

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Music of Brian Eno and Robert Fripp**

#### **The Brian Eno and Robert Fripp partnership**

##### **Brief History**

Brian Eno became interested in repetition from exposure to the music of the Minimalists. The first piece he ever performed in public was La Monte Young's 1960 piece *X For Henry Flynt*. The piece gives the following instructions to the performer "a heavy sound (such as a cluster) is to be repeated as uniformly, as regularly, and as loudly as possible a relatively large number of times"<sup>1</sup>. From this performance Eno noticed how the subtle variations of timing and timbre between each recurrence became more obvious with time, leading him to conclude, "Repetition is a form of change"<sup>2</sup>. In a 1985 interview Eno singled out another Minimalists work Steve Reich's *Its Gonna Rain* as "probably the most important piece that I ever heard, in that it gave me an idea I've never ceased to be fascinated with – how variety can be generated by very simple systems"<sup>3</sup>. The influence of Minimalists like Riley, Reich and La Monte Young would cause Eno alongside Robert Fripp to bring Live-Looping to the masses.

##### **Music**

In the autumn of 1972 Brian Eno and Robert Fripp got together to produce the album *No Pussyfooting Around* (1973). The record was made by the combination of Brian Eno's manipulation of two Revox tape recorders in an identical formation to Terry

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<sup>1</sup> P15 Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974)

<sup>2</sup> 25 Tamm, Eric. *Brian Eno* (New York: Da Capo Press 1995)

<sup>3</sup> p23 Tamm, Eric. *Brian Eno*

Riley's 'Time-Lag Accumulator' using Robert Fripp's guitar as the input. The record contains two long pieces of music, *The Heavenly Music Corporation* and *Swastika Girls* both reliant on the tape delay system Terry Riley had invented. Although the record was clearly based around Terry Riley's 'Time-Lag Accumulator' system Robert Fripp decided to rename this equipment system Frippertronics. In Fripp's words "Frippertronics is defined as that musical experience which results at the (intersection) of Robert Fripp and a small and appropriate level of technology which is my Les Paul, the Fripp pedal board of fuzz, wah-wah and volume pedals and two Revox's."<sup>4</sup> Fripp goes on to describe the aesthetic effect of Frippertronics saying, "there are two categories of Frippertronics, pure and applied. Applied is where it's used as an alternative to traditional orchestration, instrumentation, arrangement and so on and pure Frippertronics is where Frippertronics stands up as music in its own right."<sup>5</sup>

### **Influence of Riley**

The structure of the piece *The Heavenly Music Corporation* strongly alludes to the work of Terry Riley. The use of a drone, its modal form, the rhapsodic solos, and subtle modulation cadence could easily read as a description for Terry Riley's piece *Poppy No-good And The Phantom Band* recorded some 5 years before in 1968.

The most significant result of Eno and Fripp's recording *No Pussyfooting Around* was through their high profile status within the rock music world that they were able to increase the mainstream music buying public's exposure to Live-Looping. They went on to repeat the collaboration with the 1975 recording *Evening Star*. This was their last

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.elephant-talk.com/intervws.htm> August 1979 interview with Robert Fripp from Toronto magazine

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.elephant-talk.com/intervws.htm> August 1979 interview with Robert Fripp from Toronto magazine

album together however both Eno and Fripp continued to use tape delay in their own music. Robert Fripp forming the rest of his musical output around it.

### **Robert Fripp**

Fripp has continued to remain at the forefront of Live-Looping ever since his initial experiments with Brian Eno. In 1978 Fripp went on to use the 'Frippertronics' system on his solo album *Exposure*. Although this effect can be heard throughout the album it is perhaps most prominent on '*Water music*' and '*Water music 2*' where Fripp creates thick almost synthesizer layers of distorted guitar to beautiful effect. "Fripp continued using the tape delay/feedback system in his work with Peter Gabriel (1976) and Daryl Hall (1977)."<sup>6</sup> The Frippertronics system is still used by Fripp even today although now he has replaced the Revox tape recorders with digital delay units (TC2290s) and renamed it Soundscaping. With Soundscaping Fripp has increased the complexity of his looping by using four TC2290s i.e. four channels of looping each of which could be set to cycle over a different time period.

Fripp's contribution to the Live-Looping movement was significant because his fame and his concert appearances increased the public's awareness of the use of tape delay as a performance and compositional device. I don't believe that Frippertronics and the compositional use of it can be said to be significantly different from that of Terry Riley and his 'Time-Lag Accumulator'. However, Fripp's music was of great importance because of his popularity and just as crucially because he was an electric guitarist. The electric guitar could probably be seen as highest profile western instrument of the time and therefore the appeal of someone doing something genuinely new with it was massive.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.loopers-delight.com/history/loophist.html> Peters, Michael. The Birth of Loop, 1996

It can be argued that it was Fripp's use of Live-Looping that has now made the guitar the most commonly associated instrument with Live-Looping.

### **Brian Eno**

*The Heavenly Music Corporation* as a system, anticipates Eno's own ambient style. First of all, the piece is a system, or process: it represents a way of making music, a concept of music-making, as much as it represents a composition in the traditional sense.<sup>7</sup>

Eno and Fripp's piece *The Heavenly Music Corporation* was in many ways a forerunner to the direction that Eno would use in his later in works. The piece is based around a process of musical creation (tape delay) that Eno would go on to systemise further in what became known as his first Ambient recording *Discrete Music* (1975). This record was produced by two stored synthesiser lines played into the same tape delay system as used on *No Pussyfooting Around*. Famously the album was produced almost without intent. Eno desired to produce some background music for himself and Robert Fripp and once set in motion the music was produced with almost no intervention whilst Fripp and Eno had tea.

*Discrete Music* saw Eno using the ideas of the Minimalists in new ways. Using a combination of Riley's 'Time-Lag-Accumulator' and Reich's idea of phasing Eno created a continuously evolving soundscape. Although the piece is not Live-Looping in the traditional sense, the fact that it is created live (once started), means it should be included here. After *Discrete Music* Eno's solo work continued to follow the Steve Reich

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<sup>7</sup> p154 Tamm, Eric. *Brian Eno* (New York: Da Capo Press 1995)

inspired ideas of systems of music generation using closed tape loops on his Ambient work series.

### **Significance**

Eno's significance as a composer and producer of music has been huge. He has been responsible for relocating the lessons and ideas of Minimalist composers into a rock and mainstream audience. Through his album *Discreet Music* Eno can be said to have created a whole new genre of music composition called Ambient music. Although *Discreet Music* uses the same tape delay system as Frippertronics and the 'Time-lag Accumulator' the results are once again very different. In this case Eno used Live-Looping to make soothing music that redefined the idea of foreground and background. This was Eno's version of the idea of automatic music, a successful realisation of the ideas of musical process that Steve Reich had produced with his early phasing pieces. Eno would continue to explore the idea of musical systems in his Ambient series of records. Eno famously said that Ambient music "must be as ignorable as it is interesting"<sup>8</sup> This mindset has a very Cagean ring to it in that once again Eno was fascinated with the idea of surface in music an idea that Cage had explored before him. Eno, inspired by Cage, also used chance in the creation of his music creating his own Oblique Strategies oracle cards mirroring Cage's use of the Chinese book called the I Ching.

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<sup>8</sup> p123 Prendergast, Mark. *The Ambient Century* (London: Bloomsburg publishing Plc, 2000)