

# Reviews

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## Events

### Electronic Music Midwest

Electronic Music Midwest 2019 took place 5–7 September 2019 at the Kansas City Kansas Community College, Kansas City, Kansas, USA. Information about this festival is available at: <https://www.emmfestival.org/>

*Reviewed by Ralph Lewis  
Urbana, Illinois, USA*

Electronic Music Midwest (EMM) celebrated its 19th annual festival in September of 2019, with three days of engaging electroacoustic music and inspiring collaborations. Hosted at the Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) by KCKCC professor Ian Corbett, who served as both Technical Director and Festival Co-Director, and Kay He, who served as the Creative Director. EMM's nine concerts showcased regional and local electroacoustic composers and performers, including special guest artist saxophonist Drew Whiting and the Kansas City-based Mid America Freedom Band. Although the works presented involved familiar, fixed media and live electronic performance formats, the music frequently incorporated collaborations with instrumentalists, video artists, and



technologists that added a particular currency to them.

The Mid America Freedom Band (MAFB), and the pieces they played, offered a compelling example of how collaboration enhanced EMM's concert selections. The presence of a local, large ensemble that was willing to engage with contemporary music, and specifically music beyond their typical repertoire, set the stage for a series of concerts that often featured works built in collaboration with, or inspired by, a collaborator. That the Mid America Freedom Band is composed of LGBTQIA performers and actively programs LGBTQIA composers is a clear welcoming gesture for both new and returning EMM attendees about the equity and inclusivity for which electroacoustic spaces are striving.

In bookended performances conducted by MAFB Artistic Director Lee Hartman, works by EMM's Organization Advancement Director Robert Voisey and Jessica Rudman combined Mid America Freedom Band's concert band instrumentation with electronics in compelling ways, allowing these often separated musical ventures to work together. Voisey's work

*Doomsday's Passed (You're Dead Already, Zombie)* used mass textures and a graphic score that played with, and against, concert band tropes, with the electronics supporting and enhancing the dense sound masses. I was impressed with the ensemble's thoughtful and creative interpretation of the score. Rudman's *From the Blue Fog* closed out the first concert with sparse moments that often blurred the space between idiomatic, acoustic playing and distinctly electroacoustic practices, cultivating the atmospheric nostalgia for summertime music festivals and forest sounds in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains.

Special guest artist Drew Whiting's remarkable saxophone versatility was on display throughout the concert series. During Christopher Biggs's *Transduction*, Whiting embodied the work's gigantic, frenetic electronic presence while playing in front of an exquisitely rendered video background. He channeled a similar aggressiveness throughout Brett Masteller Warren's structured improvisation *Feedbacz*, maintaining the high energy level it required. In contrast, he provided a subtle, supporting role throughout Eli Fieldsteel's gentle *Depth of Field*, allowing Fieldsteel's performance on his LightMatrix controller to take center stage. Whiting's performance of Alexis Bacon's *Ötzi* was especially outstanding as he found a communicative balance between the music's hard, percussive framework and its tender melismatic reprieve, delivering Bacon's enticing ancient and modern technology-themed work with timeless grace.

Corbett's *Tesseract*, one of several multichannel works programmed throughout the festival, also reflected EMM's presence at KCKCC's Performing Arts Centre in being written specifically for the space's 7.1.4 Dolby Atmos speaker set up. Corbett's music was explosive, with fast-moving

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metallic gestures shooting from speaker to speaker. Although a shorter work, *Tesseract* succeeded in demonstrating the expressive capability of the concert space. This capability also enhanced other fixed media works including: Michael Smith's *Discords*, Han Hitchen's *Hot Oil*, and Jennifer Jolley's *Paint My Chopper Pink*.

Like Corbett, Smith also took advantage of the multichannel possibilities of the space in *Discords*, using slow, gradually evolving textures that emerged from the corners of the space and fluttered across the stereo field. Hitchen's *Hot Oil* unleashed the volatile nature of the titular liquid with abrupt processed attacks in an increasingly focused soundscape. Jolley's *Paint My Chopper Pink*, described as a "motorcycle motet in four voices," manipulates its opening motorcycle engine revs and reifies the percolating and beating patterns of the original source by processing them in Max and PeRColate toward increasingly distorted facsimiles. Eventually, these highly processed revving sounds dissipate into ringing bells (perhaps now referencing bicycles rather than motorcycles), dissolving away from the audience.

