

In the 1st Person : March 2004

NewMusicBox

Stephen Vitiello and Marina Rosenfeld

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For several years, we've wanted to do an issue of *NewMusicBox* exploring the relationship between music and the art world. We decided that this month would be the perfect time to connect with Stephen Vitiello and Marina Rosenfeld. In the upcoming months, Stephen will participate in several group shows in New York and will have a solo show in Paris as well as a concert at the Tate Gallery in London. New Albion will release his latest collection of sonic explorations: a collaborative album with David Tronzo. Stephen is also producing a 2-disc set of recordings from New Music America 1979 for the Kitchen, which will be issued on Orange Mountain Music, Philip Glass's archival label. Marina has two upcoming solo releases: a CD of solo turntable compositions, on Quakebasket (NY) label; and a DVD of multi-channel works on the Tellus/Harvestworks label (NY). The DVD documents three works created with a Van Lier Fellowship from Harvestworks in 2003. Other forthcoming releases include collaborations with: Christian Marclay and Toshio Kajiura ("DJtrio") on Apshodel (San Francisco); Alan Licht on Table of the Elements; and Lee Ranaldo and Nels Cline on Atavistic. Marina's next live performance will be at Phill Niblock's Experimental Intermedia on March 31. She will also perform and speak about sound art at NYU's upcoming conference, "Tapeworms," on April 9.

Sound Artist vs. Composer

STEPHEN VITIELLO: We can start with that idea of being a sound artist. I did this interview with [Alvin Lucier](#) last week for a new CD-based audio magazine called *The Relay Project* which is going to be introducing sound pieces that Lucy Raven from *BOMB* and [Rebecca Gates](#) from *The Spinanes* are starting. I started out by asking him how he defines himself and if he uses the term Sound Artist. Even though he has rejected the term, Alvin is as important as they go in terms of really being conceptual and musical, doing so much work that has really moved me in the field that I consider Sound Art. Do you think of yourself as a sound artist?

MARINA ROSENFELD: I don't. I find that the notion of being a sound artist is very useful in terms of expanding the potential field in which my work is operating, but ultimately I prefer the notion—just for myself, personally—that all of my work still engages with a fairly strict idea about music and music as a subcategory of sound. I don't see those two things as equivalent. Sound artist as a definition take you outside of that.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: You studied music, right?

MARINA ROSENFELD: Yeah, my background is really in music—music composition, music theory. I guess I'm somewhat influenced by that. And you?

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Well, I think of myself as a sound artist, but then when I write my bios I tend to cater it to whatever it needs to be. So when I've made CDs, they've tended to say electronic musician Stephen Vitiello, or composer, or something like that. But really my background is playing in punk rock bands in the late '70s, then other bands in the '80s, and then starting to collaborate with visual artists on soundtracks from the late '80s for about ten years, doing probably close to 100 soundtracks for short film, video, dance, and performance art. I came to my own personal identity through [the project at the World Trade Center](#), where I started listening to buildings and architecture, finding that I had a lot more connection to defining or relating to a space than I had to certainly playing guitar and also relating to other people's images. As I did it, I started to read and see what else other people had done. I've read a good deal about [Max Neuhaus](#),

who had this kind of basic distinction for his work with new music as being about sound in time vs his work with installation/sound art as being defined by sound in space—I'm paraphrasing. For me that really connected to creating open-ended work....

MARINA ROSENFELD: Sound in time versus sound in space...

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Yeah, and that has really lasted as music versus installation—installation being sound art, again for my personal reference.

MARINA ROSENFELD: That distinction doesn't ring true for me automatically, but that's interesting. I think the connection you and I both have is an idea of enlarging the area that we're allowed to be talking about while still doing the kind of aesthetic work that we're interested in. For me the distinction between concert music or performed music and installation is not so important as what I like to think of in terms of a personal trajectory, the discovery (as a musician and as a fledgling composer) of the visual artists, the conceptual artists of the '60s and '70s filtered through having looked at [Cage](#), [Fluxus](#), and that world—discoveries about [Robert Smithson](#), [Sherry Levine](#), and especially [Bruce Nauman](#). The interest for me was to bring that kind of discussion back into contact with the practice of composing music. Not so much discarding the history and looking at it as sound in space, but making the construction of musical ideas in time into a way of talking about some of those same issues that were extra-musical or just larger-musical. But obviously both approaches can yield results. I think we'll both agree, it's more of a way to find a prism or find a frame.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: In terms of the work I've done, I tend to hold onto that sound art concept. Sometimes I need a distinct term to represent—not just my own work—but having worked as a curator, an archivist, and a distributor, as a way to tightly describe something to people.

