



Music

AT EASTERN

The EWU Department of Music presents

Davis Hill
Senior Composition Recital

Sunday, February 24, 2013
5:00 p.m.
Music Building Recital Hall

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Bachelor in Music Composition

Studios of Ben Luca Robertson and Dr. Jonathan Middleton

"What you are saying when you make something is that the universe is not sufficient, and what it really needs is more you. And it does, actually; it does. Go look outside. You can't tell me that we are done making the world."

- Jerry Holkins

"Doesn't matter what the press says. Doesn't matter what the politicians or the mobs say. Doesn't matter if the whole country decides that something wrong is something right . . . When the mob and the press and the whole world tell you to move, your job is to plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth, and tell the whole world—
'No, you move.'"

- Captain America

"Man, if you have to ask, you'll never know."

- Louis Armstrong

All music and text composed by Davis Hill

Program

Return to SR-388 (*abridged performance*)

I. First Landing
V. Darkness
VIII. Dread

Davis Hill - piano/conductor
Erin Larkin Foster - bassoon
Emma Mortenson - violin/electric violin
Lauren McKinley - percussion/noise synthesizer
Ben Luca Robertson - zither

Hyperacusic

Davis Hill - Agrippa

Lights Out

Pamela Brownlee - voice
Austin Long - tenor saxophone
Davis Hill - piano
Candice Jones - bass
Alek Gayton - drumset/percussion

Rhapsody

pre-composed sound

Freefall

Michael Gerety - guitar
Davis Hill - piano
Jake Madison - bass
Alek Gayton - drumset

Narcissus' Dream

Clara Johnson - voice
Davis Hill - polyphonic vocoder module

Sonata

Kendall Feeney - viola
Davis Hill - piano

I Get Anxious, Okay?!

I. Nail-Biter
II. Dread is Like a Waltz
III. The Glimmering
IV. Spirits
V. Paean - Epitaph

Kaelynn Jones - clarinet
Erin Larkin Foster - bassoon
Mikaela Elms - cello
Cody Bray - tenor voice
Joshua Lindberg - piano

Lauren McKinley - percussion
Alexandra Rannow - soprano voice
Randi Lithgow - alto voice
Matt Michelotti - bass voice
Davis Hill - conductor

Notes

Electro-acoustic/Software instrument: Agrippa

The electro-acoustic instrument *Agrippa* was designed as part of the Soundspaces instrument design class. Comprised of both physical and software components, it is also capable of utilizing its output device (a speaker) as an input source.

Agrippa collects audio from two contact microphones, one of which is normally attached to a metal percussion brush. This audio is processed in *Repeater 0.92*, a computer program designed with Max/MSP, before being outputted through the speaker. Processing consists of two distinct “repeat” or “echo” operations applied to the same audio signal. Each operation has customizable parameters for the amount of repetition and the length of audio segment to which that repetition is applied.

The customizable repetition parameters and use of simple physical inputs allow *Agrippa* to create many types of sounds. Complex polyrhythms are possible, as are wind- or ocean-like washes. Analog distortion or supercharged harmonics can be created by applying the contact microphones to the speaker. Ghostly whispers can be achieved by dragging microphones across strands of the percussion brush.

Agrippa's power lies in its ability to amplify and extol sounds that are otherwise inaudible. In this way, everyday objects such as nail files, binder combs, or brushes can become fascinating sonic playgrounds.

Return to SR-388

Return to SR-388 is an 11-movement music/multimedia production that combines acoustic and electronic music performance, electronic sound, written narrative, video performance, and visual art to create a fully immersive atmosphere.

The piece is based on a video game that I played in my childhood. Set in the distant future, the game tells the story of an intergalactic bounty hunter sent to eradicate a monstrous race of alien creatures on a far-flung planet.

I wrote an original prose narrative that reframes the game's story. The music is based upon this narrative, and is improvised in response to it. The narrative structure is divided into chapters—one for each movement of music. It is reprinted below.

Many video games present violence as the primary mode of communication between player and game world. In video games, violence is acceptable because injuries are abstract. Bullets strike invisibly, bodies fade into thin air, and protagonists regenerate instantly. Presumably, the emotional trauma fades, too.

Video game characters are voiceless, and they must obey our every command—such is their programming. Yet if we gave them voice, how would they feel about the things we make them do?

