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Marshall University Music Department Presents a BFA Senior Composition Recital, Jeff Blair

Jeff Blair

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DEPARTMENT of MUSIC

presents a

BFA Senior Composition Recital Jeff Blair

Tuesday, April 14, 2009
Jomie Jazz Room 210
8:00 p.m.

This program is presented by the College of Fine Arts through the Department of Music, with the support of student activity funds. For more information about this or other music events, please call (304) 696-3117, or view our website at www.marshall.edu/cofa/music.

Program

MetaCluster

(2007)

Jeff Blair, trombone
Alex Conn, trombone

The title of this piece is a combination of two words: Meta is defined as something self-referential in this case, the relationship of the sound of the instruments and how they interact demonstrate change. Cluster refers to a tone cluster. From the beginning of the piece, I started with a tone cluster which slowly changes in pitch, albeit a minor change. I derived the tone cluster used at the beginning of the piece by analyzing the frequencies of a short sound – a single one of the 'clicks' heard near the beginning of the piece. When analyzing a short sound or sounds, one finds that certain frequencies will have a visual spike where they have more amplitude than the frequencies around them.

Inspired by Karlheinz Stockhausen's works featuring electronic music with live performers, I had always wanted to write an electro-acoustic piece combining pre-made material with live performance. Work on this piece was difficult to manage as I organized groups of 20 to 40 fragments of sound (depending on the grouping), most of which are around two tenths of a second in duration.

Often the trombones are mimicking the electronic sounds, or sections of the electronic portion of the music. Multiphonics played through the trombone adds depth and a distinct character to the sound. I chose to add an additional metallic sounds the collection – a pitched bowl. In many ways the sounds generated from the bowls serve the same function as the material by the trombone players. One pitch cluster that is picked up by the pitched bowls passes through the electronic music and is picked up again by the trombones, making minor changes in pitch along the way.

Traversing Sine

(2007)

Titles of my pieces are usually meant to be understood literally. In this piece, I constructed a chord using sine waves and bent the pitches of this chord down in frequency over the course of a few minutes. Different events occur at certain moments which affect the sounds that remain until the end of the piece. The sets of sounds are never permanent, and change in different durations of time. This was spurred from thoughts about how we

perceive time. A second does not seem to last the same duration in all situations, but measurements of time say they do.

Tzolk'in

(2008)

John Ross, Flute

During the time I was composing this piece I learned about the intricate workings of the Mayan Calendar. This calendar operates in three unified cycles. Each of these contributes to the Great Cycle or the Long Count, the largest of the three cycles. To provide some perspective of time, the Long Count is over 5,000 years in duration while the Tzolk'in contains a mere 260 days in comparison. I chose to study the workings of the smallest cycle, the Tzolk'in. This cycle contains twenty sets of thirteen day cycles.

I modeled this system in the piece by creating twenty short unique motives and combining thirteen of these motives in the correct order twenty times. Ordering the cycles correctly is simple in the comparison to how the calendar actually functions. After ending the first cycle with the thirteenth motive, a new cycle starts with the fourteenth motive moving to finish the cycle and continue to the sixth motive. Not only is the idea of the cycle important in Mayan culture, but the idea of recycling is critical. All of these sub-cycles only occur in one Tzolk'in cycle.

The Avatar

(2006)

The Avatar was my first electro-acoustic work. I used fragments of different projects I had been working on to construct this piece, including some writing, and a recording of a trombone. Most of the material generated was first recorded and then manipulated electronically. Also, sine waves and white noise were manipulated to produce more active and colorful sounds.

This piece tells a story of a community in distress. They have absolute faith in their rituals, and as things started to change rapidly, they realized the illusion of their habits. The community in this story is a pagan one that asks for help from a God, but the sign they receive is a weak creature who accidentally cut itself.

Location I/Acceleration

(2009)

This piece is divided into three sections. The first section contains images which cannot be clearly defined and is the longest lasting section. The second section is half the length of the first. The piece moves more rapidly and functions by connecting the first and third sections through contrasting photographs with similar objects. The third section is half the length of the second, and has the most rapid changes and contrasting images. By the start of the last section, the images are clearly defined.

The images function as the foreground element in this work, allowing the music to move in textures which rise in different layers of intensity throughout the piece. Often one will hear a texture of small intensity immediately followed by one of great intensity. In some ways, the music and the photographs have switched roles. The textures often give aural snapshots of an environment while the photographs provide a 'melodic' function.

This recital is being presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Theory/Composition. Mr. Blair is a student in the studio of Dr. Mark Zanter.
