

The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation

FYS 129

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Various Quotes

These slides contain a collection of some of the quotes largely from the musicians that are studied during the course.

The idea is to present “musicians in their own words”.



Thurston Moore

American guitarist and vocalist
(July 25, 1958–)

Background on Sonic Youth

Thurston Moore was a guitarist and vocalist for Sonic Youth.

Sonic Youth was an American alternative rock band from New York City, formed in 1981. Their lineup largely consisted of Thurston Moore (guitar and vocals), Kim Gordon (bass guitar, vocals, and guitar), Lee Ranaldo (guitar and vocals), Steve Shelley (drums).

In their early career, Sonic Youth was associated with the no wave art and music scene in New York City. Part of the first wave of American noise rock groups, the band carried out their interpretation of the hardcore punk ethos throughout the evolving American underground that focused more on the DIY ethic of the genre rather than its specific sound. As a result, some consider Sonic Youth as pivotal in the rise of the alternative rock and indie rock movements. The band experienced success and critical acclaim throughout their existence, continuing into the new millennium, including signing to major label DGC in 1990, and headlining the 1995 Lollapalooza festival.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonic_youth

Moore Quotes

Q: What led Sonic Youth to do a project like Goodbye 20th Century?

Moore: It was definitely a universe or world that we were aware of. Definitely charged by. A lot had to do with William Winant, the percussionist. He was Cage's percussion in his final years and he's somebody that's really involved in that world. People like Xenakis have written percussion pieces for him. He's a friend of ours and we had done things with him. I have done some improvised music with him. He mentioned it to us at one point 'it would be great if you guys, the kind of band you are, with your love of this music, would play this music and the compositions of these composers that utilize the musician for what he plays and not for any sort of any traditional instrumentalization.' The pieces are based on time notation and sounds as created by the musician's own personal quality. He thought that we would be perfect arbiters of this.

So we sat around, looking around at a lot of this music. There's Pauline Oliveros pieces, Cage pieces, Steve Reich's microphone piece, Kosugi's piece. A lot of them had to deal with graphics. We decided to do it. He said 'you can do it. Look at these notations and try it.' I had already gotten involved in playing some of it from meeting up with Jim O'Rourke. He was playing with Kosugi, doing music for Merce Cunningham. They had asked me to perform some of their music, a Cage piece and a Kosugi piece for Merce Cunningham. I did some of those concerts for Cunningham and realized 'this is fantastic. I can actually play this music and I'm not a trained, traditional musician.' I just thought that was real enlightenment for me. This music was more punk rock than any punk rock music ever was. Somebody who knew David Tudor said that the perfect people to play Cage were heavy metal musicians.

That was it. We just decided it was going to be a great project so we decided to just do it. It was true we got some William Winant guidance on that. We got together with him and O'Rourke and Pauline Oliveros wrote a piece for us and Christian (Wolff) came in with some pieces for us. We got really interested in Fluxus composition. That music was even more so... based on the person making it more than any kind of traditionally trained practitioner. Fluxus music is really aligned with visual art and literature art so that was something we wanted to put on the record. We did a Yoko Ono composition that was just instructional. Scream at a wall. OK, great composition. What a fantastic composition. Scream at a wall, scream at the sky.

Thurston Moore Interview by Jason Gross, 2000.