

Xtensions : works for solo percussion & electronics

Ron Coulter

Ron Coulter – percussion & electronics

All compositions by Ron Coulter

Track List

1. Zzzerrrrangatang! (2015) 4:29

Vibe Suite (2008-ongoing) 20:39 total
2. I. Vibolet (2008) 2:41
3. II. Persistent Reflection on Opportunity Lost (2011) 4:23
4. III. RE: the destruction of a life by a precious little flower (2009) 6:03
5. IV. Disappointment in the smallness of humanity (2015) 7:32

6. System No. 1 (2015) 7:40

7. Seven Thoughts for Glockenspiel (2015) 9:58

Beautiful Waste (2015-2016) 12:53 total
8. I. Life is a Grindstone (2016) 4:45
9. II. Poem 456 (Bukowski) (2015) 3:52
10. III. Gamelan Shtyle (2016) 4:16

11. Boxes of Music (2008) 5:09

61:19 total duration

Recording, Mixing, Mastering & Graphic Design by Ron Coulter

Recorded in Casper, WY between September 2015 & March 2016

All compositions by Ron Coulter and published by Kreating Sound

Source is unknown for the sample used in *Poem 456 (Bukowski)*

Special thanks to Glenn Schaft, Tony Leonardi, Fred Morris, John Cage, and Charles Bukowski.

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NOTES

In 1937, John Cage wrote: "Percussion music is a contemporary transition from keyboard-influenced music to the all-sound music of the future."¹ Nearly eighty years later, it is obvious that percussion music is not simply a transitory medium but a viable and potent mode of art making in itself. The caveat is that percussion music must maintain its integrity of identity, its essence, and avoid the sway of convention. That is to say that, it must remain the all-sound music of the future and not become the some-sound music of the day. How to do this? Percussion music must exemplify exploration, inclusion, and radical idiosyncrasy rather than the prevailing standardization, commodification, and idolatry of tradition. It must do this even in such inherently contradictory contexts as composition, recording, and academia.

Such exemplary ideals underlain the practices of the pioneering percussionist-composer-performers, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, and John Cage, beginning in the mid-1930s² and resulted in them creating and inspiring a remarkable body of work between 1935 and 1942. Although this all-sound-music-of-the-future percussion music formed in, and epitomized, the forward-thinking experimentalism of the 1930s, banal, academicism quickly encroached percussion music as early as 1942 in Carlos Chavez's spurious percussion composition "Toccata" with its conventional instrumentation and performance techniques, and its poverty of rhythmic, textural, and timbral materials.³ This encroachment has since continued and become normative with the assimilation of percussion music into the academy and modern-day concert halls.

The music on this recording represents an extension of those musical ideals and explorations begun in the 1930s. It deals in the immediacy and inherence of materials at hand, reflexivity to location and temporality, while avoiding convention, association, and the cults of technocracy and virtuosi. This music strives for the do-it-yourself, be-yourself, overturn-the-system, sound-centered aesthetics of true American Experimentalism.

Zzzerrrrrangatang! (2015) is composed for four elephant bells and snare drum. The elephant bells are graduated in size and thusly in the pitches they produce. The snare drum's playing surface (i.e. drum head) is coated with rosin just as a violinist's bow. The sound in this composition is generated primarily by friction – the rubbing of the elephant bells on the rosined drum head – just as a violinist rubs their bow on the violin's strings. Due to the physical nature of the elephant bells and snare drum head, the sounds generated by the performer are, to a degree, indeterminate (i.e. unpredictable). The composition is notated with graphics and text rather than conventional music notation. Built into the notation schema and interpretation

¹ John Cage, "The Future of Music; Credo," in *Silence*, (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 5.

² In the 1950s, their activities and resulting work was labeled as American Experimentalism. This label identifies the desire, and work, of artists to break free of the cultural chains of European tradition and create a truly unique American music.

³ This argument focuses on percussion-only works, and excludes earlier concerti for percussion (Milhaud, Creston, etc.) and developments in the inclusion of percussion from traditionalists like Shostakovich (*The Nose*), Stravinsky (*Les noces*), et cetera.

of the work is the opportunity for improvisation, or rather in-the-moment reflexive interactivity between performer and objects. The title is derived from the composition's inspiration, Michael Zerang, who is a creative, Chicago-based percussionist that often explores friction in his own work.

Vibe Suite, I-IV (2008-ongoing) for vibraphone and electronics is an ongoing series of works for vibraphone; the series concept was borrowed from Stuart Saunders Smith's wonderful series of *Links* for vibraphone. The musical content of *Vibe Suite* is probably much less profound than the individual titles would suggest, but the aesthetic aim is existential transcendence and the sublime via simplicity. Each movement is a reflection and composed as needed; the series will continue for as long as needed. The suite can be performed in a variety of ways: selected movements, in its entirety, solo, ensemble, with or without electronics, and so on.

