



The University of Texas at Austin
Butler School of Music
College of Fine Arts

EARS (ELECTRO-ACOUSTIC RECITAL SERIES) PRESENTS

MECHANICAL / MICROTONAL

Thursday, December 5, 2019, 7:30 PM
Mirror Room (PAC 3.412)

INTERIM DIRECTOR, UT ELECTRONIC MUSIC STUDIOS

Christopher Trapani

This concert will last approximately 110 minutes with intermission

PLEASE SILENCE YOUR ELECTRONIC DEVICES

PROGRAM

Kyle Gann

Texarkana

Nabil Abad

Unspecified Values (world premiere)

Åsa Harvard

Scribble (world premiere)*

Daniele Ghisi

Tre Pezzi (world premiere)*

I. Thou art so like a flower - thou art so like a vortex
II. Jean-Claude
III. Venere non è una stella

Marlon Schumacher

6 Fragments on One Act of Cleaning a Piano (world premiere)*

Annie Gosfield

Shoot the Player Piano

Bottom of the Barrelhouse - Double-Barreled Version (world premiere)

Hunter Prueger

STOP/RESET (world premiere)
Hunter Prueger, microwave oven

INTERMISSION

Monte Taylor

Sigil I (world premiere)

Michelle Lou

Solo Audio-Visual Set
Michelle Lou, laptop audio and visuals

Nathan Nokes

of motor, bar, & wire (world premiere)

Jinghong Zhang

Transformation: The Ascending World (world premiere)
Jinghong Zhang, voice, violin, and dance
Lisette Hotz, dance
Andrea L. Hart, stage director / designer
Court Rogers, costume designer

* selection from the UTEMS call for works for Quarter-Tone Disklavier

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Kyle Gann

Texarkana

BORN 1955, Dallas TX

COMPOSED 2000

DURATION 5 minutes

Kyle Gann is a composer and the author of seven books on American music, including books on microtonality, Charles Ives's *Concord Sonata*, John Cage's *4'33"*, Conlon Nancarrow, and Robert Ashley. He studied composition with Ben Johnston, Morton Feldman, and Peter Gena, and about a fourth of his music is microtonal. His major works include the piano concerto *Sunken City*, *Transcendental Sonnets* for chorus and orchestra, the microtonal music theater piece *Custer and Sitting Bull*, *The Planets* for mixed octet, and *Hyperchromatica* for three retuned, computer-driven pianos.

FROM THE COMPOSER Texarkana was the birthplace of both Conlon Nancarrow and Scott Joplin (although Nancarrow was born on the Arkansas side, and Joplin on the Texas side). Nancarrow's favorite pianists were Earl Hines and Art Tatum. Had Nancarrow (1912-1997) and Joplin (1868-1917) ever worked together, or influenced each other, we might have had a ragtime of transcendent rhythmic complexity. To explore that possibility I split the difference between Joplin and Hines and applied Nancarrow's techniques to an early-jazz, still ragtimish style derived from James P. Johnson (1891-1955). *Texarkana* is built almost throughout on a fast basic rhythm of 29 in the virtual "right hand" against 13 in the "left," with a couple of Johnson quotes, one small Joplin one, and ending in a skewed version of James P.'s solo "Jingles," as recorded in 1930. The piece is dedicated to my jazz harmony teacher John Esposito, who may play it if he likes.

Nabil Abad

Unspecified Values

BORN 1997

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 10 minutes

Nabil Abad is a composer from Cleveland, Ohio. Nabil has received performances from several ensembles including The Columbus Symphony, the Alabama All-State Orchestra, the UT Wind Ensemble, and the UT New Music Ensemble. Nabil's works have been performed at festivals such as soundSCAPE in Cesena, Italy and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival where he was a new music fellow in the summer of 2018. Nabil is currently a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin Butler School

of Music and previously received his bachelor of music degree from the Baldwin Wallace Conservatory.

FROM THE COMPOSER *Unspecified Values* is a program that will randomly generate the piece you are about to hear. In this work, musical parameters such as rhythms, pitches, and dynamics are being randomly generated in real time. Some aspects of this piece that I retain control over are the timing of musical events, texture, and the ranges in which the random values are being selected. To add variety, at various points in this piece I take the generated data and manipulate it to create some familiar musical features such as triadic harmonies and canons.

