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Zeitgeist is supported by City of St. Paul's Cultural STAR Program, The Amphion Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the MAP Fund, the Jerome Foundation, the Albrecht Family Foundation, The Mandel Family Foundation, and the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council, through an appropriation by the Minnesota State Legislature.



This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Early Music Festival

Music of Alvin Lucier

Co-presented by Zeitgeist and 113 Collective

November 17-20, 2022

Studio Z



Early Music Festival

Music of Alvin Lucier

November 17-20, 2022

Zeitgeist

Heather Barringer and Patti Cudd, percussion;
Pat O'Keefe, woodwinds; Nikki Melville, piano;
and guests Laura Harada, violin and Michelle Kinney, cello

113 Collective

Joey Crane, Tiffany Skidmore, Josh Musikantow, Benjamin Mansavage Klein, Walt Skidmore, Justin Spenner, Willow Skidmore, Alyssa Anderson, Michael Duffy, Kyle Hutchins, Adam Zahller, Charlie Gannon

Artist Statements

"Composer Alvin Lucier was wholly fascinated by the phenomena of sound, and he devoted his life to exploring and making manifest this (usually) invisible but profoundly audible aspect of our natural world upon which all musical expression rests. His music centers sound waves moving through space, colliding with surfaces and containers, interacting with other waves, and finding its way to our observation. Sometimes awesome and profound, sometimes subtle and intimate, Lucier's music asks patience and careful listening from performers and listeners. Its magic will unfold slowly, and won't treat musical elements like melody, harmony, and form in ways that are conventionally recognizable. But, if approached with curiosity and receptiveness, this music will delight and move us and remind us of what a marvelous world we are blessed to live in."
– Heather Barringer, Zeitgeist

"Lucier's work in the 1960s and 1970s, alongside that of other artists like Gordon Mumma, Robert Ashley, and David Behrman, codified a body of music identified as American experimentalism. Lucier's role as a pedagogue, a role he began in the 1960s and continued to the end of his life, inspired artists to pursue the extent of their curiosity and develop their own unique approaches to experimentation. In his seminars, emerging artists were encouraged to share their whims and chase them as far out as possible. Lucier inspired new generations of musicians through his fascination with sound, and offered a model of how to maintain a graceful creative pursuit throughout his long and rich career. This grace was based in the joy of discovery and a desire to share that joy with the listener." – 113 Collective

PROGRAM

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17

Opera with Objects (1997)

Heather Barringer and Patti Cudd, objects

Broken Line (2006)

Heather Barringer, vibraphone; Nikki Melville, piano; Pat O'Keefe, clarinet

Silver Streetcar for the Orchestra (1988)

Patti Cudd, amplified triangle

Theme (1994)

Heather Barringer, Mike Duffy, Pat O'Keefe, Tiffany Skidmore, voice

intermission

The Sacred Fox (1994)

Joey Crane, voice

In Memoriam Jon Higgins (1984)

Pat O'Keefe, clarinet

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18

Nothing is Real (Strawberry Fields Forever) (1990)

Nikki Melville, piano and teapot

Two Circles (2012)

Heather Barringer, vibraphone; Laura Harada, violin; Michelle Kinney, cello; Nikki Melville, piano; Pat O'Keefe, clarinet

Heavier Than Air (1999)

Zeitgeist, CO2 filled balloons and voice

intermission

Performing Emily (2017)

Tiffany Skidmore, voice

Letters (1991)

Nikki Melville, piano; Pat O'Keefe, clarinet, Michelle Kinney, cello, Laura Harada, violin

Song for Soprano (1962)

Alyssa Anderson, voice

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Six Geometries (1992)

113 Collective, chorus

Ricochet Lady (2016)
Heather Barringer, orchestra bells

Intervals for chorus and sound-sensitive lights (1983)
Members of 113 Collective and Zeitgeist, chorus
intermission

I am sitting in a room (1970)
113 Collective

No Ideas But In Things: The composer Alvin Lucier (2012)
A film by Viola Rusche and Hauke Harder

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Bone Moon (2019)
Patti Cudd, vibraphone; Kyle Hutchins, tenor saxophone

Music for Violin and Alto Saxophone (1980)
Willow Skidmore, violin and Charlie Gannon, saxophone

Memory Space (1970)
Members of 113 Collective and Zeitgeist

Flight Paths (2018)
Heather Barringer and Patti Cudd, percussion

ARTIST BIOS

Alvin Lucier (1931-2021) was an American composer of experimental music and sound installations that explore acoustic phenomena and auditory perception. A long-time professor at Wesleyan University, Lucier was a member of the influential Sonic Arts Union, which included Robert Ashley, David Behrman, and Gordon Mumma. Much of his work is influenced by science and explores the physical properties of sound itself: resonances of spaces, phase interference between closely tuned pitches, and the transmission of sound through physical media.

