

Leading the Field of Music Through Three Premieres at SFA

by

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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2016, I gave premiere performances of three new works for solo percussionist with electronics: *Pulsar*, *The Taos Hum*, and *Ojibwe Song*. I was the consortium director for *Ojibwe Song*, and I was a consortium member for *Pulsar* and *The Taos Hum*. Each piece utilized electronic audio components that accompanied solo percussion instruments: *Ojibwe Song* was written for vibraphone, *Pulsar* was written for concert snare drum, and *The Taos Hum* was written for timpani. Being on the leading edge of the field of percussion helps SFA's music department and myself stay on the forefront of what is happening in the world of music. I had the pleasure of giving my performance at SFA while live streaming the concert, and I also recorded the pieces individually so I can share them with anyone interested in these compositions. Below are the some notes for each piece as written by their respective composers:

THE TAOS HUM

The Taos Hum by Stephen Snowden is an audio phenomenon reported by a small, but sizable, portion of people living in and around Taos, New Mexico. Commonly heard as a persistent low-frequency humming, rumbling, or droning, it is often described as quite disturbing and has been attributed to a decrease in mental stability among the general population. Explanations for the source of the hum range from secret underground nuclear testing facilities, to tectonic plate movement, to invisible alien spacecraft. Despite much scientific (and not-so-scientific) research, the true cause of the hum remains a mystery and many doubt that it even exists at all.

OJIBWE SONG

Ojibwe Song by Alexis Bacon is a nine-minute electroacoustic piece for percussion and fixed media. To record the audio, I interviewed Alphonse Pitawanakwat, a First Nations Ojibwe speaker who moved to the Lansing area as a young man to work in the auto industry. Now retired, he is one of many Ojibwe (Chippewa) speakers who have been contributing to the rebirth of the Ojibwe language. During my interview with Alphonse, I learned much of his life history, including: stories of his rural childhood on Manitoulin Island (the last unceded reserve in Canada), testimony of how his mother was forbidden to speak Ojibwe as a child in her Catholic boarding school, and his fond memories of singing in his church choir. These spoken phrases allowed me to frame the piece as a metaphor for the rebirth of the Ojibwe language: the speaker became lost in a fog (the language was threatened); he experienced corporal punishment (the language nearly disappeared); and after passing through the fog he was again able to sing church hymns and songs written in Ojibwe (the language is returning).

PULSAR

Pulsar by Francisco Perez was named after the rhythmically static astronomical entity, Pulsar is the result my exploitation of a reoccurring rhythmic and melodic motif. Sonically mimicking the massive density of the neutron star, the active interplay between the live performer and playback is notably inspired by the electronic music of Moderat and the rudimental style of Mike McIntosh.

Ojibwe Song by Alexis Bacon

Dr. Brad Meyer has commissioned Dr. Alexis Bacon, a renowned electroacoustic music composer, to create a piece for solo percussionist and electronics, which will be titled *Ojibwa Song*. Dr. Bacon is currently writing the composition's electronic content, which will be centered on the spoken and sung language from Native American organization in the greater Lansing area. Dr. Meyer will premiere the piece in January of 2017 on a solo recital at SFA. He will be submitting the piece to be performed at numerous festivals, including: Society for Electroacoustic Music in the United States, International Computer Music Conference, New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, and several other notable national/internationally conferences.



COMPOSER

Alexis Bacon is a composer recognized nationally and internationally for her acoustic and electroacoustic music, having won awards such as the IAWM Search for New Music Pauline Oliveros Prize, the Ossia International Composition Prize, and the ASCAP/SEAMUS student composition commission. She has also received grants and awards from the Indiana Arts Council, the Percussive Arts Society, the American Music Center, and ASCAP, and commissions from the duo Due East, the Bro-Fowler Duo, and violinist Robert Simonds. A Fulbright scholar to France, she studied music composition in Paris with Betsy Jolas before attending graduate school at the University of Michigan, where her composition teachers included William Bolcom, Michael Daugherty, Evan Chambers and Susan Botti. Also skilled as a violist and pianist, she remains active as a performer. She has taught at the University of Michigan, West Texas A&M University, Indiana State University, and the University of Indianapolis, and spends her summers teaching at Interlochen Arts Camp. In 2015 she began a position as Assistant Professor of Music Composition at Michigan State University.

ABOUT *OJIBWE SONG*

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lost in a fog (the language was threatened); he experienced corporal punishment (the language nearly disappeared); and after passing through the fog he was again able to sing church hymns and songs written in Ojibwe (the language is returning).

As always in my electroacoustic music, the percussion and the recording intertwine to create an atmosphere that carries the listener on an emotional journey. The percussionist acts as the protagonist while the audience is surrounded by evocative atmospheric sounds that portray the drama of the story suggested by the recordings. My goal with this and with my other electroacoustic works is to explore ways in which some of the complex tapestry of American voices can be heard through my work.