System No. 1 (2015) is composed for snare drum, almglocken, 10.25" aluminum pot lid, clamshell, clock coil, miniature radio, and requires the following implements: two small chains, bass bow, and a bamboo skewer. The work is notated using text, graphic notation, and some conventional music notation. The notation demands reflexive interactivity between performer and objects throughout the interpretation of the work. This reflexive interactivity is a required feature of the work, as many of the sounds are produced through the automation of the objects, which once set in motion, move and sound on their own accord; this occurs with the almglocken, aluminum pot lid, clamshell, and clock coil. The title comes from the performative spectacle of the work, which presents to the viewer like the management of a system of moving objects. The management of the objects is not passive but rather an active and progressively more determinate role as the work develops.

Seven Thoughts for Glockenspiel (2015) is scored for glockenspiel, two rin, three elephant bells, two magic wands, and nine graduated telephone bells, along with a variety of implements; some of the instruments are also utilized as implements. The work was inspired by the compositions and improvisations of percussionist, Jean-Charles François, especially his work for snare drum, *Fragments II*. The complexity of "noise" and its juxtaposition with "the sublime" drives many of my compositions. The longtime challenge of realizing this aesthetic using a conventional, pitched percussion instrument like the glockenspiel came to fruition in this work and will be further developed in future compositions.

Beautiful Waste (2015-2016) is composed for 5 brake drums, cassette tape, and electronics; it requires the following implements: two medium rubber mallets, wire brush, bamboo skewer, two bass bows. The title of the work refers to the brake drum-as musical instrument and it has a subtextual relationship (realized after the fact) to the narrative content in the second movement.

Movement one, **Life is a Grindstone**, is an exploration of repetition and subtle variation, monotony and minor difference, the day to day. The title will be self explanatory. The harsh, unforgiving electronic processing will be familiar.

The title of movement two, **Poem 456 (Bukowski)**, was inspired by Stuart Saunders Smith's lovely composition, *Poems I, II, III* for five brake drums, cowbell, and narrator. Smith's work also provided the realization that brake drums could be a viable sound source for a solo composition. The sample of Charles Bukowski reading his poem "Man Mowing the Lawn" followed by what appears to be an excerpt of an interview or conversation was found on a homemade, unmarked, cassette mixtape containing numerous excerpts of poets reading poetry and conversing; the original source is unknown.

Movement three, **Gamelan Shtyle**, applies a hand-dampening technique taken from gamelan performance practice and applies it to the brake drums. Additionally the extreme contrasts heard in Balinese gamelan music are reflected in this composition. The center of the movement features a blues-inspired cadenza, à la Barney Childs.

Boxes of Music (2008) is scored for amplified tam tam, eleven music boxes, two very thin splash cymbals, two coffee cans, and electronics. The title lacks creativity, but is descriptive. The piece is a miniature sound-mass composition inspired by the so-called sound-mass compositions by composers such as György Ligeti, Iannis Xenakis, and others. The arch form of the work is easily identifiable and is built simply from the accumulation and then dissipation of sounds, the deconstruction and then re-emergence of familiar melodies. This is process music.

Biography

Ron Coulter is currently Instructor of Percussion, Improvisation, Jazz, American Popular and World Musics at Casper College. He previously served as Senior Lecturer of Percussion, Improvisation, and Jazz Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale for a decade and as a Visiting Instructor of Percussion at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. He has also taught as an Adjunct Instructor of Percussion at John A. Logan College and Youngstown State University, and as an independent contractor at Westminster College and Chadron State College. He has presented clinics, master classes, lectures, and/or performances at more than 90 colleges and universities internationally as a visiting artist. In 2006 Ron was invited to become an Educational Endorser with the Promark Corporation and Black Swamp Percussion, and in 2016 he became an Educational Endorser with Pearl Drums and Adams Percussion.

