

John Mc Guire

John, you're living now for five years in Cologne, carefully composing. The last piece you wrote was FRIEZE for four pianos, and you worked four years on it. As far as I know, you are American with your full heart. How did you work on FRIEZE?

The original idea for the piece was quite simple: the material was to consist exclusively of repeating figures covering a large part of the available piano range. I thought of the figures as very slow wave forms at 1/2, 1/3 cycles per second, etc. That notion came out of a number of improvising sessions that I had participated in with my friend ALDEN JENKS in 1969 - 70, on some voltage-controlled equipment which he had built himself and was showing me how to use.

It became more problematic when I decided to use a great many different patterns, and to differentiate them by means of contrasting tempi and speeds. One thing led to another, and before I was finished the piece came to consist of seventy-two different patterns in thirty-six different tempi, most of them composite figures to which all four pianos contribute, something like Kotekan figuration in Balinese music. Almost all of the work, however, went not into thinking of patterns..... that's relatively easy..... but into finding a common ground on which a number of different patterns could coexist. I wanted all those patterns to somehow grow into a single pattern, and it took me a long time before I felt that that had happened.

What keeps you in Cologne?

Right now I am working in the electronic studio at the Cologne Hochschule and have a fair amount of time there. It's an opportunity I wouldn't want to pass up, since I have never done any electronic music.

You visited the States this summer. What was your impression generally and of the music scene in particular?

My general impression of the United States? It's big. It's an entirely different feeling living in Germany, which is a walled fortress, spiritually and physically, and always will be.

All the musical ideas I've ever had which seemed to me any good have had to do with a notion of sounds spinning across some kind of huge earthly amphitheater, and I had to come to Europe before I understood that this would not necessarily be an interesting point of departure for composers of all countries. For example a German composer might tend to think in more introverted terms, or in terms of some kind of other-worldly paradise. The resultant music need not be any less valid, obviously; it's just a completely different starting point. I wasn't really conscious of the role that the sheer physical environment plays in one's imaginative make up until I left America, and then came back again and saw how big it was.

I didn't spend much time checking out the musical scene. There were very few concerts, since it was summer. I did happen across no less than four new publications of writings about new music: SOUNDINGS, ASTERISK, NUMUS WEST and EAR. All of these publications seemed to me very interesting and attested to a liveliness of interest and discussion which has been pretty much dead in Europe since the fifties.

There also seemed to be a new attitude developing toward the tradition of experimental music in America: All throughout my academic training, in the early sixties, the ever-present implication was that the only decent composers were Europeans, and that composers like CAGE, PARTCH, even IVES and RUGGLES, were somehow either crazy or not quite worth a student's trouble. I have the impression that the youngest composers are simply not going to listen to that kind of thing any more, and that, along with all the communication which seems to be going on, is surely a good sign.

Do you want to come back?

Well, as I said, all the musical ideas I've ever had which seemed to me to be any good also seem to have been involved with experiences I've had while living in America. Under those circumstances, a desire to return is inevitable. At the moment there are various kinds of practical and personal considerations keeping me here, but sooner or later I'm sure I'll return to America.

Dear Walter,

Thank you very much for your 2 letters. It sounds as though you had interviewed the entire American avant-garde, and I'm flattered that you would wish to include me in a book with so many reputable people. ("Desert Plants" is a beautiful and appropriate title, by the way). I'll try to send you a couple of pages of Entree.

