

**C
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COMPOSERS ENSEMBLE
DEPARTMENT *of* MUSIC AT PRINCETON

SO PERCUSSION

Eric Beach — Josh Quillen —
Adam Sliwinski — Jason Treuting

works by N. Cameron Britt, Lainie
Fefferman, Sean Friar, Andrea Mazzariello
& Prof. Daniel Trueman

Tuesday, February 10, 2009
8:00 p.m.

Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall

The Composers Ensemble at Princeton
Barbara White and Michael Pratt, Directors

Presents

SO PERCUSSION

Eric Beach – Josh Quillen – Adam Sliwinski – Jason Treuting

~~THE PROGRAM~~

120 bpm : take 1

Daniel Trueman

Formicidae Commensal

MR Daniel

thanks, konrad

Lainie Fefferman

~intermission~

Ruining Fusion

Sean Friar

Aybabtu

N. Cameron Britt

octobot

Andrea Mazzariello

PROGRAM NOTES

120bpm: take 1

for laptop-percussion quartet

Most commercial computer music programs set a default tempo of 120bpm. Why? Probably because choosing a clock duration of 1 second is the most obvious thing from a programmer's perspective (when in doubt, use 1), yielding 60bpm, but 60bpm feels slow, so why not half it, resulting in 120bpm? As a result, a fair amount of music created with these programs goes by at 120bpm.

This piece is a first take at what is going to be a longer piece for laptop-percussion quartet, composed for So Percussion. It may very well become a movement of the final piece, or it may vanish into oblivion, wreckage from the composition process, or it may provide raw material that gets used in part. This has easily been the most difficult piece for me to start; the possibilities are annoyingly overwhelming. We'll see.

I've long been interested in how differently machines and people measure time. Oddly, we assume that the machines are always "right," whatever that might mean (unless, of course, the machine is faulty). But, for many, the "inhuman" quality of time that machines lend to music is heard as flawed (in spite of the widespread popularity of electronic dance music). In this piece, the machines and the humans duke it out. The laptops provide a constant click at 120bpm (at first; later the pulse slows to 60bpm, and then 30bpm, and then the pulses begin accelerating, methodically, still within a 120bpm framework, and then finally Stockhausen rears his head and we begin to hear "overtones" of 120bpm layered on top of one another, one by one, and then the lower overtones are gradually subtracted, until we are left with a wonderful 50Hz hum, to make a long story short...), but the humans can reset the clock at any time by striking a handy piece of wood. Not to be thwarted, the clicks keep re-emerging, like whac-a-mole, relentless. What's remarkable about this almost dopey relationship is that a whole host of meters and rhythms can emerge, some seemingly having nothing to do with 120bpm, but all derived from fairly simple numerical relationships to 120bpm; in fact, at one point, something akin to the wildly asymmetrical Norwegian telespringar dance meter (three uneven beats) appears—I couldn't believe it myself.

Computers are also able to freeze time, in a way, or at least freeze sound in time, so we can look at it, almost hold on to it. In contrast to the clicks of the whac-a-mole, this aspect of

"120bpm" is completely unpulsed, and consists of sustained Hardanger fiddle and piano sounds that can be explored slowly with a pair of long retractable tethers (a modified computer golf game interface, of all things). In what is surely unfamiliar territory, even for adventurous performers like So Percussion, these tethers inspire a slow, non-percussive approach to playing, and stand in sonic and physical opposition to the digital metronomes that pervade the rest of the piece.

There are also some pitches involved in "120bpm;" these, I just like.

