Guide to the Richard Maxfield Collection ARS.0074

Franz Kunst
Archive of Recorded Sound
2011
soundarchive@stanford.edu
URL: http://library.stanford.edu/ars
Richard Maxfield (1927 – 1969) was born in Seattle, Washington. His musical aptitude was revealed at a young age, playing both piano and clarinet as a child, the latter in the Seattle All-Youth Orchestra. He also began composing in high school, largely exploring neoclassical and twelve-tone serialism. After a year in the Navy, he enrolled at Stanford University for one year (where reportedly campus station KZSU played his music) but transferred in 1947 to U.C. Berkeley to study with Roger Sessions after having heard his work on the radio. Graduating in 1951, Maxfield traveled to Europe on a scholarship, where he met Boulez, Stockhausen, and Nono, and was introduced to the electronic tape music which would guide his work from then on. Maxfield also studied with Krenek, Babbitt, Copland, Maderna, and Dallapiccola, but was ultimately influenced the most by the work of John Cage, whom he met through Christian Wolff in 1958. Maxfield would employ chance as a compositional tool, at times drawing strips of tape from a glass bowl, not unlike a bingo game. Richard Maxfield’s music was presented at Fluxus events, the Living Theatre, and other loft performances beginning in the late 1950s. He composed music for dance, and was musical director of the James Waring Dance Company. Maxfield was friend and mentor to La Monte Young, who performed his works extensively beginning in the early 1960s. Young’s MELA Foundation is custodian for Maxfield’s archive. Outside of composing, Maxfield wrote essays, produced a film (“An Introduction to New Music”), and worked as freelance audio engineer (one regular client was Westminster Records from 1960-1962), but he was far more involved with music education. In fact, New Grove’s Dictionary of Music calls him “the first teacher of electronic music techniques in the United States.” Maxfield taught at the New School in New York City in 1959 (taking over a class taught by Cage) and later at San Francisco State in 1966 and 1967. He moved to Los Angeles the following year. On June 27, 1969, Richard Maxfield, then 42 years old, jumped out of a window of the Figueroa Hotel.

Richard Maxfield (1927–1969) was born in Seattle, Washington. His musical aptitude was revealed at a young age, playing both piano and clarinet, the latter in the Seattle All-Youth Orchestra. He also began composing in high school, largely exploring neoclassical and twelve-tone serialism. After a year in the Navy, he enrolled at Stanford University (where reportedly campus station KZSU played his music) but transferred in 1947 to U.C. Berkeley to study with Roger Sessions after having heard his work on the radio. Graduating in 1951, Maxfield traveled to Europe on a scholarship, where he met Boulez, Stockhausen, and Nono, and was introduced to the electronic tape music which would guide his work from then on. Maxfield also studied with Krenek, Babbitt, Copland, Maderna, and Dallapiccola, but was ultimately influenced the most by the work of John Cage, whom he met through Christian Wolff in 1958. Maxfield would employ chance as a compositional tool, at times drawing strips of tape from a glass bowl. Unlike some aleatoric composers, however, Maxfield would further edit works according to what he thought worked best.

Maxfield’s music was presented at Fluxus events, the Living Theatre, and other New York City loft performances beginning in the late 1950s. He composed music for dance, and was musical director of the James Waring Dance Company. Maxfield was friend and mentor to La Monte Young, who first performed his works in 1960 in New York. Young’s MELA Foundation is custodian for Maxfield’s archive.

Outside of composing, Maxfield wrote essays, produced a film (“An Introduction to New Music”), and worked as freelance audio engineer (one regular client was Westminster Records from 1960 to 1962), but he was far more involved with music education. In fact, New Grove’s Dictionary of Music calls him “the first teacher of electronic music techniques in the United States.” Maxfield taught at the New School in New York City in 1959 (taking over a class taught by Cage) and later at San...
Francisco State in 1966 and 1967. He moved to Los Angeles the following year. On June 27, 1969, Richard Maxfield, then 42 years old, jumped out of a window at the Figueroa Hotel.

**Preferred Citation**

**Sponsor**
This finding aid was produced with generous financial support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

**Scope and Contents**
The Richard Maxfield Collection consists of electronic music written by Maxfield on open reel tape from 1959 to 1964. Some tape boxes appear annotated by the composer. Nine are labeled as distinct works, while two others are more likely to be work tapes or copies. Pastoral Symphony, Amazing Grace and Cough Music are some of his more canonical pieces, and date from the period considered his most prolific. Maxfield would edit tapes for each performance to ensure a unique event, and it is unknown what versions these recordings represent. Although he supposedly did all his composing in New York, several of these tapes have a Southern California address. The live recording of Dromonon, a ballet for tape and live instruments, was performed by a quintet at Judson Memorial Church New York City in 1964.

**Subjects and Indexing Terms**
Electronic music

---

**box 1**

**Amazing Grace 1961-1964**

- Physical Description: 2 audiotape reel(s)

**Scope and Contents**
Tape 1 box notes KPFA - 1. old mono (orig.) ; 2. edited mono (Dinsmoor, edited 1964-02-03 at Flushing) ; 3. 7.5 ips stereo (San Antonio). Tape 2 is dated 1961 July 1.

**box 1**

**Cough Music undated**

- Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

**Scope and Contents**
Tape box and leader says "Living Th. - San Antonio Tape." Maxfield performed Cough Music at a New Music event at the Living Theatre in New York City 1960 March 14.

**box 1**

**Dromonon 1964 May 19**

- Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

**Scope and Contents**
Ballet for tape and live instruments, as performed at Judson Memorial Church, Washington Square, New York City. Opening Night, 1964 May 19. Goldstein, violin ; McDowell, organ ; Roussakis, clarinet ; Dinsmoor, trumpet ; Corner, trombone ; and five other instruments conducted by RVM.

**box 1**

**Electronic Symphony undated**

- Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

**box 1**

**Pastoral Symphony undated**

- Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

**box 1**

**Suite from Peripateia (1959 & 1961 May 6) 1959-1961**

- Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

**Scope and Contents**
Tape box contains inscription probably by Maxfield: "Please return this tape to its owner and composer, Richard Maxfield," followed by an address in South Laguna, California.
box 1  Wind (25 min., San Antonio) 1961 April
    Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)

box 1  [electronic music, possibly Bacchanale and Night Music] undated
    Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)
    Scope and Contents
    Tape box says Bacchanale, Night Music copies.

box 1  [electronic music - modified sound effects - dub] undated
    Physical Description: 1 audiotape reel(s)
    Scope and Contents
    Tape box contains Maxfield's Laguna Beach address, as well as an address label, also from
    Laguna Beach, from poet Ruth Forbes Sherry.