

Perhaps the most inventive of these recent revivals was a reimagining of Ashley's *Automatic Writing* conceived and performed by the collective Object Collection in conjunction with the Incubator Arts Project in November, 2011.

Unlike the other Ashley pieces that were given new life in New York City at the end of 2011, the composition *Automatic Writing* wasn't conceived for the stage. The sound piece is built around the involuntary utterances Ashley sometimes makes (although he has never been diagnosed, Ashley believes that he has a mild case of Tourette's syndrome). The recording – released in 1979 on Lovely Music, Ltd, the label founded by Johnson – features overlaid tracks of Ashley's voice paired with a synthesizer bassline and Johnson speaking in French. It's a dramatic 45-minute artifact constructed over a period of five years.

In Object Collection's hands, and under the guidance of director Kara Feely and composer Travis Just, *Automatic Writing* became an ensemble piece presented live on stage with multiple video monitors showing the members of the ensemble repeated as if in a claustrophobic hallucination.

*"I talked to [Ashley] a lot about how, in relationship to his operas, there are sort of characters in it – the voice, Mimi's French voice, the disco music,"* Feely said. *"In a way, I've always thought of it as very theatrical. There's no story, there's nothing really happening, it's very thick and it never really settles into one thing."*

Feely and Just have collaborated on a number of unconventional operas – intense productions with loud electric guitar and fractured storylines. There's a clear lineage stretching back to Ashley's work, even if it's of a decidedly different generation.

*"I like the idea of it being the kind of thing you're not supposed to do,"* Just said. *"[Automatic Writing is] this studio thing, this monolith, and I thought 'What would it be like to deal with it as a living thing?'"*

Just comes from a background of both improvisation and classical composition, having studied with Andrew Cyrille, Wadada Leo Smith and James Tenney. Discovering Ashley's music, he said, changed the way he approached his own work. "I can't imagine coming across him and going 'well, it's back to writing sonatas'," he said. "It would be historically inconceivable."

All of this activity was a much deserved tribute for an 83-year-old composer who arguably cleared the path for such new music luminaries as Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Meredith Monk and Steve Reich. But at the same time, Ashley said he never expected to see other people performing his work.

*"I was never interested in writing music for somebody else to play without me,"* Ashley said. *"My activities in doing that were so unfortunate. You give a score to an ensemble and they go 'oh, you can't do this, you can't do that.' I think the deepest part of you that wants to make music wants to make it yourself. The part of you that thinks 'I want to make some music', you think 'I want to make some music.' But I've had really wonderful experiences in the past year with young musicians I admire very much who want to do pieces of mine."*