

MUSIC FOR THE LOVE OF IT

MARCH 2007



photo by John Maggioletto

Build Your Own Instruments

by John Bertles

Building musical instruments is a tremendously satisfying creative and musical experience that also leads the builder to discover the science behind sound. It's even more satisfying, however, when you build your instruments from recycled and reused materials—it's fun, cheap, and ecologically sound.

That's the premise behind Bash the Trash®, a group of environmentally-minded musicians and educators who build and perform on instruments made from very unusual materials—the detritus of our modern society. Each interactive concert or workshop is a journey into sound, science and instruments—how instruments are made, why they work, and how you can make your own. Using trash as a resource, and augmented by a thorough knowledge of organology (the study of musical instruments), they have created over 200 different kinds of instruments that range from winds to strings to percussion and even into instruments made from cast-off electronics.

The lure of building instruments is especially seductive to children, who just

can't seem to get enough of the exercise. Once they have built an example of one instrument family, they want to build one from all of the families. On the way they are getting a tactile demonstration of the science behind sound and instrument design, including:

- Vibration—what it is and how different vibrating materials lead to different timbres
- Sound waves, frequency and human sound perception
- Types of instruments
- Getting different pitches by instrument design factors (length/mass, tension, density, etc.)
- Changing volume by instrument design (resonators, cones, etc.)

But the only way to get this experience is just by diving in and building a few instruments for yourself. Following are two fun instrument designs that can be built with minimal materials. (For more trash-based instrument designs go to www.bashthetrash.com.) For when you build instruments you are retracing the steps of scientists and instrument makers all across the world, as well as across time.



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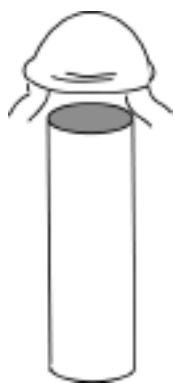
Balloon Drums

You will need:

- Two sturdy cardboard tubes approximately 2.5-4" across the top. The tubes should be longer than 6"; different lengths are best
- Two 10-12" balloons
- Sharp scissors
- Duct tape
- Rubber bands (or you can use duct tape instead)

Procedure:

Cut the balloons as shown and discard the valve.

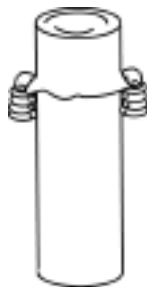


Stretch the "cap" of the balloon over the open end of the tube:



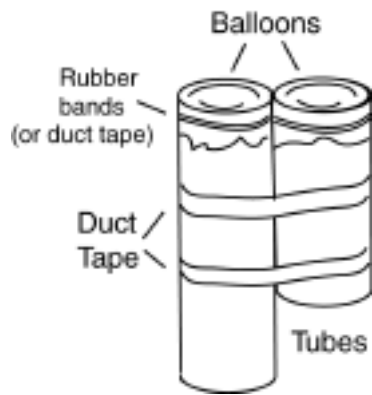
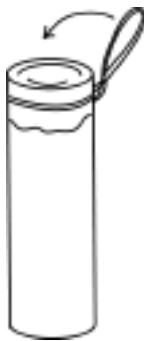
Pull the balloon as hard as you can down the tube. The tighter you stretch the balloon, the higher the pitch, and vice versa:

Wrap a rubber band tightly around the balloon to prevent it from slipping (you can use duct tape instead).



Wrap duct tape around the tubes to hold them together as shown in the first illustration (two lengths of duct tape ensures better stability).

When playing the balloon drums, hold them between your legs for better sound. Lightly tap on the balloons with your fingers (don't use a pencil or stick). For a louder sound you can pinch a bit of balloon and pluck it.



Straw oboe

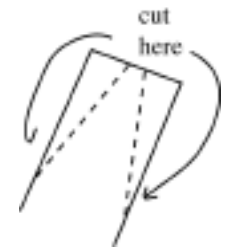
You will need:

- Plastic straw
- Scissors

Procedure:

Flatten one end of the straw between your fingers.

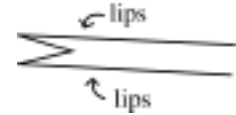
Using the scissors, cut the corners of the flattened end of the straw:



Put your lips on the straw with the open parts to side.

Bite down with your lips a little bit and blow. You should hear a buzzing sound. If not, try:

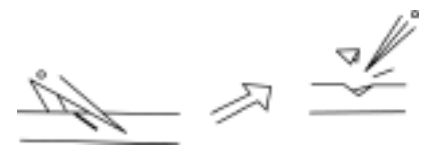
- moving your lips a bit up or down the straw
- tightening or loosening your lips
- recutting the straw at a slightly different angle.



