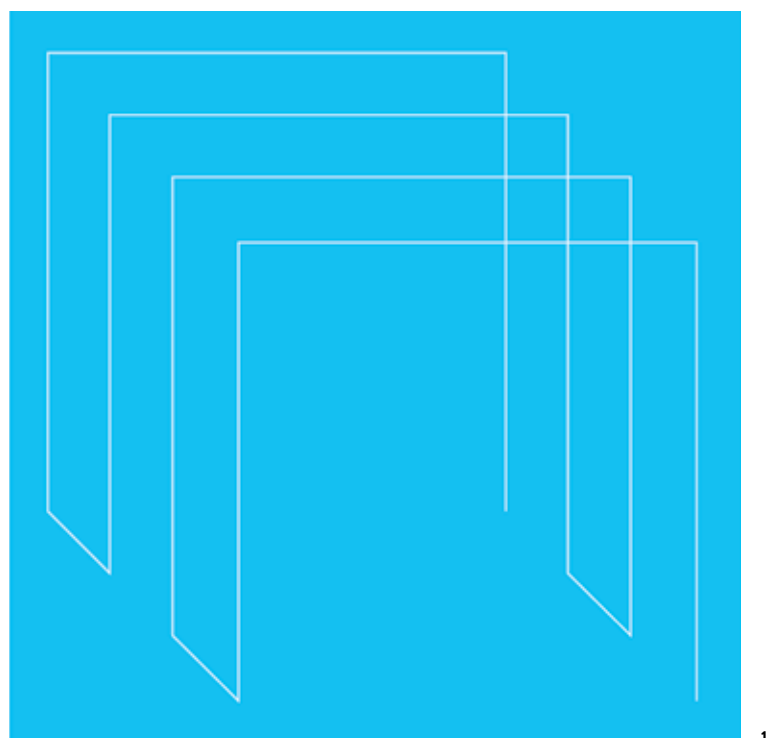
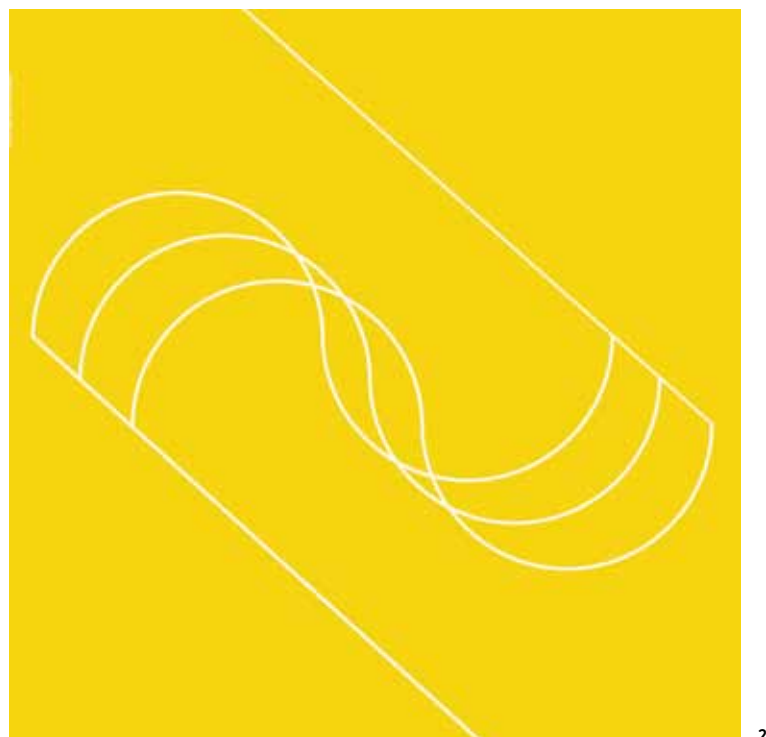


# Music



1



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The monumental frequencies of Eleh

A few months back, in an old Beaux Arts building in New York, Eleh sat at a synthesizer in dim light. For the sake of the sanctity of his sound, he usually chooses to shroud himself in darkness and leave his identity an open question. But people, even esoteric people who might fancy themselves above such workaday fray, like mystery less than they let on. So the light shined just enough to cast the enigma, convincingly, as an ethic. No more, no less – no matter.

The sound did the rest, which was considerable. At ISSUE Project Room, an experimental Brooklyn performance space where hushed reverence is routine, breath was hard to come by. Eleh buckled the air instead, with heaving masses of electronic frequencies that modelled mass from the immaterial. The stage was not his own – he shared it with Duane Pitre, in a duo dubbed Pitreleh – but the presence of Eleh in any scenario, intoning sculptural drones and pulses, occasions a solitary sense of introspection and command. Eleh's music is an abstraction, a magnet for lore, like Iceland or Samuel Beckett or love. Or electricity. It might seem familiar, but how well do you know electricity? What elements of it could you claim to genuinely, granularly understand?

