

Chirp:
NEC's Music Technology
Showcase

*Beyond the "world of unsuspected sounds":
A concert of Computer-Assisted Music*

Stratis Minakakis, curator

Sunday, May 4, 2025
8:00 p.m.
Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

If there is one attribute that permeates the evolution of music in the past century, it is the radical expansion of its means of expression. As the frontiers of the medium expanded, older compositional practices were abandoned or repurposed, and new ones were invented. The electronic music revolution and the adoption, since the 1960s, of computers as compositional tools transformed the field to the extent that several compositional practices of the last 50 years are not truly accessible without the aid of technology. The efficiency of computers as interpreters of symbols, automators of tasks, and problem solvers make them ideal companions in exploring music that pushes the frontiers of sonic imagination and creates new modalities of experiencing music and music-making.

In the early 20th century, the French composer and electronic music pioneer Edgar Varèse expressed the desire to create new instruments that would contribute “a world of unsuspected sounds.” This concert features acoustic, electronic and multimedia works in which such “unsuspected sounds” acquire form, syntax, and meaning through the creative dialogue between composer and computer.

– *Stratis Minakakis*

PROGRAM

Guantian Li

Err on C wave
World premiere

Fixed media

Evan Haskin

I.Y. (2025)

Maya Kaya, oboe
Evan Haskin, electric guitar,
bass drum resonance, live electronics

Fani Kosona

Narrative 06

(Repeated cycles in a random world) (2025)

World premiere

Evan Haskin, midi keyboard

Xiaofeng Jiang

video by Xiaofeng Jiang,

Koki Renwick, Jessie Yu

I see my fragments through a crevice (2024)

Thomas Giles, alto saxophone

Amy Advocat, bass clarinet

Joseph Vasconi, piano

Intermission

Stratis Minakakis

video by

Marsia Alexander-Clarke

Escuchando (2021)

recorded amplified voices

Rose Hegele, soprano

Jeanette Lee, Caroline Nelson,

mezzo-soprano

Tyler Bouque, baritone

Holly Druckman, conductor

Kai Burns

For the Pond, From the Hill (2025)

Yufei Wu, alto flute

Chasity Thompson, bass clarinet

Kai Burns, electric guitar, voice

Evan Haskin, electric guitar

Noah Mark, percussion

Ranfei Wang, piano

Gabriella Foster, violin

Olivia Katz, cello

Cosmo Lieberman, electronics

Stratis Minakakis, conductor

Noah Mark

A Cymbal is Not a Horn (2025)

Emma Boyd, violin
Olivia Katz, cello
Noah Mark, percussion
Mark Abramovski, piano

Tianyi Wang

Song of Experience (2019)

Chihiro Asano, mezzo-soprano
Tianyi Wang, live electronics

Li *Err on C wave*

Err on C wave is an electronic music piece composed in 2025, inspired by reflections on the concept of "Dao" (the Way of Nature) in Laozi and Zhuangzi's philosophy. The work uses OpenMusic as its primary creative tool, focusing on the selection and processing of overtones based on the C wave.

A core sequence (0, 5, 3, 2, 6, 10) serves as the fundamental rule for arranging the chord sequences and drives the overall structural development.

During the composition process, this core sequence was subjected to expansion and contraction, generating two groups of chordal sequences that share similar shapes but differ in width, representing micro and macro perspectives respectively. Additionally, the proportions between different sections were controlled using the Fibonacci sequence, reflecting the idea of natural generation and ordered growth.

– Guantian Li

Haskin *I.Y.*

I.Y. for oboe and electric guitar is focused chiefly on deformation and disproportion. Interruptive material is scattered across the form and large-scale repeats eschew a linear continuity. Gestural organization is established utilizing algorithmic processes facilitated by the program OpenMusic.

The two instruments are at irrevocable odds, dealing with juxtaposing histories, functions and timbral qualities—sometimes complementing, sometimes harshly opposing, always directing and aggregating energy from the other. Common timbral ground is eventually facilitated literally by the inclusion of an alien force, that of a resonating bass drum, which serves to unionize the duo into a single, hybrid entity.

'You know, the whole philosophy of ad hoc combinations has its strengths and weaknesses.' – Evan Parker

– Evan Haskin

Kosona *Narrative 06 (repeated patterns in a random world)*

Narratives is a series of pieces for solo instruments, started as an homage to my teacher in composition and mentor Theodore Antoniou, based on two elements that he used to favor: a narrative element and an “heterophonic” texture, which in his view consisted of an orchestrational treatment of a monophonic setup by “sculpting” it in terms of density, timbre and volume.