When you can make a good steady sound, cut some tone holes. Using the scissors, make a cut in the straw, at an angle, and then from the other side.

Cut 3-4 tone holes starting from the middle of the straw down toward the end.

Blow steadily and modify the pitch by covering the holes in different combinations until you have a sense what notes are available to you. Play them in any order within a single breath, in a nice catchy rhythm. Congratulations! You just improvised your first oboe solo.



Founded in 1992 by John Bertles, Bash the Trash® has been delighting

audiences ever since with an unusual mix of humor, science and music. They have performed with Yo-Yo Ma, taken solos with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, jammed with Wynton Marsalis, and been featured on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. They have also become an educational force, collaborating with such institutions as Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, New York Philharmonic, Grammy Foundation, and Juilliard School.

www.bashthetrash.com

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The In Box

TONAL REFRACTION

Pianist Nancy Garniez, director of the Alaria Chamber Music Workshop and author of several articles in *Music for the Love of It*, is now offering private lessons, classes and workshops in a visualization technique she calls Tonal Refraction. This technique is designed to strengthen auditory awareness and understanding, for improved mental, physical and emotional coordination. She writes, "The elements of Tonal Refraction—color and a grid—reflect a lifetime of creative problem solving. I began experimenting with notation while teaching amateurs to sight-sing in tune. The grid was suggested by the composing method of my friend, distinguished composer Ursula Mamlok; it clarifies duration and facilitates conceptualizing tone. My involvement with color and texture comes from many years of creating needlework." Tonal Refraction classes are available in New York City for individual musicians, chamber ensembles, and special sessions for persons with hearing loss or specific playing problems. Further information is available at www.tonalrefraction.com. Contact Nancy Garniez, nancygarniez@tonalrefraction.com.

SETTLEMENT MUSIC SCHOOL HONORS 100

Philadelphia's Settlement Music School, the largest and one of the oldest community schools of the arts in the United States, recently announced the next group of "The Settlement 100," a roster of 100 eclectic, diverse and unexpected individuals whose experiences at Settlement Music School helped shape their lives. This group brings the total to 60 announced so far. The final 40 will be announced in 2008, Settlement's Centennial year. Settlement has served approximately 300,000 students since 1908. One of the honorees, jazz bassist and recording artist Michael Cruse whose father was a member of the Count Basie and Duke Ellington bands, began lessons at age 5. "My destiny as a bass player evolved at Settlement Music School." Roots member and honoree Leonard Hubbard recalls the thrill he had "by studying with Eligio Rossi who taught the bass legend Stanley Clarke." Clarke is also one of this year's honorees.

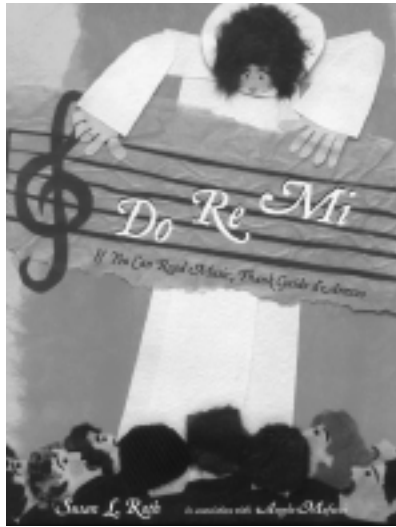
PUBLICATION DATES MOVING FORWARD

You may have noticed that, in response to many requests, the printed *Music Workshop Guide* appeared in January this year. *Music for the Love of It* has now decided to advance our entire publication schedule by one month. Our newsletter will appear in March, May, July, September and November, giving us a little less hectic year end in which to compile, edit, print and mail the Workshop Guide, so you can have it early in the new year.

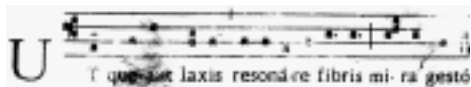
Book Reviews by Ted Rust

From Song to Page, and Back Again

Do Re Mi: If You Can Read Music, Thank Guido D'Arezzo by Susan L. Roth, 2007. Boston, Houghton Mifflin. ISBN 0-618-46572-3



"A thousand years ago, if you heard a song and wanted to hear it again, you would have to remember it by heart," writes Susan Roth in *Do Re Mi*. Since the 11th century, songs have been shared at a distance, and over centuries, thanks to a beautifully simple notation system, in which pitch is represented by the vertical position of notes on a staff, sequence by their horizontal order and duration by the shape of the noteheads. This system is attributed to Guido D'Arezzo (990-c.1050), an Italian monk who described these ideas in his treatise, *Micrologus*, and over a long career of teaching and disputation finally won the Church's support for its use. Guido's Latin hymn, "*Ut queant laxis resonare*," in which the syllables "ut," "re," "mi," etc. fall on a rising scale, is the source of the note names still taught to singers.



