
Arthur Jarvinen

an annotated bibliography of
the artist as a
performer/composer

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“Zen is nearly impossible without a teacher-
Composition is nearly impossible with one.”

-from the notes of Arthur Jarvinen

This quote was found in the stacks of paper left behind after Arthur Jarvinen's death. As the quote suggests, Jarvinen was an artist who insisted on doing things his way. This led to Jarvinen's individual and unique standpoint on the art of composition and music in general. Jarvinen was known as a composer and performer, but those terms simply don't cover the variety of work he created during his lifetime.

The purpose of this bibliography is to evaluate the available sources which specifically represent Arthur Jarvinen's role as a performer/composer. While there is very little written about Jarvinen by other people, there are several sources in which Jarvinen discusses his view of himself as an artist. Additionally, there are many recordings which showcase Jarvinen as a performer of his own works. This bibliography is intentionally incomplete. While Jarvinen wrote a great deal of traditional scores, none of them will be featured here. It will also exclude recordings which Jarvinen made as a performer but with which he had no role as a composer (this is primarily his recordings of works by Feldman and Andreissen). Rather, my aim is to try and give a complete overview of the various projects in which Jarvinen actively took a role as a performer/composer. Finally, there are a few works here which do not fall into the category of musical works, but perhaps would better be described as works of literature. The reason for their inclusion is that I feel that Jarvinen approached these works in the same way he would any composition, and they offer insight into his creative process.

Antenna Repairmen. *Ghatam*. MA Recordings M037A. Compact Disc. 1997.

The Antenna Repairmen was a percussion ensemble consisting of Robert Fernandez, M.B.Gordy, and Arthur Jarvinen. *Ghatam* is a cd length work and is described as a “sculptural/musical performance piece...played entirely on ceramic instrument designed and build especially for this situation by [Stephen] Freedman.” Although the group was formed in 1978, this appears to be the only commercially released recording the ensemble ever made.

Báthory-Kitsz, Dennis, and David Gunn. “In the House.” Kalvos and Damian. WMA file. <http://kalvos.org/shows-2008.html> (accessed December 16, 2010).

“In the House” is a radio program, hosted by the fictional characters Damian and Kalvos. The actual hosts of this show are Dennis Báthory-Kitsz and David Gunn. For their show on June 16th, 2008, their in studio guest was Arthur Jarvinen. David Ocker, a composer and friend of Jarvinen's, described the show as “the best overview of Art's career of which I'm aware.” This statement is fairly accurate; the only other source that features more personal information about Jarvinen is the Oral History Project interview, which is also covered in this bibliography. However, since this interview was conducted nearly ten years after the oral history interview, it contains discussion of many works

that had not yet been written at that time. The format of the show is comprised of long musical examples of Jarvinen's work (frequently entire works) interspersed with interviews with Jarvinen. Aside from an overview of his childhood and his history as a developing musician, the interviews contain in depth discussions regarding many works including *Endless Bummer*, *Serious Immobilities*, *Nighthawks*, *No Blues*, *Sgt. Pekker* and *The Invisible Guy*. It is illuminating that Jarvinen describes his music as "repetition and variation." Additionally he describes *Sgt. Pekker* as perhaps his best attempt at an opera (despite the fact that he was never terribly interested in writing an opera). Finally, the interview discusses his new found interest in listening to field recording and shortwave scanning as its own form of composition, which later became an important element in his TempWerks pieces.

California EAR Unit, The. *The California EAR Unit*. New Albion Records NA019. Compact Disc. 1989.

This album, performed by the California EAR Unit, features Jarvinen as both a performer, and as a performer/composer. The opening track is a work of Jarvinen's titled "Egyptian Two Step" and features Jarvinen on both chromatic harmonica and compressed air spray cans. Jarvinen writes in the liner notes that the piece was written "to give me a chance to play chromatic harmonica with the EAR Unit. The idiosyncrasies of the instrument led me to compose an ensemble sound in which it would be at home, not out of place." Additionally, this album features two other works (Stockhausen's "Dr. K – Sextet," and Andriessen's "Hoketus") in which Jarvinen acts as a performer with the ear unit. While there are many other recordings which feature Jarvinen in the role of a performer, there seem to be no others that feature him in both roles individually.