Due to time constraints, this performance will present an abridged version of the piece.

RETURN TO SR-388

composed by Davis Hill

I. First Landing

Your ship sails through space, quickly approaching its destination. Space rocks and debris streak past, occasionally glancing off the hull. You enter orbit and penetrate the planet's atmosphere. As your ship floats to the surface, the noise fades. All you can hear is the low hum of your engines.

II. Interlude

Your ship touches down gently; the air is calm. You feel the comfort of arrival. You take a moment to breathe deeply. Soon you will leave your ship and venture out into the wild, but not yet. Not yet.

III. Elation

You slide your helmet into place and step out into the alien atmosphere. The air is calm, the radiation low. The surface has a strange sort of beauty, at once both foreign and familiar. Shrubby, elongated plants sway in the breeze; leafy fronds sprout from cracks in the soil; yellow waterfalls cascade down craggy hills. Other than the flora, this planet seems empty. You feel no sense of threat or anxiety. You relish the feeling. It may not last for long.

IV. Remembrance

As you gaze serenely at the landscape, you are startled by a loud beeping. Your suit navigation system has located the entrance to the aliens' tunnel complex, the complex that should take you to the very core of this planet. Your breath catches in your throat. Shaken, you remember where you are. You were sent here for a mission. You were sent here to kill.

V. Descent

You quickly reassert your calm and step into the cave entrance. As you descend, all you can hear is the trickle of water and far-off rustlings. Your footsteps echo loudly within the darkness. You are alert, almost calm: entirely in control. The mission occupies your mind.

VI. Attack

Rounding a bend, you see the gnarled husk of one of your prey. As you stoop to examine it, you feel a chill at the base of your neck; whipping around, you dodge just in time, as it flies from the darkness, leering. Your mind numbs; your hands react automatically—firing, clenching, firing. You miss the first four shots. It lunges, enraged. Suddenly, a hit. Your weapons obliterate the creature. You pause to wipe the gore from your faceplate. Your nerves quickly relax. No time for fear. This mission is far from over.

VII. Darkness

Eighteen hours. You've seen more of them than you had ever thought could be alive. Your suit is intact; you have no injuries. Life support is fully functional. Your training has left you prepared—but this is not what you signed up for. You begin to feel the anxiety that has been slowly building over the past several hours.

VIII. Dread

Sixty-seven hours. Somehow, they've changed; grown stronger. The later ones knew of your arrival. They had prepared themselves, mutating into strange and more terrible forms. Each battle grimmer than the last; harder fought, harder won. They are wearing you down slowly. They do not care how many must die. There are hundreds of them, perhaps thousands. There is only one of you, and they know it. Every step feels like iron. The sound of your own breath frightens you.

One hundred fifty-three hours. You turned off your sensors long ago. You do not want to know how many of them are in front of you, below you, above ... behind. You are running out of ammunition. Your suit is still fully functional, but it was never meant to be active for this long. Exhaustion burns the corners of your eyelids. You can feel the iron taste of blood rising in your throat.

One hundred seventy-two hours. The air is silent, the darkness impermeable. For the last twelve hours you have marched, silently, into the recesses of this planet, impeded by no one. The inside of your visor is caked with vomit. Nothing to do but move forward. You are close. So close. The Queen's chamber: salvation — or death. You round the bend ...

IX. Confrontation

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X. Desolation

The Queen is dead: her writhing spine broken, her gaping jaws turned to ash, her blood mixed with your own. You fall to hands and knees, gasping against the cold mineral floor. They said there would be an exit—a way for the Queen to reach the surface. A way for you to escape. They were wrong.

Your suit is badly damaged. Life support was completely destroyed during the battle. Numbly, you notice it at seventy percent. Sixty-seven. Sixty-four. You can feel the suit slowing around you, reacting to your breathing less and less quickly. Your armor, once protection from harm; now, a brassy sarcophagus. You stagger to your feet, your thudding gait more and more erratic. Thirty-four percent. But—victory. Victory! But ... will they ever know? Wheezing, you wonder whether it matters. Mission accomplished. Was it worth it? Thirteen percent. This can't be the end. Victory. Was it worth it? Victory

XI. Death: Reprieve?

flesh	metal	pain	light	blood	why	death	sorrow	love?	agony
death	where	no	kill	dead	dark	cry	now	inside	hope
black	heart	earth	here						

Hyperacusis

Hyperacusis is a state of extreme acoustic sensitivity, in which sounds of low or moderate amplitude are perceived as painfully loud. *Hyperacusis* is a solo piece composed for the electro-acoustic instrument Agrippa. The structure of the piece is derived from gestural rather than melodic or harmonic development.