Lauded for providing “a once-in-a-lifetime experience for adventurous concertgoers,” **Zeitgeist** is a new music chamber ensemble comprised of two percussion, piano and woodwinds. One of the longest established new music groups in the country, Zeitgeist commissions and presents a wide variety of new music for audiences in the Twin Cities and on tour. Always eager to explore new artistic frontiers, Zeitgeist collaborates with poets, choreographers, directors, visual artists and sound artists of all types to create imaginative new work that challenges the boundaries of traditional chamber music.

A collection of composers and performers of new music, **113 Composers Collective** produces concerts, seminars, and master classes throughout the Twin Cities. Since its inception in 2012, the group has presented over 200 world premieres and worked with composers and performers

such as Anthony Cheung, Chaya Czernowin, James Dillon, Julio Estrada, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Pisaro, Collect/Project, Duo Gelland, Ensemble Dal Niente, Fonema Consort, Marcelo Rilla, Bill Solomon, Strains New Music Ensemble, and dozens of musicians of the highest caliber.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Alvin Lucier, edited by Heather Barringer

OPERA WITH OBJECTS, for performer with resonating objects, is one of a series of works I have made which explore the resonant properties of everyday objects. In **I REMEMBER** (1996) singers search for the resonant regions of bottles, cans, and other small chambers which, when arrived at, produce significant gains in loudness levels. In **OPERA WITH OBJECTS**, one or more performers tap objects which, when coupled with others, produce vivid changes in timbre as well as loudness.

BROKEN LINE consists of a series of glissandi which, when sounded against the fixed pitches of the piano and vibraphone, produce audible beating patterns—bumps of sound that occur when two or more closely tuned sound waves are sounded together. **BROKEN LINE** was originally written for flute, vibraphone, and piano, but Zeitgeist is doing a version for clarinet, vibraphone, and piano.

SILVER STREETCAR FOR THE ORCHESTRA, for amplified solo triangle, explores the natural timbral and spatial characteristics of sound waves. The player dampens the triangle with the thumb and forefinger of one hand while tapping the instrument with the other. The performance consists of moving the geographical locations of these two activities and changing the speed and loudness of the tapping. During the course of the performance, the acoustic characteristics of the folded metal bar are revealed. In order to more vividly hear the acoustic phenomena, stereo microphones are placed in front of and close to the sounding triangle.

To “set” John Ashbery’s poem, **THEME**, I inserted microphones into the mouths of various vessels I had collected, including a small milk bottle, a seashell, a vase, and an empty ostrich egg, to pick up the words as they were sounding inside the vessels. (I thought of them as four small rooms.) The readers speak normally, allowing the pitches of their voices which match those resonances of the vessels to create musical sounds. Occasionally, however, a reader will tend to emphasize certain pitches more than others, reading in an almost chant-like way, to sound the resonances of the vessels more clearly.

In **THE SACRED FOX**, for voice with gourds, bowls, boxes, and other resonant vessels, a performer chants permutations on the onomatopoeic Japanese word for the sound of a barking fox into a bowl, gourd, or other resonant vessel.

In **IN MEMORIAM JON HIGGINS**, a pure wave, flowing from a single loudspeaker, slowly sweeps up the range of the clarinet. As it does so, the clarinetist plays long tones across the ascending wave, creating interference patterns — beats of loud sound produced as the sound waves coincide. The speed of the beats is determined by the distance between the waves: the farther apart, the faster the beating. At unison, no beating occurs. At very close tunings — within a few cycles — the patterns may be heard to spin through space.

During **NOTHING IS REAL (STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER)**, fragments of the melody are played and sustained as clusters. The performance is recorded on a cassette tape recorder. After the last fragment has been played, the tape is rewound and played back through a small loudspeaker hidden inside a teapot. During the playback, the lid of the pot is raised and lowered, changing the resonance characteristics of the pot. Twice during the performance, the pot itself is lifted off the lid of the piano, causing the resonances to disappear completely.

TWO CIRCLES (2012): When I was asked to make a work for the Venice Biennale I immediately thought of using the image of the two overlapping circles (a symbol of harmoniousness) that Carlo Scarpa designed for the Brion Cemetery in San Vito d'Altivole. I roughly measured the proportions of the overlap and asked composer Ron Kuivila to design a circle with pure waves spanning eighteen semitones ascending and descending from a center tone. The duration of the circle is 10:30 seconds. Its exact copy overlaps the first at 7:30 seconds. The total length of the work is eighteen minutes. Because the pure waves are in constant motion, the speed of the beating slows down and speeds up depending on where an instrumental tone crosses them. If a tone starts in unison with the pure wave, the beating begins at zero and speeds up as the wave moves away from it. If it starts before the wave arrives in unison with it, the beating starts fast and slows down to zero as unison is reached. If a tone straddles a unison, the beats slow down to zero and speed up again. These three patterns provide the rhythmic gestures of the work.

