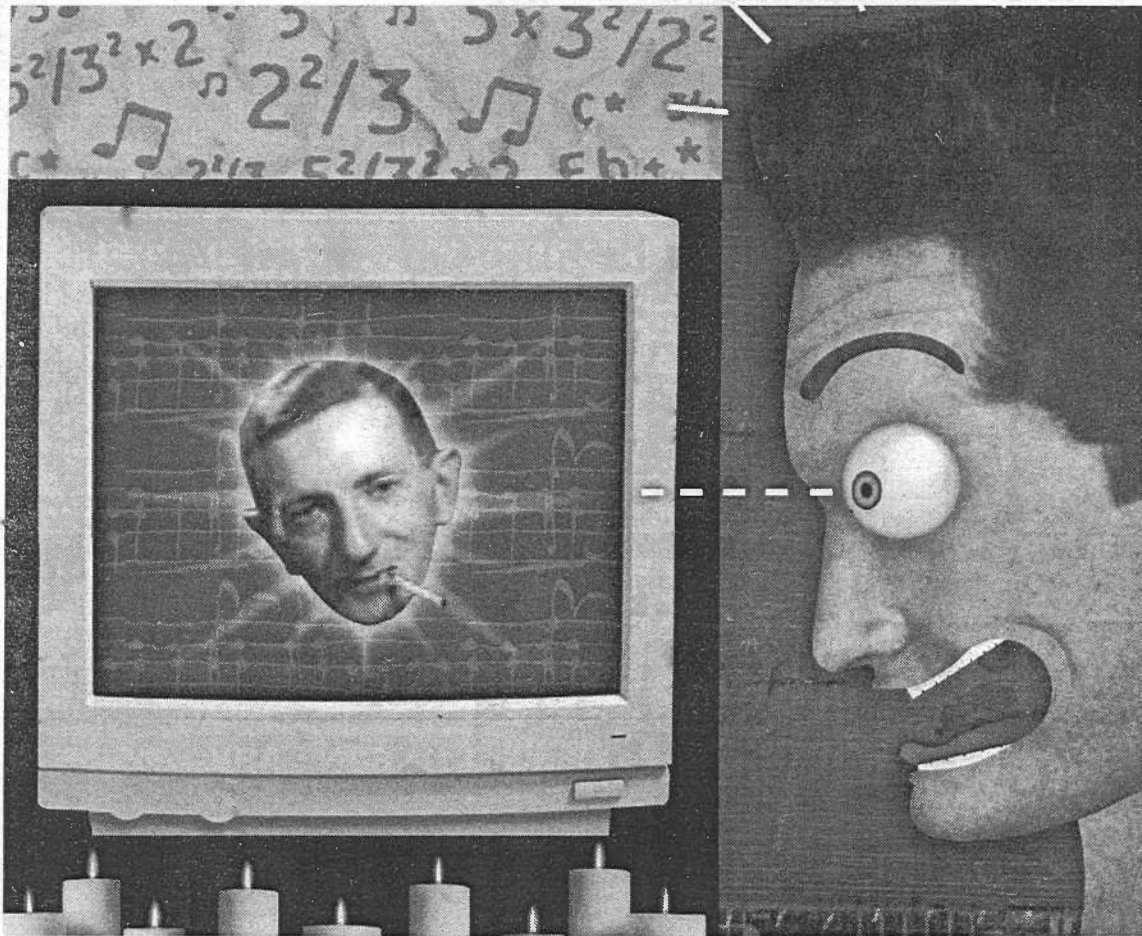


## KYLE GANN

*New Music on the Internet*

# Weirdos Like Me



JOHN UELAND

That sold me on the Web. Once you sift through the 97 per cent of it that's trying to sell you something, it can be a meeting place for weirdos like me. I started searching every fringe figure that the mainstream publishing world won't pay attention to: Ivan Wyschnegradsky, Kaikhosru Sorabji, Harry Partch, Giacinto Scelsi. The home pages devoted to them are invariably amazing, uploaded by fanatics evidently frustrated by their inability to publish their knowledge in any more profitable form, and generous with biographical details, early and late photos, work lists. Webheads galvanize around ideas that mainstream publications won't touch. You can't convince an editor that just intonation (pure tuning) is more than a specialist's oddity, but on the Net it attracts endless debates and lively manifestos. Downtown improvisation, ignored in books, elicits dozens of painstakingly annotated discographies for John Zorn, Elliott Sharp, and others.

