Music That Ears Create —— Sound Museum

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In the 1970s, as I continued to create works of art in which I fused various electric sounds to generate louder sounds, I started to realize two things. The first thing I realized was that no matter how complicated the waveforms were, everything would end up making similar sounds when I put them together. The other was that the first time experiencing the sound would be the most interesting. As I listened to a certain sound two or three times, my body would grow accustomed to the sound and rapidly become less stimulated.

Because of these unsatisfactory findings, I abandoned using a synthesizer in the 1980s. After that, however, mundane sounds in which I had no interest until that point began to captivate my attention. The sounds of turning a page, placing a cup on the table, clothes getting rubbed, and coins discharged from a vending machine… These were never simple “insignificant” sounds, which cannot be artificially generated by putting together waveforms, but flush with extremely high density content. In addition, although almost all of them were small sounds, they retained their own idiosyncrasies and sounded mettlesome in their specific environments.

Motivated from these experiences, I decided to create a work of art by utilizing “small sounds” and chose music boxes to start with. Music boxes are practical since they contain the information of their own sounds and also exist as sound producing vessels. Moreover, their acoustic alters when attached to various objects, which provide them with new physical forms.

Having listened to the sounds of those newborn objects, I was struck by a new auditory experience, which was not attainable when I was listening to loud sounds. Music boxes create small sounds, so one has to make an effort to listen to them. When their sounds stop, one realizes that one can hear cars running outside or people’s footsteps extremely well. This is because of one’s augmented auditory perception due to his or her active listening. This experience allowed my interest to transition from “making sounds” to “listening to sounds.”

One of my dedications to “listening” was “ear shapes.” Ears of the Rooftop was derived from my childish question; “Are elephants and rabbits listening to the same sounds as we are?”

Having 1.8m long 6cm diameter pipes next to one’s ears, the person can experience a totally different soundscape. As ambient sound goes through the pipes, they generate “howlings,” which are idiosyncratic to their own oscillation frequency. Their howlings are so lively that they sound like a piece of

music. Thus, a small adjustment of the existing environment, which can be done without adding an additional sound, can make our auditory perception capable of creating “music.”

This apparatus taught me the fact that “music” exists in every part of this planet. That “music” cannot be heard easily although it is around us. That “music” suddenly becomes available to us only when we are ready to “listen.” In addition, it goes away in a second when we think of something else. That is why the world of sound is very intriguing. And of course, “silence” also has a significant role in music.

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