

HOUGHTON
COLLEGE

GREATBATCH SCHOOL OF MUSIC

presents

Ian Riley, percussion.

in graduate performance recital

*The Greatbatch School of Music
Recital Hall, Center for the Arts*

April 9th, 2018

8:00 PM

Program

Electroacoustics, Live Electronics, & Percussion
“A Guided Tour”

Hummingbird

for *vibraphone and synthesized audio*

Steven Bryant

(b. 1972)

The Role of the Percussionist

Stop Speaking

for *solo snare drum, and tape*

Andy Akiho

(b. 1979)

Doing what one cannot

Fabian Theory

for *marimba, tom-toms, and effects*

Nigel Westlake

(b. 1958)

Guided nostalgia

Memory Palace

for *nostalgia and electronics*

Christopher Cerrone

(b. 1984)

- I. Harriman
- II. Power Lines

As a courtesy to the performers and your fellow audience members, please be certain that all cell phones, watch alarms, and pagers are either turned off or set for silent operation. Flash photography can be very disconcerting to performers and is not permitted during the performance. Thank you for your cooperation.

During the performance, the lighting in the recital will change, and may at times make it difficult to enter or leave the room – when the room is dark, please refrain from using cell phones, as the light from the screen will largely distract from the performance.

Hummingbrdd, Steven Bryant

Adapted from Steven Bryant's original composition for solo euphonium and Dr. Brad Meyer's transcription for vibraphone, this arrangement of Hummingbrdd was created in collaboration with Mr. Dustin Woodard in an effort to interpret the timbral and articulatory effects of the original composition on the vibraphone.

Hummingbrdd is a happy, lively little piece written over one weekend, primarily as a test drive of a new piece of software, Melodyne. Every sound in the entire piece is created using the composer's voice, then sampled through the software and edited in various ways. No being a trained vocalist, Bryant writes that, "[he'd] never attempted anything quite like this before and found it incredibly fun to do. As a compositional exercise, it reminded [him] of the value of simply playing, with musical materials and creative tools."

Bryant's use of electronics in this manner provide our first insight into the intersection of percussion and live electronics. Unlike an acoustic accompaniment on tape, Bryant's use of augmented vocals enters the realm of 'live electronics,' and breaks the wall between 'electronic' sounds and 'music.'

The pairing of vibraphone with Hummingbrdd provides a unique opportunity to exemplify the ways in which a vibraphone becomes reminiscent of the human voice – the interaction between the instrument and the tape creates a musical effect wherein the sum becomes greater than the parts.

Hummingbrdd represents what is likely the most accessible marriage of percussion and live electronics, characterized by sing-able (no pun intended), song-like melodies, and a charming aesthetic that makes it as much a joy to listen to as it is to perform.

Fabian Theory, Nigel Westlake

Westlake's Fabian Theory represents, in many ways, the most direct application of live electronics to the percussion idiom. Written for marimba, and three tuned drums (typically tom-toms or often roto-toms),

Westlake does what any of us would want to, and coopts the delay pedal, famously a supplement for the electric guitar, and patches his marimba through it.

Immediately, we are struck by the at-once expected delay, but still the somewhat alien effect that it has on the timbre, meter, and now, harmony, being played on the marimba – save for under careful scrutiny, Westlake’s stroke and the amplified delay, are indistinguishable; we expect that there should be a clear line between the real instrument, the marimba, and the electronic funny-business that is coming through the speakers, and yet, when done well, the effect is... unsettling. For Westlake, and many others, this is just the beginning, this seamless interaction between the electronics and the percussive sound is, unlike so many lyrical, song-like instruments, like winds, and strings, the natural impact, decay, and termination of even the most sustained percussion instruments, transmute their timbral power through electronics flawlessly.

Interesting to note, with Fabian, is the level of specificity with which Westlake approaches the application of the electronics. The first full page of his score is dedicated to ‘A Note from the Composer,’ outlining suggestions for working with the delay on stage, as well as some basic questions and answers that serve as a sort of errata for earlier editions of the score. Amusingly, Westlake recognizes the strangeness of his instrumentation, and addresses a few issues that may arise, ending poignantly by stating that, “Percussionists the world over seem to be particularly resourceful with regard to [electronics-related] issues.”

From a notational perspective, Westlake’s score is comparatively sparse in its reference to the required electronic components. On page one of the actual score, the composer denotes the proper settings for the delay pedal, with the expectation that it will remain ‘on’ or ‘active’ unless otherwise denoted, furthermore noting in the first measure that ‘all tempi must be strictly adhered to.’ Initially this seems to be a rather un-musical requirement, but quickly becomes evident that this consideration is necessary due to the nature of the digital delay – the proper effect will not be achieved if the delay interval is not a subdivision of the pulse.

