

J.G. Thirlwell: Educating the ear

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Abstract

By the end of the seventies the creative assimilation of the teachings of music pioneers like John Cage, Steve Reich and La Monte Young had assumed its most structured form with the appearance of noise composers such as Maurizio Bianchi and the heavy industrial ecstasy of Throbbing Gristle – music that stands among the most significant examples of academia informing the music of the young European and American subcultures of the time. These developments led to the birth of a multi-faceted popular music mosaic with particular cultural functions, which inspired Australian composer J.G. Thirlwell to embark on his idiosyncratic 30-year career. His exploration of a very broad range of music idioms (noise, classical, pop, jazz, soundtracks), the application of intertextuality both as to form and as to the content of his music compositions, the use of technologically advanced methods to encompass an experimental musical transcription, render J.G. Thirlwell the agent of an unexpected balance between popular, anti-commercial and academic forms. The unorthodox innovations of J.G. Thirlwell require a trained ear and familiarity with the particular norms comprising his *sui generis* musical approach. Nevertheless, he is creating landmark innovations and rejuvenating the sonic, and especially the artistic, dimensions of what we call culture.

The aim of this paper is to examine the intertextual nature of J.G. Thirlwell's pioneering work, especially in his early stage recordings, and to describe his form/content development, which constitute his contribution to modern experimental musical locus.

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