The score imitates LEGO® building toy instruction manuals. These manuals represent the building process using illustrations only, without any additional verbal directions. At each step in the building process, the user must compare that illustration to previous illustrations in order to determine which pieces to add before moving on to the next step.

The construction of a LEGO® model—and the interpretation of the score for *Hyperacusis*—thus becomes intuitive rather than didactic. The "silence" of this wordless score is representative of how the piece sounds.

Lights Out

Lights Out is a through-composed song in which the music and lyrics are continually changing.

Is it jazz? Is it chamber music? Is it pop? It seems closer to the tradition of through-composed European art song than anything else. However, even this association is violated by the inclusion of improvisation.

Perhaps more than any other piece on this program, *Lights Out* stands on its own.

*The moonless night whispers yearning
Warm summer breeze
Wind in the trees*

*Swift alight one lone bird flies toward distant cliffs
The kiss of your lips*

*All the joy that we shared
The end seems unfair
Love bright as day watched as clouds darkened the air!*

*Lost in reverie I hear your voice soft among the leaves
Then quickly, turning 'round once more—!
Tasting night like before*

*Wrapped in shade I stand my ground
Goodbye*

Rhapsody

Rhapsody is a brief electronic sonata in the style of classic 8-bit video game soundtracks. Characteristics of classic (pre-1996) 8-bit video game music include florid arpeggiations, a repetitious and pop-like approach to harmonic development, driving rhythm, fanfare, and creative use of timbral effect.

Most video game music is designed to loop endlessly. For this piece, the challenge was to write something that sounded like 8-bit music but developed within a linear, Classical dialectical structure.

Traditional 8-bit video game music is confined to only four simultaneous tracks of sound. I did not have these limitations, though for the most part I attempted to emulate them.

Freefall

As a composer, it is easy to see complexity as the only way to present meaning. *Freefall* was my attempt to write something simple yet powerful. This piece is simple at all levels. It adheres to "bridge" or "popular" form (AABA). The melody consists mostly of octaves; the harmony, of repeated triads (the most basic type of chord). *Freefall* sits squarely within an instrumental jazz-pop style.

The harmonic relationships in *Freefall* are all stepwise, rather than by fifth. This proximity causes the harmony to seem to flow lazily, rather than change abruptly. The goal is to create a wash of sound—a field of energy—rather than to present, permutate, and resolve a theme.

Narcissus' Dream

Narcissus' Dream is a sonic extrapolation of the Narcissus-Echo myth of Greek mythology. The myth concerns Narcissus, a demigod who is seduced by his legendary beauty, and the forest nymph Echo, who is cursed so that she can only speak by repeating what has been spoken to her. When Echo sees Narcissus in the forest, she becomes infatuated and attempts to communicate. Narcissus, resentful of any external lover and frightened at hearing his own words repeated, flees to a grove, where he is fascinated by his own reflection in a pool of water. Echo cannot leave her beloved, and wastes away to a voice on the wind. Narcissus is equally enraptured, and drowns while attempting to embrace his reflected self.

Narcissus' Dream is composed for female voice with polyphonic vocoder. A vocoder is a synthesizer that creates a composite timbre representative of both the human voice and synthesized tones. In this piece, its use enables the vocalist to "sing" chords.

Sung from the perspective of Echo, the piece contains three sections, which loosely represent the five stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance). The first section establishes the narrative and incorporates brief echoes of the text. In the second section, the performer illustrates an emotional breakdown by erratically repeating fragmented versions of phrases already sung. The third section is a denouement that cements Echo's fate as a spirit.

This poem is the death-dream of Narcissus. Perhaps these are Echo's words, transmitted across a liminal, death-cusp plain; perhaps they belong to Narcissus. Perhaps it is only hallucination.

