

**CCM**

COMPOSITION SERIES

PRESENTS

# SONIC EXPLORATIONS

CENTER FOR COMPUTER MUSIC -

DEPARTMENT RECITAL

John Gibson, Indiana University, guest artist

Yunze Mu, Xavier University, guest artist

**Wednesday, March 20, 2024**  
**Cohen Family Studio Theater**  
**7:30 p.m.**

# PROGRAM

Endangered Sound 2 (2024)

CiCLOP Improvisation

*For laptop orchestra*

CiCLOP – Cincinnati Composers Laptop Orchestra Project

Mara Helmuth, Carl Jacobson, Mu-Tien Lai, Kevin Li, Hefang Ma, Yunze Mu

Kieran McAuliffe, electric guitar

Nick McDermott, euphonium

Gracie Zamiska, dance

Self-Governed Lullaby (2024)\*

Zach Graham  
(b. 2004)

*For electric bass guitar and stereo fixed media*

Zach Graham, bass guitar

Sunshower (2023)\*

Nick McDermott  
(b. 1981)

*Video fixed media*

The Sermon (2024)\*

Valerie Dreith  
(b. 2004)

*For vibraphone and stereo fixed media*

Valerie Dreith, vibraphone

Dogma's End (Self Scattered) (2024)\*

Andy Demczuk  
(b. 1990)

*Video fixed media*

In Summer Rain (2021)

John Gibson  
(b. 1960)

*8.1 Channel Fixed Media*

«salsa al vapor» (2023)\*

Felipe Tovar-Henao  
(b. 1991)

*Omaggio for piano and electronics*

Michael Delfín, piano

Air Traffic (2023)

John Gibson

*For trumpet and 8-channel electronics*

Josh Krovetz, trumpet

\* Indicates world premiere performance

# PROGRAM NOTES

## **Endangered Sound 2**

Endangered Sound is a structured improvisation for Internet2 performance, previously performed between the CCM Center for Computer Music and the Network Music Conference at Stony Brook University in 2018, using Mara Helmuth's SoundMesh software and the RTcmix music language. This new version performed by Cincinnati Composer's Laptop Orchestra Performance Project uses Yunze Mu's SoundMeshWeb, with WebAudio for streaming between the CCM electronic music studios and Cohen Theater. Participants contribute their own ideas of endangered sounds. You will hear pandas, birds (the cerulean warbler, ocellated turkey, and piping plover - all of which are endangered North American species), guitar and ancient sounds from China (bianzhong) and Japan (biwa), as well as technological relics. Kevin Li: The 56k modem's screeching connection and Sony's classical VHS intro were iconic sounds of the '90s, symbolizing the dawn of the internet age and home entertainment revolution. However, both have since become obsolete relics, replaced by faster internet speeds, DVDs and digital streaming platforms. Nick McDermott: These are portions of recordings of euphonium virtuoso Simone Mantia from the years 1898 and 1899. The recordings represent a confluence of sounds from a bygone era; a deceased performer, performing two pieces that have nearly been lost to time, and recorded on some of the earliest forms of recording technology.

## **Gracie Zamiska Biography**

Gracie Zamiska is a 4th year Ballet BFA student at CCM. She has performed in productions with the dance department since the fall of 2020, and her choreographic works have been featured in the annual Student Choreographer's Showcase at CCM since 2021. She is honored and excited to be a part of this collaborative project!

## **Yunze Mu Biography**

Yunze Mu is a composer, sound artist and music programmer based in Cincinnati, Ohio. He is currently teaching at Xavier University as adjunct professor and Miami University as visiting faculty. He received a DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) in Composition at the College-Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati, where he studied computer music with Mara Helmuth and taught introductory courses in electronic music. He is currently working on his web-based music application, Web RTcmix. Mu holds a bachelor's degree in electronic music production from Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing, China. His music, papers, and VR installations have been shown and performed at numerous events and conferences, such as NIME, ICMC, SEAMUS, NYC Electronic Music Festival, and venues in China, Poland, France, United States, and Korea.

## **Self-Governed Lullaby**

Not too long ago, I started composing acoustic music. I felt free and lost at the same time. There's a common adage that says you have to know "the rules" to break them. Entering the electronic realm now, I feel the same way I did on the summer evening when I composed my first real piece. So again, I ask myself: am I circumventing the confrontation of norms in a genreless genre of music out of pure ignorance due to my inexperience in the domain? Most definitely. But this track smells exactly like how fish sounds like and you might be able to convince me otherwise. And in this brief moment in time, that's enough for me.

# PROGRAM NOTES

## **Sunshower**

I've always thought there was something magical about a sunshower; that moment when the sun finds a gap in an otherwise rainy sky, and suddenly the light seems to turn into liquid gold. This piece is a portrayal of one of these moments.

## **The Sermon**

The Sermon is part of a larger collection of pieces that explore the different parts of the Anglican Church service. It employs the use of a constantly-changing vibraphone motor to create ambient atmospheres. This piece explores ideas of personal voice, the human thought process and the soundscapes surrounding churches.

## **Dogma's End (Self-scattered)**

This Sonata in D major is inspired by the residue of failed ideas—an exquisite corpse of modal sounds portraying the flashing images of my involuntary memories.