Kory Reeder's *Dance for Princess Charis Grant* offered an interesting example of collaborative staging for a concert work for piano and electronics. It originated from a dance collaboration and from the perspective that the work "should be an invitation for choreographed energy, excitement and experimentation." Inspired by, and developed with, a choreographing partner in mind, *Dance* remained a rich experience from its full opening gesture through the rush of its artfully curated noise and sound masses. As it continued to maneuver through a series of gear-crunching transitions, a formal calm came into focus.

Choreographic, improvisational, and performance-focused works also received ample programming time, as seen in performances of *Qin*, a real-time interactive composition by Chi Wang, *ISOLATE* by Douglas McCausland, *semi-human // semi-sentient* by Kristopher Bendrick, and two works performed by the Kansas City-based Mnemosyne Quartet. Wang's *Qin* stood out in terms of subtlety with regard to both composition and performance, expanding upon and replacing the gently flowing mode of playing of the zither-like qin with Kyma controllers. The piece comfortably drew on synthesized sound, but whether using near approximations of plucked string sounds or distantly related ones, they were frequently contained within the sort of performativity and attack and decay times seen in performing the acoustic instrument. In contrast, Douglas McCausland's *ISOLATE* used a handmade electronics interface called the Master Hand (a wearable glove) to control chaotic elements of synthesis. With abrupt, percussive motions, this controller was used to create a harsh, metallic, and unstable soundscape. Kristopher Bendrick's *semi-human // semi-sentient*, more so than any other work in the festival, produced distinctly theatrical, purposeful discomfort. Utilizing live gurgling, strained vocal rattles by Bendrick, as well as a no-input mixer setup, fixed media, and a video of intense strobe light patterns, his immersive performance succeeded in communicating the sense of uncomfortable vulnerability written about in the composer's program notes.

Meanwhile, the Mnemosyne Quartet, made up of Eli Hougland (electronics), Michael Miller (bass clarinet), Russell Thorpe (saxophone), and Ted King-Smith (saxophone), presented King-Smith's *Suite for Four*

*Items from a Thrift Shop* and the Donna Haraway-inspired *Swamp Thing* by Seth Andrew Davis and Colin Mosely. In King-Smith's work, the quartet used improvisation with live processed found objects used as tools for realizing the fixed media track for the work. The ensemble, switching to their usual instruments in the middle of the performance, contrasts the quotidian rhythms of how they played the found objects, reconciled with the limitations of these objects. Even as the ensemble stretched its rhythmic language, it maintained a focus on its middle register.

Davis's *Swamp Thing* required Mnemosyne to interact with a video score contributed by Mosely. Drawing formal boundaries inspired by the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, and Chthulucene epochs in Haraway's Posthumanist writing and the fictional humanoid plant element created by Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson for DC Comics, the work features the quartet improvising as it follows the video score. At first they play with glissando-heavy, destabilized gestures, being propelled forward into new sections with new characteristics by swooping electronic interludes. Near the end, the electronics and live improvisation settles into a circulating, iterating space that fades away.

Davis's and Mosely's work was far from the only one incorporating video or visual scores. Other examples included Carlos Catallo Solares's and filmmaker Timothy David Orme's *Generations 1.1*, Emily MacPherson's and filmmaker Austin Windau's *Phosphenes*, and Mario Diaz De Leon's and interdisciplinary researcher Donya Quick's *HAILO*. In some cases, such as *Generation 1.1*, an intense, energetic concrete sound world was combined with grainy,

poetic, black and white visuals, while the visuals and electroacoustic sounds Quick and Diaz De Leon used were generated by an interactive artificial intelligence system making inferences about Diaz De Leon's guitar playing.

In other cases, the visual component was a longstanding component of the composer's practice. Kay He's *HEAT it UP!*, for clarinetist Jackie Glazier, He on piano, and fixed electronics, used an animated component of the work that portrayed surreal Southwest desert landscapes from sunrise to starry night. Mark Zaki's *be still and wait without hope* drew on a shared feeling of separation, gently accompanying a collage of brooding portraits and pianist Mara Zaki's thoughtful performance with traces of electronics.

Each year, the Electronic Music Midwest festival offers unique circumstances to electroacoustic composers and performers. This iteration had particularly compelling guest artists, strong concerts, and an array of aesthetic interests and creative musicians at various stages of development. My hope is that EMM will continue to exist and support emerging composers and performers for many years to come. I have found that festivals like EMM that serve a specific area or sub-discipline yield a strong sense of community, offer entry points to new and student composers, and provide a refreshing exchange of ideas and interests that cannot always be easily replicated at a home institution or with local peers. In addition to its interest in collaborative endeavors, the Electronic Music Midwest festival, taking place at KCKCC or at Lewis University in Illinois in alternating years, allows new and returning participants to better plan ahead, especially as funding for travel continues to diminish.