Come near I'll show you spring and summer and yet you loathe me

I was fair once yet now I am cursed

*I dreamed you (you)
You and I
Yet Fate is deaf (deaf!)*

*Cry my beauty washed away
Washed away in your senseless bath*

*Your beauty You forgot Forgot I was beautiful too
you never knew I could not tell you*

I cannot speak

*I sigh I whisper I laugh You do not hear me
Hear me.
With you I had no future . . .*

I am but shade Shadow of speech gone by Voiceless—doomed to sing!

Look at me. Look at me. Look at me!

*Life will bloom come spring but not for us
"Farewell" she cried
Farewell.
all that remained of love . . .*

Sonata

Sonata is primarily a harmonic and orchestration study. It is also my first piece for accompanied solo string instrument. Its main focus is to explore the possibilities of relationship between two instruments. What happens when soloist and accompanist reverse their roles? What if both are soloist, or neither? Can one instrument sound "inside" the other; can they sound as one?

In *Sonata*, I attempted to avoid explicitly "jazz" harmonies and inflections in favor of what could be called neo-Romantic (or as I call it, "soft") atonality. The main distinction is that jazz harmony tends to harmonically rectify every pitch in a way that is overtly nominative. These sonorities might be simply considered chromaticism in a classical context. In "soft" atonality, chords and harmonic relationships are valued primarily as sources of color, rather than as part of a harmonic dialectic.

I Get Anxious, Okay?!

I Get Anxious, Okay?! is a five-movement work for chamber ensemble with pre-recorded sound and electronics. It is influenced by new complexity, in which the music is purposefully difficult to perform. Another notable influence is the work of the iconoclastic French composer Erik Satie, whose perverse sense of humor earned him as many enemies as it did friends.

Harmonically, *I Get Anxious, Okay?!* is a modal extrapolation of C minor. Melodic structure is derived from the intervals of augmented and diminished seconds. However, the primary method of development is gestural.

The piece is modeled after an anxiety "episode."

I. In the first movement, piano improvisations are intermingled with a short, simple phrase that grows more erratic with each repetition. The anxiety "victim" grows nervous: why won't it stop?

II. In the second movement, the pianist breaks into a waltz-like ostinato. The rest of the ensemble joins in a frantic race for harmonic and rhythmic stability. The victim must avoid anything that would trigger her anxiety! Otherwise . . . !

III. The third movement builds amorphously into a panoply of dread. The tenor ambles, seeking, and finds doppelgangers in the cello and kazoo. The victim's vision grows hazy and her head swims. She is all alone, now. Fear and exhaustion give way to a half-life—a space between life and death.

IV. In the fourth movement, the victim, defeated, awaits oblivion. Yet voices ebb and swell within the cage of her brain. She cannot let go; there is nothing she can do to stop her own psychological implosion.

V. In the fifth movement, the victim wakes as if from a dream. Terror is revealed as illusion; her strength returns. The silent hours of early dawn give comfort and truth. This movement borrows from Gregorian chant and German chorale styles. The ending cello theme is based on the *Epitaph of Seikilos*, the earliest Greek song that is extant in its entirety.

Thank You:

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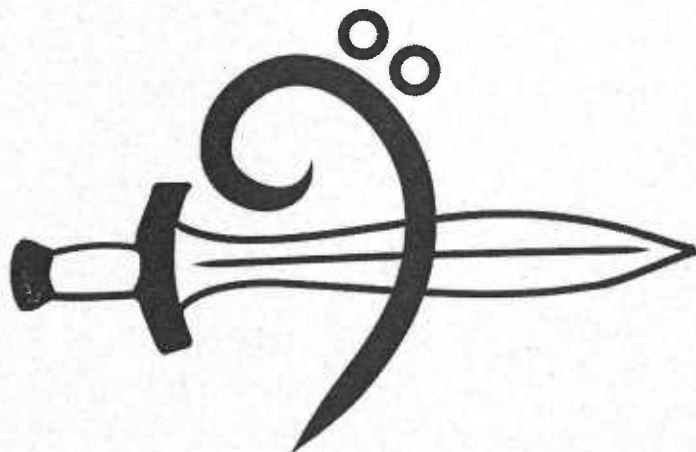
And, most especially, to Kendall Feeney, cherished teacher and friend.

Additional Credits

Polyphonic vocoder software and noise synthesizer percussion module designed by Ben Luca Robertson.

Agrippa designed by Davis Hill with Ben Luca Robertson.

Return to SR-388 art created by Ari Holmes.



For a list of upcoming Music Department events, please visit:
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