



University of North Texas
College of Music

Senior Recital | Saturday, April 12, 2025 | 8:00 p.m. | Merrill Ellis Intermedia Theater

Dominic Willis, composer
In Retrospect

Sparky (2024) Dominic Willis
(b. 2003)

Sethan Felkins, alto saxophone
Joseph Woodburn, timpani
Isaac Morgan, percussion
Dominic Willis, piano and MIDI controller

Apricity (2024) Dominic Willis

Spencer Alger, marimba

A Stroll Through Garson's Garden (2023) Dominic Willis

fixed media

Desktop Memories (2023) Dominic Willis

Max Rubenstein-Miller, piano

Program five hundred eight of the 2024–2025 season
Photography and videography are prohibited

Creative Modes (2025)..... Dominic Willis
I. Press Start
II. To New Endeavors!
III. Invisible Wall
IV. Think Outside the Box
V. Final Push to the End (Credits)

fixed media

World Premiere

Autumnfide Waltz (2025)..... Dominic Willis

Zichen Yu, guitar
Dominic Willis, piano

World Premiere

Program Notes

Sparky (2024)

"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 Thought/Thought 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.

Apricity (2024)

Apricity is a contemplative marimba solo reflecting on the title's definition: the warmth of the sun in winter. I decided to write a marimba solo based on this niche word after a call with my mom in January in which we realized that, by sheer coincidence, we both came across the word "apricity" and its definition for the first time that day. In fact, the day in which that call happened was also the first partially sunny day in an otherwise entirely cloudy week. On top of that, one of the first pieces I ever wrote, entitled *The Sun is Bright But It's Still Cold Outside*, deals with a similar subject matter. I was already planning to compose a marimba solo at this point, but all of these signs helped me establish a clear thematic direction for the piece right from its inception.

This piece is a personal milestone for me in a few ways. First, it's the first solo piece I've written for what I consider to be my primary instrument, which I've wanted to do for quite a while. Second, it acts as a sort of spiritual successor to the aforementioned *The Sun is Bright But It's Still Cold Outside*, to the extent that a melodic motif from that piece is incorporated throughout this solo. Finally, this marimba solo feels like my first opportunity to give back to marimba composers like Robert Oetomo and Ludwig Albert, whose pieces have helped shape my identity both as a percussionist and as a composer.

A Stroll Through Garson's Garden (2023)

A Stroll Through Garson's Garden is a musical tribute to the 1976 electronic album *Mother Earth's Plantasia* by Mort Garson. A lesser known yet nonetheless fascinating composer, Garson had a varied musical career that saw him writing everything from popular music to film scores, though he's best known today for his pioneering electronic music. He was an early adopter of the Moog synthesizer and was among the first composers to heavily integrate it into his work, and *Mother Earth's Plantasia*, composed entirely with the Moog, has become his most iconic album in recent years, especially with the album's first reissue in 2019. I hadn't heard of him until stumbling across this album online in the fall of 2022, but the album has since become one of my all-time favorites. Each track is brimming with warmth and whimsy while also taking great advantage of the Moog's timbral capabilities. As such, my goals with this piece were to capture Garson's charming and endearing musical style with entirely synthesized instruments and to pay homage to such a wonderfully unique musician.

Desktop Memories (2023)

The legacy that Windows XP has left on modern culture cannot be understated. Despite being over two decades old, it continues to be one of the most iconic operating systems in the world, in part due to its unforgettable design. Whether it be its iconic default background, Bliss, or its memorable sound effects, Windows XP truly had a one-of-a-kind aesthetic that continues to resonate with its millions of users, myself included. On top of that, I've always had a sentimental attachment to Windows XP as a result of growing up with my family's Windows XP computer, which is roughly 20 years old and still works to this very day. With all this in mind, my goal with *Desktop Memories* was to celebrate Windows XP and the impact it's had both on myself and on the world at large.

Bill Brown, who composed the sound effects and music for Windows XP alongside sound designer Tom Ozanich, was by far the greatest influence on this piece. In fact, many of the melodies heard in this piece either directly or indirectly quote the iconic motifs found in his work. Other stylistic influences on this piece include Joe Hisaishi, Ludwig Albert, and Frédéric Chopin.

Creative Modes (2025)

Creative Modes is a multi-movement work that combines elements of two of my favorite musical mediums: chiptune and the marching arts. Utilizing the soundchips of the Nintendo Entertainment System, the Sega Genesis, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System, and the PC Engine, this work strives to capture both the larger-than-life emotions and power found within marching arts productions and the characteristic, imagination-inspiring limitations of chiptune.

When thinking about what these two distinct musical mediums have in common, I realized that at the heart of each medium lies the inherent spirit of creativity, evident by the long hours of passion and effort that artists and performers of each medium pour into their work. As such, each of the five movements of *Creative Modes* explores a different step of the creative journey:

I. Press Start - Here we experience the joy and wonder at the start of any creative endeavor as we the artists imagine all the wonderful possibilities that lie on the other side of our hard work.

II. To New Endeavors! - We get deep into the work necessary to bring our vision to life, defeating each obstacle as we come across it. But as the challenges grow more difficult, so does our ability to maintain our pace, leading to an eventual halt of progress.

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III. Invisible Wall - Finding ourselves at a creative standstill, we begin to doubt our artistic potential, wondering what it will take for us to overcome our artist's block and make our final project as strong as we know it can be.

IV. Think Outside the Box - As a reimagining of my 2022 composition *Conversation for Bass Clarinet and Marimba*, this movement encapsulates the unorthodox yet undoubtedly creative approaches that bring us out of our rut, often by taking what we have already created and building upon it in ways we would have otherwise never imagined.

V. Final Push to the End (Credits) - We take those last steps towards the completion of our work, finally being able to see the fruits of our labor. We can now take a step back and relax as we watch our passion project go on to live a life of its own.

Taking inspiration from such talented arrangers as Paul and Sandi Rennick, Tom Rarick, and Doug Thrower, as well as inspiration from incredible video game and chiptune composers like Nobuo Uematsu, David Wise, Tim Follin, and FearOfDark, *Creative Modes* is my love letter to chiptune, the marching arts, and the spirit of musical creation.

Autumntide Waltz (2025)

I distinctly remember one autumn car ride from my childhood when Vince Guaraldi's *Great Pumpkin Waltz* started playing through the car's speakers. My dad told us how hearing that tune makes it feel like fall has officially begun, especially when taking in the autumn scenery at the same time.

I cannot understate the impact that the work of Vince Guaraldi has had on my career as a musician. Many of my stylistic tendencies, musical interests, and even my desire to be a composer can be traced back to hearing his music from childhood onwards. Although I eventually began listening to his music year round, nowhere did our family listen to his work more than from the start of fall through the end of winter. For me and many others, he has undoubtedly shaped the sound of these seasons.

Taking additional inspiration from Brazilian guitarist Bola Sete and jazz pianist George Winston, *Autumntide Waltz* is my tribute to Vince Guaraldi, the immeasurable impact he has left on my life, and the many Guaraldi-filled autumn seasons I've been able to experience.