Pulsar by Francisco Perez

ABOUT THE COMPOSER



Francisco Perez is a percussionist and composer from Pflugerville, TX. As an active performer, he has accepted international engagements in Guatemala, Mexico, Spain, and China, and toured extensively throughout the US including performances at prestigious venues such as Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and the nationally-televised Super Bowl XLV. He regularly performs with the Lexington Philharmonic and the blueSHIFT Percussion Quartet.

As an active composer, Francisco is privileged to have a wide variety of published works with several ensemble commissions from the University of Kentucky, Texas Christian University, as well as individual commissions for solo percussion and electronics. His music is published through C. Alan Publications and TapSPACE Publications.

In the marching arts, Francisco has played snare drum for The Cavaliers (2011 & 2012) and Crossmen Drum & Bugle Corps (2010). In 2011, he helped secure the prestigious Fred Sanford Award for Best Percussion Performance under the direction of Mike McIntosh and Dr. Brian Tinkel. Additionally, he has served as visual designer and technician for the award-winning Flower Mound HS, Adair County HS (BOA Grand National 2015 Class A Champion), and Texas Christian University (PASIC 2012 Champion) drumlines. Currently, Francisco is the drumline instructor and arranger for the University of Kentucky's Wildcat Marching Band.

Francisco received his Bachelor of Music Education from Texas Christian University under Dr. Brian West and his Master's in Percussion Performance from the University of Kentucky under James Campbell, where he is currently a candidate for the Doctorate of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance.

ABOUT *PULSAR*

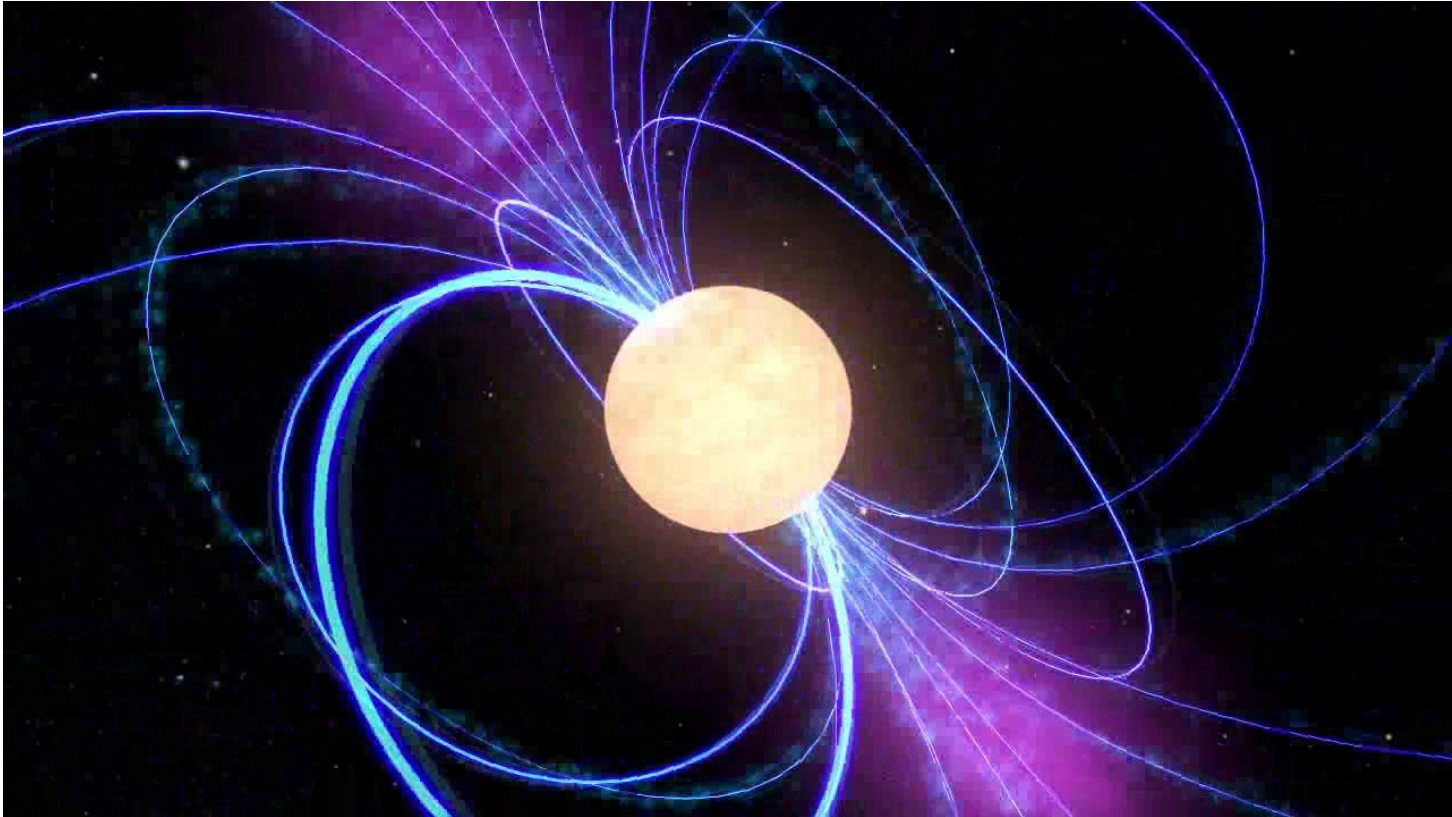
Written for solo snare drum and electronic accompaniment, *Pulsar* is the fusion of many influential concepts and musical idioms I've studied in recent years. As with much of my output, I've yet again found astronomical inspiration while watching an episode of Neil deGrasse Tyson's *Cosmos* reboot. As an extremely dense remnant of a long-gone massive star, a "pulsar" is a highly magnetized neutron star, which can rotate between 7,000 and 40,000 times a minute. Combined with this rotation, its colossal density, and intense magnetic fields, powerful beams of electromagnetic radiation project in all directions of space to act as a sort of galactic lighthouse for distant observers.

