



in the LABORATORY series

REACTIVITY AND RESPONSE

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Caroline H. Hume Concert Hall

San Francisco Conservatory of Music

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Stick Figures, by Fred Frith (1991)

I was commissioned to compose *Stick Figures* (for six guitars and two players) back in 1990 by an amazing art space in New York’s East Village called The Gas Station. They applied to Meet the Composer and to everyone’s surprise got the go ahead! The Gas Station looked kind of like a junkyard, it was basically a squat on the site of an old gas station where artists gravitated and hung out, and it was a few blocks from where I’d been living for more than ten years. Given the nature and feeling of the place—this was no “concert space”—it made sense to me to make something that felt more like a working environment than a music performance. If people wandered in after we started it would have the feeling of a couple of folks getting on with their work. They could come and go, and we’d still be there! And of course “folks getting on with their work” also often involves a kind of meditative quality, you get lost in the intense attention to detail, and I was interested in that as well. I think the first version, the one that Mark Howell and I performed at The Gas Station, was more than half an hour long. Later I made

versions that were much longer, but also a version of twenty minutes which was intended for formal concert settings.

I realized early on that it made more sense for the performers to be percussionists rather than guitar players, since it has more or less nothing to do with the guitar as a “guitar” and more to do with precisely controlled gestures of the kind that percussionists make routinely. So apart from the premiere with Mark, I’ve paired in all the subsequent iterations with drummers of one kind or another. Other than that the basic set up is very simple. There are precise tunings for each of the six guitars, the rods have to be positioned at precise locations on the guitar necks, there are strict instructions for how and where to thread the cord that passes over and under the guitar strings. E-Bows are E-bows. And the rest is choreography on a timeline!

-F. Frith

Threads by Nicole Yazmin

If we cut anything in the world in half, we will soon see molecules, then atoms, electrons, protons, neutrons and finally, quarks. String Theory says that there is something beyond quarks. If you look even closer, you will see a thread-like filament that is vibrating and interacting with other threads. They are working in tandem, conflicting, growing together, separating. This piece follows these threads as they expand and create the foundations of our world.

-N. Yazmin

Hello, by Alexander Schubert (2014)

Hello is an audio-visual piece in which a video projection serves as a score to be interpreted by the ensemble. The video consists of gestures performed by the composer Alexander Schubert in his own living room. The piece comes in eight movements and is an invitation into the

personal world of the composer, in which there are very few moments of calm.

The piece is written for open instrumentation, for an ensemble of any size, and players are invited to use other small instruments or props aside from those found in the instrumentation of the ensemble. For example, toy instruments, everyday household tools or found objects can be chosen, in order to fit a given video gesture that the performers wish to accompany. With the video functioning as a component of both the rehearsals and the performance, the piece creates a fascinating trajectory for the creative process, in which the audience can hear and observe the decisions made by the players in terms of how to musically “react” to the gestures found in the video, a set of decisions that can vary drastically from one performance and set of interpreters to another. Performers play with a click-track to stay aligned with the gestural events in the video and its accompanying electronics track, and the resultant performance is a product of the coordination of sound and gesture created in rehearsal - independent, malleable, and responsive on a personal level from performer to performer.

-A. Schubert/E. Dudley

Sistere (2020) by Zeena Parkins

Translating as ‘to stop’ or ‘to stay’ in Latin, *Sistere* is work of delicate interplay in which composer Zeena Parkins (also a multi-instrumentalist) explores a wide variety of playing techniques on the cello in simultaneity with pre-recorded elements. There is also a bit of play on words in the title, since the work was written for and premiered by Maggie Parkins, the composer’s sister. The piece unfolds in a number of phases that explore diverse playing styles on the instrument, beginning with a “brief ‘research’ moment, rediscovering the fingerboard and cello body using the hand, palms and fingers, but not

the bow.” A fixed media track begins around 50 seconds into the performance, a combination of sampled and filtered elements with discernible aspects of orchestration, and a series of boxes with timings in the score indicates a transit through various techniques and gestural elements for the soloist in alignment with the track. Sistere “requires the performer to devise one’s own strategies for entering into the sound worlds indicated by the various boxes: PRESS SQUEEZE/6 SIMPLE SHAPES/WHISTLE/CIRCLE BOW/etc. They are all distinct and always in conversation with the fixed media track.” In a relatively short space of time, the piece manages to traverse an incredible range of sounds possible to create on the cello, from the most conventional to the most inventive; whistling on the part of the performer marries with birdsong in the track, and moments of quotation from Messiaen’s Quartet for the End of Time come into relief and fade away; bowed sonorities pair with processed, sustained waveforms, and the lines between acoustic and electronic sound generation at times become effectively blurred.

-Z. Parkins/E. Dudley

Ulloa by Kristofer Twadell

The west side of San Francisco is often shrouded in a fog that comes from the sea. It blows in and swirls in the air, giving an eerie feeling when walking in it. But it is not just eerie - it is also oddly serene, especially in the morning. This piece was composed to convey the experience of walking on Ulloa street on a foggy morning. Walking West on Ulloa there is a slight hill up before it descends steeply. When one gets to the top they might expect to be greeted by a view of the streets and the sea, but instead there is only more fog that blankets everything. The electronic elements are meant to represent the surrounding nature of the fog, while the trombone represents different shrouded objects one might walk past.

-K. Twadell

Eight Lines, by Steve Reich (1983)

Under its original title, *Octet*, the work was commissioned by the *Hessischer Rundfunk* (Radio Frankfurt) and was completed in April 1979. It premiered at Radio Frankfurt on June 21, 1979, by members of the Netherlands Wind Ensemble, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw. Originally, it was scored for string quartet, two pianos, and two woodwind players each playing clarinet, bass clarinet, and flute as well as piccolo. Reich rescored it in 1983 to make performances easier, by adding a second string quartet, and retitling the work *Eight Lines*. The additional two violins solve “the difficulty of playing rather awkward double stops in tune,” and the additional viola and cello “allow the rapid eighth-note patterns to be broken up between ... two players” to prevent fatigue. Ever since the world premiere in Frankfurt in 1979 ten players were used, dividing the wind parts among four musicians. The composer regarded this as a perfectly ordinary option, while pointing out “whether there are eight, nine, or ten performers, the piece is always musically an octet.” (S. Reich/Wikipedia)

In the words of the composer:

‘Eight Lines is structured in five sections, of which the first and third resemble each other in their moving piano, cello, viola and bass clarinet figures, while the second and fourth sections resemble each other in their longer held tones in the cello. The fifth and final section combines these materials. The transitions between sections is as smooth as possible, with some overlapping in the parts so that it is sometimes hard to tell exactly when one section ends and the next begins.

In the first, third and fifth sections there are somewhat longer melodic lines in the flute and piccolo. This interest in longer melodic lines composed of shorter patterns strung together has its roots in my earlier music as well as my studies in 1976-77 of the cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew Scriptures.’

-S. Reich