

NWCR778

Judy Dunaway

Balloon Music



1. *Piece for Solo Tenor Balloon (for Marion DeLaet)* (1996) (8:33)
Judy Dunaway, tenor balloon
2. *Bluebird* (1997) (6:50)
Judy Dunaway, balloons, Yasunao Tone, prepared CD; Composed in collaboration with Yasunao Tone. Original balloon improvisations recorded by Pieter Stellingwerff at Estrapool.
3. *Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime* (for Dean Martin) (1995) (13:02)
All parts performed by Judy Dunaway, balloons
4. *Champagne in Mexico City –* Fragment Set #1 (1997) (5:13)
Judy Dunaway, balloons; Don Evans Farkas, electronics; composed in collaboration with Don Evans Farkas.
5. *Blown Uncut* (1997) (4:56)
Judy Dunaway, balloon
6. *Rubber Patchwork Quilt* (1997) (6:18)
Judy Dunaway, balloons
7. *Champagne in Mexico City –* Fragment Set #2 (1997) (7:13)
Judy Dunaway, balloons; Don Evans Farkas, electronics; composed in collaboration with Don Evans Farkas
8. *Balloon Pop* (1995) (00:13)
(Created by Judy Dunaway and Mark Howell. Recording engineers: Mark Howell at SUNY, Stonybrook; Paul Geluso at Harvestworks).

Total playing time: 52:18

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Notes

As an experimental guitarist in the late 1980s, I pressed balloons against the strings of my guitar and rubbed them over the pick-up to get interesting sounds, an idea I borrowed from Eugene Chadbourne. In 1990, the New York performance space Roulette invited me to do an evening of my compositions and improvisations. I wanted to create new pieces that didn't use standard instruments, so I decided to work with balloons. Balloons were a significant tool of artistic expression for me at that time because of the association between latex and AIDS prevention. I lost many friends to AIDS and saw latex as a material that allowed both sexual freedom and survival.

I found that balloons responded best to manipulation by the mouth, hands and body. I experimented with inflated, semi-inflated, and cut fragments of balloons of various sizes, and through this I discovered techniques for playing them. The more I worked with balloons, the more I became seduced by this new musical vocabulary. They could sound like animal calls, voices, wind, electronic synthesizers, gastro-intestinal gurgling, birds, door squeaks, violins, or whales. They were unpredictable, uncontrollable, and volatile, strongly affected by temperature, humidity, and the condition of my hands, giving all my works a certain level of indeterminacy. I liked the tremendous stretchiness that allowed an infinite prism of

microtones. I liked that I could choose the color and size of my instruments, and that they had a sensual and appealing visual image. I liked that they were inexpensive, light and transportable. I especially liked people's reactions to them, ranging from fear of popping to uncontrollable giggles. Most importantly, I was showing the audience that anything that can produce sound is a musical instrument.

An inflated balloon has a resonant body like a classical guitar and vibrational nodes like a timpani. The mouth of the balloon functions like a woodwind reed or a brass player's lips. Rubbing the balloon yields sounds through a stick-and-slip mechanism similar to the bowing of a stringed instrument. Because rubber dampens its own overtones, the pure tones produced by the balloons are similar to those produced by an electronic oscillator. The oral inflection and enunciation into the mouth of the balloon are similar to that used by a singer.

After eight years of making music with them, I sometimes think that balloons may be magic. They are made of natural latex, which was first discovered and used for waterproofing shoes and bottles by the Mayans in the Central American rainforests. Latex comes from the *Hevea brasiliensis* plant and it serves as a protective agent, seeping out of and sealing over wounds in the tree's bark; in the same way, it has been

used for modern hygienic uses to protect humans from disease. Balloons also relate to our own childhood, a time of fantasy and imagination. And balloons hold air, quite often our own breath. Is it so strange that I seem to have fallen under their spell?

In 1994 during an artist residency in the Netherlands, I had the opportunity to visit Marion DeLaet, a composer at the music conservatory at the Haag who had written a piece for balloons. Marion's piece used a variety of sizes of balloons, which she had dubbed soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The size that I think most closely correlates to her tenor is the sixteen-inch round balloon that I purchase from a balloon wholesaler in New York City. I based my *Piece for Solo Tenor Balloon* on the harmonic series that occurs when the balloon is rubbed, combined with a small microtonal range controlled by squeezing the balloon between my knees.

Also during my Dutch residency I recorded a set of improvisations for blue balloons of various sizes. Three years later, I decided to make an individual CD of these improvisations for Fluxus artist Yasunao Tone, who creates music by playing CDs which he prepares by placing small pieces of plastic tape on the surface. We recorded Tone playing my CD and the result was *Bluebird*.

Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime is a piece for eight balloons that could only be realized through my recording each part on a multi-track recorder, as I had no other balloon players at the time. The "song" passages are played on the mouthpiece with the rest of the balloon cut off, and I call this type of balloon fragment "blown cut." *Blown Uncut* refers to the fact that it is a whole balloon, not a fragment, and "blown," means that the sounds are from air entering and exiting the balloon.