In *Earth Sound Earth Signal* (2013), a new book about the electricity and wires within us all, author Douglas Kahn reconsiders the relationship between nature and the electric arts. In a universe seething with electromagnetism and ambient forces charged enough to make hair stand on end, there is no dichotomy, he suggests – there is no difference. Indeed, in such a context the notion of 'nature' itself is problematic for the different states it seems to presuppose.

What could be more natural than radio waves – ancient in their origins from stars, the sun, the sky – coursing through the cosmos?

Andy Battaglia

All images courtesy: Tugit Records and John Brien

'Electromagnetism had nothing less than the historical misfortune among forces of nature to be disclosed at the moment of its industrialization,' Kahn writes, signalling the ease with which the guiding force of the modern age could have been regarded not as alien but as innate. Signs of electricity, thought to be newfangled and contingent upon the tools of their detection, happened to find earthly form through early iterations of the telephone and random natterings on telegraph wires.

But maybe it was all just the perpetual playing of an instrument at a different sense of scale. Peering back through history to the single-stringed tool with which Pythagoras conceived a cosmological 'music of the spheres', Kahn writes: 'A technological timeline of musical cosmoses could be strung from the antiquity of the monochord to lines of telecommunication.' Our world, with all its wires, is increasingly a medium for music.

Eleh's music electrifies every space it engages. With the flip of a switch or turn of an oscillator control, it exposes the ways in which all space is, in fact, potentially electric. In performance, the sound seems to push past walls, to move mass with mass of its own. It's monolithic, monumental.

Even in Cleveland, Ohio. 'Parts of the building were vibrating like crazy; the frame around our fire-escape door was rattling, the rafters were buzzing – it brought the building alive.' So said Christopher Auerbach-Brown, media programme manager at Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, the site of Eleh's most recent live rite. The museum, designed by the Iranian-British architect Farshid Moussavi, scans like one of Eleh's album covers: shape-shifting, many-sided, formalistic and severe yet enlivened by a sense of energy and effect.

The material Eleh played took recorded form in *For Moussavi Atrium* (2013), the latest addition to the musician's discography, initiated via vinyl-only releases that volleyed around like samizdat and, over time, CDs issued with mention of having been mastered specially for the digital domain. ('This box is not intended to be a replacement of the analogue records but an entirely different experience,' reads a statement for 2011's *Floating Frequencies/Intuitive Synthesis*, a three-CD collection of tracks released on vinyl years earlier.)

The mastering matters, as does everything in Eleh's realm. His music is process music, in a sense, all of it assembled via modular synthesis at the extremes of meticulousness and precision. But then it's magnanimous too, so intensely invested in itself

*Eleh's music electrifies whatever space it engages. With the flip of a switch, it exposes the ways in which all space is, potentially, electric.*

and the virtues of its investigations as to be generous in its insularity. It's music that resounds in private, psychoacoustic spaces in the inner ear and rattles things as big as buildings. It can be minimal to the point of misperception yet seem looming and voluminous. Another note appended to *Floating Frequencies/Intuitive Synthesis*: 'Incorporating tones as low as .05 hz (well below the range of human hearing) Eleh is as much of a physical experience as it is an audio one.'

The Eleh experience is metaphysical, too, for the ways it transposes the thingness of sound and the manner in which sound can be deeply, devotedly meditative. An air of research surrounds it, so much so that certain works sound like test tones and operational findings more than articulations of anything recognizable or known. It's sound unswayed by associations or connotations – sound as immaterial material excised of all weight and made all the more weighty by the absence.

In correspondence, Eleh himself – less elusive than simply conflicted about attention being mislaid on anything other than his sound, the means of so much personal focus and aesthetic elimination – writes: 'Eleh's purest function in my life is that of healing. It's a rare source of stillness for someone who, historically, has too much energy and has done too much thinking.' As for questions about his identity, methods and wiring: 'When you let go of the desire to "know" anything I think you can have a much richer experience with the work.'

Hearing is forgetting the name of the thing one hears, Eleh seems to suggest. Or, as Carl Andre put it, 'a thing is a hole in a thing it is not'.

No more, no less – no matter.

*Andy Battaglia is a writer based in New York, USA. His work has appeared in The Wall Street Journal, The Wire and The National, among others. He is an organizer/curator of Unsound, a music and arts festival in New York and Kraków, Poland.*

- 1  
Homage to the  
Square Wave from 'Homage  
3xLP', 2013
- 2  
Homage to the  
Sine Wave from 'Homage  
3xLP', 2013
- 3  
Homage  
2013, album artwork



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