MARINA ROSENFELD: The utility of these definitions is interesting because it's quite clear that we are not in a field like painting, where the distribution and marketplace are set up to insure that the artist is taken care of. We're in this real no man's land. It's a wonderful freedom on one hand, and it's a real handicap from another point of view. We're both interested in the production of objects around these more ephemeral kinds of outputs in our work, so some of these definitions simply have a marketplace utility, which is important. Sound art has a sort of '70s ring to it to me. It sounds somewhat utopian. It also sounds medium based, which is traditional in the sense of the way art areas have been categorized or separated. To that extent I embrace it as simply one more mantle to add to my resume. One thing that affects me very much—by choice, but also sometimes in a negative way—is that I like to be engaged with that history that comes with the word "composer." I often butt up against it in a somewhat violent way it seems, in terms of the reactions that some of my work produces. It's definitely a mixed bag. I think there's more room in the sound art category to be undefined. You're really in trouble as soon as you take on that composer thing.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Meaning how people respond to you when you say, "I'm a composer"?

MARINA ROSENFELD: Well, when you present a work that's unconventional in terms of the history of composing, and say "I'm the composer of this work and I see myself as the composer and I will now conduct it for you," you've accepted a whole set of conditions obviously. Foremost among them is the notion that you're the auteur. You are the author of this experience that other people are about to have. That's exactly an area that I'm really interested in messing things up in—careening the outcomes and production scenarios.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I would connect this more to the history of conceptual art, or creating forms to work within. For me it's different and the same. It's funny, I haven't been in academic circles enough to run into the trouble that I might. The only place where I find a problem is when I apply for funding. Not to bring everything back to money...

MARINA ROSENFELD: What category do I apply in?

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Yeah, because most music panels have a bias towards composers, and I'm not really a visual artist although I'm represented by two galleries and I do make objects, but people still say really basic things like: what are the dimensions? I got one really big grant once for "advances in the visual arts" for the work I've been doing. I talked to [Kristin Oppenheim](#), who is also as a gallery-based sound artist. I said, 'What do I do? I have sent in CDs to grants panels and they said we don't have a CD player, send slides.' She said, 'Well, take pictures of the speakers and write down your title and a short description.' Then I got a \$30,000 grant, which paid for my next exhibition. But it was a kind of crazy thing about fitting into rules. I have never managed to get a grant as a composer. All the lecturing I do and workshop teaching is always in visual arts departments, even if I'm talking about sound in relation to video artists or film, or media art in general.

MARINA ROSENFELD: That's interesting because I, by contrast, am actually on the graduate faculty at [Bard](#) in their music/sound department. I've taught during the year there in the electronic music category. I think that's because the people in charge there have a different attitude than you might find at a [Princeton](#) or [Columbia](#).

Context

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Another thing about titles and this idea of commodity and market is that we are at this very vital moment. There are something like seven exhibitions coming up in New York including the [New Sound New York Festival](#) in the spring. There have been a growing number of shows integrating sound into museums in the last five years or so. But for me what is really going to make it last as it is—if it's going to last—is if it takes on a kind of commodity form, if it becomes buyable. From the artists I know that come out of that '60s and '70s conceptual period, they had an enormous amount of audio work that for the most part hasn't sold. [Vito Acconci](#) is an amazing artist who has done an enormous amount of work with audio, but no one really knows him for that.