Fat Pillheads Like Elvis. *Fat Pillheads Like Elvis*. Compact Disc.

Created after *The Mope*, this ensemble embodies the combined rock/new music genre which Jarvinen did so well. The songs are essentially complexly composed blues-based rock songs. Jarvinen's influence from Captain Beefheart is clearly evidenced in these songs. While the group apparently never played any shows before breaking up, the album contains an early version of "Erase the Fake" which would later be recorded on the *Erase the Fake* album recorded by Some Over History. It also contains "Johnny Sprays" to which "Murphy-Nights" (recorded on *Edible Black Ink*) was written as a coda.

Gann, Kyle. *American Music in the Twentieth Century*. Mason: Cengage Learning, 2005.

Kyle Gann seems to have been a longtime fan of Jarvinen's work; he wrote liner notes for the "Edible Black Ink" album, wrote about him on his blog after he passed away, and took time to mention him in his book. *American Music* seems to be the only academic book source which has made reference to Jarvinen, which is why it is included here. It is unfortunately a very brief mention and lumps Jarvinen in with other artists that Gann likes to describe as "totalist composers." Gann's definition of "totalism"

is embodied by the idea of “writing music that appeals to audiences on a sensuous and visceral level, and yet which still contains enough complexity and intricate musical devices to attract the more sophisticated aficionado. It also implies using all of the musical resources available, so that Indian raga-like melodies may fit together with jazz harmonies within classical structuring devices.” This seems to be a huge generalization, not only towards Jarvinen, but towards all composers to whom the term has been applied.

Jarvinen, Arthur. “American Composer - Arthur Jarvinen.” *Chamber Music Magazine* 17, no. 3 (June 2000): 39-40.

This article, which featured Jarvinen specifically, seems to be the source material which Gann used when compiling his *American Music* book. It reads with basically the same tone as that book, but takes a more in depth and descriptive look at Jarvinen. Still, the overall theme inaccurately places Jarvinen in the context of “totalism.”

_____. *Edible Black Ink*. The California EAR Unit. OO Discs oo28. Compact Disc. 1996.

This album is a collection of chamber pieces for a variety of instrumentations, performed exclusively by The California EAR Unit. It is one of the best examples of Jarvinen’s work as an integrated performer/composer. It should be noted that the album contains liner notes written by Kyle Gann and contains the pieces that Gann frequently references in his other writings on Jarvinen. The compositional style in these pieces is radically different from one piece to the next, but in general, they are through composed “chamber pieces.” For someone with no previous knowledge of Jarvinen’s work, this would be perhaps the best place to start. One of the most noticeable features of the album is Jarvinen’s use of the electric bass in the context of a new music ensemble.

_____. *Endless Bummer*. Arthur Jarvinen and Miroslav Tadic. Lakefire Records LR0301. Compact Disc. 2003.

Endless Bummer is a single piece in three parts (although they are sequenced on the album in reverse order because Jarvinen felt this made for a better overall listening experience) and is performed by Jarvinen primarily on electric bass and Miroslav Tadic on guitar. The piece is stylistically situated somewhere between surf music, minimalism (without the pulsing), and ambient music. The work seems to continue on basically the same path the its entire duration. In terms of Jarvinen’s overall career, the work seems to bridge the gap between his rock work (The Mope, Invisible Guy, Sgt. Pekker) and his long form “chamber music” compositions (100 Cadences, Conspiracy of Crows).