Selections from the UTEMS call for Works for Quarter-Tone Disklavier

Åsa Harvard

Scribble

BORN 1961

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 2 minutes

Daniele Ghisi

Tre Pezzi

BORN 1983

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 5 minutes

Marlon Schumacher

6 Fragments on One Act of Cleaning a Piano

BORN 1978

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 5 minutes

Annie Gosfield

Shoot the Player Piano

BORN 1960

COMPOSED 1999

DURATION 7 minutes

Annie Gosfield, whom the BBC called “A one woman Hadron collider,” lives in New York City and works on the boundaries between notated and improvised music, electronic and acoustic sounds, refined timbres and noise. Her music is often inspired by the inherent beauty of found sounds, noise, and machinery. In 2017 Gosfield collaborated with Yuval Sharon and the Los Angeles Philharmonic on the multi-site opera *War of the Worlds* that incorporated three defunct air raid sirens that were re-purposed into public speakers to broadcast a free, live performance to the streets of Los Angeles from Walt Disney Concert Hall. Annie has been awarded fellowships and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation (2017), the American Academy in Rome (2015), and the American Academy in Berlin (2012). Active as a writer and teacher, she contributes to the *New York Times* series “The Score,” and has been the Milhaud Professor of composition at Mills College, a visiting lecturer at Princeton University and a visiting artist at Cal Arts. She is currently a visiting professor at the University of Texas at Austin.

FROM THE COMPOSER At the age of 14 my sense of harmony was changed forever after hearing a wildly out of tune calliope on a riverboat in New Orleans blast *Basin Street Blues*. *Shoot the Player Piano* (*The Treasures of San Sylmar*) was inspired by this fascination with old mechanical instruments, and the odd, detuned sounds that they produce as they deteriorate. As time takes its toll on these great beasts, the tunings become increasingly random, pipes warp, hammers wear out, and tempos slip and slide as their timing mechanisms fluctuate. Familiar songs take on new life when performed by these contraptions, along with a homegrown microtonality and a uniquely inhuman sense of rhythm.

The function of mechanical instruments was largely utilitarian, designed to attract customers above the din of a carnival fairway, barroom, or riverboat, and to keep the money coming in, the liquor flowing, and people dancing. Timing mechanisms on nickelodeons were adjusted to play faster in order to bring in more nickels per hour. Although many composers’ fascination with these instruments lies in their near-impossible precision and speed, my attraction to them lies in the other extremes of their inhuman qualities: the random rhythmic imperfections and strange tunings they attain after a life of service in a smoky bar room or a run-down riverboat.

Shoot the Player Piano is a work for an imaginary orchestra of aged and unusual mechanical instruments. The antique instruments that I videotaped for this project were so well-maintained they sounded as if they could have been manufactured yesterday. Because my original inspiration was the unpredictable quality of deteriorating instruments, I chose to compose the music with sounds drawn from outside sources. Using a combination of old and new recordings of calliopes, nickelodeons, German jahrmart organs and their interior bells and percussion, prepared piano, accordion, the violin of LaDonna Smith, the banjo of Eugene Chadbourne, and various machine sounds, I created a large library of samples and then detuned, altered, edited, and arranged these sounds. Almost all of the sounds that you hear did not come from the accompanying instruments on the screen (with

the two exceptions: the sound of the paper roll turning, and the banjo tremolo). Video images include the instruments themselves, their inner machinery, and the exterior novelties designed to attract customers. *Shoot the Player Piano* starts with the quiet hum of these machines (their internal motors, the sound of a nickel dropping) and ends with a raucous collision of accordion, piano, violin, banjo, and calliope, striving to bridge the gap between the purely mechanical sounds of these musical machines, and the music made by these half-ton mechanical wonders. The video was shot at The Nethercutt Collection, a museum of pneumatic instruments and antique cars in Sylmar, California, in a large complex known as "San Sylmar." Byron Matson, my gracious host, is the curator of the musical instruments, and is featured in this video.