MARINA ROSENFELD: [Maryanne Amacher](#) has this vast, totally seminal and important body of recorded material that needs to be reformatted for contemporary equipment.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: And it needs to be documented.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I think a lot of younger artists are thinking about that and are interested in doing that. Especially now with DVD a lot of this work is in the process of being archived. I think that will have an effect on the extent to which the history is known or unknown. Some of these things have mythic proportions, things that you could have never been there for, but that can only be a good thing.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I think it was in Minneapolis, that empty house of Molly and [Dennis Russell Davies](#) that Maryanne took over for a sound installation—that's a mythic piece. It was called [Living Sound, Patent Pending](#) "MUSIC FOR SOUND-JOINED ROOMS" and was presented during the New Music America Festival, Minneapolis-St. Paul (1980). The music and visual sets were staged architecturally, throughout the nearly empty Victorian house. There's a story that Molly tells of the police coming to shut it down (after complaints of noise) and Alvin Lucier had+ to explain to them that it was a work of art and that the volume was essential to the piece. I was curating a component to the Whitney's "[American Century](#)" and I asked her if there was a way that she could present it. She said, "You're crazy. What is documentation going to do?" There was that conference at the Guggenheim a couple years ago on [variable media](#), looking at how works can be presented outside of the original intention or when the artist isn't there. Maryanne is such a case. Her work is so remarkable but only if it's really presented through a very particular technology. The tuning of herself to the building is not something you can just put up on a set of speakers, although [her Tzadik CD](#) is very beautiful.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I think what we're talking about comes down to another issue, which is experience. When I'm thinking about that Maryanne Amacher work what popped into my mind was when I was able to see some physical objects from [Gordon Matta-Clark](#). It would have been a little earlier maybe, but some of those pieces, forms cutting through houses, were documented wonderfully through film and photography. There was a show in Los Angeles in the '90s about the dematerialization of the art object. They had pieces from the building where you could look in a physical, sculptural, plastic sense at these layers of material from which the house was built. It was really quite fascinating to see. It was just a chunk of something that someone had preserved, if I remember correctly, that has a metonymic relationship to the overall piece that musicians haven't explored so much—like a CD in relation to a live piece. Even a CD of a Beethoven Symphony only has a fractional relationship to the actual symphony, which exists in multiple versions somewhere in a kind of ideal state. I think sound artists, or contemporary artists working with sound and music composition, could be thinking more about artifacts that have a partial relationship to the whole as an interesting way of making a connection to live experience—I know I'm really interested in that as a performing artist and also as an orchestrator of events. The object doesn't have to be equivalent to the experience. Not so much a documentary, but there are interesting ways of experience seeping into materials that in some way act as stand-ins.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I think for me it's always been important to represent that, but for there to be responsibility on the part of the museum, or gallery, or CD production company, or whoever to somehow give people context. What I see happen too often is that that element then gets presented as the work. People will think, 'Oh I've seen that piece of Gordon Matta-Clark,' even though all they've seen is an artifact or an element. When I look at some of these archival-based labels, there are labels that have done a good job describing the context under which this work was made, or even

just saying that this is an except or one of the ways in which this work has been performed. In whatever form our mediums grow there's the issue of archiving and how responsible people are describing that in detail and, depending on the artist, how much they want it said that this is the ultimate version or not the ultimate version.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Or conversely, how open the institution is to actually presenting the real experience—making available the opportunity to mount the live work, not just the after effect, or distilled object, or the history 20 years later. It seems like this is happening in certain places, which is good.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I think so, too. I always had this thought, it goes back to when I was producing this CD of Nam June Paik's audio pieces from the late '50s. People will say, 'Oh yes, I've heard [Nam June Paik's *Homage to John Cage*](#),' which was one of the works. Basically I found all the tapes he used to play in a performance in which he might have three tape recorders playing, but it's not an actual tape of the whole piece. I tried to explain it in the liner notes, but it's just that same kind of thing. Maybe it doesn't deeply matter. Maybe it's great that they heard something that they wouldn't have otherwise heard. But for me it's almost like: 'Well, you heard the piano, but you didn't hear the rest of the orchestra.' The piano might have been the soloist, but you still had these other elements.

