

Press Quotes

One of the most fascinating musicians on the (Seattle) scene is Ellen Fullman. Twenty years ago Fullman began developing her enormous Long String Instrument, a 100-foot horizontal harp with 100 parallel strings attached to a spruce soundboard. It is the largest string instrument in the world, the only one of its kind. It produces an astonishing variety of sounds, including a continuous, cloud chamber swell you'd swear was electronic; a whistling reminiscent of Tuvan throat singers; the warbling, sympathetic vibrations of an Indian tamboura; and, when palmed like a drum, short bursts, like a Thai bamboo harmonica... The subtle, sensual shifting of overtones, as they float in and out of the fundamental pitch is an almost sculptural experience, the sonic equivalent of watching a very active Northwest sky.

-Paul de Barros, Seattle Times, 2000

The slightest touch releases buoyant, shimmering tones resembling a gigantic zither. Considering the visual beauty of the instrument, its tracery of bronze strings and polished, finely crafted sound boxes, its not surprising that Fullman began her career as a sculptor and ceramist.

-Gavin Borchert, Seattle Weekly, 1999

...There were points where, if you had closed your eyes, you would have thought you were in the room with a giant bellowsy accordion. The physical presence of the Instrument has a real effect on the body too, with each timbre having a different effect—reedy treble sounds chattering teeth, low sounds thrumming against your chest, others vibrating beautifully or nastily against your skull (mostly the former), and all overlapping. It was neat to watch the performers work the Instrument with motions and techniques that I had never seen before—most memorably, bits of regular textile string were folded into a "v" and rubbed along the metal string's under surface, creating a wonderful scrape/rumble.

-Robin Edgerton, Resonance magazine, 1998

The instrument is deceptively simple: a loom of long metal wires played by one or more players who walk the length of the instrument, rubbing their fingers along the lengths of the strings, exciting it into vibration much as you would to get a crystal glass to sound. The sound is arresting—so much so that Fullman, who was a sculptor when she made the sound-making instrument, had devoted her energies over the decade she has lived in Austin to refining the sound...

-Jerry Young, Austin American Statesman, 1994

The Long String Instrument...opened up incredible musical possibilities with its amazing ability to produce unending harmonic overtones that seem to appear from every point in space.

-Rob Forman, ND magazine, 1994

The long string instrument... can sound by turns like a cello, a Volkswagen horn, a harmonica, bagpipes, and Indian Sitar or a pipe organ. Fullman has the distinction of being the only virtuoso,

indeed the only musician, who specializes in the instrument. As such, she has had to invent all the playing techniques herself.

-John Burnett, Morning Edition, 1993

New music explores and dissolves certain boundaries, so Ellen fits into this in a wonderful way by having an instrument that is so large that it can't be ignored, and it becomes the focus of fascination for people. And the sounds are really quite beautiful and dreamlike, I would say.

-Pauline Oliveros, on Morning Edition, 1993

With their fingertips securely caressing the wires, the three resemble Lilliputians as they slowly traverse hither and yon along the lengths. Their dreamy choreography... slows to a trancelike stroll during adagios, as the music swells and billows through the room. Not only has Fullman had to invent a notation system to accommodate the logistical necessities of performance, but she also had to compose music that is appropriate to her instrument. "The sound is so radically different," says Fullman, "that it amounts to a new form of music."

-Helen Thompson, Texas Monthly magazine, 1992

The strings were stroked rather than plucked, generating plenty of volume and sounds that were suggestive of an orchestra tuning, the deep notes of a cello, a reedy church organ, bagpipes, a cheap electric guitar. It was quite remarkable—emotionally calming because of the insinuating nature of the sounds, intellectually provocative because of the unique technique of the players, aesthetically exciting because it produced such novel sound... The Long String Instrument is so large and resonant that it creates an inescapable sensation that the whole room is a titanic violinpiano, with the audience inside it.

-Bart Becker, High Performance magazine, 1989

In less time than it takes to blink an eye the sound would move from that of a monotone car horn to the fullness of a gothic church organ. The next minute the sound of a shorted-out electric wire evolved into a Middle Eastern raga.

-Roberta Penn, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, 1989

Fullman and Massie looked like a pair of solemn spiders weaving a web as they moved through Fullman's "The Long String Instrument"...

-Martha Ullman West, The Oregonian, 1989

The fine wires running the length of the room are as graceful and delicate as the taut anchoring threads of a spider's web. Fullman and her associates move back and forth among the strings in slow motion, as if they are deep sea divers in a viscous ocean of sound. The pace is slow and meditative—but once you listen for them you notice continual rapid changes as the player moves along each string: ethereal intervals which evaporate before you can name them...

-Sarah Cahill, Mills College, 1989

Paradoxically, her music is both intense and serene. The attractively eerie, acoustically unstable droning suggests urgency, while the slow formal development of the piece invites an intuitive, suspended-intellect sort of hearing.

-John Henken, Los Angeles Times, 1989

Her tonalities were in minor keys, yet transcendently calm, producing a beautifully meditative atmosphere. Dissonant tones would suddenly jut out and then recede, and as soon as you tried to identify the overtones present they'd already changed.

-Kyle Gann, Village Voice, 1987

Arthur Plant walked into the lobby of the Travelers Insurance building to look over Ellen Fullman's work... and like some of the workers who poked their heads in from time to time, he laughed at the contraption... There was no melody, just a sustained line of mellow tones that built in tension—not unlike the beauty of deep notes from a cello. "I'm filled with the emotion of it," Mr. Plant said. "What vision, to brush up against a string and have this result. It's the difference between artists and us ordinary people."

-Jeffrey Schmaltz, New York Times, 1984