## The SPLICE Institute

SPLICE took place 23–29 June 2019 at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. For more information on all aspects of SPLICE, visit <https://splicemusic.org/>. To find out more about all the past Institutes, visit: <https://splicemusic.org/institute/past>.

*Reviewed by Seth Rozanoff  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

SPLICE is an organization that produces a diverse range of musical and educational activities. In June 2019, the SPLICE Institute, now in its fifth year at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, brought composers and performers together to provide an environment that encouraged the creation of works for electronics and conventional instruments. The SPLICE Ensemble, SPLICE Festival, and, more recently, the SPLICE Academy, all contribute to the field of music technology.

The Institute's staff this year consisted of guest artists and composer-teachers including Ensemble Dal Niente, composers Kyong Mee Choi and Eli Fieldsteel, and harpist Ben Melsky. There was also a core group of performers and composers drawn from the Western Michigan University staff, the SPLICE Ensemble, and other universities as well, notably, Christopher Biggs, Elaine Lillios, and Per Boland.

This year's participants engaged in composition, performance, and entrepreneurship workshops, along with master classes and concerts. The composition workshops covered such topics as: how to reliably set up live electronic systems for a given

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work, notational practices, Max and SuperCollider software, and other hardware and software issues. As such, the SPLICE Institute attempts to address practical issues that involve technology, to support artists' own sense of independence within their artistic practice. Performance workshops were offered for beginner to advanced-level musicians. The aim here was to provide a starting point for participants when solving technical or musical issues that might arise during concert and rehearsal scenarios.

Ultimately, the SPLICE staff successfully provided an environment inclusive of all participant levels and aesthetic interests. Another interesting feature of this year's Institute were the entrepreneurship workshops headed by Ben Melsky, wherein he addressed career development themes. These themes included: time management after graduation, beginning new projects, and developing one's overall artistic identity. Past guests, such as composer-performer Joo Won Park from Wayne State University, Michigan, have given workshops about software and electronic music performance issues.

A core performing group at the Institute was the SPLICE Ensemble, which included Sam Wells on trumpet, Keith Kirchoff on piano, and Adam Vidiksis on percussion. The group presented a distinctive electroacoustic repertoire and has worked with student composers from various colleges in the U.S.A.

The SPLICE Ensemble contributed many concerts to the Institute, performing as a trio and also presenting

solo works. For example, Vidiksis and Kirchoff produced a concert of recent instrument plus electronic works. These works included the following: *Sublimation* (2004) for marimba and electronics by Kyong Mee Choi, and her *To Unformed* (2009) for piano and fixed media; *things that follow* (2018) for percussion and electronics by Heather Stebbins; *Piano Hero I* (2011/2012) for sampler and video by Stefan Prins; and *Monstress* (2019) for piano and computer, by Christopher Biggs. The SPLICE Ensemble also produced concerts with Institute guests, artists such as violinist Mari Kimura, and Paula Matthusen and Joo Won Park on electronics.

Another event worth mentioning that focuses on live musical performances involving technology is the SPLICE Festival. Now preparing for its third year, SPLICE Festival 3 will take place at Miami University in Ohio, 20–22 February 2020. Previous Festivals have taken place at Western Michigan University and Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

This Festival can be viewed as a “new music gathering”, which supports the development of artistic relationships between the audience, performers, as well as students, all engaging with one another while attending various presentations and concerts. Programming is selected by the SPLICE staff from a range of submissions drawn from their Call for Proposals. This results in performances by participants, new works for the SPLICE Ensemble, workshops, and lectures.

An interesting theme inherent in some of the works programmed in past concerts was the role of the composer-performer. For example, in Concert I of the second SPLICE festival, Howie Kenty performed on vocals and electronics in his work *Everybody Loves Me*. In Ted Moore's *feedback viii*, the composer

performs using a no-input mixer with a Eurorack synthesizer. Kyle Johnson performed live electronics in his *I'm not really much of a talker*. And Mark Zanter performed electric guitar in his work *Racket*.

The workshops and talks offered during the festival covered a wide range of topics, such as electronic instrument design, designing interaction, analysis of electronic music, composer-performers, and collaborative electronic music, among others. Previous artists conducting these workshops have included electronic harpist Jennifer Ellis, and sound artists Jason Charney and Steven Kemper. (For other past festivals refer to <https://splicemusic.org/festival/past>.)