Bottom of the Barrelhouse **Double-Barreled Version**

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 7 minutes

Years ago, I would make special trips to the Cliff House in San Francisco to visit Musée Mécanique, an early 20th Century tourist trap that featured mechanical contraptions in varying states of disrepair, including coin operated orchestrions, player pianos, antique slot machines, love testers, fortune tellers, and music boxes. I would fill my pockets with quarters and run as quickly as possible from one machine to the next, attempting to get as many contraptions blasting away at once, so I could bask in their glorious microtonal and polyrhythmic din. These noisy day trips were as much of an influence on this piece as any human. "Bottom of the Barrelhouse" draws on these experiences, and a few fragments from a 1996 piece, premiered at The Extended

Piano, a Disklavier Festival in NYC curated by Elliott Sharp.

The "Double Barreled Version" is an extended revision for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart, that was inspired by barrelhouse pianists and the power and density that they achieved playing in the temporary saloons set up for loggers or turpentine workers known as "barrelhouses." The pianos were usually in terrible disrepair, and the music had to be loud enough to be heard over the wild noise of a very rowdy crowd. "Bottom of the Barrelhouse" incorporates dense layers of barrelhouse and boogie woogie riffs and adds a strong dose of dissonance and big, fat, clusters. Relentlessly odd repeats are created by inserting or removing tiny slices of time, resulting in time signatures that I would never ask a human to interpret (23/32!). Two robotic pianos do the work of four strong humans,

and, unlike the barrelhouse days, the violent tendencies will remain inside the piano, and (I assume) won't extend to fights in the crowd. My father was from Chicago, so I grew up hearing lots of Chicago-based piano duos such as Pete Johnson and Albert Ammons. I was also fascinated with the great pianist Hazel Scott,

who was known for playing her own style of sophisticated stride on two pianos at once. So thanks, Christopher Trapani and the Butler School of Music, for letting me create my own quarter tone fantasy of a couple of pianos gone wildly awry.

Hunter Prueger
STOP/RESET

BORN 1996

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 9 minutes

Hunter Prueger is an Austin-based composer and saxophonist. His music is often characterized by a unique approach to color and texture with an emphasis on sound exploration and discovery, which often involves new playing techniques and "non-musical" objects. Hunter considers himself to be an avid music fan of all styles and genres which has led to collaborations with rock musicians and hip-hop artists. He also enjoys running, crocheting, and playing accordion with the UT Conjunto. In 2018 Hunter received his B.A. in music from Luther College and is currently

working towards his M.M. in composition at The University of Texas at Austin.

FROM THE COMPOSER The microwave oven is perhaps the most controversial kitchen appliance. It is shrouded in the fear of cancerous radiation and a stigma of laziness and unhealthy food. Some people don't seem to trust it. On one occasion while writing this piece I was jokingly warned that I might grow a third hand in the composition process due to radiation exposure. With its retro-futurist design and awkward size it is also one of the goofier kitchen appliances, and it can be hard to take it seriously at times. *STOP/RESET* is my attempt to cut through all of our perceptions of the microwave and present it as something else entirely: a musical instrument. This performance is not intended to be humorous, but I don't mind if you laugh.

Monte Taylor
Sigil I

BORN 1991

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 9 minutes

Monte Taylor is a composer, guitarist, and improviser based in Austin, TX. His works have been performed on festivals including Australian Percussion Gathering, Charlotte New Music Festival, Electric LaTeX Festival, Electronic Music Midwest, Florida Electro-Acoustic Student Festival, Florida International Toy

Piano Festival, Kansas City Art Institute's Art-Sounds, New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, SCI National Student Conference, SPLICE Institute, TUTTI Festival, and UTEMS Electro-Acoustic Recital Series, by ensembles including Bent Frequency, Compositum Musicae Novae, Frost Electronic Music Ensemble, Passepartout Duo, and the University of Texas New Music Ensemble. As an improviser, Taylor works primarily with the electric guitar, as well as live signal processing and generative electronics.

FROM THE COMPOSER *Sigil I* was originally composed as a duet for classical guitar and Disklavier, before the algorithmically generated component of the Disklavier part took on a life of its own. It was important to me to avoid the gross display of robotic virtuosity that pervades most music for Disklavier, dictating a slower pace for the development of the melodic material. Rather than emphasizing

impossibly fast musical gestures, I chose to emphasize less obvious metrics of virtuosity, such as rapid dynamic changes and subtle polyrhythms. The Disklavier plays slowly, almost meditatively at first, as compounding melodic fragments and polyrhythms accumulate, obscuring the threshold at which the music becomes unplayable for a human pianist.

