

Elegy and Honk (English horn and tape) is (not surprisingly) a work in two highly contrasting movements. The entire accompaniment to the Elegy is derived from a few English horn sounds — short notes in various registers, some “airy” key clicks, and a whoosh of air rushing through the instrument without the reed in place. The dense clouds in the background actually come from a single very short English horn “blip” subjected to a process called granular synthesis, through which the original audio is exploded into tiny fragments. Each fragment is then stretched nearly to the breaking point and recombined into several layers of overlapping texture. The second movement employs an expanded palette of source material including a menagerie of geese and duck sounds, joined by an old-fashioned bicycle horn — HONK, indeed!

Base Metals (tape) was commissioned by Swedish Radio in Malmö. The title refers to the metal sounds that provided the central material for the piece, and it also evokes the creative process of transmuting these raw sources to a higher musical and expressive plane. All the metal sources derive from sound sculptures constructed by the artist Derek Shiel from metal objects collected over a period of time. From the wide range of objects I selected those whose internal resonant properties would provide me with variegated spectral families. Some possessed intervallic and tonal properties, others were inharmonic or noisier, and some sounded more synthetic than truly metallic. Although there are a number of striking orchestrated impacts and resonances in the piece, I was less interested in the clatter and clash of metal than in more sustained morphologies. Thus there is a focus on varied pushes, surges, swirls and sweeps of spectral energy, balanced with calmer drifts, undulations and dips, all of which move in and out of more clearly pulsed moments. These motions are also spatial so there are approaches, emergences, dispersals and distant disappearances, sometimes leaving behind the residues of spectral trails. The metal-based families, which are hardly ever absent, are brought into relations with a few other sound-types, and those who know my other pieces might spot the occasional refugee-sound from the past, recontextualised. Thanks to Derek Shiel for making his sound sculptures available, and to Bosse Bergqvist for initiating the commission.

Singing Hills (chamber ensemble and tape) is a work for chamber ensemble and computer. The ensemble includes three percussionists, one of whom plays MIDI percussion (the MIDI percussionist triggers computer playback of sampled sounds). All of the instruments play into microphones, and their sound is thereby fed into a computer running MSP software. The computer modifies the sounds of the instruments in various ways. The conductor, in addition to his usual role of coordinating the ensemble, uses a MIDI baton (the Buchla Lightning) which the computer follows. By following the conductor, the computer can follow the score, and therefore the computer “knows” the appropriate time to apply various modulating processes to the live instruments. The result is a mixture of traditional instrumental sounds, environmental sounds, electronic sounds, and sounds that are combinations of all of the above. There is often an intentional ambiguity among sounds.

The Center for New Music

The Center for New Music (CNM) is a performing organization devoted to 20th century repertoire and is the focus of contemporary composition and performance at the University of Iowa. The Center, like the internationally renowned Writers Workshop, embodies the institution's commitment to the vital role of the creative arts at the frontiers of human experience.

The Center was originally funded by a \$100,000 matching grant from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1966. From the start, the Center sparked the composition of new works expressly for the ensemble, and it brought exciting professional realizations of both local and international repertoires to the University community as well as to tour audiences throughout the state of Iowa and beyond. The Center functions as a laboratory and performance extension of the School's composition area and as a repertory ensemble for the creation and presentation of new music in general. The Center also serves as the locus of activities for guest composers whose visits range from a few days to entire academic terms.

As the Center enters its 36th year, it remains an advocate of contemporary music performance. The Center's programming reflects the eclectic range of compositional styles currently being written, as well as what is considered classic repertoire from the 20th century. The quality of performance is based on working with a core ensemble, grounded in solid repertoire over an extended period of time. The Center seeks to build new and more diverse audiences through outreach concerts, and to establish a professional reputation through CD recordings as well as through the invitation of guest composers and performers nationally.