Formicidae Commensal

When I was in grammar school I was fascinated by the social world of ants, and devoured books and encyclopedia entries on the subject. As an adult I lived in Oakland, California and my apartment complex, like many older buildings in the city, was infested with ants. My respect for the complexity of ant, or *formicidae*, social order remained, though begrudgingly. In retrospect, I realized I could have enjoyed my uninvited guests if we'd been able to carve out a cooperative, or *commensal*, living arrangement. Of course, ants do work cooperatively quite successfully—just not interspecifically. It's a characteristic they share with humans, making difficult the complete resentment of their presence. Often their single-minded obsession with amassing resources, to the detriment of other species (insect, flora or fauna) puts into stark relief that particular human flaw. *Formicidae Commensal* is a result of my playing with the idea of various rhythms, and imagining the unsettling of a hierarchical social structure. The video backdrop was assembled from various educational videos. Particularly notable, is a partial collaboration between Cold War-era Soviet and U.S. scientists modeling robotics and artificial intelligence, resulting in an ant-like creature intended to ambulate the moon.

thanks, konrad

Konrad Kaczmarek wrote a really slick little sequence for a piano piece of his. I stole it for this piece. Thanks, Konrad.

Ruining Fusion

Two kinds of music (one quiet, sustained and sparse; one loud, punchy and aggressive) fuse together in this piece. It's not an even or welcome union; the aggressive batters, jerks around, and subsumes the passive until it is sure it has broken it down.

Aybabtu

Despite never having been much of a video game player, the sound world of this piece nonetheless takes some inspiration from classic 8-bit video game music. According to my sister, the title could be a litmus test for dorkiness: All your base are belong to us. I made the buzzers based on projects from Nicolas Collins excellent book, "Handmade Electronic Music."

octobot

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THE COMPOSERS

N. Cameron Britt is a second year student in the graduate composition program.

MR Daniel is an interdisciplinary composer working in sound, installation, video, text, textiles, and performance. Her conceptual aural art has been performed or exhibited in New York, San Francisco, Minnesota, Chicago, Seattle, and on Greek National Radio, as well as with the MuthaWit Orchestra at BAM. MR studied sound design and electronic music composition with Pamela Z and Steven Everett, and creative writing with Junot Díaz, Julius Lester, and Marci Blackman. She received the doctorate in History of Consciousness from University of California at Santa Cruz, and subsequently was an Institute of Health Policy Studies Postdoctoral Research Fellow at University of California at San Francisco and Carnegie Mellon Visiting Professor of Film and African American Studies at Emory University in Atlanta. Currently, MR is a graduate fellow in Music Composition at Princeton University.

Lainie Fefferman is really glad Sean Friar sent her those bullroarer samples. Thanks, Sean.

Sean Friar (b.1985, Santa Monica, CA) grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from UCLA with B.A.'s in Music and Psychology. He is a grad student in composition at Princeton. Though primarily a composer of acoustic music, he became a video artist and laptop ninja a few weeks ago.

Writer, artist, and musician **Andrea Mazzariello**, a.k.a. massey, is a doctoral fellow in Music Composition at Princeton University. His creative output is diverse, from concert music to rock songs, sound design, prose, and collage. His work has been performed or exhibited in diverse venues, including the Fringe Festival in New York, the 555 Gallery/Studio in Detroit, and the South by Southwest music festival in Austin, by such ensembles as the Berkshire Symphony and NOW Ensemble.

Daniel Trueman is a composer and performer. His ensembles include *QQQ*, *PLOrk*, *interface*, *post-Post*, and *Trollstilt*. He teaches composition at Princeton University and has got some stuff in the works.

THE PERFORMERS

SO PERCUSSION

Eric Beach — Josh Quillen — Adam Sliwinski — Jason Treuting

Since coming together at the Yale School of Music in 1999, **So Percussion** has been creating music that is at turns raucous and touching, barbarous and heartfelt. Realizing that percussion instruments can communicate all the extremes of emotion and musical possibility, it has not been an easy music to define. Called “astonishing and entrancing” by Billboard Magazine, “brilliant” by the New York Times, the Brooklyn based quartet’s innovative work with today’s most exciting composers and their own original music has quickly helped them forge a unique and diverse career.