A new addition to SPLICE, currently in its first year, is the SPLICE Academy. These activities took place at Temple University's Boyer College of Music and Dance in Philadelphia in July 2019. The staff included the SPLICE Ensemble, Elaine Lillios, Christopher Biggs, and Temple University's David Pasbrig and Sandra James. This academy is designed for high school students, introducing them to music technology topics such as studio recording, editing, live mixing, electronic music performance, and coding.

Returning to the concert activities from the 2019 SPLICE Institute, there were four concerts in which all works used conventional instruments and live electronics. In the following selection from these concerts, various strategies for shaping musical relationships between instruments, performers, and electronic sound are demonstrated.

In Concert I, one approach was found in Andrew McManus's *Impulse response [Neurosonics 4]* (2019) for eight-channel fixed media and tenor saxophone. In this work, McManus managed his spatial sound properties,

alongside saxophonist Justin Massey's performance. Massey's saxophone lines are interwoven within thick layers of electronic sound, juxtaposed within an immersive electroacoustic space. This approach required Massey to adjust his performance to interact with various sonic characters as they were introduced in the electronic part.

A solution for working with electronic sound and an ensemble was heard in Brittany J. Green's . . . *to experience life* (2019), which also was heard in Concert I. Here, the Splice Ensemble parts were colored by Green's electronics. As such, this work successfully orchestrated a range of delicate figurations within the electroacoustic sound world, where the role of the electronics seemed to expand and enhance the ensemble's expressive musical range. Green's electronics never overpowered her instrumental parts, due to careful coordination.

In Concert II, Tyler Adamthwaite's *Mori* (2019) for bassoon and electronics built sonic materials that were drawn not only from the bassoon's lyrical qualities, but also from the physicality of the instrument itself. Adamthwaite created and developed various rhythmic and textural lines in the electronics. The source material sounded like it was captured beforehand from a recording of bassoonist Josh Hart. In Drew Smith's . . . *pour Vincent Van Gogh* (2019) for violin and live electronics, Smith combines sounds produced by violinist Jenna Michael with electronic sounds to create a virtual, composite instrument. Michael's live sounds were often mirrored with the electronics part, which served as a continuous extension of the live part.

The works already mentioned demonstrate a vital aspect of the SPLICE Institute—namely, the

pairing of composer and performer. Other examples of this type of interaction could be heard in works from the third and fourth concerts, such as Vahid Jahandari's *There Was Yet No Heaven* (2018), for baritone saxophone and fixed media. This work was originally intended for fixed media only. However, the composer was able to "make room" for saxophonist Wilson Poffenberger's playing. The result is a saxophone improvisation, relying on Poffenberger's personal approach to his instrument, influenced by the sounds heard in the fixed track.

In Rebecca Gray's *I was not who* (2019), for flute and electronics, Robin Meiksins provided vocal and alto flute material, which was used for that work's sound design. The composer and performer shaped the material in an exchange of ideas that occurred in the research stage for this piece. Ni Zheng's *Asphyxia* (2019), for clarinet and electronics, is a distinctive example of an approach to transitioning between instrument-plus-electronics and accompanimental patterns. Clarinetist C. Olivia Valenza offered listeners a dynamic performance of Zheng's work. Valenza demonstrated a high level of virtuosity, required by the work. And lastly, Ralph Lewis's *Can't Take You Anywhere* (2019), for cello and fixed media, relied on cellist Stephen Marotto's approach to his instrument as well. This work highlights an accompanimental approach, matching Marotto's cello playing with electronic sounds. Although the electronics are fixed, the distinct character of both instrument and electronics, resulted in a playful counterpoint.

The artistic quality and educational environment present at the SPLICE Institute was a resounding success, offering vital practical experience for musicians interested in developing their electronic musical practice.

## Recordings

### Clemens von Reusner: Electroacoustic Works

Compact disc, 2018, NEOS 11803, available from Neos Music; [www.neos-music.com/](http://www.neos-music.com/).

*Reviewed by Ross Feller  
Gambier, Ohio, USA*

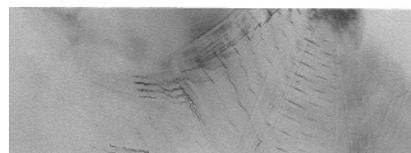
Clemens von Reusner is a German composer whose work is focused on exploring the boundaries of acousmatic music. For almost four decades he has produced a body of work involving electroacoustic music, radio plays, and soundscape compositions. His recent release on Neos, *Clemens von Reusner: Electroacoustic Works*, contains seven compositions composed within the last decade that represent a variety of approaches to making acousmatic music.