The Look of a Musical Performance

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I was thinking about your work and this idea of having a signature work. I always think of the [Sheer Frost Orchestra](#) as the first, immediate vision when someone mentions your name, even though you have a large body of work and other ways of performing.

MARINA ROSENFELD: That's another thing that happens partly through your own agency and partly as a consequence of varying degrees of interest by presenters and so on of different works that you have. For the purposes of this conversation I guess I'll say, for those who haven't seen it, that the Sheer Frost Orchestra is my 17-woman electric guitar improvising orchestra with a score and playing system that I developed for it using nail polish bottles on floor-bound guitars. It initiated a whole series of works about a set of issues that I'm interested in having to do with the idea of virtuosity and skill, and the lack thereof, or what the history of an individual needs to be to enter a piece of new music—not just as a listener, but also as a player. Also the idea of where musicianship is inside of a human being, what can coax it out, and also engaging histories of instruments within pieces, so that the electric guitar operates both sonically, and then floating over the piece as a signifier.

The piece was first done in 1994. There have been many versions though this decade, always with new scores and new players and new scenarios. I recently premiered a new orchestra called the Emotional Orchestra.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I think I read a blurb or a press release.

MARINA ROSENFELD: You may have also read what I would call [an emotional attack on it](#) from [Allan Kozinn](#) in *The New York Times*. He came to cover it and was absolutely aghast about everything about it from beginning to end. *[laughs]* But the level of his reaction and the things he attacked were really very telling. The salient issue in the piece really, really upset him.

The new work is for an all-female orchestra, 20 players this time. A mixture of really hardcore improvisers and complete novices were all playing bowed instruments—all the string instruments, harp, the percussionist, electric guitar, a quasi-electric bass, all working out the idea of emotion through a graphically notated system of stripes of different varieties and densities around the idea of bowing.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: And each with a violin bow or a cello bow?

MARINA ROSENFELD: Yeah, everyone with a bow. Another element of the piece that really, really upset him—perhaps no one else, but I don't know that *[laughs]*—was the fact that I worked with the fashion collective [As Four](#) to do a sleeve that sheathed the arm of each performer in a kind of gaudy, golden, architectural—differently shaped in each case—single sleeve. Everyone had street clothes and this extravagant structure on their bow arm, this extraordinary looking protrusion on one limb of each performer, highlighting the fact that this piece was about bowing and repetition. Again, trying to go from this set of concerns that I've developed over almost 10 years in the earlier work, into a new piece.

I'm really interested in developing the new orchestra and some of the visual ideas in it. It seems to be quite taboo, but I actually am really interested in the relationship of fashion and clothes to new music. Not in a magaziney, what-are-they-wearing kind of way, but in the sense that this is an unspoken element. It's quite customary to speak about the body, but the body is actually not a naked body and it's also not a clothed body. So what body is that? I'm interested in making real what body that is. So looking at this garment is sort of an entry point into this whole discussion. I'm really interested in going in that direction and finding ways of making that relationship more explicit.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: It is interesting because of [how we think of] frames for work. New music really has avoided staging to such an extent, coming out of a classical setting, wearing black. Now it's just, be as invisible as you possibly can.

MARINA ROSENFELD: It probably is the most controversial element in my work. Since the nail polish bottles... I'm attracted to continuing in that vein.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I can't think of anyone else who is.

MARINA ROSENFELD: It's very exciting. I'll be doing it again in Germany during 2004, but this was a first run-through at [Deitch Projects](#). It was great doing it here in New York. It was the first time I did a first of something in New York. Usually you bring it to New York after you've perfected it. We just did this really punk rock. It was very exciting.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Is there also a commodity that Deitch sells out of this in the gallery?

MARINA ROSENFELD: Right now this was a piece that was documented in video and some photographs. But I am interested, as I've said, in extending the play of materials and histories and bodies and people in this piece. One element that I love is selecting people to come inside and be the artwork. That in itself is a kind of curating.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: It's also a kind of composition.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Yes. It's really an upsetting notion—I mean it shouldn't be. We have so many composers who have explored and extended the relationship between improvisation and authorship: there's the entire history of jazz for one thing. But it still rankles some people, especially if you're using classical instruments. Someone who has a very strict Western art music classical training, and a musicology degree from Harvard, going in the direction that I've gone... You're either supposed to be part of that world or you're not.