By comparison, most pages on better-known musical subjects are shallow. The established composers have theirs sponsored by publishers or universities, which means that you get, courtesy of Schirmer's, an exhaustive list of Milton Babbitt's honorary degrees and no works he's written later than 1967. Famous figures close to the pop world have utilitarian fan pages of variable quality; the most impressive I've seen is Michael Nyman's ([www.netpoint.be/abc/music/nyman/](http://www.netpoint.be/abc/music/nyman/)), the most helpful

much-desired information virtually for free. Five years ago I couldn't get my book *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge University Press) published in America. Today, I doubt I'd succeed in Europe. If an editor hasn't heard of Morton Feldman, he or she assumes that you'll never sell 2000 copies of a book about him. But that, I'm convinced, is because editors aren't familiar with the new terrain the Internet has mapped out: a landscape not of raised cities of knowledge that you can see by looking around, but of deep ravines and canyons in which knowledge collects.

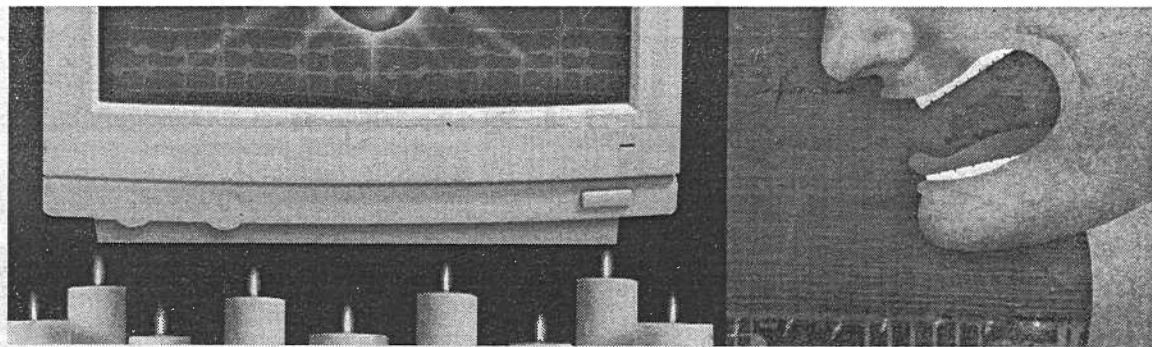
And so, in a world desperately starved for information about what's already out there, book editors try to appeal to a mainstream thousands of miles wide but by now less than an inch deep. They approach me to suggest books that duplicate knowledge that's already published. They know those books sold in the past, they think they'll sell again. What the print media ought to be learning from the Internet is to diversify, to become less conservative, to take risks and seek out those subcultures, linking them together. Instead, they're doing the opposite rapidly expanding their definitions of what is too esoteric to publish. Perhaps it is inevitable that as a new medium emerges, the visionaries flock to it leaving the old media to those who can't see above the bottom line. But that's no reason for the old media to commit suicide.

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## Web's Best

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- ▶ 205.216.138.19/~websites/jszanto/welcome.html **Harry Partch's more laissez-faire disciples chattily debate his self-appointed fascist priesthood.**
- ▶ www.dnai.com/~jinetwk/index.html **The ur-pages for alternativè tuning aficionados.**
- ▶ www.pratique.fr/~chatham **Weekly outbursts by Downtown's original guitar banger, Rhys Chatham, from exile in Paris.**
- ▶ www.hyperreal.com/music/artists/brian\_eno **Fun, but couldn't Eno provide his real lyrics instead of having fans erratically transcribe them?**
- ▶ cmp-rs.music.uiuc.edu/~martiran/index.html **A son's loving tribute to Salvatore Martirano, explaining his Sal-Mar construction and MIDI instruments in welcome detail.**
- ▶ www.music.mcgill.ca/~schulman/sorabji.html **Not only a life and discography for Kaikhosru Sorabji, Parsi composer of gargantuan piano works, but juicy snippets of his criticism.**
- ▶ www.medieval.org/music/modern/scelsi.html **Primitive but thorough site on the complete works of reclusive Italian mystic Giacinto Scelsi.** —K.G.

