

Solar Music

Joe Jones

After my first experience of using SOLAR ENERGY in my music, I found it difficult to go back to making battery powered pieces.

Playing with the subtle changes that occurred in the sounds produced by the different combinations of solar cells and motors, under a constant light source (light bulb), selecting one, then taking this combination out into the sun light, where the movement of the earth, cloud formations, and wind, slowly and sometimes radically changed the sounds. The voltage being higher in direct sunlight and lower when cloud formations cast shadows over the solar cells.

The wind plays its part by gently or not so gently moving the motors or hanging instruments, causing them to swing. The combination of all these factors create the solar music for that particular day.

From complete density of sound in a cloudless sky at mid-day to silence in a heavy sky or total silence at sun down.

First Solar Pieces

The first Solar Music Piece was hand made chimes 1977, Harlekin Art, Wiesbaden. This was immediately followed by hanging zitaras, to take advantage of their multi-string sound capacity. The "Solar Zitar" pieces could be hung outside or in a window, the sun and wind creating their own composition.

This was a development of an earlier idea, 1964, but could not be completed because of the cost of material at that time.

"Sound Forest"

Many Music Machines are placed in a forest, drums, zitaras, toy pianos, etc. The motors are powered by solar cells.

As the sun rises the instruments start to play, and as the sun gets stronger, louder, clouds passing by change the sound also. As the sun sets, the forest once more becomes silent till the next morning when the sun rises again.

"Solar Orchestra"

The use of music stands in my music goes back to the beginning, 1962, simply because of the compactness of the object, its simplicity of form, and its usefulness to place things on, under or suspend from.

Also, it's visual suggestion of "MUSIC" in a formal sense. Placing the Solar Cells on the music stands as if they were sheet music to be played, the twist being that the solar cells do the playing, the SUN supplying the "Music Score". The music instruments to be played suspended from or placed under the music stand with the motor to play the instrument suspended over the instrument, all in some way attached to the music stand, completing the set up.

Solar Orchestra was originally placed in a plastic covered tent, with the front open, to capture the sound and direct it forward towards the audience.

Visually it consolidated the orchestra, giving a feeling of "music" in a formal sense, association with music pavilions or where "music" is separated from the audience.

Solar Orchestra has been used without the tent for performances also, giving a feeling of more openness and thus giving the opportunity for the audience to move around and among the orchestra parts. The sound not being projected as with using the tent, one has to get closer to hear the sounds, and thus get more intimate with the orchestra.

Solar Orchestra was constructed so that it could be set up and taken down easily, transported in a car from place to place, giving a freedom in selecting places to play.

One idea is to travel around the world giving Solar Music Concerts and recording them to document the changing of sounds, brought about by the different settings and different setting up of the music instruments, plus the occasional changing of music instruments as new ones were found, to replace or to add to the others in the orchestra.

"Solar Hot House"

Using both Solar Orchestra and hanging Solar Music Instruments, placed inside a Hot House amongst plants and flowers, with pathways and benches, so that people can walk through or sit down in this closed environment, where the sounds are somewhat protected from the outside world.