

**"THE LUNATICS ARE
ON THE LOOSE ..."**

*European Fluxus Festivals
1962-1977*



"THE LUNATICS ARE ON THE LOOSE ..."

**EUROPEAN
FLUXUS
FESTIVALS**

1962-1977

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KLEINES SOMMERFEST: APRÈS JOHN CAGE WUPPERTAL, 9 JUNE 1962

Henar Rivière Ríos

In the beginning of the year 1962, architect Rolf Jährling asked Nam June Paik to hold a concert in Jährling's Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal.¹ The gallery space was conceived as a "germ cell of rebellion" aiming at the renaissance of modern art in Germany after World War II.² The activities of South Korean composer Paik, already known as "l'enfant terrible" of the experimental music and art scene of the Rhineland, certainly seemed to match these aims.³ However, Paik was immersed at the time in his research on electronics that would soon turn him into the pioneer of Video Art, and thus considered his time inadequate to prepare a musical evening alone. Instead, he offered the gallery owner an alternative: George Maciunas and Ben Patterson could put together a programme for him.⁴ The Lithuanian-born Maciunas, recently arrived from New York, was introduced to Jährling as an "amazing American" and editor-in-chief of a magazine of new arts called *Fluxus*.⁵ Patterson, an American composer and double bass player living at that time in Paris, had been active in Rhineland's experimental scene since 1960.⁶ Jährling received Paik's suggestion positively and, consequently, a "small thing in the small town of Wuppertal" was organised. The evening would come to be known as "the first Fluxus Manifestation in the world",⁷ although it would not bear the name "Fluxus" just yet.

Rolf Jährling's plan was to host the concert on the occasion of the opening of the gallery's summer group exhibition of painting and sculpture. For the evening, he chose the gentle format of a *Kleines Sommerfest* ('Little Summer Festival'), a strategy he had already used as a means of smoothing the way for a favourable public reception of previous shows.⁸ Within this framework, the actual concert was named with the more precise and descriptive title *Après John Cage* according to George Maciunas's programmatic intentions. In preparation, the "amazing American", Patterson and Paik agreed upon a roughly forty minute long programme. The three travelled to Wuppertal for the fixed

date, Maciunas coming from Wiesbaden at his own expense and Patterson from Paris at Jährling's, carrying with him his valuable double bass.⁹ Paik, on his part, brought along with him a few other colleagues to the soirée.¹⁰

To start the festive opening of his summer exhibition, Jährling introduced first the painters and sculptors whose works were exhibited in the various rooms and within the garden of his villa, an art nouveau style building that housed his gallery on the outskirts of Wuppertal.¹¹ The guests, who had been personally invited, congregated around him sitting in chairs or crowding at the doorjambes and on the stairway, their laughs and applause celebrating his friendly speech.¹² When he finally came to announce the concert *Après John Cage*, his hesitations gradually increased to the amusement of the audience: the musicians would perform pieces that would go beyond the work of the most important contemporary composer, named John Cage – seeking Paik's approval, he asked whether he had expressed it all right. He was not sure about how to pronounce the name of Maciunas, nor did he know if it were possible to subscribe to Maciunas's magazine *Fluxus*, which was intended for publication in the near future.¹³ This magazine was initially planned as a series of editions which, as the attendees could see in the brochures they had been given, was of international scope, reaching from the U.S. and Europe to Japan and Russia, and dedicated to a broad range of artistic practices and concepts, as well as to philosophy: "anti-art, concept art, automatism, bruitism, brutalism, dada(ism), indeterminacy, concretism, lettrism, nihilism; theater, prose, poetry, happenings, philosophy, plastic arts, music, cinema, dance". As if encouraging the readers to flow freely from one of these categories to another, the polysemic origin of the series's title was illustrated in the brochure through the different dictionary meanings of the word "flux".¹⁴

Jährling's talk continued after renewed applause, going now through the programme of the evening, which had been modified after being printed on the invitation leaflets. The gallery owner imparted to his audience the changes that he and the *Fluxus* editor-in-chief had jotted down on one of the copies. Initially scheduled as a concert of

compositions by Benjamin Patterson and Maciunas himself, three new works by American composers Terry Riley, Dick Higgins and Jed Curtis would be added. Additionally, the two pieces by Patterson would alter their order and Maciunas's "Lippen Musik" ('Lips Music') would change its name to *Homage to Adriano Olivetti*.¹⁵ Such spontaneity in the organisation might be ascribed to the fact that this was the first event arranged in Europe under Maciunas's supervision, but, in actuality, it was to become a characteristic mark of most of the following events.

