

Uncanny Affable Machines

“...I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.” —Andy Warhol

Human-like machines and machine-like humans fascinate, especially in music. The six pieces on this disc offer various weird but unfraught scenarios of human/machine interaction. Each of them features a lone human performer negotiating intersecting worlds of mechanical and human. A human soloist contends directly with an inflexible mechanical partner in three of the pieces: *Uncanny Affable Machines*, *The Sun Beats the Mountain Like a Drum*, and *Let Me Tell U About R Specials*. In these, the electroacoustic parts often have an uncanny, superhuman rhythmic precision, but this is undercut by the nature of the manipulated sampled sounds, most of which have human-performed, bird-performed, or chaotic rhythms as part of their fabric. On the other side, the heroic human performer can be seen/heard herself as a “soft machine”, to use William Burroughs’ phrase, wielding a low-tech but incredibly sophisticated and powerful acoustic instrument. The relationship between human and machine, high-tech and low-tech, biology and silicon, is a close and cordial one. In *Uncanny Affable Machines*, performer and soundfile sound like they’re in different worlds, but, as they swap material back and forth, it soon becomes clear that they’re inextricably linked. After some adventures, they ultimately get crazy together and give birth to a new form of being.

The Sun Beats the Mountain Like a Drum exploits extremes of expression and contrast. The pipa is set apart from most other instruments by its large range of visceral performance gestures—notes bend like crazy, strings can be twisted together to produce distortion, machine-gun tremolos can strike at any moment. The wild physicality of the instrument is palpable, with an in-your-face presence; then in the next moment, it can sound exceedingly beautiful and delicate. For the pipa’s electroacoustic partner, I looked for material that would emulate its hyper-expressive power, using raw as well as refined sounds. In shaping the architecture of the entire piece, I draw from distinct musical traditions and sound worlds; some of its high adventure lies in how these traditions collide, rebound, and are transformed and convoluted by one another.

Let Me Tell U About R Specials is a meditation upon a commonplace narrative—dining in a contemporary American restaurant. I became aware at some point that most restaurants had given their food servers the same script to work from, beginning with “I’m [Patti], I’ll be helping you out this evening!” and ending with “Have a nice night!”. (My favorite mid-meal line is “Are you still working on that?”). By creating a piece of music that follows this familiar set of signs for beginning, middle, and end, I hope to give listeners a sense of where they are at any given point. And I invite them to ponder the disturbing similarities between high art and the service economy. The fixed media part of *Let Me Tell U* is made up entirely

of flute sounds and waitperson-speech. Aside from copious pitch shifting, these sounds receive minimal processing; the soloist accompanies herself.

Cross Chop for solo drumset, and *Frozen Rain, Summer Dreams* for solo piano, touch on the mechanical in historically older ways. The sense of perpetual motion, occasionally shifting gears, pervades *Cross Chop*, beginning with a quotation from the Surfaris' classic "Wipeout". *Cross Chop* is also named after a surfing term—a "cross chop" happens when a wind blowing sideways to shore disturbs the rhythm of the bigger waves rolling towards it, setting up a less predictable cross-rhythm. Difficult for surfers, but exhilarating for percussionists. *Frozen Rain, Summer Dreams* begins with an emotionally chilly prelude (*Frozen Rain*), inspired by weather I encountered when climbing Snowbank Mountain in Montana one August. The plinking of ice pellets on crusted snowfields is evoked here by a (somewhat mechanical) pulsating high note which disappears with the beginning of *Summer Dreams*, a song without words based on a setting of a poem by Bill Kushner that evokes the nature tropes of classical Chinese poetry (e.g., "yellow orioles warble high in/the shadowy summer woods"). The ice returns in ghostly form at the end.

And No Birds Sing is performed on a high tech virtual instrument, a grand piano tuned with 19 notes in each octave; the improbability of such a machine existing as an acoustic instrument is part of its appeal. The microtonal tuning is driven by expressive

needs: dividing the octave into 19 equal intervals offers a wider palette of both consonance and dissonance than the common 12-tone equal temperament. The title is a repeated end line in Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", a vivid, well-known poem with the archaic flavor of a medieval ballad. It begins:

*O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.*

The shocking brevity of that end line evokes a bleak winter landscape. My piece takes its tone from this implication of environmental catastrophe, specifically our ongoing Anthropocene mass-extinction event, rather than from a belle femme fatale. But the "sans merci" part of the poem's title resonates—we live in times notable for an absence of pity and mercy (and many other virtues) in our rulers.

—Eric Moe

Biographies

Paul Vaillancourt (D.M.A) is Professor of Percussion at Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia. He has been a featured soloist at the Banff and Aspen Summer Music Festivals, Sound Symposium Music Festival in Newfoundland, with the National Arts Centre and Ottawa Symphony Orchestras, the St. Petersburg Chamber Orchestra (Russia), the Guanajuato Philharmonic Orchestra in Mexico, the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra, the

CSU Philharmonic and CSU Wind Ensemble. Recent concerto performances have included Jan Jarvlepp's *Garbage Concerto* with the Columbus Symphony, Jennifer Higdon's *Percussion Concerto* with the Arizona State University Symphony Orchestra and Brian Cherney's *In Gottes Garden schweigen due Engel* for solo percussion, voice and percussion ensemble at McGill University in Montreal.