Champagne in Mexico City began as a series of improvisations with Dan Evans Farkas processing the acoustic sounds of my balloons through a series of unpredictable, low-tech electronics, occasionally accentuating it with sounds from various gutted and manipulated electronic toys. The improvisations serve as the source, and *Champagne in Mexico City* exists in as many forms as can be made from the source. Fragment Sets #1 and #2 consist of a variety of material from the source, edited together into a continuous form. My concept is loosely based on the late writer William Burroughs's cut-up techniques, in which he used scissors to physically cut-up texts, and then reassembled them in random patterns.

Rubber Patchwork Quilt is created from a large number of balloon sounds I recorded onto my electronic sampler. I then played back the sounds in random sequences, by accessing an error in my sampler's memory. The error caused the sampler to spit out random sequences of sounds at various speeds, interspersed with digital noise and distortion. I recorded the sequences and then transferred them to multi-track at Studio PASS in order to create a contrapuntal arrangement.

People often ask if I will be popping balloons at my concerts, and my response is usually to the negative, as I don't find the sound that interesting. However, Mark Howell and I recorded a number of balloon sounds at SUNY Stonybrook electronic studios in 1995 in order to analyze their characteristics. We decided to slow the sound of a Balloon Pop and, after considerable time-stretching, a stunning image was revealed.

During the late 1980s, **Judy Dunaway** began performing as a guitarist and vocalist in New York City's downtown free improvisation scene. She co-founded the New York Women's Improv Festival in 1986. From 1990-1994 her art-rock duo, Judy Dunaway and the Evan Gallagher Little Band, performed throughout the U.S. and Europe, and they released two CDs of this material, "Judy Dunaway" (Lost, 1990) and "Judy Dunaway and the Evan Gallagher Little Band" (AMF, 1993).

Since 1990 her compositions and improvisations for balloons have been presented in New York City at Lincoln Center Out-of-Doors, the SoHo Arts Festival, the Alternative Museum, the Knitting Factory, P.S.122, Hear Theater, SoundLab, and many other venues, as well as throughout the U.S. and Europe. She has performed as a balloon player in compositions by Roscoe Mitchell and John Zorn, and in improvisational pieces with the Flux String Quartet, Illuminati, DJ Singe, Ken Butler, Andrea Parkins, and numerous others.

Other works by Dunaway include *Sensation*, a composition for audience presented at the Mixed Messages Festival where it was conducted by Jackie-60 Award-winner Baby Dee; *Duo for Radio Stations*, simulcast on WFMU (New Jersey) and WKCR (New York); *The Dead* for organ and seven cheap tape players premiered at Roulette and released on a compilation from AMF; and the score for Diane Torr's performance art piece "Crossing the River Styx," the "high decibel music" that instigated the closing of Franklin Furnace in 1990. Judy Dunaway appears on CRI's collection "New York Guitars" (CD 698) performing her composition *Fifty 210* and "The Emergency Music Collection" (CD 770).

Dan Evans Farkas is a music and sound editor who has worked on films by Sidney Lumet, Mike Nichols, Jim Jarmusch, the Coen Brothers, and others. As an electronic composer he has appeared at Experimental Intermedia, Roulette, The Kitchen, the Staten Island Electronic Music Festival, the International FLEA Festival, and many other venues.

Yasunao Tone's multi-media work has been presented as part of the Fluxus exhibition at the 1990 Venice Biennale, the Walker Art Center's traveling exhibition on Fluxus, and the Guggenheim's "Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky." The Merce Cunningham Dance Company has included his compositions and improvisations as part of their repertory since 1979. CDs of his music are available from Lovely Music and Tzadik. He recently received grants from NYSCA and Harvestworks for creating an interactive CD-ROM.

Production Notes

Produced by Judy Dunaway.

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

CD mastered by Robert Wolff, engineer, Joseph R. Dalton, and Judy Dunaway, at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

Assistant producers: Bjorn Dittmer-Roche, Dan Evans Farkas, Paul Geluso, Brenda Hutchinson, Phil Kline, Chris Nelson, Jasmin Zorlu.

Recording Engineers: Paul Geluso, Mark Howell, Brenda Hutchinson, Leslie Lavelanet, Bradford Reed, and Pieter Stellingwerff.

Assistant Engineers: Bjorn Dittmer-Roche, and Ben Manley.

Piece for Solo Tenor Balloon; Recording Engineer: Paul Geluso at Harvestworks.

Bluebird; Original balloon improvisations recorded by Pieter Stellingwerff at Estrapool. Recording engineers at Harstworks: Leslie Lavlanet, Brenda Hutchinson and Paul Geluso.

Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime; Recording engineer: Bradford Reed; Assistant Producer: Phil Kline.

Champagne in Mexico City- Fragment Set #1; Recording Engineer: Paul Geluso at Harvestworks.

Blown Uncut ; Recording engineer: Paul Geluso at Harvestworks.

Rubber Patchwork Quilt; Recording engineer: Paul Geluso at Harvestworks; Assistant recording engineers: Bjorn Dittmer-Roche and Ben Manley.

Champagne in Mexico City – Fragment Set #2; Recording Engineer: Paul Geluso at Harvestworks.

Balloon Pop; Recording engineers: Mark Howell at SUNY, Stonybrook; Paul Geluso at Harvestworks.

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