

April 1, 2024 | 7:30PM | Sheryl Crow Hall
Anthony Di Sanza Solo Percussion

Program Notes

Wood & Water – Anthony Di Sanza

Wood & Water was initially composed as a frame drum duo in 2018 and then re-imagined as a solo with audio track in 2021. The work explores four thematic ideas that, while mathematically related, are set in different tempi creating a unique identity for each. The structure of the work is not conventional but hopefully perceptible to the listener. Beginning with an unadorned statement of the 1st theme, ornamentation is systematically included through an additive process bringing this material to its fully flowered state before moving on to the brief and melodically based 2nd theme. Following an improvised solo, the first two themes are presented in oscillation highlighting their tempo and stylistic contrasts. The third theme, which has a *half-time* feel, bookends the extended 4th thematic area, which oscillates between a funky groove and waves of rolling melody. Following a truncated return to the 1st theme, the work concludes with a *tihai* (a thrice repeated rhythmic cadence used in Indian music) composed by Todd Hammes.

I initially composed basic material for the accompanying audio track acoustically, layering instruments via simple audio recording/editing software. I then asked Marc Hill to realize my raw, acoustic ideas electronically while giving him creative freedom to experiment and enhance the sonic landscape with his own ideas. The title of the piece is a reference to the Birch Creek Summer Percussion Academy in Egg Harbor, WI, at which I was teaching when I began composing the work.

Pulled from Time – A. Di Sanza

Composed in 2023, *Pulled from Time* opens with plaintive melodic material that outlines the work's harmonic home base and sets a mood of introspection. Following the serene introduction, the music turns buoyant, but uneasy as the feel of the steady 6/8 meter is thwarted by unpredictable bass interjections. In both appearances of the allegro material, the uneasy tension is resolved when the bass finally falls into a steady rhythmic groove. The contrasting middle section paints faint musical gestures that are blurred at the edges, again uneasy but more resigned due to experience. The work ends with a rare statement of the tonic chord without the disruptive major seventh, perhaps representing a sense of optimism.

An initial version of *Pulled from Time* was composed in 2020 during the globally devastating COVID 19 pandemic and during the final months of my only sister's decline and ultimate death. This piece is dedicated to the memory of my sister, Pamela, and the strength she showed throughout her life. She passed well before her time.

Frida Kahlo's Tweetstorm – Ben Wahlund

Frida Kahlo's Tweetstorm is composed as a suite for solo 5.0 marimba in six connected movements. These are loosely programmatic in nature and marginally influenced by the artwork of Frida Kahlo (1907-1954). While she clearly has not posted on Twitter, this piece does put to song how I imagine she might perceive living in this digital age.

This was commissioned by and composed for Anthony DiSanza, Professor of Percussion Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I appreciate the humility, tenderness, precision, joy and ferocity with which he approaches music and hope future performances of *Frida Kahlo's Tweetstorm* will continue to celebrate these qualities.

Energy Fields Forever - Per Nørgård

Energy Fields Forever can be experienced as a journey among three independent musical universes, each with its special laws and conditions. Throughout the work Nørgård explores the melodic and rhythmic material in three layers based on an approximation to the *Golden Ratio* (the relation 3-5-8).

In operating with three musical strata (tonally and metrically different and usually without rhythmic congruence), the music might be described as conflicted-polyphony, where the interruptive nature of the independent lines tear at the fraying linear perspective.

Sometimes the composer chooses to let one strata dominate, or weaves notes from different strata creating new, boundary-crossing melodies and motifs. Often it is up to the listener to choose the foreground and the background of the music.

The work opens with three clear statements of the core melodic fragment (comprised of six pitches) set in unique metric/rhythmic configurations. This angular, yet simple melody, and the three metric/rhythmic identities serve as the basis for Nørgård's ever-changing yet seemingly static music.

Following the opening melodic statements, Nørgård wastes no time in digging into the polyphonic underpinnings of the composition. Using synthesized drum and chime sounds, the multiple layers of the music are plain to hear. In persistent reference to the *Golden Ratio*, the rhythmic material consists of layered subdivisions of 3, 5 and 8 notes per beat.

Nørgård ultimately explores the polyphonic layering of melodic, metric and rhythmic material using an acoustic multiple percussion set-up (which presents the opening melodic material, in inversion, on six tuned drums with counterpoint woven on a metal pipe), as well as a combination of keyboard percussion instruments (MalletKAT, vibraphone and bass marimba).

Nørgård abandons the conflicted-polyphonic texture for a brief period while applying his minimalistic "waves" principles to the six-pitch inverted melodic fragment on tom toms, bringing emerging melodies to the fore through gradual dynamic and rhythmic change.

Near the end of the work, Nørgård quotes the end of a simple waltz melody by Adolf Wölfli as the basis of a kaleidoscopic fabric of tones. Wölfli spent most of his life institutionalized where he painted, wrote poetry and composed works of art that demonstrated a combination of madness and genius.

The tension between the simple melody and the ambivalent polyphony experienced at the end of the work points back to Nørgård's vision of his boyhood years: the pre-sentiment of "a music that arose out of a single melody that rushed around through all the instruments of the orchestra."

Energy Fields Forever was composed for – and in collaboration with – Gert Sørensen. (Notes by G. Sørensen & A. Di Sanza)

Walking on Stones – A. Di Sanza

Composed for multiple Middle Eastern darabukkas and fixed audio file, the work is in five sections, attempting to explore diverse sonic and rhythmic settings. Opening with contemplative ambient sounds, the piece then moves through two sections that explore a variety of timbres and a two drum conversation set in a 14 beat cycle. The 4th section escapes the confines of steady time allowing for flowing melodies on multiple drums. The final section is based on an energetic bass line in 12/8 (subdivided 3-2-3-2-2) that encourages the soloist to super-impose various groupings as counterpoint to the fixed ostinato.

The seed for *Walking on Stones* was planted in my mind while walking on a stone beach in Door County, WI. I recorded the amazing sounds of the rocks beneath my feet and immediately started thinking about a musical environment in which to use the recording. I collaborated with my friend Marc Hill to create the fixed media file, initially giving him only vague musical parameters for each section. We worked through many revisions of the fixed media material as I built the solo drumming ideas. This is our second collaboration in the realm of drumming solos with fixed media having previously created *Wood & Water* for solo frame drum and fixed media.