

# T H E   K I T C H E N



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THE KITCHEN

presents

**Gordon Monahan's**  
**Sounds and the Machines That Make Them**  
*concert for computer-controlled kinetic machines*

June 22-24, 1995

*Conceived and Created by*  
**GORDON MONAHAN**

*Technical Assistants*  
**LAURA KIKAUKA**  
**STOCK**

*Lighting Designer/Master Rigger*  
**ALEX KAHN**

*House Sound Design*  
**JOHN PLENGE**

The first version of *Sounds & The Machines That Make Them* was commissioned by the 1994 D.A.A.D. Inventionen Festival, Berlin. This present concert at The Kitchen constitutes the second version. A third version will be presented at Kampnagel, Hamburg in December 1995, and a final version will be presented at The Kitchen in late Spring 1996.

**For The Kitchen**

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## ABOUT THE WORK

This work is a hybrid sound installation and music performance. The piece consists of a series of sound machines that I have been building over the past three years, while living and working in Berlin.

The installation/performance consists of a group of computer-controlled kinetic machines, where the actions of homemade instruments and sound sculptures are programmed and automated by computer. All of the machine-instruments are controlled by a system that converts MIDI-programmed information into control-voltage signals that are capable of controlling the kinetic movement of any electro-mechanical device, such as a motor or solenoid coil, with musically-orchestrated precision. In other words, MIDI signals, which normally provide control of an electronic music studio, are converted (using specially-designed processors) to high-current electrical signals that can then precisely control the movement of a mechanical/robotic device. All of the machines are designed to produce musical or industrial sounds by combining percussion instruments, plucked or bowed strings, spinning metal sheets, and the industrial-mechanical sound-actions of machines and their gestures.

MIDI-to-Control-Voltage technology has been around for about ten years now. One of the most important pioneers using this technology is the sound artist Trimpin, whom I have had the privilege of working with in the past. He was the one who got me started on the technology to develop this current project. Because of the wide-ranging possibilities for application of this technology, I view this current piece as a work in progress, and I'm sure that I will see it that way for many years to come.

I also see this technology as a new form of audio, or as a mutation of the traditional audio system. MIDI-to-CV technology allows for the digital control, through standard musical programming, of the kinetic movements of sound sculptures. Here the automated sound sculpture usurps the function of the loudspeaker as it becomes the end-stage audio broadcasting element of digital signals determined in the programming of MIDI-music information. In turn, the MIDI-to-CV converter replaces the MIDI synthesizer in the electronic music studio. Thus the components of the traditional audio system are replaced. Electronic music is no longer confined to listening to sterile loudspeaker broadcasts, as new technical capabilities deliver an alternative audio processing system. Now, instead of hearing synthetic audio projecting from standard loudspeaker boxes, we can experience it as broadcast through home-made kinetic objects. This is theoretically akin to David Tudor's *Rainforest* project from the 1970's, although the technology is digitally-based rather than analog-based.

My central aesthetic concern with this work is to compare what we might consider to be 'primitive sounds' (e.g. the sound of spinning metal plates, water pouring on hot metal, etc.) and 'technological sounds' (e.g. digitally controlled sounds). The question arises as to which sounds are 'real' and which are 'imaginary'; which sounds are 'ancient' and which are 'modern'; which sounds are 'chaotic' and which are 'controlled'. If we assume the Cagean stance that music exists in nature, then we can assume that music has always existed in nature, and therefore music predates civilization. This work imposes technological control over these natural, musical, prehistoric sounds, in order to question our assumptions of what music is and where it comes from.

*Gordon Monahan*

## BIOGRAPHIES

**GORDON MONAHAN**, born 1956, in Kingston, Ontario, Canada, won First Prize at the 1984 CBC National Radio Competition for Young Composers, as well as commissions from the Vancouver New Music Society; CBC Radio; Dade County Art in Public Places, Miami; The Kitchen, New York; and the DAAD Inventionen Festival, Berlin. His controversial commission for the Dade County MetroRail transit system was banned during the 1988 New Music America Festival in Miami. That same year, Monahan was chosen as CBC Radio's entry to the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris. Monahan has been Artist-in-Residence at the Banff Centre for the Arts (1990), the Exploratorium in San Francisco (1991), D.A.A.D., Berlin (1992-93), and a fellow with the New York Foundation for the Arts (1991). His work *Piano Mechanics* will be performed by pianist Anthony de Mare at the ISCM 1995 World Music Days in Essen, Germany.

