



University of North Texas College of Music

Ensemble Concert | Monday, November 18, 2024 | 8:00 p.m.
Merrill Ellis Intermedia Theater

Spectrum: New Music by North Texas Composers Sponsored by the Composers Forum

The In-Between (2024)	David Stout (b. 1955)
generative AI video and audio	
Sparky (2024)	Dominic Willis (b. 2003)
Sethan Felkins, alto saxophone Devin Brown, timpani Isaac Morgan, percussion Dominic Willis, keyboards	
"I am the space..." (2024)	Benjamin Shirey (b. 1985)
fixed media	
Movements Between the Still Time (2024)	Sampson Li (b. 1995)
Beige Cowell, saxophone	
Black Ink on White Noise (2024)	Colton Weed (b. 2002)
fixed media	
Hope-Regen..... (2024)	JD Fuller (b. 2004)
JD Fuller, voice and live electronics Stephanie Jantzen, piano	

Program two hundred and fifty-two of the 2024–2025 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

love will never be enough Benjamin Damann
(2023) (b. 1994)

Teng Cao, toy piano
fixed media

Metal-morphoses..... Ryan Fillinger
(2024) (b. 2001)

fixed media

Voidweaver..... Dylan Flenniken
(2024) (b. 2005)

Ella Curb, violin
Colton Weed, violin
Anthony Brooks, viola
Ethan Nelsen, cello
Julie Rompf, double bass

Fragments..... Aidan Barboza
(2024) (b. 2004)

Fanfare for a Forgotten King
Hymn for a Dead God

Auron Ragsdale, trumpet
Aidan Barboza, organ and Edison phonograph

foam..... Colin Stokes
(2024) (b. 1987)

fixed media

seabeams..... Nolen Liu
(2024) (b. 2002)

Nolen Liu, live electronics and live visuals

They should have spent more time together —
coz it's all about perspective..... Justin Friello (b. 1989)
(2024) Pak Hei (Alvin) Leung (b. 1997)

Justin Friello, voice and electric baritone guitar
Alvin Leung, voice and piano

Program Notes

The In-Between

This cyber-jazz-noir encounter of the fourth kind is one in a growing body of cinematic songs exploring the potential of the written word (lyrics) to bring forth a sound world and guide musical form utilizing generative AI. Questions abound re: the role of the artist / composer in the use of AI based "generators". Wearing the hat of the DJ/curator, record producer, sound designer, editor, re-mix artist, and lyricist, *The In-Between* demonstrates the storytelling potential of Gen AI as a song writing vehicle. The lyrics are written dynamically by the human author in response to the musical utterances of the AI to build out a song over many dozens or even hundreds of successive 30 second iterations. This back-and-forth dynamic is not unlike working with a live ensemble to compose songs through a collaborative improvisational process. The resulting sonic artifact can be seen as a kind of score (demo tape) that may be interpreted by others to create their own unique arrangements.

"I am the space..."

"*I am the space...*" delves into the impermanence of self and the transient nature of being. Through fragmented text and sound, the piece navigates the tension between presence and absence, inhabiting the space between moments, thoughts, and emotions.

The text unfolds an evolving self, shifting through contradictions and pauses, questioning the nature of existence. As the piece progresses, it leads to a quiet realization: "I'm here. I am the space."

The music mirrors this introspection, blending stillness and motion to create a contemplative space where listeners can explore the subtle complexity of being.

In Movements Between the Still Time

In Movements Between the Still Time, I am exploring different stages of movement and stillness. I am using contrasting musical materials to represent the different stages between moving and static sounds.

This piece was composed as part of the Barcelona Modern Academy for Nacho Gascón.

Sparky

"Sparky" was the nickname my late grandfather gave me when I was a young child with a limitless amount of energy. No matter the situation, my restless and bouncy younger self seemed to operate daily without any sort of "off button". That energetic kid is still a part of me today, though nowadays that energy resides almost exclusively in my mind, and while having that level of energy in my head all the time certainly has its drawbacks, I like to think that it's my mind's way of preserving that hyperactive part of myself that's been with me since I was born.

With that in mind, I created this piece to examine what it's like to live with an energetic and hyperactive mind like my own. It consists of four sections based on the day-to-day happenings of my mind:

I. The Hyperactive Mind in Motion - Thoughts are produced rapidly, one after the other, to the point that it's difficult to keep track of them all.