In *Anamorphosis* (2018), the first work on this collection, we hear carefully crafted, high-quality sounds and production techniques. Von Reusner has created a sonic universe in which unidentifiable sounds are used to form a highly compelling, plausible, artificial or virtual landscape. Sounds "appear" from nowhere, moving at various speeds and trajectories passing by the stationary listener. This is mostly accomplished by using gradual changes in amplitude and spatial positioning. It was sometimes difficult to tell whether separate events existed as part of a composite timbre or texture, or whether they were intended to be heard as separate entities.

Von Reusner allows his materials to develop organically at a leisurely rate within through-composed forms that allow the listener sufficient

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Clemens von Reusner  
electroacoustic works



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amounts of time to become attuned to minute changes in the overall texture. This strategy draws the listener in from start to finish.

The second work, *Ho* (2008), begins with a series of sharply attacked, synthetic sounding timbres, bathed in a heavy dose of reverb. Some of the sounds seem intentionally to resemble sci-fi sounds, at times conjuring up sonic images found in Bebe and Louis Barron's well-known film score for *Forbidden Planet*. Each new sonic reiteration contains a rich variety of waveforms articulated in different ways using various amplitude envelope shapes.

Von Reusner takes a "kitchen sink" approach to his introduction of sonic materials—there are a plethora of simple waveforms, processing techniques, and simple and complex forms of modulation, all situated within a highly fragmented soundscape. Often the general texture is quite thin and sparse. Because the pacing of events is aperiodic, the listener is continually surprised when new timbres and sounds are added. Materials are added very gradually, with the effect being that each ostinato or fragmented texture is listened to intently, with a close focus. Sounds are heard within a disconnected, pointillistic format, with few antecedent-consequent relationships besides those that occur simply due to placement in the same timeframe.

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The composer has clearly thought considerably about panning details and gestural shaping. For example, a low-pass filtered noise is amplitude-modulated with a low frequency oscillator that loudly begins in the left channel, and moves over to the right channel as it decrescendos, building back to full force as the sound returns to the left channel.

The composer's use of pitch-centered "instruments" reminded me of much work with Csound, and in fact according to the liner notes: "*Ho* was achieved by means of additive sound synthesis using the Csound audio programming language." Each "instrument" type is clearly heard and re-identified, as it is re-heard, even when processed with other types of sound treatment. Set loose at the beginning of the composition, it is almost as if each instrument follows its own trajectory throughout the piece.

About 2 minutes from the end of this 12-minute piece, the music becomes locked into a background ostinato pattern over which the composer brings back some of the previously heard sounds in a less urgent manner. This carries the piece to its conclusion, which is marked by a scratching or paper crinkling sound. The listener is left to ponder what it all means.

*Definerte Lastbedingung* (2016) [Defined Load Condition], the third piece, presents us with an unusual method for producing an acousmatic work. According to the liner notes: "*Definerte Lastbedingung* works with the sound of electromagnetic fields generated by electrical equipment. Recorded with a special microphone, this sound material has hardly any of what is otherwise typical for 'musical' sound. There is no spatial depth, nor any dynamics." Unlike the previous composition, for which I suspected the use of Csound, in this work I

would never have guessed at the novel way in which the composer created his sound palette.

At the beginning of the piece we hear complex frequency-modulated, cymbal-like sounds time-stretched, combined with granular, water droplet sounds that become part of subtle rhythmic patterns. The background contains materials in slow motion. We hear very slow crescendos and decrescendos, which give the impression that we are physically in close proximity to the sounds.

After approximately 3 minutes the texture changes to pulsating timbres combined with sounds that could have been made by the Star Wars character, R2-D2, as well as additional granular sounds. Some of the sounds seem to be deliberately reversed, suggesting the pliability of time itself. Two and a half minutes later a much sparser and more percussive timbre takes over, related to the previously heard granular sounds but bathed in liberal doses of spatialized reverb.

This dissipates at about 6:47, at which time a new section begins featuring a variety of sounds pulverized with unexpected silences and reverb trails. Next, grinding motorcycle sounds appear, making their way from channel to channel. This leads to a series of pointed, single attacks followed by more reverb trails. Throughout this section there is much attention paid to filtering and equalization.

