

..... La Pâte à Son

Cooking up a musical storm by making a mess with sound dough

Conceived as a sound toy to encourage musical experimentation, la *Pâte à Son*—which can be translated as “sound dough”—allows any and everyone, both young and old, from novices to experienced musicians, to become composers of unusual musical.

The concept is simple—the user is presented with a perfectly ordered series of musical notes, be they scales or simple tunes. This structure may be chosen from a number of pre-sets, but it is always pre-determined, never accidental, never random. Put simply, the idea is to make a mess out of finite order.

Graphically, a checkerboard is the dominant feature or main playing field of the *Pâte à Son*. Two reservoirs produce unlimited quantities of sound dough that are distributed through pipes on either side of the checkerboard.

The continuous flow of musical notes is structured and repetitive, and each note is represented by a different color. To intervene, the user drags pipes from the conveyor belt below. Depending on their placement, these pipes direct and determine the direction of the musical flow. Several different kinds of pipes and mechanical elements are available.

First there are neutral transporters—simple pipes, both straight and bent, that simply carry the sound dough particles. Next, there are instruments, eleven in all, that act upon the silent notes to give them explicit instrumental voices. A doh is always a doh but may be expressed as a guitar, or a flute, or a human voice depending on the instrument pipe it moves through. Finally, there are switches, in the shape of a cross or a T, that distribute equal proportions of sound dough in different directions. These unassuming and deceptively simple pieces are the key to the compositional process of the *Pâte à Son*.

Adding switches to the circuit ensures that sound particles will loop and sooner or later return to their point of origin. Creating closed circuits makes simple melodies more complex. And additional passes through the same switch makes superimposed complex melodies exponentially more so.

From the nearly infinite number of possible circuits comes the multitude and variety of music generated by the *Pâte à Son*. It is interesting to note an unexpected side effect—a visually aesthetic circuit creates a musically aesthetic composition. From graphic and compositional beauty, melodious music is born.