II. Hyperfixation/Rumination - When the mind gets focused on something, positive or negative, it's hard for any other thoughts to break through that focus. Eventually, the mind chooses to work with, rather than against, the subject of intense focus.

III. Train of ThoughtThought Spiral - The mind is back in motion once again, though now we see a clear line of logic from one thought to the next. But these thoughts can also spiral way out of control, and when that happens, the logical thread that once connected everything vanishes in the midst of the chaos.

IV. The Hyperactive Mind at Rest - Yet even a brain with relentless energy must ease up as the day comes to a close. At this point, some thoughts from earlier resurface, though with a far greater sense of clarity than before. Taking inspiration from the works of jazz composer Darcy James Argue and chiptune composer Blitz Lunar, *Sparky* captures the somewhat chaotic, occasionally silly, and ultimately groovy state of my hyperactive mind.

Hope-Regen

Hope-Regen takes inspiration from meditations on the natural elements within our bodies: water, fire, air, & earth. Our bodies are mostly water, and so water symbolizes here fluidity and cohesion- blood nourishing the body and connecting us to ourselves while allowing for change, flexibility, fluidity. Fire represents temperature in the body and the energy, the fire, that drive us to transform, grow, & burn. Air, the most essential to life, embodies movement and breath, connecting our body and mind as our lungs push & pull.

Cumulonimbus clouds begin as rising water vapor condenses, forming towering structures of beautiful shapes and immersive landscapes miles above. These clouds can bring thunder, lightning, snow, sleet, hail, & rain. In raining, the water that has risen to tower high above returns to Earth, which represents stability, groundedness, & strength. I too am filled with water, rising into the sky, breathing, and transforming- knowing that at some point, there must be a release, but when in storm, falling, or resting I am still the same water that lines our planet, erodes for the new, and nourishes all life.

Metal-morphoses

Metal-morphoses was composed by recording unconventional sounds and techniques on a large brass instrument, then manipulating and combining the recordings to create a cohesive sound-composition.

Voidweaver

A thrilling, fast-paced string quintet. *Voidweaver* is a direct response to a previous string quintet I wrote earlier this year, featuring similar elements and spinning off one of its motifs. Inspired by composer Christopher Larkin, *Voidweaver* provides constant energy with an underlying sense of unease. With elaborate rhythms, uneven time, and tension filled melodic lines, this string quintet aims to captivate the audience and subvert expectations.

Fragments

Fragments is a collection of works composed to be recorded on a Model C Edison wax cylinder player. The first two works of this collection are "Fanfare for a Forgotten King" and "Hymn for a Dead God." "Fanfare for a Forgotten King" utilizes the natural hollow and dull sounds that come from recording on wax cylinder to illustrate the emptiness of materialism. Represented through the imagery of a once powerful and wealthy king who has been reduced to a footnote in history and instead of having a triumphant and celebratory fanfare is instead represented by a solemn and melancholic piece. "Hymn for a Dead God" makes use of the innate distortion that comes with recording on wax cylinder to create an eerie atmosphere for the listener. Religion is something that has been co-opted by capitalism and is no longer about true spiritual growth as a person but has been replaced with proving one's holiness through their wealth. This hymn's eerie and empty tones expose that we praise imitations of our gods and have killed our real gods through our greed.

foam

foam explores the intersections of human creativity, AI, and speculative philosophy through sound. Inspired by the AI "paper clip maximizer" thought experiment, this piece probes what it means for a system to operate with single-minded efficiency, devoid of human nuance or ethical bounds. The increasing density of the rhythms and chimes hints at the escalating, self-replicating nature of AI in this hypothetical scenario: a gradual shift from the sparse to the dense, from gentle pulses to an almost overwhelming presence. This evolving soundscape questions whether pure efficiency can coexist with a sense of wonder, or if both are ultimately shaped by the intentions of their creators.

The video component deepens this exploration. AI-generated images depict abstract stained-glass panels that occasionally transform into what look like skylines or cathedrals. This visual metaphor connects the piece to our cultural veneration of technology and capitalism as modern forms of worship. Just as cathedrals once embodied spiritual devotion, these AI-driven images reflect a contemporary fixation on efficiency, productivity, and economic growth, often without regard for the broader consequences. The interplay between sound and image evokes a sense of beauty and unease—questioning whether these new forms of "worship" enrich or diminish human experience.

Program notes generated by GPT-4, prompted and edited by the composer

seabeams

seabeams is an ambient piece for live electronics and video, inspired by the Valhalla Supermassive preset by the same name.