Susan Roth summarizes Guido's accomplishment in a beautifully illustrated book for children. Its language is clear and simple, its ideas rich and timeless. If you are lucky enough to have a preschooler you can read it to, you will doubtless have the extra pleasure of multiple repetitions.

The Anatomy of Melody: Exploring the Single Line of Song by Alice Parker, 2006. Chicago, GIA Publications, Inc. ISBN 1-57999-560-7

Guido notwithstanding, Alice Parker contends that "a page of music contains about 5% of the information needed to perform it." This book is about breathing a melody back to life from the skeletal indications on a printed page. If anybody can teach that, Alice Parker can. Her beautiful settings of folk songs and church music, a staple of choral literature, are palpably true to the style and meaning of their original materials, and for the past 20 years she has been presenting a series of workshops, coachings and publications about singing, conducting and writing choral music.

Parker begins with what makes a melody both endear and endure. In her first example, "Oh, Shenandoah," she explains its origins as an after-work song of crew on sailing ships, helps us



feel the ambiguity and nostalgia of the text, and diagrams the slow rise and fall of the melodic line, likening it to the ship's motion. She then discusses what a song is to communicate, which to her must begin with a specific emotional state, a mood. Other sections explore the building blocks of melody (text, rhythm, silences, pitch contours), the connections of phrasing with breathing and text with tune, the varieties of musical style, the role of improvisation in performance. Each chapter includes practical guidance and exercises for musicians.

This book has enriched the way I read, play and think about melody.

You can learn more about Alice Parker's ideas at www.melodiousaccord.com.

Blues: Capturing the Essence

by Eric Roach

The blues genre is considered the very backbone of American music. Its influence can be heard in virtually every popular style of music that exists today, and the blues itself is still very much alive and well. It is often a simple form of music, but simple doesn't equal easy when it comes to the blues. Years can be devoted to studying this musical art form, and many artists never seem to fully grasp its essence and translate it into their playing. How can a simply structured form of music created by sharecroppers and common folk with no formal musical training be so elusive to the practicing musician? Here we'll explore the widely overlooked key to becoming a good blues musician.

Throughout the southeast, there are numerous cities, such as Memphis, that claim the title of "The Home of the Blues." Memphis is indeed a landmark for the development of the blues genre, but the origin of the blues lies in the Mississippi delta. During the late 1800s, sharecroppers, slaves, and prisoners began to develop simple songs, now known as "field hollers" that were often sung *a capella* or were accompanied by makeshift instruments. From this, the "delta blues" was soon born. The songs were often short and unelaborate. They reflected the struggles, worries, hard times, and, contrary to popular view, the joys of the delta people. Quite simply, the blues was about life. It was the very condition of these people that made the blues what it was, and still is today. For this reason, it is necessary to understand the culture from which the blues came in order to understand the blues itself. Much like certain forms of poetry or art, understanding how its

When the blues went mainstream, many latched onto it because they felt the pain, the sorrow, and the happiness of the men and women who performed it . . . but (were) unable to produce it themselves with the same authenticity.

pioneers thought, and how they saw the world, is the key to the music.

The delta blues was developed by the African-American sharecroppers and field workers, who were descended from the slaves of white plantation owners. Even though they were no longer slaves, their opportunities for a decent life were severely limited by the still strong hold kept on the south by whites. Most lived in substandard housing and worked for either a percentage of the year's crops or a bare minimum of wage. Formal education was non-existent for the blacks, and violent hate crimes against them were common. Blues was developed as a means to deal with the stresses of such a life, and was a release for many. It was often intended to lift the spirits of its performers and listeners.

Other subsequent forms of blues followed a similar pattern of realistic subject matter and celebration of life. Artists sang about everything from heartache to spiritual redemption. Some even sang about the woes of prison life, such as Bukka White and his "Parchman Farm Blues."

When the blues went mainstream, many latched onto it because they felt the pain, the sorrow, and the happiness of the men and women who performed it. Up until this point, there was no popular style of music that dealt with real life in such a raw, unstylized fashion. Unfortunately, many musicians who did not grow up with the music and the lifestyle that gave it birth found themselves attracted to it, but unable to produce it themselves with the same authenticity and emotion that they heard from their record players.

