

Reading Station

(PLATFORM 2)

Last October, on Reading Station concourse, a sonic chair offered weary travellers rest and relaxation. Here **Kaffe Matthews** explains her sonic design experiment



☞ a sensual vibrating techno-hymn designed by sound artist kaffe matthews for Reading's travellers. 'drop time', will be playing from the glass pod in the station's forecourt from October 30th to November, 2002, absolutely free.

stop. relax. drop in. come be transported by delicious sounds vibrating and circulating your body, as you lie stretched out in matthews's huge red velvet sonic armchair. with 9 speakers immersed invisibly in plush upholstery, the music emerges through the fabric, defying gravity, perverting time, taking the listener away.

made by matthews's recordings from train travel in and around Reading, digitally processed to spin this dynamic space. ☞

Have you ever listened to those beautiful melodies flying up the loo hole as a train rattles along its line? It's a drone-based hum with always a note or two or three that hangs in the air and vibrates and changes with the passing rattling landscape. Stick a microphone down the hole and record it and use as the basis for music making. Something I had intended to do for a while, and as I had suspected, produced rich and melodic material that became the raw stuff I processed to make 'drop time'.

photos Kaffe Matthews

This is the third piece I have made for 'red chair', and so there's a much greater understanding of the things that work, that really communicate with the sitter. Like which frequencies relax, titillate, alarm, amuse, and then how to move them between the speakers, and what could happen with them on the way. And does the communication still remain *there*...? or are we now vibrating fat underneath? Having built the chair so that particular colours or frequencies would play out of particular speakers, I obviously use their location as a map or design around which to shift sounds. It's gloriously architectural, and each time creates a real space for the listener, no, sitter/feeler to travel away in.

Yes, the physical phenomena created by music were the initial reasons for my wanting to make sonic furniture in the first place, aside from having a particular specialist portable venue to compose for, and to make something for a solo audience.

Yes, let's acknowledge music as a vibrational physical earthbound fact. Access its physicality, get inside, use these elements as the design of the song.

As is the way, once working on this furniture thing again, ideas fired on the making of another piece. One that could create a social space as well as allow play with a listener in other positions. What about lying down? Would folk lie down on a bed in a public space with strangers and relax enough to feel something? Using a lying down platform thing, there would also be space for me to build substantial bass cabinets underneath. So to enable the making of a work that really utilises relationships between the human body's own vibrational frequencies with particular sonic ones, and then the emotions that appear as a result.

A huge sonic bed could be the thing, Yes, then invite people round to the studio and test different frequencies on them, see if we can get eyeballs rattling, hips rolling, crania shaking, yet remaining within the pleasure paradigm. No fearsome, painful, horror-ride this one, no. Deep joy will be the intention, and of course the funny thing is that possibly the majority of liars would not heed a drop of this music if it was playing at them from a pair of wall mounted speakers.

I should add here that another aspect of my compositional work has been looking to harness external natural processes outside of my own ideas as systems to make music. In a way the pitch changing melodies of the train resonances during one journey did that by determining the sonic and melodic aspects of 'drop time', but since 1999, I have twice been in a situation to harness the never repeating patterns of the weather to make music.

Here then another opportunity arose to possibly explore a different system as a structural source and driver; that being of the human body's own electrical activity in response to different situations. I had had the pleasure of being introduced to ongoing research at the Biophysics department of Gt Ormond Street Hospital,



London, where I could have access to the latest scanning and magnetic resonance imaging techniques. Here I could put myself through a series of emotional experiments (pleasure-experiments?) in the brain scanner, record the electromagnetic radiation produced and use that to create a compositional system I could exploit to make the work for a sonic bed.

The MRI machinery also produces fantastic sounds to sample and it could be interesting also to record snips of the researchers' musics most associated with pleasure as raw stuff for this system. Interesting relationships were appearing.

Yes. A chance to reflect organic processes and details in a precisely honed and digital form.

A sound artist works with temporality, with the invisible. Here I could develop and compose with invisible information direct from the body: to compose a music for the body from the electricity of our thoughts.

And then the phone rang, and a series of discussions led to a commission from the 'her noise' exhibition. Yes, go ahead, make a sonic bed. A variety of deep frequencies underneath, tweeter pillows – interesting.

Good. The search for that music can continue.

[her noise exhibition, curated by Anne Hilde Neset and Lina D Russell, produced by Forma; due to open early 2004 at the Baltic Arts Centre, Gateshead, then tour the UK and other parts of Europe.]

Addendum.

A huge bed. In a public space. Audience invited to get on it, to lie on it.

There being a particular hyped artwork in existence, there have been a few doubtful responses to the thought of a sonic double bed. ... 'Oh no, the bed thing has been done ...'

Not like this.

Kaffe Matthews is a musician and sound artist, with an interest in sonic design.

www.annetetworks.com