In the context of talking about histories and trying to rewrite and redefine lineages for ourselves as individual artists—the *Times* reviewer was completely upset by the presence of Laurie Anderson. I invited her to play and she agreed to do it and I was thrilled. It connected us with one of the pioneers of the avant-garde and unconventional use of the violin in a kind of transmedia context, and this reviewer made a remark, "What was she doing there?" Somehow the presence of fashion in this sacrosanct new music domain poisoned the whole environment for him and thus for her to be there must have been some kind of a fashion statement. It made it so ridiculous. But it doesn't matter ultimately, because Laurie was so open minded about coming down with all these young people that she didn't know and it was great!

The Experiential Quality of Music Making

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I often balk at this idea of being a composer—not coming from training or not working with a score, I feel a little presumptuous. But then there are things I that I know are very composed, even a selection of collaborators. So much of my own training is really through being a collaborator with visual artists. Now if I make a record and I bring in [Pauline Oliveros](#) and [David Tronzo](#) to play, who are in sort of different camps, I've already heard their sound in my head in relation to my sound. I present them with parameters or structures or maybe just certain instruments or pitches that I know they will respond to. So for me it's not that I compose a work for slide guitar, accordion, and photocells, it's that I composed a work for David Tronzo, Pauline Oliveros, and my own setup. The person who's pulled a musical quality out of me more than anyone else is Pauline Oliveros. The experience of working with her since 1998 has really changed my ears as well as confidence as a player and as a creator, an awareness of sound overall. She's someone who's missing from a lot of the history books.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I was on a panel with her last year at [Hampshire College](#) about Women in Experimental Music. There were seven or eight people. She was the sort of *eminence gris* of the panel and it was great to hear her talk openly about her coming up and what she did as a young artist because she has a very established and very particular place today and doesn't have any need to defend her position at this point. She's certainly carved out her own territory. It was great to hear her talk about forging forwards under hostile circumstances in the '50s and '60s.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: She's been at it for so long and she knows her place in history. I think it needs to be rewritten to the point that she gets properly acknowledged. A lot of my favorite artists and the artists who moved me most, it's almost more because of the personality that comes through a body of work. So, it's not like there's some classic piece of hers for me; it's more what's she's done overall, what she's given. When I met her at this festival, we were flying home, I asked her if I could study with her. And she said, "No, but I have a concert next week with [Joe McPhee](#) and you'll play with us."

MARINA ROSENFELD: That's trial by fire!

STEPHEN VITIELLO: It really is. She networks people in a way that she knows they'll profit from and she'll profit from: there's a sound that will be valuable to her and there's an experience that will be valuable to me. Any other time she's set up one of these trios, it's almost always because she actually has this idea that the other artist and I will go off and work together afterwards.

I guess that's where I connect to music. The part of me that still connects more to music and is distinct in my head from sound art is in collaborative concerts, records... It's so much about the dialogue. I just finished this record with David Tronzo. He had been my guitar teacher in the early '90s and I deeply admire him. This was a way to do something together and speak to each other through two very different techniques. And this is what is most enjoyable to me, rather than working isolated in a room, which for the sound art actually makes sense, but I find it antisocial when working on music.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Music is not fully activated as music without more than one body there. We have increasingly solitary experiences of music because of the Walkman and headphones...

STEPHEN VITIELLO: ...and laptops...

MARINA ROSENFELD: ...but there is from antiquity the notion of music as social, as well as mathematical and intellectual. Another artist that I to cite is [Marina Abramovic](#), someone whose works were totally about experience, and much more about experience than some of the composers working contemporaneously with her, especially [the duo work](#) she did with [Ulay](#). I think I learned more from those pieces than—I'm not going to trash any particular composition—hyper-systematized serial work that was the equivalent avant-garde at that moment. I was really missing a certain point to it, as far as my own relationship to it goes. But Bruce Nauman, Marina Abramovic—[Merce Cunningham](#) in a different sense—all were very much engaged, not just with experience, but with systemizing of elements that I think of as composition. So for me the leap back to composition from these different places was very immediate and quick and made sense.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: They're all really dealing with physicality as well as structural ideas which I think connects both of us and how we approach sound art.