This problem still exists today, despite numerous established structures and technical guides on how to play the blues. Learning only the technical aspect of the music falls tragically short of making one a blues player. Many forget, or do not realize that the blues itself is a musical manifestation of the region, people, and circumstances from which it came. It is ten percent technique, and ninety percent emotion, and I will even go so far to say that the emotion gives birth to the technique. That is the essence of the blues.

So how does one become a good blues player? The first requisite is a genuine love for the blues. Even then, it is an

unavoidably long road, but you can begin your journey by immersing yourself in the music and the culture. I recommend for reading *The Land Where the Blues Began* by Alan Lomax. It details the actual journey of Lomax through the deep south, where he befriends and records numerous artists who would subsequently become some of the most influential people in blues history. I also recommend listening to your favorite blues players, and trying to understand how they viewed the things they sang about. Attend as many concerts as you can, and watch the legends. Attempt to grasp the essence of their approach, both to their instrument and their lyrics. Play what they play, and try to sound as much like them as you can when you play it. Once you have a firm grasp on the influences from which you draw, you can then begin to move out onto your own path. I have personally spent the better part of the last twelve years involved in the blues, and have played numerous venues across the southeast, learning from such local Mississippi legends as Jesse Lee Robinson and Richard Brown. I've also had the great fortune of crossing paths with great artists such as BB King, Kenny Wayne Shepherd, Doyle Bramhall Jr., Little Milton, and Bobby "Blue" Bland. From these legendary men, I have learned the importance of understanding where you're coming from in order to know where you're going. This is true not only for the blues, but for life itself as well, and that is no small surprise. At the very core, they are one and the same.

© 2007 Eric Roach

Eric Roach is a professional guitarist and writer. He lives in Clearlake, California.



Eric Roach's 1998 Gibson
"The Paul"
signed on back by BB King,
Kenny Wayne Shepherd, and
Doyle Bramhall Jr.



“(Chopin) shunned all forms of excess or exaggeration and was never a Romantic composer in the Lisztian or Byronic sense. . . . He revered the music of Bach and Mozart above all other composers . . .”

Angela Lear

Interpreting Chopin

by Angela Lear

Chopin’s music has always posed a challenge to pianists. His compositions have retained a universal popularity and continue to be performed in virtually all corners of the world. They have been recorded and re-recorded in the thousands, so Chopin is apparently well-represented—but has the challenge to his interpreter ever been successfully met?

To gain further insight into his unique musical language and stylistic practices it is essential to comprehend as far as possible his expressed intentions. Our knowledge and appreciation of this most elusive and poetic of composers is greatly enriched by the combined study of not only his original manuscripts and related material (i.e. draft scores, early editions and annotated scores), but also the many statements made by his associates, friends and pupils who knew his playing and teaching principles. In addition to the considerable amount of general correspondence, reviews and reports of his concerts are revealing, although not always laudatory, especially from avid supporters of the ‘piano pounders’, as Chopin called them. I feel it is also valuable to become familiar with Polish folk music, the wonderful songs and dances, and the historical development of the Polonaise, Rondo, Krakowiak and Mazur.

Most of us lead busy lives so is it really necessary to undertake the time-

consuming task of such studies? In answer I would like to cite one example of the wide disparities that exist between Chopin’s expressed intentions and the interpretative approach pianists commonly adopt (including many who profess faithfulness to the text) when playing his famous ‘Black Keys’ *Study in G flat major*, Op.10 No.5:



Chopin’s autograph manuscript for Op. 10 No. 5. The composer’s performance directions, are *leggerissimo e legatissimo*, with no forte marking. The staccato left hand is not marked to be pedaled.

We are familiar with performances of this remarkable study executed in brilliant style—played *Allegro con brio/Presto* with highly charged *forte* dynamics, heavily accented and liberally pedaled—to suit the desired virtuosic display. This approach is, however, in direct opposition to Chopin’s original score markings and his concept of its interpretation. His

score markings were actually given as *leggerissimo e legatissimo* (extremely light and delicate with a very smooth effect), carefully balanced against an unpedalled staccato left hand accompaniment. Exaggerated dynamics and express-train tempo markings are not to be found in the original manuscripts, but modern performers have, regrettably, arrived at an opposing concept to that of the composer! Of course, the delicate lightness of touch Chopin demands is much easier to ignore than achieve. There is also the problem of maintaining the tempo from the outset to include the double octaves that descend in a final flourish of triplets. No slowing down of pace is indicated here (not even a *poco rit.*!) but even acclaimed virtuosos apply the ‘brakes’ at this point.