The concert *Après John Cage* opened with the reading of George Maciunas's paradigmatic text "Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art". German theatre-director Carlheinz Caspari (also known as Arthus C. Caspari) declaimed it in its German version 'Neo-Dada in den Vereinigten Staaten', his words emphasised by a large chart being unfolded in the background by Nam June Paik.¹⁶ The listeners were thus lectured for ten minutes on the theoretical foundations that supported the experimental artistic practices they were about to witness. The neo-dadaist developments, explained Maciunas's writing, ranged "from 'time' arts to 'space' arts", encompassing virtually all artistic forms of expression and blurring the boundaries among them. On top of that, the developments were linked to the concept of concretism in its different degrees. This latter notion implied the rejection of the abstractionism and artificiality of, for example, "a note sounded on a piano keyboard or a bel-canto voice", in favour of concrete sounds "for instance, produced by striking the same piano itself with a hammer or kicking its underside". Within the concretist spectrum, "the furthest step" that reached even beyond the "method concretism" of "indeterminacy systems", was "a kind of art-nihilism" or "anti-art", which sought to "approach closer affinity with concrete reality", breaking "the artificial separation of a performer from the audience, or creator and spectator, or life and art".¹⁷ Once Caspari's reading concluded, the actual concert pieces began, staging varied levels of concretism that would illustrate Maciunas's ideas.

Benjamin Patterson took a few seconds to tune the double bass and then began his *Duo – 1961 for Voice and a String Instrument* (1961) accompanied by American baritone William Pearson. The graphic score

of this composition was written along the lines of new music, especially influenced by John Cage's principle of Indeterminacy. Patterson's score consists of different visual signs suggesting sounds and actions for voice and mouth, as well as for a "prepared" string instrument.¹⁸ Bartok pizzicatos, nail pizzicatos and harmonics among other sounds on the prepared contrabass would merge with various kinds of mouth-produced noises: blowing and sucking, tongue fluttering and slapping, throat inhaling and exhaling.¹⁹ On that summer evening in the Galerie Parnass, the singer also interspersed, among those sounds, a broad range and wide amplitude of vocals in an occasionally syllabic and meaningless chant (fig. 1).

The audience that had mainly remained silent during the approximately nine minutes of the performance, received the piece with cordial applause and prepared itself for another in the same vein. However, the following *VARIATIONS FOR DOUBLE-BASS* (1961) would offer them something considerably different. For a further nine minutes, Patterson alone played his contrabass with a red feather duster (fig. 4), woodworking clamps, colourful plastic butterflies and eatables, among other quotidian materials hitherto classed as extra-musical (figs. 2–6). Rapidly developing the idea of the prepared string instrument of the previous piece, the composer entered in this way a new field, where not just the distorted sounds of the double bass, but especially the nature and variety of the manipulations that produced them came to the foreground. In Patterson's score, such manipulations or *Variations* consisted of seventeen brief numbers written mainly as text instructions featuring little musical notation. Going from the ironic performance of "quasi-webern sounds" (sic),²⁰ they extended, for instance, to the use of the contrabass f-hole as a mailbox drop for postcards (fig. 6). Actions like this imply a treatment of the instrument that deprives it of its cultural aura, downgrading it to the rank of common object. Others went further to the limit of aggression: the performer balanced his expensive contrabass upside down on its scroll on the stairs of the villa (fig. 2) and "agitated" its strings with a newspaper holder filled with different sorts of paper (fig. 3).²¹ All of this took place in a light and humorous manner, giving rise to the crescent hilar-

ity of the spectators, whose laughter, hand clapping and "bravos" also played a part in the rendition throughout which just a few tones were to be heard. Instead, several squeaks, creaks, knocks with knuckles on the contrabass and the lengthy whistling of a balloon deflating through a whistle, expanded sporadically through the room. Dense, the silence was filled by the visual stimuli of the executed actions and employed tools: gold-face paper, a hammer, a Japanese hand fan, etc.²²