At nine minutes into the piece, the texture becomes much more sparse, similar to the first few minutes but in a more elongated, drawn-out manner. The composition builds in intensity as the granular rhythm droplets are brought back. This is followed by a long, fizzled fadeout that effectively closes the piece.

The fourth work, *Dry Friction* (2012) is, according to the liner notes,

"based on the sound of metallic surfaces" composed out within a framework that harnesses "different manifestations of friction." The introduction includes a good deal of resonance boosting, or nasal filtering, of sustained Karplus-Strong-like timbres. To this, the composer adds reverb with a long decay time, as well as short-lived sounds that unexpectedly occur and then vanish. There is an audible dialectic between "dry" and "wet" sounds, but it is difficult to discern the dry sounds given the omnipresence of the wet background. Here the composite sounds, given this complex texture, take on the properties of the sounds that are bathed in reverb. To accomplish the opposite, to hear the dry sounds as dry, one might imagine them being set off from the rest of the material via pockets of silence that surround them, heard on their own without their wet counterparts.

Some of the sounds used in this work sound like they originated as samples and were played back at different sample rates or rates of speed. Alongside these sounds there are other sounds that might remind listeners of *musique concrète* techniques. One example of this occurs with processed speech sounds, which we hear in the form of a vocoder with added flange.

As in some of the other pieces from this collection, some of the materials in this piece seem to happen without apparent instigation or consequence. This is due to the lack of follow-through by the composer. For example, in *Dry Friction* there is a significant change to a drone based texture around 8.5 minutes into the piece. Instead of developing or continuing the drone it simply drops out like most of the other preceding materials. This is not simply a tool of fragmentation, like that found in John Oswald's *Plunderphonics*

works. Instead it suggests a structural flatness.

Nevertheless, around 10:20 the composer allows his sounds to stay put for a while, in a manner that is in line with their inherent significance. This poignantly leads to a section that includes some intriguing sounds that give the impression one's head was submersed in a giant tub filled with water. Here resonance is pushed past the limit, feeding back into the compositional fabric. The piece ends with a juxtaposition of flapping, simple amplitude-modulated sounds.

In a sense, *KRIT* (2018) is not significantly different from the other pieces on this disc. It seems to begin where *Dry Friction* left off, with the juxtaposition of two distinct textures. But this is unlikely given the six years that separate the two works. The liner notes state: "The basis of *KRIT* is a chaotic underlying sound that is cut into pieces and rebuilt in many variations. In the course of the composition, chaotic but simultaneously uniform, as well as isolated but extended manifestations of this sound are developed and become audible in different degrees of density and spatiality."

Whatever the case, this intriguing compositional method produced a work full of spraying liquid sounds, brief moments of bubbling, distant storm-like rumbling, and close-up scratching and thumping. Around the midway point, the spraying becomes much more active and moves across the stereo field in waves, harnessed to various flange-like treatments. Then we hear busy, urban, traffic-like sounds. About two-thirds of the way into the piece it takes on an ambient character, becoming much more sparse and soft. It stays like this for the remainder of the piece, constituting a calm ending. But the ending also includes contradictory material in the form of foreground material that

implies continuation, even as late as 30 seconds from the end.

The next work, *Sphären der Untätigkeit* (2013) [Spheres of Inactivity] "is based on the repeatedly filtered sub-harmonic development of synthetic frequency-modulated sound whose spectral nature is based on the proportions of the golden mean and which regains its original form only at the end of the work."

*Sphären der Untätigkeit* begins with the presentation of clearly demarcated sinewaves, suggesting that the composer used additive synthesis techniques to create his frequency-modulated sounds. It sounds like a music box in parts, but one that is electrified, distorted, and heavily processed. Events occur sparsely over long stretches of time. An ominous organ-sounding chord is sustained in the background, processed with what sounds like convolution reverb, while the foreground is occupied by a percussive drill sound, suggesting an unstable texture.

Unlike some of the other works on this disc, *Sphären der Untätigkeit* unfolds at a very slow rate, at least for the first several minutes. This allows the listener to track meaningful changes over larger chunks of time.

*Topos Concrete* (2014), the final piece from this collection, is another example of a work that uses interesting methods to produce an acousmatic composition. "To make solidified concrete audible, various objects made of glass, metal, paper, plastic, stone, and wood were drawn along the floor—like an oversized stylus of a record player. Using contact microphones, the resonant movements of the objects were recorded." This material becomes the basis for the piece.