Few other notes accompany the score, notationally, save for instruction to “hold this pattern with the footswitch,” an instruction concerning the loop created in measures 49-50, which are then sustained, and an invitation to begin the next sections “when ready (in sync with delay pattern).” From the perspective the performer, having spent time with the score, and understanding the setup, these instructions are clear, unobtrusive, and in many ways, elegant in their simplicity – for the uninitiated, however, these markings must be deciphered and interpreted, and may very well prove to be nonsensical. We see, in more modern works, different variations on possible solutions to this issue of notational interpretation.

Stop Speaking, Andy Akiho

Akiho’s compositional style is, traditionally, minimalist, with representative works such as Karakurenai, for marimba and steel pan, or 21, for marimba, and cello, Akiho is well-known for his innovative approach to percussion writing; Stop Speaking is no different.

Written for solo snare drum and ‘digital playback’ (for our purposes, ‘tape’), Stop Speaking is immediately set apart in its treatment of the concert snare drum as a solo instrument, and furthermore, by the unique implements with which to strike it (namely, finger-pads, fingernails, palms, brushes, etc.) Similar to Westlake, Akiho dedicates the first page of his score to the ‘instruction manual’ for the work, outlining the meaning of different notation, as well as appropriate interpretational practices. From a technical perspective, as a percussionist, this piece is difficult – and this is to say nothing of the ‘tape.’ Stop Speaking is a piece that toes the line between ‘live electronics,’ and accompaniment. On a technical basis, there is no change in the tape that is dependent on the performance of the percussionist, nor is there any stopping and starting, no additional triggers – this is very much a ‘push ‘play,’ and go along for the ride.’ And yet, anyone who experiences Stop Speaking, especially in person, cannot help but to find that they could easily be fooled.

Akiho’s ‘digital playback’ for Stop Speaking is the bane of accompaniments for the percussionist – harmonically static, almost exclusively preparatory, and most importantly, unmetered; there is no pulse, no groove, very nearly no anticipation, simply a collection of

sounds, in temporal sequence. But, it is so much more. Akiho purposely deploys a level of ambiguity in meter and rhythm to instead draw the focus of the listener, and the performer, to the unique cadential inflection of human speech patterns – or rather, of human speech patterns, as approximated by an electronic voice. Named Vickie. She’s nice.

Stop Speaking occupies an important crossroads in the genre of percussion and live electronics, in that the interaction between the performer and the electronic device is plain – despite its static nature, the experience of the audience is very much one of interaction, and the level the intimacy that the performer must develop with the ‘tape’ is not so dissimilar to the automation by which any triggered sample or pedal effects must be activated. Furthermore, Akiho’s composition forces us to deeply analyze our definitions of percussion, electronics, and very much also that of music – where is the line between language, sound, rhythm, and music? Stop Speaking uses live electronics, and a percussionist, to help us consider.

Memory Palace, Christopher Cerrone

Christopher Cerrone’s 2012 Memory Palace inhabits a unique space within the electroacoustic genre, both compositionally and notationally. Unlike Westlake’s Fabian Theory, Memory Palace presents a much more ethereal sonic space, the triggered samples acting as fodder for improvisation, exploration, and evolution within the musical structure. At first listen, Memory Palace presents itself as suspiciously inactive, as far as our conditions for ‘live electronics’ are concerned. We can see that there are clearly electronics involved in the setup, and have a distinctive sense that the aural experience involves electronically-generated sounds in combination with acoustic ones, and yet on a purely auditory level, the trigger samples seem almost like a sonic backdrop, rather than an integrated aspect.

Watching a performance, however, is quite a different matter. Upon the visual addition of a performer following the notated instructions in the score, we, as the audience (not just a listener, any longer) become privy to a transparent interaction between the electronics, the percussion elements, and the performer. As the performer interacts with the

instruction at the start of the first movement to play, “As if improvising; like a child discovering the instrument,” we are inundated with the sensation that the electroacoustic elements are actively informing the actions of the performer, and recursively, that the performer is actively aware, and responding to them.

Cerrone’s Memory Palace brings to the foreground another important aspect of the genre that we are exploring: that of performance art. Due, in part, to its newness, and also in part to the types of performers, specifically percussionists, and that actively engage with it, a level of performance artistry has become synonymous with the percussion and live electronics genre. Save for very early performances of early works, there seems to be a pervasive element of artistic (arguably, ‘extra-musical’) contextualization tasked to the performer, as if the composer is saying, “yes, we know this is weird, but here’s what it might mean.” This deeper layer of performance art within the electroacoustic percussion subgenre is quickly becoming commonplace, and thus, expected. The popularity of groups like Sō Percussion, Third Coast Percussion, and others, is tied up tightly within this undercurrent of performance practice.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the Master of Music degree in Percussion Performance.

Ian Riley is a student of Pf. Dustin Woodard and is pursuing a M.M. in Percussion Performance at Houghton College. Ian has a degree in music performance with high honors from The School of Music at Schenectady County Community College and a bachelor's degree in Music Education with a concentration in music composition from Houghton College.

Beginning in Fall 2018, Ian will begin his studies with George Willis, to pursue a DMA in Percussion Performance at West Virginia University.

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