He has performed all over the world with many contemporary music ensembles including *Bent Frequency*, *Sonic Generator*, *Furious Band*, *The Fountain City Ensemble*, the piano/percussion duo, *STRIKE* with pianist Jeff Meyer, and as a founding member of the newly formed *Zohn Collective*.

With playing that is "fierce and lyrical" and works that are "other-worldly" (The Strad) and "evocative" (New York Times), Jessica Meyer is a versatile composer and violist whose passionate musicianship radiates accessibility, generosity, and emotional clarity. As a soloist and member of the award-winning and critically-acclaimed contemporary music collective (counter)induction, Jessica has premiered pieces for solo viola internationally—expanding the repertoire for viola by championing new works while also composing her own. Her solo show—where she uses a loop pedal to create a virtuosic orchestral experience with her viola, voice, and hand percussion—has been featured at iconic venues such as BAMcafé and Joe's Pub in NYC, the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, and in Paris at Sunset Sunside. Recent and upcoming premieres include performances by

the Grammy-winning vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, Sybarite 5, PUBLIQuartet, NOVUS NY of Trinity Wall Street under the direction of Julian Wachner, MoVE, Sandbox Percussion with vocal duo Two Cities, and A Far Cry.

Yihan Chen was a prize winner of the 1995 Freedom and the 1989 Art Cup International Chinese Instruments Competitions. She has performed at major international festivals in China, USA, France, Portugal, Canada, Japan and Italy, such as Spoleto Festival, Lincoln Center Festival, De Création Musicale de Radio France, Le Festival d'Avignon, Encontros Acarte 98 Portugal, La Cité de la Musique, Lotus Festival, and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's New Music Festival. She has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress and other leading venues. Ms. Chen has collaborated with internationally renowned composers such as Chen Yi, Zhou Long, and Chen Qigang. She was the soloist of the Hua Xia Chamber Ensemble and has been performing with Music From China since 1999. After graduating from the China Conservatory of Music with a bachelor's degree in 1995, Yihan was a faculty member at its affiliated middle school.

Lindsey Goodman is a soloist, recording artist, chamber collaborator, orchestral musician, educator, and clinician who has performed solo and chamber concerts, taught masterclasses, and given presentations at countless series, festivals, and universities in three countries.

An advocate for living composers and electroacoustic music, Lindsey has premiered over one hundred new works. In addition to

her solo albums *reach through the sky* (New Dynamic Records) and *returning to heights unseen* (Navona Records), she is featured in solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral performances on New World, Navona, Albany, and other labels. Lindsey has performed multiple New York City recitals, concertos from Mozart to commissions across North America, and been featured in radio broadcasts across the county.

Lindsey is solo flutist of the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, principal flutist of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra, and adjunct lecturer at West Virginia State University and Marietta College. She is a founding member of chamber ensembles PANdemonium4, Leviathan Trio, ASSEM3LY, and Chrysalis Duo. Lindsey received degrees from the Manhattan School of Music, Northwestern University, and Duquesne University, and she resides in Ohio with her husband and dog. www.LindseyGoodman.com

Eric Moe, composer of what the NY Times has called “music of winning exuberance,” has received numerous grants and awards for his work, including the Lakond Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a Guggenheim Fellowship; multiple commissions from both the Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundations, the Barlow Endowment, Meet-the-Composer USA, and New Music USA; fellowships from the Wellesley Composer’s Conference and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts; and residencies at MacDowell, Yaddo, Bellagio, Camargo, VCCA, UCross, Aaron Copland House, Ragdale, Hambidge, Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians, and the American Dance Festival, among others.

Tri-Stan, his one-woman opera on a text by David Foster Wallace, was hailed by the New York Times as “a tour de force” that “subversively inscribes classical music into pop culture.” A recording is available from Koch International Classics. *Strange Exclaiming Music* (Naxos) was described by Fanfare as “wonderfully inventive, often joyful, occasionally melancholy, highly rhythmic, frequently irreverent, absolutely eclectic, and always high-octane music.” *Kick & Ride* (bmpop/sound) was a WQXR album of the week. Other all-Moe CDs are available on New World Records (*Meanwhile Back At The Ranch*), Albany Records (*Of Color Braided All Desire, Kicking and Screaming, Up & At ‘Em, Siren Songs*), and Centaur (*On the Tip of My Tongue*).

As a pianist, Moe has premiered and performed works by a wide variety of composers.

His playing can be heard on the Koch, CRI, Mode, Albany, New World, and Innova labels in the music of John Cage, Roger Zahab, Marc-Antonio Consoli, Mathew Rosenblum, Jay Reise, Ezra Sims, David Keberle, Felix Draeseke, and many others in addition to his own. His solo recording *The Waltz Project Revisited—New Waltzes for Piano*, a CD of waltzes for piano by two generations of American composers, was released in 2004 on Albany. Gramophone magazine said of the CD, “Moe’s command of the varied styles is nothing short of remarkable.” He founded and currently co-directs Pittsburgh’s Music on the Edge new music concert series. Moe studied at Princeton University and U.C. Berkeley and is currently the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Music at the University of Pittsburgh.