Musical Concerns vs. Visual Concerns

STEPHEN VITIELLO: There's a short video called ["Art must be Beautiful, Artist must be Beautiful"](#) where Marina Abramovic is brushing her hair. It's performance art but there's also such a musical quality to it.

MARINA ROSENFELD: On so many levels. Another thing that music is really about, or that sound is really about is repetition. You can't get away from it. Especially now, more than any other generation, we all look at graphic representations of sound waves on ProTools all the time, or Peak, or whatever the software is. The idea of a vibration or just a sine wave is strangely present to any sound or audio person... I love the piece from 1980 [Rest Energy](#) with the bow and arrow. Ulay holds a taut bow and Marina points the tip of the arrow at her heart, and both of them in a kind of choreographed swoon are leaning away from each other in a perfect physical interpretation of potential energy, potential calamity. In the video, all you can hear are their amplified heart beats.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I know the still...

MARINA ROSENFELD: It is about an action that is not going to happen or which might happen. It's like one half of a wave.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: It makes me think of some [Terry Fox](#) pieces about silence that he did at [Capp Street](#) in San Francisco. There's one about the potential of an earthquake to move a certain object, to create a collision or a crash, which would then become a sound. It's a very beautiful work just about that moment, a frozen moment in time before that sound actually occurs or the potential of that action taking place.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I think that one way in which you are more closely aligned with visual art history rather than a music history is precisely that interest in archiving or activating those historical relationships. It's something that I'm also interested in, maybe in a slightly different way, but that's something that musicians for the most part haven't been interested in. Maybe because the history has appeared to be, or at least the way it's been institutionalized, has been linear and offshoots just aren't considered. There is a linear history from [Monteverdi](#) to [Boulez](#), let's say. Whatever filtered off to the edges isn't taken into consideration. Whereas the history of visual arts is so multi-branched. I look at the visual artists historically as having always been in a complex dialogue with this more three-dimensional history.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Maybe with music coming out of conservatories, maybe it's more closed to these deeper conversations.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Yeah, I think so.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: It's funny. Being an archivist—I'm the archivist for [The Kitchen](#)—is one of the best idea/information-support systems to my work, though of course, I never feel like I have enough time or energy to be as creative as I wish once I finish the 9-5 day. My experience of working with audio archives really came about through [Chrissie Iles](#) at the [Whitney](#) who gave me the opportunity to curate the sound show for [The American Century Part 2: 1950-2000](#), which suddenly gave me the reason to dig into collections and histories and learn a lot in a short period of time. I had done similar work with video archives, working at [Electronic Arts Intermix](#) for 12 years but this focus on audio histories, re-mastering and prolonged listening opportunities was new and very informative, as well as inspiring. I recently got second hand that someone said that they love my work and they thought that there was a distinct relationship between my archival interests and my creative work, that there was a response and interest there.

I was giving another talk, actually at [Tony Conrad](#)'s class in Buffalo, and I said I did this piece in relation to [Donald Judd](#) and Tony threw up his hands and said, "You're so obsessed with the past." I froze because I respect him so greatly, but I also know he's coming from a different place. I guess it's the recent past that I'm at least interested in, if not obsessed with.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Well, Tony's obsessed with the past.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I was just about to go on stage once and he gave me this long lecture about [Pythagoras](#)'s father, and it was unbelievably fascinating, but I was also in that pre-panic of going out in front of a sold-out audience and sort of wanting to go into a cocoon and getting this amazing history lesson. So yeah, he's got a hold on the past.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I just did this concert this weekend which I loved doing. I'm not a regular member of [this project](#) but I sit in sometimes with [The Text of Light](#), which is this incredible [Stan Brakhage](#) abstract film with a group of musicians improvising, not a soundtrack but a parallel piece. One really nice thing about the staging this weekend, totally on the other side of the equation, is that at the [Walker Arts Center](#) in Minneapolis they have these huge screen so the film was just enormous, like you were going to see a Stephen Spielberg movie or something, and we were these darkened, barely visible five people below. There's really some nice freedom in that; you're not being looked at. It liberates you from one of the aspects of being a performing artist—you're usually not allowed to bend over and be invisible. It was totally anti-staging, but there was staging in the sense that there was this beautiful visual object going on. It's true that staging or costume or visual aspects to performance are really a genre-specific aspect of a performance. There are things that are acceptable for rock, or acceptable for music theater, in general I guess that's true because the music is so bad...