_____. *Erase the Fake*. Some Over History. OO Discs oo48. Compact Disc. 1998.

This album seems, in many ways, to function as a companion album to *Edible Black Ink*. Like *Edible Black Ink*, the entire album is performed by a single ensemble (Some Over History) and features Jarvinen again in the role of performer composer. Where it diverges however is in the fact that it contains works that have an element of improvisation to them (there was admittedly improvisation within some tracks on *Edible Black Ink*, but they were never the overriding basis for a piece). Furthermore, the liner notes contain poems written by Jarvinen, each of which is tied to work on the album. There are two quotes that precede the poems. The first, written by Allen Ginsberg, reads:

Well, while I'm here I'll
do the work –
and what's the Work?
To ease the pain of living.

The second quote, written by Jarvinen reads:

I say it a little differently
but it's the same thing I suppose?
Composing , to create a World –
I want to live in.

The inclusion of these quotes, along with the poems, creates the sense that this album is a highly personal endeavor for Jarvinen. The first three lines of the first poem, “out of the blue” read:

that's how the new came
randy died, age 32
metronome just stopped

The “Randy” mentioned here is clearly Randy Hostetler, Jarvinen's friend, who passed away in 1996. It is clear that the death of Hostetler had a strong impact on Jarvinen. Still, this seems to be one of the few instances of the publication of Jarvinen's poetry, which he seems to have approached in the same way he approached his compositions.

_____. *Experimental Etudes*. Sylmar: Leisure Planet Music, 1996.

This is the only published book that Jarvinen ever wrote and it offers remarkable insight into Jarvinen's role as an educator. The book is collection of etudes, each one written by Jarvinen with the specific goal of dealing with a particular problem one might encounter within a new music idiom. I can think of no other book that has been written with this goal in mind, and it is remarkably well done. Compositional concepts dealt with include polyrhythms and metric modulation, graphic notation, repetitive, minimalist

structures, and improvisation. Included with the book is a cd containing realizations of many of the etudes in the book. These recordings were performed by member of the California EAR Unit, including Jarvinen.

_____. Interview by Libby Van Cleve. Tape recording. Yale University, November 12, 1997.

This interview was conducted as part of Yale University's Oral History Project's American Music Series. It is perhaps the most in-depth and comprehensive source on Jarvinen. It covers Jarvinen's childhood and upbringing and essentially the entire path of his career up to that point. One of the greatest things it offers is insight towards the way Jarvinen viewed his own compositional process and the relationship this process had to Jarvinen's role as a performer/composer. He states that "right from the start, [it] seemed like composition and playing went together. They didn't seem like different things to me." He continues:

What it all gets down to for me is it's all composition. It doesn't matter if you're writing a ting-ting-ta-ting jazz head, or a twenty-four-hour piano solo like I'm doing now, or doing a piece of physical poetry or performance art, or doing a painting or, many cases, even preparing a meal. Basically, on some level it's all composition and many of the same rules and the same concerns and the same issues are there at stake."

These examples show that Jarvinen clearly felt as if composition was a way of life rather than just a way to write music, and that he approached everything as if it were a composition.

Beyond this, the interview contains virtually the only published account of Jarvinen's earlier work, which he described as "physical poetry." Jarvinen states:

It's my own kind of poetry that I do that is built out of element other than, although sometimes including, language. So it's every bit as much poetry as written poetry is, except the images. Instead of describing them in words and then pushing them around on the page and thereby pushing them around in your mind, I create the images in real-time on stage with stuff. And I literally push the stuff around on stage.

Mention of this type work in any other source is completely non-existent (with the exception of the unpublished book *Lint*) other than the passing mention that Jarvinen considered himself a "physical poet."

_____. "The Invisible Guy home page." The Invisible Guy home page. <http://www.invisibleguy.com/> (accessed December 17, 2010).

The Invisible Guy is perhaps the most totally synthesized representation of Jarvinen's overall aesthetic principals. The work is a combination of album, novel, web

piece, and more. Jarvinen described the project as “a real soundtrack for an imaginary spy film.” The work unfolded as a series of written episodes, like chapters in a book, with a different song to go with each chapter. Jarvinen was working on this during the period where he became fascinated with surf music, so most of the songs borrow from this genre. This is a clear example of how Jarvinen treated most everything as a composition. For him, writing a book was just the same as writing a composition. There is no real way to classify a work like this, which is part of what makes it so interesting.