Subsequent to Patterson's performance, Caspari announced the premiere of Maciunas's *Homage to Adriano Olivetti* (later retitled again as *IN MEMORIAM TO ADRIANO OLIVETTI*, 1962), for which "any used tape from an Olivetti adding machine may be used as a score".²³ The version staged at Parnass was a "chorale" of smacking lips and tongues, different kinds of lip-farts, blowing noises, pig-like sounds and wet nose sniffs, interpreted by Maciunas himself together with Patterson, Caspari, Paik and one of the friends Paik had brought along with him that evening, Tomas Schmit.²⁴ This piece, much shorter than Patterson's, lasted for scarcely two minutes and openly amused the audience.

Murmurs, titters, a faint rustling of what was perhaps crumpled paper followed – it was Terry Riley's *EAR PIECE* (1960), which was, as Jährling had announced in his opening speech, performed by the guests themselves. The audience members had been provided with copies of the score, where the following instructions were to be read: "the performer takes any object(s) such as a piece of paper cardboard plastic etc and places it on his ear(s) he then produces the sound by rubbing scratching tapping or tearing it or simply dragging it across his ear he also may just hold it there it may be played in counterpoint with any other piece or sound source [...] the duration of the performance is up to the performer ..." (sic).²⁵

Applause, a shush, a sudden yell and laughter with renewed applause traced Dick Higgins's *Constellation No. 2* (1959). The rendition did not take more than a minute on this particular occasion. The text instructions for this piece indeed left the door open to variable durations, as well as to diverse kinds and quantities of sounds. Both by choice and by chance (rolling of dice), these variables were to be determined by the performers themselves. One performer had to act as the

"leader", moving his arms "through a complete clockwise circle", so that they could be read together as if they were the second hand of a watch.²⁶

Last came the grand finale of the evening. At the very moment when Jed Curtis began performing his *Tribut [an größten lebenden Komponisten in Deutschland]* (1962), not even his colleagues knew what he was about to do. He had prepared himself for the occasion by buying in a low-cost supermarket two hundred pieces of the cheapest candies he could find, blue plastic conical goblets approximately two centimetres tall, filled with chocolate and supplied with an attached little spoon that could be broken off to eat the filling. He had put all the candies in a paper bag and also brought with him a music stand, which he had placed in the performance area. Then, the action started: "I was at the entrance of the house, which is quite a distance away, I don't know, ten meters, twenty meters, something, and I walked along the house, through the kitchen, through the [drawing] room, like a Noh priest, a Noh performer, very, very slow, and I had the sack in my hand, and I had no emotion on my face, nothing, and the people were talking, 'What is he doing?', 'How long will it take to come up here?', 'Come on!', 'Hurry up!', but I ignored them, I just kept moving, [...] it was a Fluxus performance: nobody can tell you to stop performing, and after, I don't know, ten minutes or something, I finally got up to the middle and very slowly I put the sack on the music stand, the music stand was very tilted so [...] the sack could balance on the music stand [...] and then I just concentrated on the sack like an old master, like a Zen philosopher, putting all of my soul, and all of my energy, and all of my love, and all of my hate, and all of my sex, and all of my boredom, everything I was, into that sack, from my soul, and the energy kept building up in me, but you wouldn't see me moving, I was not shaking or anything, I was perfectly still and then, after a long time, I exploded, and I don't even know what I did to explode, I mean, I don't know what the movements were, but what I do know is the explosion only took half a second and the sack and everything in it went in every direction throughout the whole room, and at first people were afraid, they thought I would be violent, I don't know what they thought, but then they started picking

up these little chocolate toys, and looking at them, and then everybody started laughing, and so one person tried it [...], broke the spoon and ate the chocolate, and 'Ja gut!', 'Ja lecker!' so, everyone in the room, they ate the chocolate and then [...] I bowed and I walked off a little bit faster, and I never smiled, I only had my explosion, I was so serious about this!"²⁷