The University of Iowa
School of Music
Presents

The National Conference of the
Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United
States

SEAMUS 2002

Intersections in Sound

CONCERT 12

April 6th
8:00 pm
Mabie Theatre

The University of Iowa Electronic Music Studios
Lawrence Fritts, Director

SEAMUS 2002: Concert XII

Clapp Recital Hall

8:00 PM April 6, 2002

PROGRAM

The Center for New Music- David Gompper, director

Mellipse 2	Allen Otte, percussion	Mara Helmuth, Allen Otte
so many days to be here		Kristi McGarity
Church Keys	Yun-Pai Hsu, piano	Paul Rudy
Hard Weather Makes Good Wood	Alla Cross, violin I Julia Liao, violin II Charletta Taylor, viola David Evenchick, violoncello	John Morrison
Intermission		
Five Arabesques	Joan Blazich, clarinet	Barry Schrader
Absence of Joy	Ilka Vasconcelos Araujo and Jason Hibbard, piano	Sam Hamm
Elegy and Honk	Megan Manning, english horn	Mark Phillips
Base Metals		Denis Smalley
Singing Hills	TheCenter for New Music	Marc Ainger

Mellipse 2 (percussion and tape); The original tape composition was created using moving elliptical filters and granular processing on a 3-second sample of a spoon hitting a pot lid. This new composition contains percussion music which attempts the same sort of tracings — single sweeps made up of thousands of tiny individual attacks.

so many days to be here (tape) The words in “so many days to be here” are all quotations from interviews conducted in shelters for families, teenagers, and children. Special thanks to Claudia Hampston Daly, executive producer of For Kids’ Sake Radio, for permission to use excerpts from the radio program “Lives of the Children.” Thanks also to Lesley A. Martin for permission to use a quotation from Mary Ellen Mark’s book “A Cry for Help,” published by Umbra Editions in 1996.

Church Keys (piano and tape); I have long loved the simplicity and clarity of the four-part hymns I used to sing in church as a child. I view these hymns now as a foundation upon which highly complex structures can be build. I have often been perplexed, however, by the range of emotions expressed in many of these hymns. On the one hand, hymns like “Far Far Away From My Loving Father,” portray a heartfelt loving and forgiving image based on the prodigal child story. On the other hand, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” contains violent war imagery and language. The opposed polarity of these two types of hymns can be striking when they appear side by side in a worship service. I have come to realize that both kindness and violence seem to be equal parts of our human nature. Church Keys is the ground on which these halves of myself, kindness and confrontation, struggle to coexist.

Hard Weather Makes Good Wood (string quartet and tape) was composed during a time of intense personal struggle, and carries a complex set of relationships between recorded material and the string quartet. There is a simple side to the evolving relations, however: the string quartet is three times overwhelmed by the tape. Each massive area is approached differently, and each triggers a different reaction from the quartet. In the passages separating the assaultive sections, the tape carries a rich, undulating harmonic progression. That music serves to soothe and regenerate the spirit of the ensemble, which is in a long-range struggle to re-establish its initial laid-back-but-high-energy, groove-oriented identity. The more complex level of relationships has to do with affinities demonstrated both between instruments and between particular instruments and the taped sounds. The overall shape of the music should be easy to follow; investing attention toward the interaction of tape and quartet, both on a sonic (i.e., the way the sounds themselves blend) and kinetic (i.e., the manner of articulation and overall vigor) level will hopefully reward the listener with deeper understanding of the music. An important fact about the tape part is that every sound there was first produced on the violin. The title refers to the fact that hard weather with scant rainfall produces wood with tight growth rings, wood which is resilient and can endure tough conditions. The emotional profile of the piece, then, is hopeful, a sort of seasoned optimism available to those who endure hardship. Since I got the advice (repeatedly!) from my father, Bill Morrison, and since I hope that my son, Ezra Morrison, will learn to survive through hard times, I dedicate the music to them.

Five Arabesques (clarinet and tape); ar-a-besque (ar’e-besk”), n. [Fr.; It. arabesco <Arabo, Arab: with reference to the designs in Moorish architecture], 1. a complex and elaborate design of intertwined flowers, foliage, geometrical patterns, etc. painted or carved in low relief. 2. in ballet dancing a position in which one leg is extended straight backward and the arms are extended, one forward and one backward. 3. in music, a short, brilliant composition in rondo form. 4. the name given to five curious little pieces by Barry Schrader for clarinet and electronic sounds.

Absence of Joy (piano 4-hands and computer) was composed in memory of my mother, Joy. She passed away in October 1999 from a lung disease called interstitial pulmonary fibrosis, which causes the lungs to harden until they can no longer function. Her loss leaves an irreparable hole in my life. Shortly after her death, her closest friend had a dream in which my mother told her, “The numbers are 18, 17, 1, and 9. Make sure my son gets them.” As a result, the pitches Eb, D, Bb, and Gb form the foundation of this work. In addition to interactive processing of the piano, some of the sounds produced by the computer are derived from some of my mother’s favorite music.