

Dialtones: A Telesymphony

ASP, Base Transceiver Stations, E1 ISDN lines, MySQL, Mobile Switching Centers, OpenGL, RTTTL (RingTone Text Transmission Language), SMS, UDP

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<http://www.flong.com/telesymphony>

In the decade between 1994 and 2004, mobile phones became so omnipresent that a new etiquette appeared in movie theatres, concert halls and other performance spaces: the ritual silencing of these ubiquitous devices. Golan Levin and his collaborators Scott Gibbons, Gregory Shakar and Yasmin Sohrawardy invert this social practice in *Dialtones: A Telesymphony*, a musical performance played on the audience's mobile phones, whose rings in public spaces are otherwise considered noise pollution.

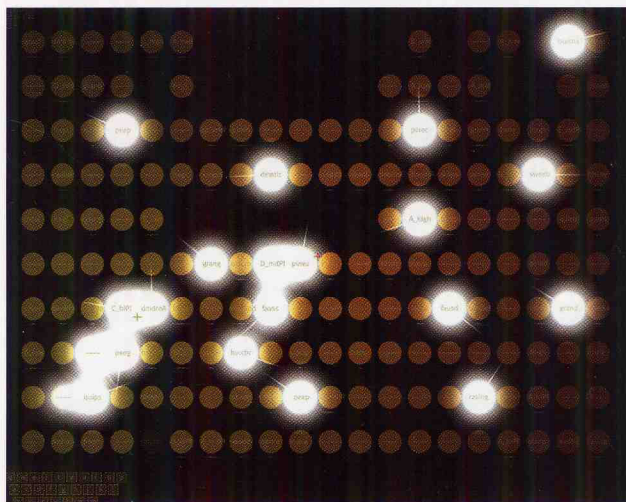
Dialtones was first performed in 2001 at the Ars Electronica festival in Linz, Austria. Two hundred audience members joined the telephonic orchestra by registering their mobile phone numbers at secure Web kiosks at the concert site. The artists assigned these participants specific seats and downloaded onto their phones special ringtones for the performance.

By determining the exact location and tone of each mobile phone in advance, Levin and his team were able to produce diatonic chord progressions, spatially distributed melodies and roving

clusters of sound. On-stage performers acted as orchestral conductors, utilizing a "software instrument" to call participants at specific intervals. The composition of ringtone sounds, accompanied by synchronized projections, lasted about thirty minutes and created sonic effects unique to this new medium. The music reached a crescendo when all two hundred mobile phones rang within a span of four seconds. *Dialtones* was also performed a year later at Artepilage Mobile de Jura in Switzerland.

"If our global communications network can be thought of as a single communal organism, then the goal of *Dialtones* is to indelibly transform the way we hear and understand the twittering of this monumental, multicellular being," Levin explains. "By placing every participant at the center of a massive cluster of distributed speakers, *Dialtones* makes the ether of cellular space viscerally perceptible." *Dialtones* calls attention to the new kinds of social relations that have arisen around mobile phones and in doing so transforms this quotidian technology into a platform for artistic experiment.

Levin studied drawing, painting and musical composition before teaching himself how to program computers in 1996. *Dialtones* builds on the legacy of John Cage, who used sounds from everyday life in his music, and whose work inspired generations of musicians and artists. However, unlike Cage, who reacted to the rigidity of 20th-century musical compositions by applying chance and variability to his work, Levin and his collaborators attempt to infuse the unpredictable, often incompatible international cellphone network with a sense of symphonic order.



Dialtones: A Telesymphony (screenshot of GUI for triggering phones), 2001