Since 1978, Monahan has performed and exhibited at numerous performance spaces, galleries, and festivals, including seven appearances at *New Music America* from 1983-92, five appearances at the *Newfoundland Sound Symposium* from 1983-90, the *Holland Festival* in 1985, the *New York Days in Rotterdam* in 1988, the *Ars Electronica* in Linz, Austria, 1989, the *Tone und Gegentone Festival* in Vienna, 1991, the *Inventionen Festival* in Berlin, 1992 & 1994, and the *Musiques Submergides Festival* in Barcelona, 1993, and the *Donauschingen Muziktage* in 1994. During the 1989-90 season, he toured the United States under the auspices of The Kitchen. His installation work exploring the acoustical aspects of whirlpools was exhibited at the New York Hall of Science in the Spring of 1990. In 1992, he presented an exhibition of his sound sculptures at Het Apollohuis, The Netherlands, and Kunstwerke, Berlin. In 1993 he established, with Laura Kikauka and Bastiaan Maris, *The Glowing Pickle*, an electronic surplus store-bar in East Berlin.

Monahan has independently released several LPs, CDs, and videotapes of his work. He also appears on the Electra/Nonesuch CD compilation *Imaginary Landscapes: New Electronic Music*. His first solo CD was released on Swerve Editions (Zone Books) in 1992. His videotapes are distributed through V-Tape (Toronto), The Kitchen (NY), and V2 ('s-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands).

Gordon Monahan's works for piano, loudspeakers, video, and kinetic machine sculpture span various genres from avant-garde concert music to multi-media installation and sound art. The renowned composer John Cage once said, "At the piano, Gordon Monahan produces sounds we haven't heard before."

**LAURA KIKAUKA** has been involved with artwork as long as she can remember. She was born in 1963 (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada), and was *the girl next door* who liked to take things apart. Her artistic parents vitiated her understanding of the English language by teaching her Latvian. Her early journey through creative media include drawing, painting, writing, assemblages, decoupages, and filmmaking. In 1980 she was awarded a scholarship to study at The Art Gallery of Ontario.

The following year she immersed herself in technological studies at The Ontario College of Art, and hasn't been the same since. Her passionate interests in electronics, computers & interfacing, electronic circuit design, audio, video, holography, plastics, welding, and mechanics, became more pronounced as she began integrating these technologies with found/assembled objects and aromas, into her work. Kikauka's work often pushes technology forwards and backwards at the same time, as she deconstructs high-technology: stripping, rebuilding, and twisting it, to redefine its personality. She cross-fertilizes technique with personal experiences to create work which reveals the humorous absurdities and ironies of our everyday lives. Kikauka values supermarkets, thrift stores, flea markets, and garbage dumps as contemporary cultural museums.

Kikauka has exhibited her installation and performance work throughout North America and Europe; some venues include: Kampnagel, (Hamburg), Apollonhuis (Eindhoven) Amerika Haus (Berlin), Schloss Ottenstein (Austria), Museet d'Art Moderne (Bourges, France), Museet for Samtidkunst (Roskilde, Denmark), Musee d'Art Contemporain (Montreal), A Space (Toronto), and The Generator (New York City), as well as numerous Artist in Residencies, including Contained (Linz, Austria), The Exploratorium (San Francisco), and The Banff Center for the Arts (Canada). She has collaborated with artists: Gordon Monahan, Trimpin, and Norman White. Upon graduating from The Ontario College of Art in 1984, she received the Lieutenant Governors Medal and the Joan Chalmers Scholarship and has since returned as an instructor of two courses - Electronics, and Computer Applications for Artists. In 1992 she moved to Berlin and has undertaken many projects including *The Funny Farm East* (her incurable obsession in the "personalization" of her living and working environment); and is co-founder of *The Glowing Pickle*, an electronic surplus store/recycling depot/museum of rare East-Bloc scientific equipment/ a social meeting place for artists and the general public/ an on-going art project with spontaneous performances such as *Midnight Madness Auction*, *The Glowing Pickle Challenge*, etc. Kikauka is to blame for *The Glowing Pickle Automat*.

"A diamond drill bit is a girl's best friend!" L. Kikauka

STOCK has been working as a computer programmer and electronics technician since 1986 (he was 13 at the time). He now specializes in media and electronic arts. He has worked as technical assistant to such artists as Stan Douglas, Erik Hobijn, George Homys, Laura Kikauka, Gordon Monahan, Bastiaan Maris, and Barry Schwartz. He has participated in projects for 2B and De Effenaar (Eindhoven), Galerie 0-Zwei (Berlin), Marstall Theater (Bavarian State Opera, Munich), Absolute Threshold (Amsterdam), D.A.A.D. (Berlin), and Steirischer Herbst (Graz, Austria). He collaborated with Gordon Monahan to create the computer motion-control system for *The Sandman*, a recent project by Stan Douglas, commissioned for the 1995 Whitney Biennial. In his spare time he works as a sound-engineer and sometimes bass-player with obscure experimental bands (*Ornament & Verbrechen*, *The LungDung HellBellies*, *Hardheaded Soul* and *Destroy After Use*) and is co-manager of *The Glowing Pickle*, Berlin.

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