The concert *Après John Cage* had culminated. Jazz music relaxed the atmosphere and Jährling's guests took the opportunity to chat with each other and with the painters and sculptors. Some of the elegantly dressed ladies were wearing a sort of paperboard bangle (fig. 7). In it, *An Anthology*, another publication on which George Maciunas was working, was announced.²⁸

1

Jährling's invitation to Paik is datable thanks to the audiotape of the evening *Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage*, on which he says, "ursprünglich hatte ich vor einem halben Jahr Herrn Paik gebeten etwas zu musizieren" ('originally six months ago, I had requested that Mr. Paik make some music'), *Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage*, 9 June 1962 [Audiotape], The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2

Noemi Smolik, 'Rolf Jährlings Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal. Keimzelle der Auflehnung', *sediment*, 1 (1994), pp. 29–30 (p. 29).

3

Ernst Thomas, 'Weltmusik mit "Avantgarde"'. Das 34. Fest der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Neue Musik in Köln', *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 22 June 1960, p. 24.

4

Nam June Paik, *Beuys Vox, 1961–1986*, exh. cat. (Seoul: Won Gallery and Hyundai Gallery, n.d. [1990]), p. 11. On Patterson's involvement in the planning of the concert, see Nam June Paik in letter to Rolf Jährling, 21 May 1962, *sediment*, 9 (2005), p. 60. Furthermore, the intercession of art critic and former gallery owner Jean-Pierre Wilhelm seems to have been crucial to render the soirée possible, see Susanne Rennert, "'We have time". Musik, Fluxus, Video: Paiks Zeit in Düsseldorf, im Rheinland', in *Nam June Paik*, ed. by Susanne Rennert and Sok-Kyung Lee, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), pp. 55–68 (p. 61).

5

Paik in letter to Jährling (see note 4).

6

Cf. *Das Atelier Mary Bauermeister in Köln 1960–1962. Intermedial, kontrovers, experimentell*, ed. by Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln (Köln: Emons Verlag, 1993).

7

Paik (see note 4), p. 11.

8

See Rolf Jährling in interview with Heinz Linnerz in 'Der Amateur und sein Parnass', *sediment*, 1 (1994), pp. 33–36 (p. 35).

9

On the practical details, see Paik in letter to Jährling (see note 4); and Ben Patterson in letter to Rolf Jährling, 28 Mai 1962, *sediment*, 9 (2005), p. 61.

10

'Zusagen zum Sommerfest', manuscript listing the confirmations of attendance at the *Kleines Sommerfest*, Zentralarchiv des Internationalen Kunsthandels e.V., Köln (ZADIK, A5.V.3).

11

More precisely Wuppertal-Elberfeld.

12

That guests were personally invited is deducible from the invitation cards, which were designed to be addressed to individuals. Invitation card, reproduced in *Fluxus Scores and Instructions. The Transformative Years. "Make a salad."*, ed. by Jon Hendricks, with Marianne Bech and Media Farzin, exh. cat. (Detroit: The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection; Roskilde: Museet for Samtidskunst, 2008), p. 152.

13

Kleines Sommerfest: Après John Cage [Audiotape] (see note 1).

14

George Maciunas, *Fluxus (Brochure Prospectus for Fluxus Year-*

boxes), version A (1962), facsimile in *Stationen der Moderne. Katalog epochaler Kunstausstellungen in Deutschland 1910–1962*, ed. by Eberhard Roters, exh. cat. (Köln: Walther König, 1988). For more details on this document, see Jon Hendricks, 'Fluxus Version A, Wiesbaden 1962', *ibid.*, pp. 201–208 (pp. 206–208) [Commentary volume]; and Owen F. Smith, *Fluxus: The History of an Attitude* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1998), pp. 59–60.

15

See invitation card reproduced in *Fluxus Scores and Instructions* (see note 12), p. 152.