From a soft, white noise beginning, we hear a slow fade-in, as if a camera lens has slowly come into focus. To this the composer adds high-pass

filtered sounds. "The Greek word 'topos' means area and is a rugged and inhospitable landscape with mountains and valleys, although it appears smooth and even from a distance." These sounds are in line with the definition of topos, in that the "smooth" introduction becomes more rugged as sounds appear closer to the listener.

In the next section we hear the application of low-pass filters onto time-stretched sounds. The sounds collide, triggering each other to start and stop. When instigated they often are passed through a resonance filter, which makes for a poignant effect. Sounds fade to silence followed by sudden, loud re-entrances and bursts of noise. Then they vanish, leaving granular water droplet sounds in their wake. The water sounds are saturated with reverb, giving rise to the thought that the composer has produced a virtual wet environment with sonic icons for wetness. The piece ends with a series of high-pass filtered percussive sounds processed with reverb and delay.

Acousmatic music is much more appreciated in Europe than in the United States. Perhaps a listener in the United States, lacking certain accoutrements of an imagination, demands visuals or narrative plots. Much of the music on this disc does, in fact, leave one to wonder about musical narratives, since many of the timbres, textures, and sounds heard come laden with semiotic meaning. If acousmatic, here, means a style of composition, then we are in the presence of a fairly limited definition, which can aid in the recognition of various stylistic traits associated with the composer. If we take the term acousmatic as a way to listen to sounds, we are also in the presence of a fairly limited experience that privileges large-scale organic forms, for example. The organic approach

to form mirrors the issue of the size of the computer screen, which can determine a composer's ideas, or change of ideas, for more traditionally minded acoustic composers who compose at their laptops.

There is much attention paid to localized gestures on this disc, less so with regard to large-scale structures. This is definitely a bottom-up approach to composing. One of the problems with using a plethora of sounds without attaching them to some kind of large-scale structure is that the listener gets lost in the localized sound-to-sound level. Without structural hierarchy the sonic fodder takes on a flat, or shapeless, character. No doubt von Reusner's work would benefit from live diffusion, which would accent the works' sense of movement and other dynamic qualities that require a three-dimensional space to fully take effect.

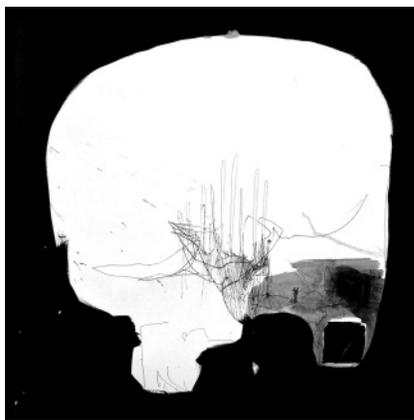
### **Peter Evans and Sam Pluta: Two Live Sets**

Digital download, 2019, available from Carrier Records; [www.carrierrecords.com/](http://www.carrierrecords.com/).

*Reviewed by Seth Rozanoff  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

In *Two Live Sets* we hear Peter Evans and Sam Pluta in a duo format that explores a range of electroacoustic dialogues. We hear Evans perform on trumpet, while Pluta performs on a custom-designed laptop instrument. Their dialogue also extends to improvising form and transitional material, similar to a fantasia composition. The duo's live performance results in a set of variations, which are led

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or instigated by either player. This "back and forth" exchange develops into a complex textural counterpoint wherein the listener hears a range of thematic musical transformations.

This new release on Carrier Records offers a limited edition compact disc containing the duo's live performance at the De Singer club in Belgium, which will be discussed here. There is also a digital download that includes two others sets, recorded at a performance at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. The opening dialogue between the players in Part I highlights Pluta's use of rich electronic palettes of color. He manages the mixing of live sampled material with dense sonic figurations, some of which stem from synthesis techniques constructed using the SuperCollider programming environment. Over 3 minutes, Pluta performs a long-form gesture, created with smaller sonic components, based on the material at the beginning of the piece. Pluta's distinctive approach to laptop performance is demonstrated in gestures, like those heard in the introduction. He designs his sound structures in ways that provide opportunities for him to develop phrases in the moment, as it were. This type of skill set, which balances conceptual and prac-

tical issues involving software-based musical performance, allows Pluta to not only continue developing his relationship with his laptop, but also with Evans. Initially, Pluta's performance suggests an interruptive creative strategy. He shapes his use of concentrated, weighty sonic material to guide a forward-moving musical narrative. Another feature of this musical behavior could be characterized as a process of a gradual separation, wherein Evans's playing seems to fade into the background. This process of juxtaposition—Evans's sustained ambient sound stream, pitted against Pluta's foregrounded staccato performance—is a core feature of the duo's dialogue.