## **In Summer Rain**

In Summer Rain explores the sound of a rainstorm, from realistic soundscape to remote transformations. Rilke's poem, "Before Summer Rain," evokes the odd feeling we get when we sense that rain is coming. My piece begins like this, in a typical suburban setting, but soon the downpour rushes us into an imaginary interior world, where harmony colors the rhythm of rainfall, and thunder and lightning take on new forms. The opening gesture — the sound of someone leaving the confines of indoor space to welcome the sweet summer air — occurred during a pandemic lockdown, adding another dimension to the meaning of the piece.

This is one of a series of my pieces that weaves in and out of natural soundscape, using it to prompt memories and associations while experimenting with its ability to take on harmonic color and animate rhythm. I think of this music as a form of magical realism, and I hope listeners enjoy entering and leaving the make-believe realm.

Much of the pitched sound you will hear comes from recordings of rainfall, subjected to precisely tuned filters and a process of spectral analysis and recomposition.

## **«salsa al vapor»**

«salsa al vapor» is an homage to and celebration of the late Mexican composer Javier Álvarez (1956-2023), whose eclectic and idiosyncratic music had a transformative impact on my own.

Largely inspired by his 1990's electroacoustic miniature « Mambo à la Braque », where Álvarez uses samples from Pérez Prado's mambo, «Caballo negro», to create a cubist-like sound collage, «salsa al vapor» takes the recording of Colombian salsa hit song, «El Preso» by Fruko y sus Tesos, to generate highly rhythmic passages for both the electronic and instrumental parts. This is interwoven with more meditative and sparse material that takes inspiration from the album Mirror Guide (2021) by vaporwave artist Giant Claw. The coexistence between these two highly contrasting sound-worlds is meant to allude to the vast and diverse range of influences that Álvarez had throughout his life.

# PROGRAM NOTES

## **Air Traffic**

Often my inspiration for new pieces comes from observing the natural world or worrying about what's happening to it. In *Air Traffic*, I'm thinking about honey bees. In his book *Honeybee Democracy*, Thomas D. Seeley, a scientist at Cornell, gives a detailed account of the behavior of these bees. His main idea — which seems charmingly idealistic, especially these days — is that humans could learn a thing or two from the social cohesion and cooperative decision-making of honey bees. But it's his research into the honey bees' ability to scout out a new home and navigate there, while keeping together a hive of thousands, that interests me most. Seeley and his colleagues performed experiments suggesting that certain scout bees guide the others to a new home they've discovered: the scouts fly quickly, in a straight line through the bee swarm, thus encouraging the other bees to follow, instead of flying randomly in all directions. My piece enacts such a swarm in its middle section, using a colony of synthetic "bees" that fly around the concert hall, while the trumpeter, as scout bee, gets them to fly right. When the bees find their home, they break into a celebratory song, with a swinging beat.

But there are real bees in this piece, too! To help me get a better sense of what honey bees are like up close, I met with Indiana University biologists Lillian Caesar and Chris Robinson at the university hives. I dropped microphones in a hive and witnessed a terrifying, claustrophobic, and frenzied sound world, which you will hear accompanying the trumpet. I even donned a bee suit to better see what they were up to. You will hear a bit of my conversation with Lillian at the end of the piece. The bees do not intimidate her. I thank Lillian for allowing me to use her voice.

Unfortunately, honey bees, while essential for agriculture, tend to out-compete native pollinators, which are also under threat from climate change and pesticides. If you want to help native bees, and you have some kind of yard, replace your grass with native plants. Bees will show up for asters, bee balm, boneset, and others. Most of these bees are solitary, not living in huge hives, so they will be happy to visit you.

In *Air Traffic*, I aim to surround the trumpet with fragments of its own live sound or with synthetic voices, using an immersive eight-channel loudspeaker arrangement. In addition to the synthetic bees mentioned above, the piece features an algorithmically constructed jazz accompaniment to the trumpet, whom I ask to improvise within a musical environment unmoored from a clear harmonic grounding. It's meant to come across as an exuberant free-jazz romp, before subsiding into a return of the opening soundscape, situated in a hay field with cars passing in the distance and bees buzzing from the nearby hives.

# PROGRAM NOTES

## **John Gibson Biography**

John Gibson composes electronic music, which he often combines with instrumental soloists or ensembles. He also creates fixed-media audio or audiovisual works that focus on environmental soundscape. His portrait CD, *Traces*, is available on the Innova label, along with other recordings on the Centaur, Everglade, Innova, and SEAMUS labels. Audiences across the world have heard his music, in venues including the D-22 punk rock club in Beijing, the Palazzo Pisani in Venice, and the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington, D.C. Presentations of his electroacoustic music include concerts at the Seoul International Computer Music Festival, the Bourges Synthèse Festival in France, the Brazilian Symposium on Computer Music, the Australasian Computer Music Conference, and many ICMC and SEAMUS conferences. Significant awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Paul Jacobs Memorial Fund Commission from the Tanglewood Music Center, and a residency in the south of France from the Camargo Foundation. He was a Mentoring Artist at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in May 2017. Gibson is associate professor of music and director of the Center for Electronic and Computer Music ([cecm.indiana.edu](http://cecm.indiana.edu)) at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

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