MUSIC FOR SURROGATE PERFORMER

Music for Surrogate Performer

"Music for Surrogate Performer" explores the notion of preserving a performer's legacy after their passing. what happens to a legacy once the creator has passed away? Can the essence of the original performer be retained if the person is no longer physically present?

"Music for Surrogate Performer" is a living bioengineered musical entity that utilizes neural networks to improvise live performances, serving as a proxy for the late legendary Alvin Lucier, a pioneering composer of the 20th century.

It builds upon Lucier's historical work, 'Music for Solo Performer' (1965) that explored the relationship between brainwave activity and sound generation in a temporally responsive sonic event. The piece captured the alpha waves produced by Lucier's 'relaxed' brain which were then amplified and fed into a network of resonant percussive instruments. Lucier emphasised the cognitive activity of the performer as a central element to composition and challenged the traditional glorification of the performer's physical prowess by shifting the focus to their actual cognitive labour.

Music for Surrogate Performer (Commissioned by the Venice Biennale, 2023) references, celebrates and extends Lucier original piece by using cutting-edge biotechnologies and his living neural networks to expand into uncharted realms. It takes the late Lucier's aperiodic neural activity and produces a responsive sound work that is still driven by cognitive labour – but in this case Lucier's disembodied 'in-vitro 'brain' that controls a similar setup of percussive instruments that Lucier used in the original performance in 1965.

This work, places Lucier's Surrogate Performer in the centre of the space and suggests that through its biological agency, it will sit in for Lucier while performing his composition from 1965. It follows Lucier's intention (as manifested in Music for Solo Performer) by further deconstructing the performer's physicality and removing them completely.

The project's significance lies in its alignment with Lucier's seminal 1965 performance, while also marking a historic word first–a deceased composer playing live after their death, facilitated through the biological agency of their 'in-vitro brain'.

In 2018 we met Lucier and decided to collaborate and in 2020 he donated his blood to our collaborati-

ve project which we then transformed using biotechnology to become his living neural networks that we grow on specialised interfaces in a petri dish. These neural networks are Lucier's 'In-Vitro Brain'. While we are still developing our collaborative project with Lucier (Titled "Revivification" to be launched in January 2025), this project (*Music for Surrogate Performer*) follows discussions we had with Lucier before his passing away in December 2021, to use his living neural networks in an interim piece referencing his historical work from 1965 - Music for solo performer. Alvin Lucier provided his endorsement for this project during his lifetime, and it continues to be supported by his family and the Lucier estate.

Music for Surrogate Performer is a tentative approach to reconcile and build a better understanding of an impending cultural shift; a trajectory that could see our human-ness and humanity challenged on many fronts. Yesterday's impossibilities are today's practicalities, and it is hoped that these performances can spark the imaginations of those who witness it.