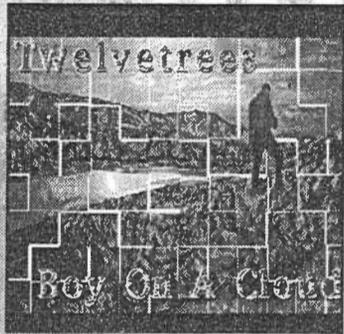


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# Everything Is a Loudspeaker



Audience members engage the performance of *Rainforest IV* at Lincoln Center.

David Tudor's *Rainforest*  
Clark Studio Theater

**BY KYLE GANN**

**E**lectronic music doesn't possess many icons one could call lovable, but it does have David Tudor's upside-down oil drum. The oil drum hangs from the ceiling, and you listen to it by standing inside. So situated, it graces the cover of the old Block/Gramavision recording of Tudor's *Rainforest IV*, with a man (reportedly video artist Bill Viola) standing in it. And by its modest yet surreal visual presence, it proclaims the democratization of electronic music.

In an era when electronic music spewed from huge, expensive machines and represented the most arid reaches of esoterica, Tudor made music from junk for Everyman. *Rainforest IV* is an old piece (1973; the original *Rainforests* were solos for Tudor, and this version was the first collaborative one), but it is the granddaddy of sound installations, and by showcasing it the Lincoln Center Festival paid homage to the genre more inclusively than it could have with any newer work.

*Rainforest* has attracted more and more performers and interest in the last decade, especially since Tudor's death two years ago this month. Its attraction is its combination of low-tech purity and leeway for rampant improvisation. The game is to suspend or mount any number of objects not usually employed for sound production and to use them as loudspeakers, by piping sound through them. The sound source can be anything, Tudor having prohibited only recordings of composed music. (According to legend, though, in one early performance Viola mischievously broke the rule by playing Aretha Franklin singing "Respect" through the oil drum, which resonated loudly every time she hit a certain pitch.)

And so, around the room sat the performers from Tudor's old group Composers Inside Electronics, along with a few artists added for the occasion, plying tables of equipment, mostly CD players, mixers, and equalizers. Some of them—Linda Fisher, Paul De Marinis, John Driscoll, Phil Edelstein, Ralph Jones—were longtime veterans of previous *Rainforests*, while others were electronic musicians in the same tradition: Ron Kuivila, John D. S. Adams, Matt Rogalsky, D'Arcy Philip Gray, Ben Manley. In the old days they would have been generating sounds from networks of electronic circuitry, but the digital era made it easier to have

many of the chosen sounds already stored on CD. Choosing what sounds to transmit is a process of give-and-take with the object: some sounds will resonate nicely, others just thud indistinctively or hardly register.

The room itself looked and sounded less like a rain forest than a jungle dense with diverse species. Thumps emanated from a long wooden box. Metallic rattles came from a Weber grill whose halves were suspended like orchestra cymbals after a crash. Harsh rumblings, like a race car taking off, flowed incongruously from an umbrella, and surprisingly loud chirps from a trio of Styrofoam packing platforms. A water-cooler bottle boomed shallowly, a milk can screeched like an angry bird, and a weak radio voice peeped incomprehensibly from an industrial-liquid can. The room shrieked with growls, whimpers, hums, roars, and every few minutes each object's sounds would change as the composers tried out new ones. Adding to the evocation of nature was the fact that most of the sounds seemed to run in repetitive loops, ranging from a second or two to half a minute (each occupying, to use Kuivila's term, its own "temporal tessitura"), like birds and monkeys emitting their mating calls at various rates.

*Rainforest's* charm resembles that of Alvin Lucier's equally popular *I Am Sitting in a Room*. A tape piece based on acoustic resonance, *I Am Sitting* forces the realization that every room has a unique chord that it resonates with. Likewise, *Rainforest* demonstrates that every object, no matter how humble, has a certain type of sound that will bring it to life; that every object, in fact, is a loudspeaker, and what we call loudspeakers are distinguished only by their versatility. Tudor's lifelong associate John Cage told the story of an old filmmaker telling him that every object has a soul, and in *Rainforest* those souls become audible.

It's a realization that even children can appreciate, and a gratifying number were present. One toddler insisted his mother hold him inside the Weber grill until her arms must have ached; another young girl asked me how to get sound out of a red oil funnel whose noises were intermittent and, I warned her, deafeningly loud. (She turned out to be the critic John Rockwell's daughter, but didn't afterward display any family tendency to criticize.) The most luminous object hung in the middle of the room: a battered old black trunk with Tudor's name and address on it, buzzing like a trumpet. As Fisher told me, "If David's listening, he's probably wishing he could jump in with his own sounds." ▮

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