_____. *Lint: the physical poetry of arthur jarvinen*. Unpublished and incomplete manuscript.

Lint is an unpublished book that Jarvinen was working on before he passed away. The title *Lint: the physical poetry of arthur jarvinen* has been assumed based on what appears to be a title page amongst the other texts. The book appears to set out to fully describe Jarvinen’s “physical poetry” pieces. It is broken down on a piece by piece basis and includes explanatory notes and anecdotes, and descriptions of the necessary props, lighting, staging, in order to perform the piece as well as instructions for how to perform the piece. These are essentially scores, although they contain no music (that is not to say that they contain no elements of sound). Additionally, there is a set of stage diagrams for each piece. In total it contains twelve separate pieces which were written between the years 1977 and 1987. Throughout the text there are references made to a preliminary essay regarding Jarvinen’s overall concept of physical poetry, however this essay seems to be missing. It seems that, aside from this essay, the rest of the book is nearly complete. While the text does give remarkably detailed information on each particular piece, it does speak less of physical poetry as a whole. The discovery of *Lint* has exposed a wealth of information on a previously relatively unknown part of Jarvinen’s career, yet these works would really be better represented through video documentation, which I hope may still be unearthed at some point in the future. Still, it would be worthwhile for *Lint* to be edited and published for all to see.

_____. *Sgt. Pekker*. Lakefire Records LR0201. Compact Disc. 2002.

As was mentioned in the Damian and Kalvos interview, Jarvinen considered *Sgt. Pekker* to be the closest thing to an opera he would probably ever write. As the name might suggest, the entire *Sgt. Pekker* album is a stylistic parody of the late music of The Beatles. The album was recorded almost entirely with the use of general midi, but all other live parts were performed by Jarvinen. In the Damian and Kalvos interview, Jarvinen admits that use of midi creates a somewhat “cheesy” aesthetic, but that he found it appropriate given that the album is a parody. Jarvinen performs these pieces as the fictitious characters John Paul Pope, Jean-Paul Fabb, Audman Aoudt, and Otto DaFaye. The album is shockingly accurate in terms of its ability to stylistically appropriate the work of the Beatles, yet Jarvinen’s musical voice is still clearly heard throughout.

Mope, The. *The Story of a Band*. Compact Disc.

If Jarvinen ever had a rock band, it was The Mope. The band primarily consisted of Jarvinen and Toby Holmes, with both of them sharing the instrumental and vocal duties between them. Stylistically the songs are all over the map, but they could all be considered to fall into the “rock” genre. Jarvinen’s personality is apparent in both the lyrics and music, and it is one of the few recorded instances of him performing in this kind of musical context.

We Are Not Mailmen. *Best of We Are Not Mailmen*. Arthur Jarvinen and Eric Barber. Compact Disc. 2000.

This group consisted of Eric Barber on saxophones and Jarvinen on electronics. This work seems to be an outgrowth of the kinds of material Jarvinen was working on when he recorded *Erase the Fake*. The pieces appear to be entirely improvised (although the overall structure is likely predetermined) and Jarvinen seems to have further developed his no-input feedback loop set-up. These seem strikingly different from most all of Jarvinen’s other work. This is perhaps due to the fact the melodic role is carried out by Barber rather than Jarvinen, but still, there is a calm and peaceful unfolding to the material.

It is my assessment that there is still perhaps a great deal of uncatalogued work and documentation which remains yet to be discovered, but it is my hope that these sources discussed here have given a fairly complete view of the creative output Jarvinen took on as a performer/composer throughout his life.

I would like to thank Jarvinen’s wife, Lynn Angebrandt for allowing me access to the unpublished items included in this bibliography.