

Cross Platform

Ryoko Akama with her self-built Box of Austere



"I suppose I've realised that a sound contains a lot of things," Ryoko Akama says, reflecting upon her move towards more simple and direct sonic exploration. "I went to an electroacoustic music conference last year, with pieces by many composers. All of the sounds were fantastic on their own, but because they were in the pieces, they were just flying in and out. That's become my frustration nowadays. I find a sound and I want to listen to it and know about it more."

Having originally trained as a sound engineer, Akama is no stranger to deep listening. But over the past 15 years her work has flourished in both the UK and her native Japan and across a variety of media, widening out from electronic music to include video art, installations, composition, improvisation and collaborative performance. "Rather than making tracks and electronic music pieces," she continues, "I work with sounds. I'm more interested in doing installations and working with analogue synthesizers and objects."

At the Full Of Noises festival in Cumbria later this month, Akama will present a recreation of Alvin Lucier's 1977 piece *Music On A Long Thin Wire*. The work consists of a wire stretched across a room and between magnets; its vibrations, driven by an oscillator, are captured through a contact mic in a wooden bridge at each end. As Lucier wrote in his sleeve notes to a CD release of the work: "By varying the frequency and loudness of the oscillator, a rich variety of slides, frequency shifts, audible beats and other sonic phenomena may be produced."

Akama first presented her recreation earlier this year, working in collaboration with Mark Bokowiec and Scott McLaughlin, as an experiment towards

Ryoko Akama

has set aside her laptop for more hands-on homemade devices to recreate the unpredictable frequency experiments of Alvin Lucier.
By **Abi Bliss**

the PhD she is currently pursuing at Huddersfield University's Centre for Research in New Music. "I realised that reproducing that kind of installation is the same idea as [studying] written scores," she explains. "I would learn something from it as a historical fact." The exercise taught her how to see the wire vibrate and to hear how its unearthly song is shaped by minute imperfections. "It's a very simple installation," she says. "I can clearly see the wave that the wire creates, and how someone coming into the space – even a dog – would change the whole process of electricity, and then the audio."

The experience of recreating Lucier's work has also inspired Akama to create the Box of Austere, a self-built instrument adapted from the shell of a shamisen, constructed in the aftermath of her first two unsuccessful attempts at recreating the wire piece. "According to Alvin Lucier's written instructions, he said that it could work with a shorter wire," she recalls. "So I thought that I could do a miniature version, but what he meant by 'shorter' was maybe ten metres instead of 50 metres. So we did some experimentation with short wires, and with the first one there was a spark, with the second we could smell smoke. Then I decided to switch off my mind and work in a different way, and I ended up having this box with two wires, electromagnetically driven by the E-Bow, and sometimes I twang it. It's as simple as that."

"I'm really satisfied with the fact that I can work with it much more closely and simply, rather than having a laptop where I get confused with options and possibilities."

Akama may have moved on from the laptop for the moment, but it was through her membership of The