

Douglas Geers
Stolen Blue

A work for 8-channel electroacoustic fixed media playback
(six minutes; 2014)

Program note

The tension between authenticity and illegitimacy has stood as a shadow by much of music of the last century, especially in popular styles. Are today's musicians standing on the shoulders of giants, or merely on wigs, tight leather, and platform shoes? Who has the right to copy, and what is fair to use? We are extremely fortunate that the legal profession and music industry have cooperated so well with artists to avoid any confusion or unfair practices related to these issues.

Brief notes on the composition

This short multichannel electroacoustic piece confronts a mix of legal, ethical, and perceptual issues, while simultaneously shifting between serious and lighthearted tones, between a sense of 'documentary audio' and invented soundscapes.

All sounds in the work are derived from a small set of audio samples taken from recordings legally protected by copyright. The first is legendary blues singer Son House's *a cappella* 1965 studio recording of the song "Grinnin' in Your Face." The second is the lead vocal track by David Lee Roth from the song "Running with the Devil," by his band Van Halen, from their 1978 debut album.

Beyond the obvious issue of creating a new work by manipulating and recontextualizing audio samples, the choice of audio here was deliberate, to highlight the debt that much popular music owes to folk music sources such as, in the case, the blues. Whereas the blues musicians who were imitated rarely were able to rise above a working-class income level, many of the pop musicians became multimillionaires. However, despite the ridiculousness of some of David Lee Roth's vocal antics, his art was enriched through the imitative elements and can actually be compelling at times.

The piece also features a shifting sense of place. As it begins, one might imagine that the blues singer was actually recorded on location at a city street corner. This abruptly shifts when the street noise vanishes, leaving only a close-miked vocal. The city street ambience returns a couple other structural junctions in the piece, as do one or more claps by Son House. Intimacy, documentary, studio recording, and purely musical soundscape moments evolve into one another and are juxtaposed.