

Instaurations

Michael Jones, percussion

May 10, 2024 – 5pm

Conrad Prebys Music Center Experimental Theater

Between Time (2021)

Matt Sargent (b. 1984)

Triptych (1994)

David Macbride (1951-2018)

I.

II.

III.

Intermission

trace-escape-horizon (2023)

Scott Wollschleger (b. 1980)

*world premiere



Program Notes

The title “Instaurations” is a term borrowed from philosopher Étienne Souriau, a French aesthetician working in the first half of the 20th century. To instaure something (and the work of art is his favored example) is to begin something, or to begin something anew, with the certainty that to abandon it or make a wrong choice in its production would result in the disappearance of the thing completely. There is thus something high-risk in art making: it is possible to use the wrong hue in a brush stroke or chip away too much stone in a delicate sculpture, thus destroying the possibility of the work itself emerging. Souriau extends this aesthetic metaphor to a number of grand places befitting a 20th century European philosopher: Existence, Being, and God. In each of these areas, we begin things and can only maintain them by insisting on their existence, by instauring them anew, and never with the security of making the right choice.

Instauration in music bears a different kind of risk. In picking up the mallets to perform any of the works on this program, there is no risk that I will “destroy” them in any finality the way I might if I splashed the wrong coat of paint on a nearly finished painting. And yet, as any performer will tell you, there is always the risk in a given performance that the work won’t reveal itself in the way one feels it can. This is the joy of preparing pieces for subsequent performances: there is always a next time; a “maybe this will be the night we really *hear* it.”

The pieces on this program and their instauration are both biographical and programmatic. Biographical in that each of these pieces are written by friends from various stages of my life and with whom I have varying relationships: the conspiratorial with Matt, the indebted with David, and the optimistic with Scott. They are thus an instauration not only of the works but of these relationships, a recommitment to them as collaborators and people in my life.

Between Time is one of a number of pieces I’ve worked with Matt over the years, and features hours of preparation both within the live part and in the pre-recorded bow layers. *Triptych* is the first piece I ever played for a living composer, and it was that interaction with David that set me on the course to be invested in contemporary music nearly 10 years ago. *trace-escape-horizon* is heard for the first time tonight, and is the beginning of what I hope will be a continued coming-together in its orbit.

Lastly, none of this would be possible without the support of the UCSD production staff and of my colleagues, mentors, and students here during the last six years. Thank you.



Program Notes (continued)

Between Time is a piece for solo percussionist and fourteen layers of bowed percussion. The piece began during the spring of 2020. As concert life went quiet during the pandemic, I found myself writing algorithms: mathematical equations that germinate into databases of notes and harmonies – seeds for musical worlds. Like a personal Goldberg Variations, I would leave these musical generators playing in the living room all afternoon long.

Between Time was a particular algorithm that I kept returning to one afternoon after the next. After a year of living with the piece, I decided to find a way to notate the music for acoustic instruments.

- Matt Sargent

No program notes besides a small dedication to percussionist Benjamin Toth exist for **Triptych**, which is surprising given the scope of the work. As the name itself suggests, it is structured in three movements. This triadic scheme extends into the many levels of the work: for example, the first movement is almost entirely structured on the notes D, E, G# and variations/harmonization thereon, the movement itself is in three parts, etc.

Within the Hartford, Connecticut percussion community, which David was a central part of, it's common knowledge that the piece was inspired by a collection of Indonesian *angklung* (tuned bamboo rattles) that David at some point in his travels acquired. Both the harmonic language of the piece as well as the chattering, aggravated technical approach to the marimba bear this influence. The marimba becomes a massive *angklung* scale that is traversed by the marimbist in equal parts virtuosity and tranquility, and, as is characteristic of David's compositional style, often a combination of both.

- Michael Jones

In *trace-escape-horizon* the percussionist conjures a magically fragile sonic situation. The first part of the work uses only two pitches, often harmonics, which playfully flicker and blend together in a constantly shifting manner, much like the way light glistens on the surface of water. The vibraphone harmonics are created in two different ways: one by striking the metal bar with a mallet and the other by lightly touching the metal bar as it is bowed softly. While writing, I imagined Mike gently holding up a nearly ungraspable and delicate microscopic sound sculpture for us to listen to and observe from different cochlear angles. As the piece progresses, new sounds are introduced and the range of the vibraphone is expanded upwards.

In *trace-escape-horizon*, you, as the listener, are encouraged to become lost in the sound and to allow your mind and ear to wander freely. The work embraces a hyper-analog aesthetic, both acoustically, and in the compositional process that was

deployed to generate the music. While composing the work I developed various procedures of disorientation and I tried to eliminate any sense of development. The music was written entirely by hand, in ink, on homemade staff paper. At times the score resembles something a child might innocently draw. The aim was to imply a sense of floating ambiguity that would be reflected both in the music and its interpretation.

The title of the work comprises three words that stayed with me as I reflected on the music. The score is a map that traces my steps of disorientation and constant forgetting. The idea of the horizon has a special place in my understanding of what an artist does. For me, the artist holds open the door to the future. What that future is remains totally unpredictable and not-yet-determined; we unveil horizons for others to soar towards and to lose themselves inside of. The horizon invites us to proceed into its boundlessness with a sense of mystery, weirdness, hope, and the promise of escape.

- Scott Wollschleger