In **HEAVIER THAN AIR**, each performer prepares a number of short sentences beginning with the words "I remember," completing the sentence with a simple personal memory. These phrases are whispered through balloons filled with carbon dioxide and aimed throughout the room. As this happens, the sounds move and locate themselves in various parts of the room. This idea was taken from a book of poetry, *I Remember*, by the late poet and artist Joe Brainard.

The idea for **PERFORMING EMILY** was taken from Jon Barlow's class at Wesleyan University by the same name. Barlow imagined the dashes that followed many of the lines of Dickinson's poems as neumes, a note or group of notes to be sung to a single syllable in a type of early plainchant notation used before the invention of the 5-line staff. Dickinson's poetry is sung against the sounds of six electronically generated pure waves, creating audible beating with variations between sung tones and pure waves.

LETTERS, for violin, clarinet, cello, and piano, explores the interplay between the glissandi of violin and cello against the clusters of the piano and straight tone of the clarinet.

SONG FOR SOPRANO, a setting of William Butler Yeats's pessimistic poem, "The Night Come," uses a cut-out technique to match words and sounds in a semi-random way.

SIX GEOMETRIES, for chorus with slow sweep pure wave oscillators, was commissioned by the Finnish Radio Choir. My first idea was to set several of William Carlos Williams' poems for four-part chorus. I took an image from each of the poems and "drew" it with pure sound waves. The chorus would sing the words of the poems against the pure waves, creating beating patterns. I soon learned that the words got in the way of the clarity of the audible beating, so I simply jettisoned them — beautiful as they were — and kept certain shapes they left behind. For example, in "Fine Work with Pitch and Copper," men putting a new roof on a house lay down

eight-foot strips of copper beaten at right angles. I simply took that image and programmed two pure waves to sweep in the form of a right angle. Throughout the work, the chorus sings an "oo" sound, which is close enough in timbre to a pure wave to create vivid beating patterns.

In **RICOCCHET LADY** for solo glockenspiel, repetitive chromatic passages move through the range of the instrument, creating echoes and reflections within the space.

In **INTERVALS**, one half of the chorus sings a pitch while the other half moves up chromatically until the ensemble arrives at an octave. Sound sensitive lights in front of the choir light when triggered by the nature of the changing intervals.

I AM SITTING IN A ROOM (1970): In 1969, I was living in an apartment in Middletown, Connecticut, teaching at Wesleyan at the time. One night, I borrowed two Nagra tape recorders from the Music Department. I had a Beyer microphone, a single KLH loudspeaker, and a Dynaco amplifier. I set the mike up in the living room, sat down in an armchair and wrote out a text that explained what I was about to do. I decided that the work would have no poetic or aesthetic content. The art was someplace else. I read the text into the microphone, recording it as I did so. I then played the recording back into the room, making a copy of the original. I repeated this procedure until I had sixteen versions, one original and fifteen copies. I stayed up all night doing it. As the process continued more and more of the resonances of the room came forth; the intelligibility of the speech disappeared. Speech became music. It was magical.

In **BONE MOON** for tenor saxophone and vibraphone, the saxophone sweeps up and down and down and up within and around the chords outlined by the vibraphone. As he does so, audible beats are produced, determined by the distances between the players' tones. The farther apart, the faster the beating; at unison, no beating occurs.

During **FLIGHTS PATHS**, two pure wave oscillators sweep up and down describing the flight paths from Hong Kong to Zurich and return. As they do so, a solo saxophone player plays tones of various duration across the sweeping waves, causing audible beats of continually changing speed to sound. The farther apart, the faster the beating; at unison, no beating occurs.

During the course of the performance of **MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND ALTO SAXOPHONE** (1995), the violinist alternately lowers and raises the tones of a whole tone interval, crossing the semitone between and reaching the original tones on the other side, forming an elongated X figure. While she does so the saxophonist, starting from the semitone between the two original tones, alternately raises and lowers his tone until he reaches unison with the upper and lower tones originally sounded by the violin. As this exchange of tones is gradually brought about, audible beats are produced at speeds determined by the closeness of the tunings.

In **MEMORY SPACE**, each performer records or remembers the sound environment from an outside space. Performers then return to an indoor space and use voice or instruments to recreate the sound environment from their outside space.