Although the drum is one of humanity’s most ancient instruments, Europe and America have only recently begun to explore its full potential, aided by explosions of influence and experimentation from around the world. In the 20th Century, musical mavericks like Edgard Varese, John Cage, Steve Reich, and Iannis Xenakis brought these instruments out from behind the traditional orchestra and gave them new voice.

It was excitement about these composers and the sheer fun of playing together that inspired the members of So to begin performing while still in school: Cage’s *Third Construction* wove elaborate rhythmic counterpoint using ordinary objects, while Reich’s *Drumming* harnessed African inspiration to ecstatic effect.

A blind call to David Lang, Pulitzer Prize winning composer and co-founder of New York’s Bang on a Can Festival, yielded their first big commissioned piece, *the so-called laws of nature*, which appeared with Evan Ziporyn’s gamelan romp *Melody Competition* on their first album “So Percussion.” In the following years, the thrill of working with amazing composers would yield new pieces by Paul Lansky, Dan Trueman, Steve Reich, Steve Mackey, Fred Frith, and many others.

For their next disc they tackled *Drumming*, one of the first and few percussion pieces of symphonic scope (well over an hour long). A landmark American work, *Drumming* fuses African aesthetics, Western philosophical concepts, and technologically inspired processes in a minimalist masterpiece.

So’s third album *Amid the Noise* saw a dramatic new direction for the group: original music, written by member Jason Treuting. Eager to expand their palette, the members

experimented with glockenspiel, toy piano, vibraphones, bowed marimba, melodica, tuned and prepared pipes, metals, duct tape, a wayward ethernet port, and all kinds of sound programming. The resulting idiosyncratic tone explorations were synchronized to Jenise Treuting’s haunting films of street scenes in Brooklyn and Kyoto. This ongoing work has resulted in exciting new projects such as the site-specific *Music For Trains* in Southern Vermont and *Imaginary City*, a sonic meditation on urban soundscapes.

In 2006, So joined the dynamic electronic duo Matmos for shows around the country and in Europe, using beer cans, hair clippers, and dry ice to great effect. In this ongoing collaboration, no raw material or household object was safe from sonic exploitation!

Since 1999, So Percussion has performed this unusual and exciting music all over the United States, with concerts at the Lincoln Center Festival, Carnegie Hall, Stanford Lively Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and many others. In addition, recent tours to Russia, Australia, Italy, Germany, and the Ukraine have brought them international acclaim.

With an audience comprised of “both kinds of blue hair... elderly matron here, arty punk there” (as the Boston Globe described it), So Percussion makes a rare and wonderful breed of music that both compels instantly and offers vast rewards for engaged listening. Edgy (at least in the sense that little other music sounds like this) and ancient (in that people have been hitting objects for eons), perhaps it doesn’t need to be defined after all.

Spring 2009 Semester Composers Ensemble Concerts

March 3: "Heaven, Earth, and In Between"

March 10: New York Virtuoso Singers

April 5: Nash Ensemble (performing works by Michael Early and Samson Young in Richardson Auditorium)

April 14: Formalist Quartet

April 28: Generals Concert

May 12: Freelance

May 16: PLOrk (Richardson Auditorium)



Princeton University Department of Music

Steven Mackey, chair
Ernest Clark, concert coordinator
Marilyn Ham, department manager
Alexander Kass, technical director
Cynthia Masterson, office assistant
Gregory Smith, academic programs manager
Kyle Subramaniam, business manager
Joseph Vizzini, piano technician

Production Personnel

Christopher Gorzelnik, production supervisor
John Burton, production technician
Liz Lammer, production technician
Bill Pierce, production technician

Student Ushers

Daniel Jaffe, head usher
Alison Carey
Yudai Chiba
Mike DiStefano
Martha Ferguson
Alexandra Jerez-Fernandez
Mengsi Li
Megan McPhee
Wensheen Tong
Lija Treibergs