The piece is meant to be performed live on a 5-octave Midi keyboard connected with a Live set, following a score with a certain amount of indeterminate elements (indeterminate number of repetitions, custom staves, graphic elements etc.). “Heterophony” is investigated in the Live set through a partially randomized timbral identity: with the use of Max Midi effects, each sound of the set is activated for a selection of specific keys and deactivated for the rest; this selection may be permanent but it may also be random, resulting to a multi-timbral instrument with a certain amount of instability in its sounding properties: a challenge for the performer, who must be making real-time decisions concerning certain aspects of the interpretation, as a reaction to a partially unpredictable sound texture.

The subtitle “repeated cycles in a random world” resumes the narration implied here: repetitive gestures, formed in such a way as to trigger the random algorithms, result in ever-changing sonic contents, thus highlighting indeterminacy as a core feature of the piece.

– Fani Kosona

Jiang *I see my fragments through a crevice*

A crevice opens in the space with strikes from outside, splitting into two isolated and distant beings. With each strike, slender cracks widen into a vast rupture, and perhaps at the bottom of this crevice, something of me remains—flickering, faint, and elusive. Within this abyss, I am scattered into fragments—a small piece of me here, another small piece there...And when someone gazes too intently, I slip away, vanishing from sight.

– Xiaofeng Jiang

Minakakis *Escuchando*

Escuchando is conceived as incidental music to the video art work “...escuchando...” by visual artist Marsia Alexander-Clarke. The artist describes her idiom with the concept of “video as mark”, borrowing a common term used in drawing and painting. Such marks most notably include narrow luminous slivers set against a dark background. Often these slivers function as the outer frames of highly filtered images of real life, particularly relating to the intricate play of light on plants. Marks are used as primary compositional motives in what the artist describes as a “visual narrative which develops sequentially, like a silent, visual fugue.” In this respect, one experiences marks in a dual way: as crevices through which we can gauge glimpses of our perception of the world, and as pure forms, autonomous abstract entities masterfully assembled and arranged in time.

– Stratis Minakakis

Burns *For the Pond, From the Hill*

For the Pond, From the Hill is the first ensemble piece I've written, and I'm incredibly grateful to Stratis for allowing me to feature it in this CHIRP concert series.

This piece was composed from the start with one main idea: to take the electric guitar, voice, and drumset, and integrate them both formally and sonically within a more traditional chamber music context—in the effort to create a distinct and natural overall sonic identity, while avoiding the uncanny valley effect that often arises when merging acoustic and directly amplified sound.

One way that I approached this problem was by separating the ensemble into distinct groupings by sonic and referential quality. This way, rather than trying to musically integrate these two groupings, they can be more easily understood as being superimposed. Then, by using Max/MSP to distort the strings and woodwinds of the pierrot ensemble, and further, turning both the PA speakers and the guitar amps backwards, we create a new reverberated space of amplified, distorted sound which sonically integrates these two musically superimposed groups. All that is left to decide is how these groups formally interact with each other—when they split off, when they merge, when they oppose, when they compliment, and the extent of their powers to neutralize or activate the opposing group.

– Kai Burns

Mark *A Cymbal is Not a Horn*

From a given sound, the physical action required and its resulting sonic characteristics can be extrapolated and modified—displaced in time, transfigured through different instrumental combinations, etc. Here, the cymbal has a generative role, and interactions with other voices allow for the possibility of a “hybrid instrument.” But this relationship is not necessarily linear, and voices, themselves already acting as iterations of a single source, can be foregrounded and further transformed, towards what could be called the arborescence of originary sound types. These behaviors inform the music's temporal identity, determining degrees of stability, stasis, and homogeneity. Maybe, through this organization, the cymbal can be released from its identity as the progenitor of sound. Maybe it is not, as I am tempted to imagine, a metaphorical double to those early instruments that were once made from animal horns, and then from metal.

Many thanks to Emma Boyd, Olivia Katz, and Mark Abramovski for their work and their help putting this piece together.

– Noah Mark

Wang *Song of Experience*

A work for solo voice and piano resonance based on William Blake's poem *The Tyger, Song of Experience* juxtaposes tranquility with ferociousness. The singer's voice is channeled into the piano using two tactile transducers, which vibrates the strings directly under them and resonates others through sympathetic vibration, thereby transforming the immobile piano into a “performer” on stage.

– Tianyi Wang

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

William Blake

Upcoming Music Technology Showcase Series concerts

Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

Chirp 4

Katarina Miljkovic, curator

Monday, May 5, 8:00 p.m.

Chirp 5

Lautaro Mantilla, curator

Wednesday, May 7, 5:00 p.m.

Chirp 6

John Mallia, curator

Thursday, May 8, 8:00 p.m.

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