Eventually, Evans fades out, yielding to Pluta's musical statements. When he re-enters, a new counterpoint begins to take shape where both are heard attempting to interrupt each other. In this section, a third voice also emerges, stemming from Pluta's real-time capture of Evans's vocal-like utterances on his trumpet. During this section their interaction sounded less frenetic, as they comfortably interweave their performance against one another.

At approximately 6 minutes into their set, the duo conclude their exploration of sustained timbres and begin to highlight Evans's shorter, quasi-melodic phrases, forming a kind of extended instrument. Here, Pluta's role is more supportive, subtly coloring or enhancing Evans's playing. At the 7-minute mark the music becomes playful, as the electronics serve background duties. Again we hear that electronic voice mentioned earlier, emerging from Evans's concentrated improvisation. Gradually, Pluta adapts his performance, transforming his timbral range, and reshaping the counterpoint with Evans. Halfway through Part I, amidst the sense of a dynamic,

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ever-changing performance, small musical fragments are re-introduced, referencing or resembling material heard in the opening. These elastic timbres are now infused with increasingly harsher moments, driving a dramatic build-up that is preceded by a short solo by Evans. As Evans improvises, Pluta re-enters, producing a counterpoint via similar interruptive behaviors heard before, at the beginning of the set. Ultimately, Pluta plays longer, accompanimental gestures that gradually fade in and out.

Overall, the duo sound like they can seemingly go in any creative direction, which the listener experiences as a sense of unpredictability. This ability to remain unpredictable may be due in part to either player not having been burdened by identifying who is producing a particular type of sound material. Pluta's laptop rig bears much responsibility for this. This kind of performative approach demonstrates how players might adjust their ways of communicating and listening to develop a cohesive, albeit unpredictable, musical interaction. Evans's and Pluta's work together allows for individual spontaneity by encouraging the development of intuitive musical relationships. The results of this type of creative interaction are also demonstrated in the duo's ability to move between processes of soloing, accompaniment, juxtaposition, or interruption, during performance. In Part I, Evans' and Pluta's sonic palettes, explore a body

of densely layered musical shapes via the previously mentioned behaviors.

Part II opens with Evans playing "breathy" sounds that lack distinct pitch material. Pluta then heavily processes these timbres to the point where the trumpet becomes unrecognizable as such. This sample is used later in support of a melodic line, consisting of delicate figurations in the trumpet's high register, performed by Evans. Pluta, by way of contrast, contributes low register, fog-like sounds, which at times seem to agitate Evans. After a 3-minute introduction, Pluta mixes in a range of processed sounds that effectively mask Evans's playing. A new formal section emerges around 4:30, based on trumpet sounds with Pluta serving an accompanimental role. Evans continues to dominate the texture, performing much more active, capricious figures. Pluta's supporting music develops as well, layering thinner lines based on trumpet timbres.

Around 8:00, the musical dialogue becomes vigorous and maintains a fast pace. The music transforms again, this time into a pointillistic contrapuntal texture. Both players become more synchronized, following one another with much more sparse playing. Then Evans takes the lead and the two gradually separate in a similar way to the opening of Part I. After two minutes of this texture Pluta breaks away, improvising a solo proper. Around 10:30, Pluta introduces another theme, which

Evans abstracts further. This theme is the most lyrical in nature heard so far on this recording. The next section has less energy but picks back up in intensity at 14:00 as Evans demonstrates his considerable virtuosic skills.

Overall, the duo are skillful at transitioning between sections, shaping form as if it were predetermined. In a sense, the core mode of behavior in *Two Live Sets* is accompaniment, meaning that Evans and Pluta focus their compositional actions during performance on continually exploring antiphonal relationships between one another. Antiphonal, here, can also represent the relationship between live and electroacoustic sound. This relationship is a source of ambiguity relating to the management of their musical dialogue—it is not always clear who is taking the lead. The concluding 2 minutes of music finishing *Two Live Sets* sounds like a coda. Its main feature is a repeating pulse-pattern maintained by Pluta, used as a type of backdrop for Evans. Evans exploits the use of concentrated air sounds. Alongside these two sound streams, Pluta adds embellishments to the pulse, further punctuating, and ultimately signaling, the end of the work. Overall, the interaction between Evans and Pluta is dynamic, representing a range of continually changing musical relationships stemming from spontaneous actions and decisions during performance, infused with laptop technology.