

FOOTNOTES

William Brooks, Stefan Östersjö, and Jez Wells

We choose to call this album *Footnotes* because it presents the artefactual results—or, perhaps more properly, the counterfactual results—of a lengthy research process that has led us into various historic documents, recordings, and technologies. The process, in this case, constitutes the research, and it is discussed at length in our chapter in *Voices, Bodies, Practices* (Leuven University Press, 2019; <https://lup.be/products/125970>). That chapter constitutes, in effect, our central research output (if output there must be); the six tracks on this album are merely the citations—the footnotes—with which the chapter is adorned.

A brief description of the six tracks follows. We are responsible for many of the names attached to them, which evolved in the course of our work as a kind of shorthand for a collection of artefacts and experiences. It will be evident that a prime motivator for our interest was that each track involves mysteries of some sort, many of which have not been resolved. For a more detailed explanation of our thinking, and of the tracks and their contents, see the publication cited above.

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Side A Track 1. Cage 7:47

In the mid-1950s the American composer Walter Bookman became fascinated with the possibility of extending to other instruments the kind of preparations John Cage had applied to pianos in the 1940s. Many of his experiments—with French horn, with bassoon, with viola—were entirely unsuccessful, and the documentation for these he destroyed. Among those which survive, however, are several episodes sketched for ordinary acoustic guitar embellished with several different sets of preparations. After Bookman’s premature death in 1957, guitarist Sean O’Brien assembled these into a continuity; then, about 1959, working with engineer Judith Waterson, he recorded these in a small, independent studio. The two made a test pressing on LP, of which only a very few copies were made. For many decades it was thought that both the tapes and the pressing had been lost, but recently a copy of the latter turned up in Fort Plain Theological Seminary in the archives of Steven Ormsby, a personal friend of O’Brien. We thoroughly cleaned this disc prior to making the digital transfer offered here, but (consistent with good archival practice) we have not applied noise reduction or made any other sonic adjustments.

Side A Track 2. Cotten 3:55

In the late 1940s and 1950s a little-known librarian, Winnie Bergman, travelled through her native Kentucky and the adjoining states with her so-called assistant, Jackie West, recording—more or less at hazard but using what was then state-of-the-art equipment—events and performances the two encountered, in venues ranging from town halls to cabin porches. For many years Bergman’s work was wholly eclipsed by the earlier W. P. A. and Library of Congress folk initiatives, but her archives survive at Southern Kentucky State College and have recently begun to receive some attention. (For a precursor to our present interest, see track 5.) One of the most striking of her recordings is presented here. West and Bergman recorded dates, titles, and persons separately on index cards, and these were subsequently shuffled and partly overwritten, with some being lost altogether. Thus we cannot be certain, but it appears this track may have been performed by a guitarist named Sid Osborn; if so, “Cotten” (spelled thus) is evidently the name he gave it.

Side A Track 3. Crump 3:32

Blues guitarist Sheila (“Big Mama”) Orton achieved brief notoriety in 1967 with unscheduled, guerrilla-like appearances on local and regional blues festivals in Texas and Oklahoma, apparently accomplished through a combination of bribery and blackmail. She acquired a sizeable body of devoted fans who somehow knew when and where she would—often quite literally—capture the stage; then, after fourteen months of celebrity, she disappeared entirely. No one has ever explained who she was, how she worked, or how she gained a following; and she was only recorded once, on a “live at . . .” tape made at an unidentified location and never released. This track is from that recording, which otherwise contains only wholly bland

performances by utterly forgettable musicians. In an impossibly distorted and incoherent introduction, Big Mama seems to shout the word “Crump” several times, echoed by the crowd; without any real justification, we have settled on that as a name for the track. We wish to acknowledge musicologist W. Frances Burton and the Josephine Whitcomb Foundation for their assistance in facilitating the inclusion of “Crump” on this recording.

Side A Track 4. *ibid.* 5:07

Composer Wladimir Brzinsky worked painstakingly for over a decade in his tiny basement apartment in Krakow, writing a series of pieces for varying forces that were all titled “*ibid.*” These all drew on identical materials but they were also literally made “in the same place”—hence the title he (re)used. The composition for guitar was recorded in 1974 by Svetlana Ostrovskaya but was not included on her only, belated, compact disc. When we contacted Svetlana, now 86, to request permission to include her performance on this record, she gladly agreed. She could not recall the circumstances of the recording, except that it had been in a “fine studio” and that a man named “Josef W” had been in the booth at the time. Unfortunately, the identity of “Josef W” remains elusive.

Side B Track 1. Cotten, *loc. cit.* 6:15

This tale strains credulity and is unverified, but it is consistent with the evidence. Apparently the Spanish guitarist Simón Ortega discovered the Bergman archive (see track 2), probably before it was acquired by Southern Kentucky State, and he became fascinated by the very track included above. In Ortega’s handwritten diary (privately held), there is a brief entry for 17 December 1961 that translates as: “Bergman recording to Wilhelm Beck for a new piece.” We know almost nothing about Wilhelm Beck, but a person of that name does appear in the 1963 telephone book for Barcelona, Spain. Meanwhile, in England, the industrial heiress Johanna Winton—restricted to her Wetherby home by a childhood accident—was pursuing an avid interest in radio and broadcasting. One of her hobbies was making off-air recordings, using specialised, state-of-the-art equipment that enabled reception, albeit with some distortion, from remote stations. In 1966 Winton recorded a broadcast made by Ortega on Spanish radio. This included the music included on this track. We have transcribed track 2 and the present track, and careful analysis does reveal an astonishing consistency in pitch content and, to some extent, melodic gesture. Hence we have concluded that the present track is, in fact, the composition made by Beck for Ortega, and we have named it accordingly. No attempt has been made to remove the static and distortion on Winton’s original tape, on the assumption that these add an air of plausibility to this extraordinary narrative.

Side B Track 2. Cage, *passim* 18:09

The story of Jude Wassermann is well known to scholars of electronic music: Jude was initially Judith Wassermann, an American GI-nurse who served in Germany in the 1950s. After leaving the service Wasserman moved to Berlin, underwent a gender change, and became Jude Wasserman (choosing the name to problematise both gender and his Jewish identity). In 1974 Jude embarked on a now legendary series of assemblages, all of which bore the term “*passim*” in the title. Each work in the series brings together excerpts and found materials pertinent to a particular composer; Wassermann’s most famous assemblage, “Mahler, *passim*,” for example, conjoins micro-excerpts from Mahler’s symphonies with recordings of German folk music, brass bands, and political oratory. “Cage, *passim*” is unusual in two respects. First, it utilises a relatively small number of quite long sound units, rather than short fragments, that are concatenated rather than overlaid and intercut; second, in addition to some found materials, it includes recordings made especially for this project by Jude’s guitarist-collaborator (and sometime lover) Scott O’Connor. By a Byzantine history of copyright transfers, all the Wassermann creations are now owned by Warner Brothers; we are gratified that, after a lengthy period of negotiation, that firm has granted permission to include “Cage, *passim*” on this disk.

Total duration: 45:12