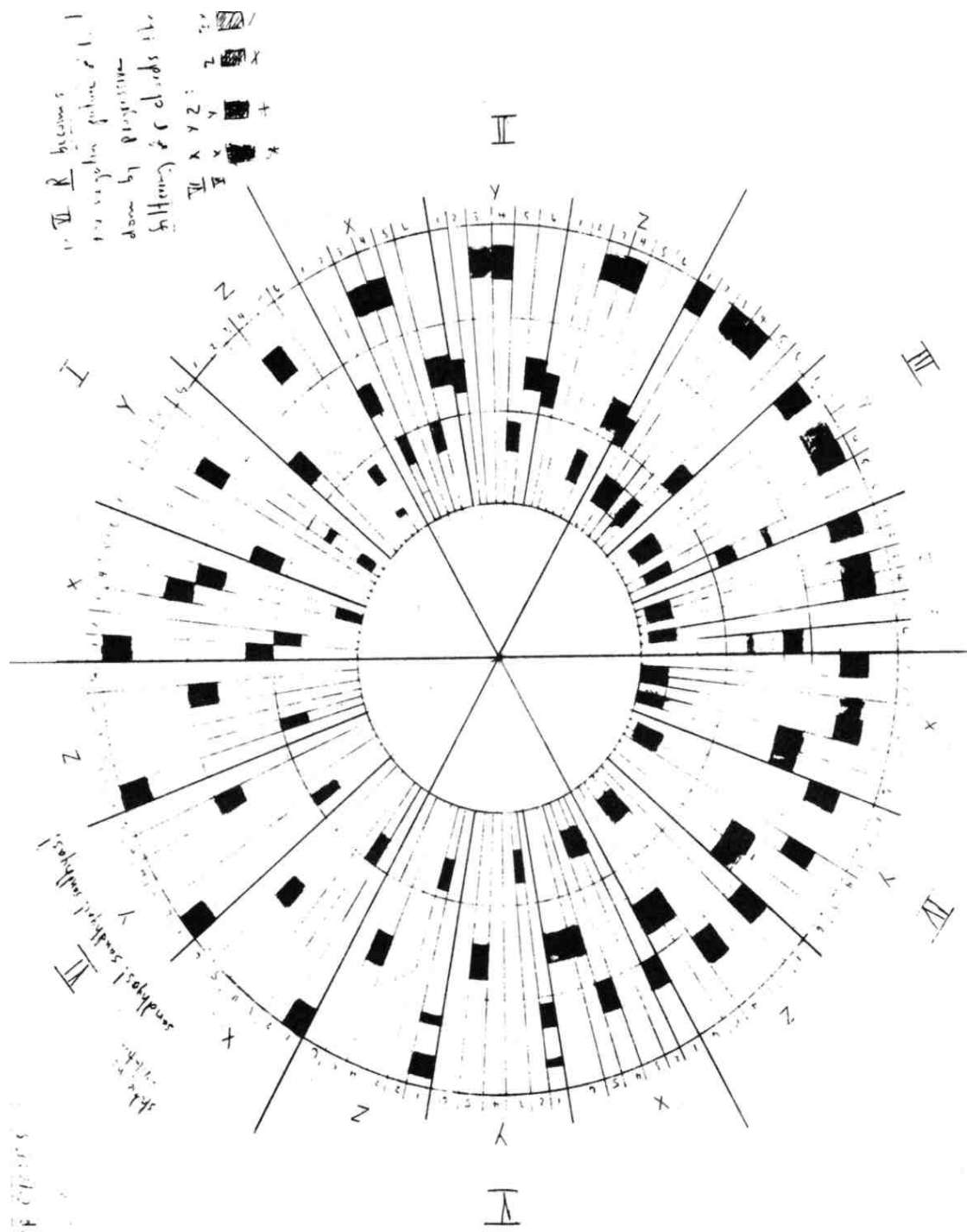
Life in Cologne has become very sad for me lately, and your questions about America were especially hard for me to answer. But I hope the answers aren't too dumb. I wrote them out very quickly as if in an interview and hope it's OK.

I'm eagerly awaiting your return to Cologne as I'm sure you'll have a lot to tell, and we can exchange impressions of our visits to America.

TL THREE M3F CITIES
+ 3x3 subcycles

- d-d
 - c-c
 - r-r
 C
 A
 B
 - d-d
 - c-c
 - r-r

K is the
 major
 part of d



TL R becomes
 the regular pattern of L
 done by progression
 following 6 circles the

TL X Y Z
 X Y Z
 X Y Z