



Lifestyle Softt Quizzes BDH Outtakes

To search type and hit enter

Alvin Lucier: Some spatial characteristics of sound waves

By: Julia Elia / October 30, 2014 / No Comments

Last night, in Grant Recital Hall, a cellist held one continuous note for over 10 minutes. Written down in black and white, that doesn't seem it would be that much of a feat, but to see it performed live was intensely mesmerizing.

One woman, Laura Cetilia, sat with her cello in front of several glass vases. These vases, suspended above the ground, contained microphones tuned to pick up various frequencies emitted from her instrument. As the piece progressed, I realized she was not holding one pitch, but continually adjusting the pitch slowly enough that it was hardly distinguishable. Occasionally, she was accompanied by the wave of another sound caused from just the right frequency being captured by one of the glass vases. I broke my stare to survey the room and found I wasn't alone in my trance. There were only a few empty seats in the hall, and zero people checking their cell phones.



This performance was part of the Colloquium series sponsored by the Multimedia and Electronic Music Experiments (MEME) department here at Brown. It was followed by a talk and Q&A with Alvin Lucier, the composer who wrote *Music for Cello with One or More Amplified Vases* and several other famous pieces that explore the physical and

ABOUT US

Blog Daily Herald is your new favorite distraction. Check us out during your biggest lectures, your longest nights in the Sci Li, and during your late-night scrolling. We're an independent student blog here to inform, entertain and divert your attention from the 'real' world. Brought to you by [The Brown Daily Herald](#) in 2009. It's 2018 now, and it's time for a change. Welcome to the NEW Blog Daily Herald.

Blog Daily Herald is brought to you by the largest, most widely read publication on campus... so we're kinda a big deal. We're a teaching organization with a mission to reflect the values, ideals, and diverse identities of the Brown community. We aim to keep you laughing, procrastinating, and always in the know.

CONTACT US

If there's something you want to see or if you want to be on our Bulletin, let us know. Shoot us an email at blog@browndailyherald.com with any questions, comments, tips, ideas, or interest in joining us.

structural nature of sound.

Lucier has taught at Brown twice, but is known mostly in academia for his 43-year-long career at Wesleyan. As he spoke about the process and intent for the creation of his work, he name-dropped several musical pioneers as collaborators and friends. Among them: [John Cage](#), [Philip Glass](#), and [Steve Reich](#). (No sweat if those names aren't familiar, but I cannot recommend MUSC0200 enough if you want to find out who they are.)

Lucier started his talk addressing whether or not music was a language universal enough to communicate with other species. His stance was simply "yes," if we aren't using our own language of music. To demonstrate his point, he brought out a device that sends out high frequency bursts made to test bats' ability to echolocate. He turned it on and very slowly pointed it in various directions around the room, affecting every individuals' perception of the pitch differently. He noted that this instrument inspired him to write a piece for performers in a dark space in which they find a central point only through sound.

When one audience member asked him "How do we find our own language?" his reply was that he found his through intense specificity. It was made abundantly clear in the talk that Lucier knows exactly what he is interested in, and what he is not interested in. He uses these interests as a frame to push back on and explore.

For instance, he does not feel drawn towards the interaction between melodies, but instead, the interaction between singular notes. He wrote a piece for two violins to sustain notes so close in pitch that their physical interaction caused "beats" or audibly perceivable interferences.

Lucier's final piece of advice was to "stick to your guns." He reported that audiences have changed for the better, something he wouldn't have the pleasure of noticing if he had listened to critiques when he was starting his career. He warded against the fashionable trends and instead hoped we would notice what we love to make.

Click [here](#) to see Lucier's, arguably, most famous work: "I Am Sitting In A Room"