STEPHEN VITIELLO: I used to do concerts for silent film or re-scored films and I was always very frustrated that there was something about it that was very performative that I was doing or that the people I was performing with were doing and that people wouldn't see it. I was doing a concert at the Brooklyn Museum with projected films and someone who was actually a true rock star came up to me and said, "Where did you record that soundtrack?" In a way it was great because he must have enjoyed the music and he couldn't see it. [Andrea Parkins](#) was playing accordion, Ursula Wiskoski was

playing electric cello, I was playing mostly pedals and feedback but also guitar. We were moving all over the place to keep all our loops going and watching the film and watching the audience, and that element was sort of lost because the visual element dominated people's minds. It's tricky because there's also something iconic about Stan Brakhage because of the body of his work and the beauty of it, maybe even more so at this moment because he just died, and to put it up that big... I don't know the answer to how to balance this.

MARINA ROSENFELD: Under the circumstance it was really right, I think to make this visual and this audio. Another thing that I've been thinking about for a long time to explore in my turntable installations with photographs is just this juxtaposition that creates...the human brain starts to beam these two things back and forth and make a connection with that. It's not necessarily the job of the artist to tell you what those two relationships are or what that joint relationship is.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Probably almost every time I've worked on a film or video soundtrack, people think, wow you've timed those edits so tightly. Very often, it doesn't work like that. There's a remarkable potential for synchronicity when the two artists are in some way in-tune, ideally, respectful of each other's work and mediums. Even when there isn't, the room for sound and image to inform each other is so great. Ideally, the sound is bringing out some emotional detail that the image holds or implies. The risk is always to tell too much with the sound. The greatest goal for me is to find a strong line where sound and image are weaving in and out of foreground and background. Each with it's own moment to shine apart and then together.

MARINA ROSENFELD: And sometimes it's uncanny that the first idea you come up with seems to be so much better than subsequent attempts to mastermind the process. I think it's because the brain is wrapping itself around something fresh, and after that you just start tinkering. It may not be that the first was the best juxtaposition but you have this feeling about it like "I wish I remembered what that first thing I threw down there was..."

STEPHEN VITIELLO: That's a vital part of so many histories. Every time I ever played in a band, it was best before we were really tight and formed. And as soon as someone outside the band got interested or we heard some producer was interested in us, then we became really bad! I think people's 4-track demos are more often so much deeper and more emotional than the versions on records. And when you're looking at visual artists, the first instinct is often where the depth of the idea is. How you keep that is a critical thing to what we make and what we hear and what we see... Trusting the core of the idea as being relevant and not "too simple." When I was working on [my residency in the World Trade Center](#), I had the microphones on the window and the sound coming through. I kept thinking, I had to make it "fuller" in order to be a real installation: add images, lighting, something. [Beverly Semmes](#), an installation artist and friend at the time, came up for a studio visit and convinced me to take everything away but the microphones and the sound, which is all I had been after until I started feeling the "stage fright" of the upcoming [Open Studio Exhibition](#).

Audiences

MARINA ROSENFELD: I think it's great when there are people in the audience who are members of the cognoscenti and who are keyed into these historical currents. But it's just as important for me, if not more important, to reach the non-cognoscenti. I just don't see what the point of it is unless you do. The kind of anti-populist argument I think is that you have to tone down what you do or in some way provide some sort of tempering aspect to it to appeal outside of a certain audience and I truly do not believe that's true.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Me neither.