Michelle Lou
Solo Audio-Visual Set

BORN 1975

DURATION 20 minutes

Michelle Lou is a composer, performer, and sound artist that works mainly in the realm of electro-acoustic music. Her work has been presented at Wien Modern, Donaueschinger Musiktage, Darmstadt Ferienkurse, Bludener Tage zeitgemäßer Musik, Schloss Solitude, The Festival of New American Music, the MATA Festival in New York City, The 66th American Music Festival at the National Gallery in Washington D.C., The Rainy Days Festival in Luxembourg, Ultima Festival in Oslo, Chance and Circumstance in Brooklyn, and Kammer Klang

in London, amongst others. She received degrees in double bass performance and composition from UC San Diego and Stanford University, with additional studies at the Conservatorio G. Nicolini in Piacenza, Italy and the University for Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria. She was a Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University and an Elliott Carter Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome. She has taught at the WasteLAnd Summer Composition Course in Los Angeles, the Akademie für Neue Musik in Boswil, Switzerland, and as a Visiting Lecturer at Dartmouth College. Michelle is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor in Composition and Electronic Music at UC Santa Cruz.

<http://www.michellelou.com>

Nathan Nokes
of motor, bar, & wire

BORN 1985

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 9 minutes

Nathan Nokes is a composer and sound artist. His works have been performed by members of ensembles such as Wet Ink, Loadbang, Mise-en, Ulysses European Ensemble, Mivos Quartet, and Invoke Quartet. He is a currently a graduate fellow, and composition D.M.A student at the University of Texas in Austin. He received his M.M. in composition from Hart

School of music at the University of Hartford, and B.M. in composition from Washington State University.

FROM THE COMPOSER While composing of *motor, bar, & wire* I was fascinated by the mechanical limitations of the disklavier. The piano, while associated with human expression, is a rather strange and unnatural instrument—resulting from amazing feats of engineering with its complex levers, industrial parts, and chemically processed wood. The disklavier highlights this in a way that is at times jarring and uncanny. The human player

has physical limitations—hand-size, speed of movement, and number of simultaneous notes. Limitations of speed and notes are shared by the disklavier as well (although the disklavier is still super-human in these traits). But the disklavier has some limitations the human does not; pedals and keys are all operated by voltage through solenoid motors. These motors struggle at producing softer dynamics, they often squeak with unwanted noise, they have timing errors from their inability to

play soft notes as quickly as loud notes, and the release of the keys and pedals are often jarring. I included the toy piano to augment these, at times, clumsy and mechanical sounds. I installed solenoid motors and a transducer inside the toy piano. Some are meant to strike the metal bars of the toy piano and some are meant to strike the metal bridge that holds the bars in place. The title of *motor, bar & wire* draws its name from the materials used in this work.

Jinghong Zhang Transformation: The Ascending World

BORN 1988

COMPOSED 2019 | world premiere

DURATION 8 minutes

Jinghong Zhang is a composer, multi-instrumentalist and doctoral student of music composition, based in Austin. Originally from China, Jinghong Zhang earned degrees in both music composition and recording art from Wuhan Conservatory of Music in 2012. In 2013, He received the Artistic Excellence Fellowship from Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, where he received his master degree of computer music composition. In 2014, he attended the CIEE study abroad program and trained in IRCAM for a summer, at the mean time, premiered his multi-media music, *InO*, in the *Musique Fest 2014* in IRCAM. During 5 years of Jinghong Zhang's graduate study in the U.S., his creative inter-media musical art works have been performed numerous times in major Electroacoustic Music conferences, festivals and workshops around the country.

and overseas, including France, China and Greece.

FROM THE COMPOSER *The Ascending World* is a theatrical multi-media work about a fantasy steam age city ascending above the ground. It's also about the journey from the mechanical to the spiritual realm of every single being in this universe. The musical part of the work is computer generated by chains of algorithmic setting and played through the two disklavier pianos. The work started with two characters living in a machinery world and trying to find out their true voices in their own ways. Through a chain of global events and tribulations, the two started to realize and to interact with each other. Until the end of the work, each of them found out the true essence of themselves in the high spiritual realm, accompanying with both a blossom of clusters of piano notes and the background electronic music. These theatrical elements combined with multi-media settings through the inter-disciplinary collaboration between the composer and talented members of the UT Department of Theatre and Dance makes this theatrical artwork come into life.