Where score markings are correctly stated in publications, Chopin’s compositions still continue to fall prey to all manner of facilitating alterations in performance—perpetuated by generations of pianistic tradition. Unfortunately the variety of erroneous

revisions imposed on Chopin’s scores from pianists who arrogantly seek to remould his music into something that suits their purposes better remain unchallenged. The easier performance options of personalised interpretation with extreme flexibility of expression—to the extent that originally written score directions are all but eclipsed—are spuriously applauded (and



“Simplicity is everything: after having played immense quantities of notes, and more notes, then simplicity emerges with all its charm, like art’s final seal. It is no easy matter.”

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

strongly defended by some critics). The idea of a *carte blanche* or free for all when interpreting Chopin is often actively encouraged on the misguided premise that pretentious sentimentality and histrionic (mis)interpretations actually improve Chopin’s compositions. To perceive Chopin as the archetypal Romantic languishing in a violet-scented mist of indecision about his scores is a misconception borne of unfounded legend.

Chopin had very clear and definite views on adherence to his score details: “Chopin could not bear anyone to interfere with the text of his works. The slightest modification was a gross error for which he would not pardon even his closest friends, not even his fervent admirer Liszt. The composer considered these alterations as a veritable act of sacrilege.” (Reported by Marmontel in *Chopin: Pianist and Teacher* by Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger) Chopin occasionally pencilled an altered dynamic or variant into the scores of selected pupils during lessons but it was only his prerogative as the composer-pianist to make any such alterations. On the subject of the sentimental/Romantic approach, we know that he shunned all forms of excess or exaggeration and was never a Romantic composer in the Lisztian or Byronic sense. Rather, his unique musical language and aesthetic belongs to earlier forms of art music and classicism. He revered the music of Bach and Mozart above all other composers—the significance of which should not be underestimated when playing Chopin.

It is vital from an artistic and aesthetic standpoint that the interpreter allows absolute priority to score directions

and remains within the guidelines marked on the texts by the composer. These provide our most fundamental link with his intentions. To clarify these guidelines, albeit simplistically, I refer to score indications that form the basis of an interpretation: e.g., that given *sotto voce/pianissimo/piano* markings are not replaced by a *mezzo piano/mezzo forte/forte*, or broad *Largo/lento tempos* exchanged for the faster pace of an *Allegretto*, etc

Chopin was also strict about the observance of his precise phrase/slur markings and agogic signs, whilst pedalling “remains a study for life”, as he said, and requires constant consideration.

Within the wide variety of musical terminology and signs that form our score instructions, the expressive scope is comprehensive. It is evident from his manuscripts that Chopin left nothing to doubt for his copyists and editors, crossing out his rejected score details with thick webs of diagonal lines that render it impossible to decipher previously written details. To further avoid misunderstanding he would write a message on his score for the engraver to clarify his precise intentions. All of which proved no guarantee against errors from copyists and editors!

Whether to pander to popular tastes, for self-aggrandizement to win praise, or merely to satisfy the less discerning listener and those with jaded ears, there exists the everpresent predilection to sacrifice the ultimate realization of his music to personal whim. Wayward performances displaying an obvious ambivalence towards the text are often claimed as great or even definitive interpretations’

either for commercial purposes or from obvious misunderstandings of Chopin’s music. Virtuoso displays of meaningless digital dexterity and the flashiness of excessively fast tempos, hard-hitting aggressively exaggerated dynamics and uncontrolled tempo deviations that debase and trivialize his music have become the facile recipes for accepted Chopin interpretations. This is not only seriously misleading to the public and untruthful but commits a grave disservice to the composer. The true art of playing Chopin presents a challenge that needs to be thoroughly reviewed and reassessed.

“Simplicity is everything: after having played immense quantities of notes, and more notes, then simplicity emerges with all its charm, like art’s final seal. It is no easy matter.” (From a statement made by Chopin to his pupil Friedrike Streicher-Muller, who studied with the composer from October 1839-March 1841 and was the dedicatee of his *Allegro de Concert*, Op.46.)

Great music should surely ennoble the spirit, create a moving experience and provide a lasting impression to reflect upon after the final notes have been played. To allow the composer to be revealed through the re-creation of his music must be the ultimate aim of an interpreter.

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Angela Lear gives concerts and lecture-recitals throughout the UK and abroad. Please visit her website at www.angelalear.co.uk for details about “The Original Chopin,” her CD recordings of Chopin’s compositions, as well as audio samples, biographical information, reviews and links.

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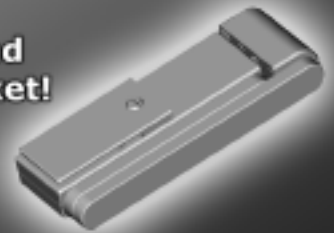
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