It took Alain Daniélou to overcome my skepticism about the Internet. My criterion was that, for the Web's interminable downloads to be worth waiting for, it was going to have to add musical information to my life that I couldn't get from standard reference works and a perusal of my CD collection. I have no interest in the Web as glorified cybercatalogue, a list of available products surrounded by hype and fancy graphics. And for the first few months, that's all I found. Most pages seemed put up by record companies or publishers whose minions scanned liner notes to write the blurbs. Click on a composer's "Biography" and you'd find "Joseph Schwantner was born in Chicago and is currently Professor of Composition at the Eastman School of Music." Or else you'd reach some moron's inarticulate opinion of what Brian Eno's best album was.

But then I stumbled across the Alain Daniélou Web page (www.imagine.net.fr/.html). Ever heard of him? Of course not. No one has, at least not for musical reasons. He *did* write the first translation of the *Kama Sutra*, so he holds a certain prestige in sex circles (whatever those might be). He was also the Western authority on Indian and Chinese musics, and published, in 1958, a *Tableau Comparatif des Intervalles Musicaux*, a book of page after page after page of fractions defining all possible musical pitch ratios using

prime numbers smaller than 512, along with citations of which musicians (usually Arabic) introduced them into performance or theory. The book is La Monte Young's bible, and holds a signal position in the history of minimalism. I had searched for Daniélou in libraries and bookstores almost in vain. And there, on the Web, was a complete list of his 60-plus books published in French, English, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, and Dutch.

I found out that Daniélou had died only three years ago at the age of 87. I read, for the first time, about the microtonal electronic keyboard instrument he invented, called the Semantic: containing a Kurzweil sound generator and two keyboards of 105 pegs each, it traverses six octaves of a 36-tone scale chosen from among the 53 nonequally spaced pitches of what he considered the perfect scale. The Web page also lists all 53 pitches, along with what Daniélou felt was the "emotional content" of each interval. A 9/8 interval from C to D (the ratio refers to the frequencies in cycles per second) is "vigorous, confident," a flat minor seventh of 225/128 is "hopeless, resigned." Eyes glazed over yet? But suddenly it connected with what Young writes in his equally obscure theory of tuning, *Vertical Hearing, or Hearing in the Present Tense*, about each harmonically related interval "creating its own unique feeling." Daniélou provides the primeval theoretical link between Indian music and minimalism.

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These fissures in the Web that fill up with fanatics point the direction the print media ought to be moving in—and like lemmings, they're galloping in the opposite direction. Sure, the Internet reveals a balkanized society in which conclaves of specialists talk shop. But the Net's subcultures make up in passion for what they lack in width, and my theory is that they represent new ideas bubbling up from the collective unconscious that may become part of the next millennium's worldview. They certainly represent deeply cared-for fields of thought whose curators are jumping at the chance to disperse

books that duplicate knowledge that's already published. They know those books sold in the past, they think they'll sell again. What the print media ought to be learning from the Internet is to diversify, to become less conservative, to take risks and seek out those subcultures, linking them together. Instead, they're doing the opposite: rapidly expanding their definitions of what is too esoteric to publish. Perhaps it is inevitable that as a new medium emerges, the visionaries flock to it, leaving the old media to those who can't see above the bottom line. But that's no reason for the old media to commit suicide.

Partly out of my own frustration, partly to prove for journalism's sake the proposition that anyone can get on the Web, I created my own home page (home.earthlink.net/~kgann/) with the help of my brother Darryl, a computer-graphics designer. Alongside some uncharacteristic but necessary self-promotion, I packed it with information I'd published that isn't easily available, in keeping with my vision of what the Net ought to be: a hip, omnivorous, and self-updating encyclopedia. I uploaded the once secret tuning of La Monte Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano*, and also a page-within-a-page for Conlon Nancarrow, with a chronology of his life and complete list of works. (I resisted, but came to understand, the confessional impulse to add photos of my cat and a running list of what I have for lunch each day.)

Did you know that Nancarrow once wrote a piece of musique concrète, and that he has three new player-piano pieces that aren't recorded yet? I hope someone finds that as fascinating as I find the extensive home page for 19th-century Russian composer Cesar Cui, or the Transcribing and Reading White Mensural Notation home page with examples from Petrucci's *Odhecaton* of 1501. We fanatics have got to stick together, for we're the ones keeping the culture alive. ♦