The Sonic Shower
A Night of Design & Bravery
April 5th, 2018
IDEO New York

Spotify playlist: ideo.to/sonicshower

Loska (2001)
Kimmo Pohjonen & Samuli Kosminen

Pohjonen is a Finnish accordionist. He's known for his avant garde and experimental work with a custom-made electrified accordion. Every sound on this track is produced by Pohjonen's instrument and his voice. Kosminen, a programmer and producer, runs it all through effects processors and samplers, morphing and augmenting Pohjonen's playing into dense structures. From a review:

“Kluster sounds like a message from the underworld. The fractured crackling, popping and scraping of 'Loska' is a computer gasping its last.”

Lux Aurumque (2006)
Music by Eric Whitacre
Text by Edward Esch (translated to Latin by Charles Anthony Silvestri)

Lux,
Calida gravisque pura velut aurum
Et canunt angeli molliter
modo natum.

Light,
warm and heavy as pure gold
and angels sing softly
to the new-born babe.

The Obliging Fairy (1960)
Written and performed by Ivor Cutler

A Scottish poet, singer, and humorist, and one of the most wonderfully bonkers people to have been recorded extensively. Cutler was for decades a high school teacher in London, and on the side appeared regularly on the radio and elsewhere (he shows up in The Beatles’ Magical Mystery Tour film, for instance).

Sonatas and Interludes for Prepared Piano, No. 5 (1946)
John Cage

45 piano notes are ‘prepared’ with screws, various types of bolts, fifteen pieces of rubber, four pieces of plastic, several nuts and one eraser. It takes about two or three hours to prepare a
piano for performance, with the objects placed and inserted at different positions along, underneath, or atop the piano strings.

There’s a long history of mucking about with the innards of the piano. Cage’s take created what people called a kind of “American gamelan.” He was inspired by Indian ragas—scales that map onto particular emotions. Although he didn’t specify which sonatas or interludes referred to which ragas, he suggested that the “pieces with bell-like sounds suggest Europe and others with a drum-like resonance suggest the East.”

**Dear Evelyn (2015)**  
Written and performed by ESKA

Eska Mtungwazi is a British singer-songwriter; her parents emigrated from Zimbabwe when she was two. ESKA, as she goes by, was for many years a go-to backup singer in London. From a British newspaper:

> She had enormous doubt about whether she would be embraced as a solo artist for several reasons – her size, age and colour. “It’s been a huge battle for me. I’m not joking you – I deferred my life for years in terms of engaging with industry matters because I just thought: ‘I don’t want to be laughed at.’”

**Blue Skies (1926)**  
Irving Berlin

Irving Berlin was born in Russia; he became one of America’s greatest songwriters, responsible for “White Christmas”, “No Business Like Show Business”, and “God Bless America”.

‘Blue Skies’ was written after the birth of his first daughter and later featured in the first major ‘talkie’, Al Jolson’s *The Jazz Singer*.

This version, from 1946, is sung by the incomparable Ella Fitzgerald. Ella’s improvised, virtuoso vocal solo adopts many of the features of bebop jazz—see you if you can spot the moment when she quotes the main melodic theme from Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*…

**A New Theory of Eclipse (2016)**  
From the album *Simultaneous Flight Movement*  
Laura Cannell

Cannell plays the fiddle, and here she puts it to use to evoke the flocking of birds along the southeast coast of Britain. Think swallows and sea birds, in their hundreds, guided “as if by an invisible hand”, as one review of this album put it, and continues:

> “Cannell’s bow slides trace the outlines of wings and the movement of bodies. Her use of [the fiddle] is idiosyncratic, often loosening the strings of the bow to slide it over the fiddle’s neck. The resultant overbowed notes are deeply resonant, with an almost harmonium-like droning undercurrent.”
Cannell recorded this in one take, live, inside a 19th-century lighthouse in the coastal town of Southwold. Set your mind’s eye to a vision of an expansive coastline, brisk air, choppy seas and lots and lots of birds.

**Svatba (1990)**
Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares

The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices is a world-famous, all-female *a cappella* choir made up of singers that are (still) recruited from Bulgarian villages and trained in their distinct style. Their centuries-old approach blends an edgy tone, dissonant harmonies, and folk melodies. Oh, and the choir’s formal name is actually The Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir. Snappy.

This bittersweet song, Svatba, is about the mindset of an anxious groom as the bride and her wedding party approaches. At the start of new things, excitement and trepidation often go hand-in-hand...

**Uja (2014)**
Tanya Tagak

Throat singing. Words to strike fear into the heart of any casual listener. But Tagak is something else: she’s an Inuk singer from Nunavut, Canada, and she’s built a career dancing on the line between traditional throat singing techniques and bravely taking applying them to new contexts.

**Vignon, Vignon (1584)**
by Orlando di Lasso
performed by The King’s Singers

Not all Renaissance music is religious music. Wine is a big theme, too...

*Vignon, vignon, vignon, vignette,*  
*Qui te planta il fust preudhom.*  
*Te fuz coupé e a la serpette,*  
*Vignon, vignon, vignon, vignette,*  
*Il me semble avis que j’alecte*  
*Quant tu passes mon gorgeron.*  
*Vignon, vignon, vignon, vignon, vignette,*  
*Qui te planta il fust preudhom.*

*Vine, vine, vine, little vine,*  
*Who planted you was a wise man.*  
*He cut you with a little hook,*  
*Vine, vine, vine, little vine,*  
*It seems that I crave for*  
*When you go down my throat.*  
*Vine, vine, vine, little vine,*  
*Who planted you was a wise man.*

**Oslo (2014)**
Håkon Kornstad

Korstad is a Norwegian jazz musician, specializing in the tenor sax. I read somewhere that he has “a tone so hot that *one can be melted freely*.”
Music for Large and Small Ensembles, Part 1 - Opening (1990)
Kenny Wheeler

Kenny Wheeler (1930 - 2014) was a UK-based, Canadian-born trumpet player and composer, best known as a writer of expansive, harmonically lush music. This is the opening movement of a beautiful piece called *The Sweet Time Suite*.

The Lark in the Morning (1955)
Irish traditional
sung by Paddy Tunney

Paddy Tunney (1921 - 2002) was reportedly known as the Man of Songs. He held in his head hundreds upon hundreds of traditional folk songs.