham, Joe Dizney, David Linton.

The guitars are tuned justly to D, A, D, F#, B, and E. The meter alternates between 3/4 and 4/4. At some points both meters occur at the same time, implying different tempo. In addition to working with the audible overtones of this tuning, the piece makes use of the percussive timbre one achieves by flatpicking over the 24th, 17th, 15th, and 12th frets of the guitar.

THE OUT OF TUNE GUITAR (1979) for three electric guitars and drums. Jules Baptiste, Rhys Chatham, David Linton, Robert Longo.

Three guitars are tuned to the same out-of-tune tuning. The piece is constructed so that at certain points four different styles of playing emerge simultaneously, while still remaining cohesive. At other points one has the distinct impression of hearing men's voices in conversation, a psycho-acoustic effect caused by the peculiar tuning of the piece. While the sound palette of the work is drawn from the classical avant-garde, the organization, compositional techniques, and method of musicians working together, come directly out of the rock tradition. Mr. Baptiste and Mr. Longo are the band members to originally play this piece.

GUITAR TRIO (1977) for three electric guitars, bass, and drums. Craig Bromberg, Michael Brown, Rhys Chatham, Joe Dizney, David Linton.

Using a conventional equal-tempered guitar tuning, the primary musical material of the piece is the overtones elicited by direct strumming over the fretboard of the electric guitar. Rhythmic and harmonic relationships appear between the grid implied by the symmetrical flatpicking technique of the right hand of the guitarists and the asymmetrical rhythms of the overtones.

--intermission--

ACOUSTIC TERROR (1980) for electric guitar and drums. Rhys Chatham, David Linton.

Composed in Paris, the guitar is tuned dissonantly. The music and melodic motion lie within the percussive timbre which occurs between the sixth-ninth overtones when a D, D#, and E tonality mesh together.

DRASTIC CLASSICAL MUSIC FOR ELECTRIC INSTRUMENTS (1981) for four electric guitars and drums. Nina Canal, Rhys Chatham, Scott Johnson, David Linton, Ned Sublette.

I wanted to compose a piece which would make use of what I learned from working with electric music over the past four years. When I first started this work, I worried over whether it was classical music or rock. It took me two years to figure out that it didn't matter. I then could simply play on stage, whether in a club or art space, and have it be perfectly clear that this music was produced by someone who is obviously a classically-trained composer, obviously someone with experience in rock clubs, and obviously a harpsichord tuner, combining all the elements. Additionally, feeling that I am first a classical musician, I wanted to make music which would integrate the various facets of my training with the life around me, the violent energy of the clubs in NYC between 1977-80. I call this new work drastic classical music.

Originally composed in collaboration with Karole Armitage's choreography and Charles Atlas' stage design and lighting, each guitar is tuned around a different tonality, similar to the tuning in Acoustic Terror, the tonal centers being C#, D, D#, and E, respectively. Despite the dissonance of the guitars in relation to themselves and each other, the culminant effect is amazingly consonant. Within the composite sound lies harmonic movement and numerous juxtaposed melodies. When a guitarist changes his or her picking technique slightly, instead of hearing the individual instrument change, the sound of the overall waveform alters, simulating the effect of orchestras at odds with each other: pianists playing madly.

36 SHORT STORIES for two guitars, bass, and percussion. Michael Brown, Rhys Chatham, Joe Disney, David Linton. Images by Michael Zwack.

Each musician writes 36 stories, to be recited internally (and silently) within the space of 64 beats times eight, at 120 beats per minute. The stories call to mind past events of the performer's lives.

An example of a typical story would be: "The boat ride to Corsica". The actual ride took eight hours. The performer allows the images of what happened on that ride to pass through his mind as he is playing the music. The music, in effect, becomes an aural accompaniment to the mental image of the performer. Practice has shown this to create a unique sound.

When we listen to a piece of music, our concentration is sometimes on the music, sometimes on what we did the other day, dinner conversation, or perhaps on the emotions the music brings out in us. The internal thought process of our minds in both image and enunciated thought can be included within a definition of music. 36 Short Stories is actually

a duet for aural sound and the internal thoughts of each individual audience member, and what they happen to be thinking as the external music is being played. The music is designed to be played in direct counterpoint to this thought process.

The slides by Michael Zwack involve the use of specific images selected from cultural media, i.e., magazines, newspapers, T.V., movies, which are then manipulated, changed, and reintroduced back into the culture. The slides are collected from specific, isolated segments of media images. These images touch upon, but do not specify narrative, and instead evoke particular familiar responses from the viewer. The projections establish narratives not specifically designated by the images themselves. Certain obvious cultural sensations are induced by the combinations.

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JULES BAPTISTE, guitar. New York. Composer and Instrumentalist currently writing for and performing with Red Decade.

CRAIG BROMBERG is currently writing dance criticism for In-Step and Flash Art. He is also experimenting with music, philosophy, and performance.

MICHAEL BROWN has recently finished writing a set of music with saxophonist Kurt Hoffman for an as yet untitled six-piece band. He works for the philosophy and medicine department of the NYU Medical Center.

From London, NINA CANAL came to NY late in 1976, started to play music in 1977, and is a member of UT, a band.

Originally working in a serial mode, RHYS CHATHAM shifted his interest to electronic music, and then electric music. His training as a harpsichord tuner led him to working with overtones as the primary sound material of his compositions. Born in NYC, his favorite hobbies are reading and running track.

JOE DIZNEY was unavailable for comment.

SCOTT JOHNSON is a composer of tape and instrumental music and is only playing this gig because Rhys Chatham blackmailed him into it.

DAVID LINTON, hair: red, eyes: blue, 160 lbs, 6 ft, plays music to avoid doing other things.

ROBERT LONGO is a visual artist and a guitarist in Menthol Wars. He has been in Washington for the past two days premiering a three-part performance piece called Empire at the Corcoran, with music by Joe Hannan, Peter Gordon, and Brian Eno.

NED SUBLETTE was born in Texas. His instruments are voice, guitar, and radio. He has just completed an album with musicians from his home town.

MICHAEL ZWACK started reading magazines, watching T.V., and going to movies when he was four years old.