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Brian Eno, January 07003: Bell Studies for The Clock of the Long Now (Opal

text

The Long Now Foundation was established in what its board refers to as the year "01996" with the purpose of developing extremely long-term cultural institutions, including its library and its Clock. "It has been nearly 10,000 years since the end of the last Ice Age and the beginnings of civilization. Progress lately is often measured on a faster/cheaper scale. The Long Now Foundation seeks to promote slower/better thinking and to foster creativity in the framework of the next 10,000 years." Thus the 10,000-year clock; the first prototype of which can be visited at the Science Museum in London or at <http://www.longnow.org>.

Brian Eno is on board as the only English member of the foundation. He free-associated himself from clocks to bells when considering his sonic contribution to the project. "I began reading about bells, discovering the physics of their sounds, and became interested in thinking about what other sorts of bells might exist. My speculations quickly took me out of the bounds of current physical and material possibilities...." As per usual with Brian Eno, one might nod.

January 07003 is a study of what these bells, when struck today, might sound like if they continued to reverberate and evolve for five thousand years, halfway through the Long Now project. Eno's not-entirely oblique strategy involves reckoning complicated algorithms and simulating the tones certain actual bells or imagined, physically unmakeable bells, might produce under given circumstances. Their peals have all been artificially produced on computer and set in motion rather than played, in the spirit of Eno's "Generative Music" software. Their parameters have been staked out by the questions and challenges Eno poses himself: "What would happen if the highest partials lasted longest? What would a large bell made entirely of glass sound like? What if a bell became a drone?" And on the final track, for once reaching back into historical possibility, What would the biggest bell ever made, the Tsar Kolokol III, sound like if it had ever been rung? It never was, because it cracked in a fire shortly after having been cast.

Theory aside, the musical results are reminiscent of and compare very favourably to aspects of both his field recording dronescape Excerpts from Music for White Cube, and Neroli, his minimalistic attempt at conjuring up the essence of perfume with sound. It is indeed slow, meditative music, meant to be savoured when in repose. In time, and not necessarily five thousand years from now, it should be considered one of his finest works ever.

[Footnote: Former Pogue Jem Finer's Longplayer, while not associated with the Long Now Foundation, seems to share the same attitude about time and our cavalier relationship to it: "A thousand-year musical composition, it will play continuously and without repetition from January 1, 2000 until it's completion on December 31, 2999. During the year 2000, Longplayer can only be heard at public 'listening posts' around the world. The project...offers no promise of glimpsing a future horizon but rather alludes to the constant impossibility of defining and imaging time beyond human existence."]

Posted by [Stephen Fruitman](#) at 08:34, 06 Jul 2004