In *Pulsar*, I've attempted to mimic this naturally rhythmic characteristic by layering distinct voices as regularly occurring polyrhythms and motifs weaved with the soloist. While the melodic material is quite simple, much of the atmosphere and sound-world I sought to render largely stems from electronic music influence – most notably, *Moderat* – and its various idioms such as drum 'n' bass and breakbeat.

Furthermore, the active rhythmic language found in the solo snare drum was inspired by the rudimental style of Michael McIntosh, which I absorbed as a member the Cavaliers Drum & Bugle Corps in 2011 and 2012. Though sections of the work may be dense (allusion to the pulsar), I sought to maintain a clear presentation of groove, motivic development, and flow within the interplay of the soloist and electronic accompaniment.

Pulsar was commissioned by a consortium of percussionists in the summer of 2016: Logan Ball, Nick

Bolchoz, Ben Cato, Korry Friend (organizer), Eliot Johnson, Dr. Lamon Lawhorn, Joseph MacMorran, Dr. Brad Meyer, & Russell Wharton.



The Taos Hum by Steven Snowden

ABOUT THE COMPOSER



The music of Steven Snowden has been described as “Beguiling... combining force with clarity” (San Francisco Classical Voice), “Wonderfully dynamic” (Interlude Hong Kong), “Rustic, red-blooded” (New Music Box), and “Marvelously evocative” (Cleveland Plain Dealer). Writing music for dance, theater, multi-media installations, and the concert stage, his work often deals with concepts of memory, nostalgia, and the cyclic nature of historical events as they pertain to modern society. While his musical influences are deeply rooted in bluegrass, folk, and rock, he utilizes non-traditional techniques and processes to compose works that don’t squarely align with any single genre or style.

A native of the Ozarks countryside, he began studies in music composition in 2002 and received degrees from Missouri State University, University of Colorado at Boulder, and University of Texas at Austin. In 2012-2013 he was a Fulbright Scholar in Portugal, researching the implementation of motion tracking technology as a means to facilitate collaboration between music and dance. In 2013-2014, he was a visiting professor and composer in residence at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and is the co-founder/director of the Fast Forward Austin Music Festival. He currently works as a freelance composer in Boston and is on an eternal quest to make the perfect breakfast taco.

ABOUT *THE TAOS HUM*

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As a composer, I spend a lot of time thinking about sound. One of the things I find most fascinating about it is the way in which it can ignite the imaginations of those who listen. So many wild stories have been concocted to explain the Taos Hum and I wanted to explore that particular aspect of this phenomenon in this piece. From a distant rumble, a diverse landscape of timbres and textures emerge and envelope the sonic landscape only to retreat back into their origins of cryptic obscurity.



PERFORMER / COMMISSION DIRECTOR

Dr. Brad Meyer is a percussion educator, artist, and composer with an extensive and diverse background. Currently, Brad is the Director of Percussion Studies at Stephen F. Austin State University (Nacogdoches, TX) where he directs the percussion ensemble and steel band (“Jacks of Steel”), teaches private percussion lessons and the percussion methods course, and is the coordinator/arranger for the SFA Lumberjack Marching Band’s percussion sections. Dr. Meyer frequently tours to universities and high schools both nationally and internationally to present recitals, workshops, masterclasses, and clinics on various topics, including: electro-acoustic percussion, contemporary marimba, concert snare drum, marching percussion, percussion ensemble, steel band, and world music. His international performances and clinics have taken him to Austria, Taiwan, France, South Africa, and Slovenia. Brad has been an active presenter/performer at numerous festivals and conventions, including: Texas Music Educators Association’s national convention, Percussive Arts Society’s International Convention, International Computer Music Conference, Society for Electroacoustic Music in the United States’ Convention, New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, Graz’s (Austria) Night of Percussion, Chiayi’s (Taiwan) International Band Festival, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis’s Intermedia Festival, and Transylvania University’s Studio 300 Festival. Brad is a composer with several compositions for snare drum, multi-percussion, and percussion ensemble published through Bachovich Publications. Dr. Meyer is a proud endorsee of Yamaha Instruments, Zildjian Cymbals, Vic Firth Stick and Mallets, Evans Drumheads, and Tycoon Percussion.

