

Somehow I went from being a non-musician to a composer to a sound artist and now I'm not sure what I am - but maybe I'm a musician and a composer and a sound artist too. I'll let the listener decide.

I had always wanted to make music but more than just play an instrument I wanted to compose music. But I didn't know how to play any instruments. I studied filmmaking at college but was so pre-occupied with the soundtrack that I had completed it before I began shooting the film. I dropped out of college and worked as a waiter and saved up to buy a tape recorder and a synthesizer. I blindly turned knobs and banged on any instrument that I could get my hands on and mixed with sounds I recorded on the street I began making film soundtracks without films. One class in music theory convinced me that I would never be able to learn music. I sought the advice of New York composer Rhys Chatam and told him I wanted to learn music. When he understood that I didn't even know a single note or chord on the piano he looked at me with wild eyes and said "You don't know any notes and you want to compose music? That's amazing! Don't learn music, just keep doing what you're doing." Encouraged by the avante-garde composer John Cage who said 'music is everywhere and we all have the best seats' I forged ahead composing off the cuff of my ears. I thought I was making music even though many people who heard called it noise.

I continued composing and performing music that went from abstract soundscapes to beat driven song-like structures but I called it noise. I produced cassettes and sold them in local record shops and through the mail. I began corresponding and trading cassettes with other artists around the world who were also making unconventional music and noise. Some people have called this movement Cassette Culture or the Cassette Network which thrived outside of mainstream culture relying on the postal system, before the rise of the Internet. Cassette Culture helped spawn a new underground music community which fueled the rise of independent DIY record labels whose motives were often, but not always about distributing unusual music that seemed to have little or no commercial potential. From these contacts I had several albums released and started my own record label to produce other music that I found inspiring. I met Berlin composer Conrad Schnitzler, who as a student of Joseph Beuys had been sculpting with metal before changing his medium to sound. Conrad gave me greater exposure to the outer edges of experimental music, audio art and conceptual art led me to focus more on site specific and multi-channel sound works which took me further away from would traditional be called music, so I began calling what I was doing Sound Art. Meanwhile "noise music" developed as its own genre and it was truly and extremely noisy.

On a bright and sunny afternoon recently I was enjoying the sound of running water while taking a shower when I dropped a nearly empty bottle of shampoo. The sudden sound of falling water hitting the plastic bottle cascaded against the bathroom tiles in a symphony of poly rhythmic overtones. The irregularity of the water flow kept the rhythms in constant flux and the volume was rising and falling in intensified crescendos. It was energetic minimal music gone wild! I immediately wanted to record the sound. This was good music! And then it struck me how peculiar and ironic it was for me to think that. I remembered discussions I had with people about Noise versus Music; yes, there were people who insisted what I was doing with sound wasn't music. So what was this? Just noise? Organized sound? These questions were answered by Luigi Russolo and John Cage already. Luckily nobody has such stupid discussions anymore. Everybody knows now that music can be anything and everything and you just need ears to hear it.

I laughed when I realized that if I released a CD of my "musical" shower no one would call it noise anymore. It would be accepted as music, maybe audio art, accoustimatic, ambient, a field recording, or even sound art but it wouldn't be called noise. I was ecstatic because I had made a simple recording of running water in the shower and god damn! It was music! I laughed as I thought, at last I am a musician, a music composer a conductor and a sound artist!.