16

See George Maciunas, 'Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art' (1962), in *Fluxus. Selections from the Gilbert and Lila Silverman Collection*, ed. by Jon Hendricks and Clive Phillpot, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988), pp. 25–27; and George Maciunas, 'Neo-Dada in den Vereinigten Staaten' (1962), in *Happenings. Fluxus. Pop Art. Nouveau Réalisme. Eine Dokumentation*, ed. by Jürgen Becker and Wolf Vostell (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1965), pp. 192–195. On the large chart held by Paik, see Astrit Schmidt-Burkhardt, *Maciunas' Learning machines. From Art History to a Chronology of Fluxus*, exh. cat. (Berlin: Vice Versa Verlag, 2003), pp. 15–16 and 114–115.

17

Maciunas, 'Neo-Dada in Music, Theater, Poetry, Art', *ibid.*, pp. 25–27.

18

The technique of "preparing" instruments was first used with pianos and it was John Cage who coined the term "prepared piano". It consists of altering the sound of the instrument by

placing objects (preparations) between or on the strings (and on the hammers or dampers in the case of pianos).

19

See complete score in Ben Patterson, *The Black & White File* (Wiesbaden, Erbenheim: Ben Patterson, 1999).

20

Ibid.

21

Ibid.

22

Both the *Duo* and the *VARIATIONS* were released on a CD by Algo Marghen using the recording of the Wuppertal concert, see Ben Patterson, *Early Works* (Milano: Algo Marghen, 1999). The series of photographs taken by Anneliese and Rolf Jährling during the soirée constitute an invaluable graphical documentation of the rendition of both of Patterson's pieces. However, they describe mainly the *VARIATIONS*, depicting many of the actions indicated in its score, a fact that has hitherto been overlooked, since the pictures have usually been indistinctly identified as corresponding to both performances. Cf. *Treffpunkt Parnass Wuppertal: 1949–1965*, ed. by Bill Boltzer and Alfons W. Biermann, exh. cat. (Köln: Rheinland Verlag, 1980), pp. 194–195.

23

George Maciunas, *IN MEMORIAM TO ADRIANO OLIVETTI* (1962), copy of the typescript, Jean Brown Papers, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

24

On the first contact between Tomas Schmit and Nam June Paik and on his participation in the soirée, see Tomas Schmit and Wilma Lukatsch, '1. Montag,

den 6. Juni 2005' (2005), in Tomas Schmit and Wilma Lukatsch, *Dreizehn Montagsgespräche* (Berlin: Wiens Verlag, 2008), pp. 10–37 (pp. 22–23). There is another performer ("Alvermann", most likely Hans Peter Alvermann, who was an artist of the Galerie Parnass) listed in the annotated invitation card, but no evidence of his actual participation in the concert has been found.

25

Terry Riley, *EAR PIECE* (1960), in *An Anthology*, ed. by La Monte Young (New York: La Monte Young, 1963).

26

Dick Higgins, *Constellation No. 2* (1959), in Dick Higgins, *Selected Early Works, 1955–1964* (Berlin: Edition ARS VIVAL & Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1982), pp. 3–4.

27

Jed Curtis in telephone interview with Henar Rivière Rios, 1 March 2012.

28

An Anthology (see note 25).

Fig. 1 Ben Patterson and William Pearson performing Ben Patterson's *Duo – 1961 for Voice and a String Instrument*, 9 June 1962



Fig. 3 Ben Patterson performing *VARIATION XI.2* from his *VARIATIONS FOR DOUBLE-BASS*, 9 June 1962



Fig. 2 Ben Patterson performing *VARIATION VIII* from his *VARIATIONS FOR DOUBLE-BASS*, 9 June 1962

Figs. 2, 4, 5 photos: Anneliese or Rolf Jährling, 2012. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York / Scala Florence
 Figs. 1, 3, 6-7 photos: Anneliese or Rolf Jährling, Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels, Cologne



Figs. 4-5 Ben Patterson performing *VARIATION XI.3* and another *VARIATION*, from his *VARIATIONS FOR DOUBLE-BASS*, 9 June 1962



Fig. 6 Ben Patterson performing
VARIATION XI.3, from his
VARIATIONS FOR DOUBLE-
BASS, 9 June 1962



Fig. 7 Guests, 9 June 1962

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