MARINA ROSENFELD: One strategy for me has been if you're not ready to be part of the audience for that piece, do you want to be in the piece? That's a whole other level of engagement with a non-new music specific audience or a non-contemporary art specific audience. But that's certainly not the only way. I think it's extremely desirable that a work contains multiple avenues of entrance, that multiple doors are open.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Otherwise we're in our same little small group forever.

MARINA ROSENFELD: And who cares! I'd love to have you in my audience but if the whole audience is you...

STEPHEN VITIELLO: Then it's useless...

MARINA ROSENFELD: Yes.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: One of the greatest breakthroughs with audience for me was having these two installations in [Marfa](#), Texas, last year which is definitely a place that has a deep art history but also a local Mexican history and a local ranchers' history. I had this large space, an old [Judd](#) space and had gone out with these cowboys and recorded coyotes. What became really interesting to me was actually the coyote calls—these little whistles with a picture of a smiling bunny [on them]—that actually made the sound of a dying baby bunny or a woodpecker with a broken leg screeching which would then attract the coyotes. I ended up trashing the coyote sounds and just making a piece out of reprocessing these calls in this really big, big room. I left and when I came back, this young guard, who was really this kind of sweet heavy metal kid, hunched over and said "Let me show you something." He was searching through pictures of people that came in and there were Mexican cowboys laying on the floor with their cowboy hats tilted over their faces listening... If anything, I expected to go there and connect to this known quantity of an art crowd, and I think this is what's given me a lot of momentum to move forward.

Curating the project at the [Whitney](#) I really expected it to be important to influence the museum and connect for the curators the idea that sound does have a connection to contemporary art. That a work like [Steve Reich's](#) *Come Out* directly influenced [Lip Sync](#) by [Bruce Nauman](#). There's been this dialogue.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I think it did influence at least one curator at the [Whitney](#), [Debra Singer](#), to take sound and the performance of sound, even strictly speaking music, seriously in the context of the museum. And it's been beneficial for ourselves and quite a number of other artists.

STEPHEN VITIELLO: What was surprising to me was how much it connected to a larger audience. It was a week-long show, and there was a really good article in *The New York Times* that talked about it and contextualized it. A lot of what was happening was you'd have this group, it seemed like there was a whole group of Bard graduate kids who sort of knew what they were coming to listen to, and then the door would open and there'd be an older couple wearing suits who looked like they'd either come from work or were on their way to work and they saw this room full of people laying down and they sat down. There was such a distinction. You'd look around the room and there'd be people from all sorts of different places who were listening. It was very much a communal environment that I never expected. I sort of thought that if I was very lucky that group of graduate students would take it to the next level, you know listening to [John Cage](#) would take them to another step. But what I didn't realize was that it would help build a larger audience. I've seen this with video art over time too. In the mid '80s, if you'd go into a room where there was a video art show, there'd only be a couple of people there and one of them would be sleeping. But over time, it was put out more and more and more and a large audience came to it that either found it and knew it was interesting or had such exposure to it over time that they got into that language. My hope is that with all the things coming up in New York this spring—the conference at [Cooper Union](#), the stuff at [The Kitchen](#) and the [Sculpture Center](#), [Diapason](#), [Art in General](#)—it's going to do that again. They'll be a home for people who are interested in this but also people will be caught by off-guard or by stumbling to the wrong room, or go because they're interested in an architect and then not only get exposed to that architect but to connections between architecture and new music which is what the Cooper Union conference is specifically about. It will just keep growing.

MARINA ROSENFELD: I hadn't put it all together that all these things were happening at the same time. It's very encouraging. I think also it's also such a bad time because of the political situation right now. There are so many reasons to stay home; perhaps, in the spirit of paradox, that's why there seems to be a renewed interest in going out. And that's always good for music because one thing about music is that it still has one foot in the world of going out and being something special. Now, we can have music everywhere...

STEPHEN VITIELLO: But it's a very different thing to enter an immersive environment or something that you're working on which has a performative quality and a very striking visual. It's just not the same taking that CD home into your private shell, or even worse putting it on an mp3 in your iPod.