Ron has been a freelance percussionist since 1997, performing in a wide range of musical situations from burlesque cabaret to live electronica. As a performer, he has toured internationally appearing in 49 U.S. states, the European Union, Norway, Croatia, and most major cities in Canada and Japan. He has performed with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Harry James Orchestra, Four Aces, The Gaylords, Al Martino, Linux Laptop Orchestra, Tone Road Ramblers, Tatsuya Nakatani, Gino Robair, Michael Zerang, Chris Corsano, New Arts Jazztet, Sean Jones, Keith Javors, Todd Coolman, Eric Richards, Ben Markley, Donadi, The Gaylords, Galen Abdur-Razzaq, Donald Smith, Marvin Stamm, Dominick Farinacci, Joanne Brackeen, Bruce Johnstone, Chuck Mangione, Rip Lee Pryor, Ashley Campbell, Lucy Shelton, Susan Botti, Julia Rich, Sony Holland, Cristina Fontanelli, Beat Kaestli, Nick Hilscher, Steve Lippia, Dick Johnson, Eric P. Mandat, Bill Smith, William O. Smith, James Falzone, François Houle, Vinny

Golia, Viv Corringham, Jim Staley, John Fonville, Ray Sasaki, Morgan Powell, Howie Smith, Tomeka Reid, Durán Vásquez, Paulo Raposo, Carol Wincenc, Eric Ruske, Francesca Dego, Ryan Anthony, Eliot Fisk, Bolokada Condé, Weedie Braimah, Erica Azim, Caution Shonhai, Renold Shonhai, Marvin Hamlisch, Sandy Duncan, Robert Van Sice, Robert Schietroma, Sylvia Smith, Music from China, Neoteric, Altgeld Chamber Players, One-Off Radiophonic Orchestra, HaZMaT Percussion Group, Maraca2, The Chance Operations Collective of Kalamazoo, Sam West Trio, Woodbox Gang, Rapture 7, Well Well Wells, and Rum Runners, among many others.

Ron is a co-founder of the Percussion Art Ensemble and Youngstown Percussion Collective, and he founded the Perkusiv Arts Elektronik, which was a series of sound events exploring the performance of existing, and the creation of new, electro-acoustic music, including 69 commissions/world premiers from 2005 to 2006. Ron has performed with symphony orchestras across the U.S.A. including the Wyoming Symphony, Youngstown Symphony, Paducah Symphony, Powder River Symphony, Chicago Chamber Orchestra, Southern Illinois Symphony, Southern Illinois Music Festival Orchestra, Warren Philharmonic Orchestra, Warren Packard Band, Ballet Ariel Orchestra, Dana Symphony Orchestra, and the Shenango Valley Lyric Opera. He has appeared as a concerto soloist with the Wyoming Chamber Orchestra, Southern Illinois Symphony, Linux Laptop Orchestra, Dana Symphony Orchestra, YSU Wind Ensemble and Percussion Ensemble.

Ron has presented at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (2013, 2003, 2002), International Society for Improvised Music Symposium (2009 & 2008), Montreal Jazz Festival (2009 & 2004), JVC Jazz Festival, International Clarinetfest, ReVIEWING Black Mountain College 3–John Cage, NIME, HICAH, LiWoLi, Blurred Edges Festival, Vu Symposium, Athena Festival VI, Futurisms Centennial Conference, Sound Lines, RadiaLx, a.pe.ri.od.ic Music Series–John Cage Festival, nief-norf’s John Cage Research Summit, St. Louis New Music Circle (2012 & 2010), Jazz Education Network International Conference, Big Muddy Film Festival (2011 & 2010), UNCG New Music Festival, redStone Recital & Gallery Series (2016–2014), Outside the Box New Music Festivals (2014–2007), U.S. Army Band Tuba/Euphonium International Conference, College Music Society National Conference (2012 & 2008), Illinois PAS Day of Percussion (2012, 2010, 2009), Wyoming PAS Day of Percussion (2016 & 2015), American College Dance Festival Association Conference, Music Educators National Conference, and numerous state and regional Music Education Association conferences, among many others. Ron was also selected as a finalist in the 2002 Percussive Arts Society International Multiple Percussion Competition and can be heard on more than 40 issued audio recordings, including his debut solo recording featuring his compositions for percussion and electronics released in September 2016.

Interests in noise, intermedia, performance art, acoustic ecology, radio art, interdisciplinary collaboration, and non-idiomatic improvisation have led to organizing numerous Fluxusconcerts, founding the Improvisation Unit, co-founding Drm&Gtr, duende entendre, REDVIXA, and Marble Hammer, as well as collaborative projects with artists specializing in performance art, sculpture, video, spoken word, and sound art. Ron is the founder and artistic director of the Southern Illinois Improvisation Series (SiiS) and Wyoming Experimental Sound Series (WyExSs). The SiiS was a monthly concert series (2014-2007) that presented 135 free

sound events exploring interdisciplinary collaboration, technology integration, site-specific work, sound installations, sound empowerment, education, and documentation in the rural southern Illinois region. The WyExSs presents composed and improvised music in the American Experimentalist tradition and is the first of its kind in the state of Wyoming. Duende entendre is an ongoing collaboration with poet and bassist, Sam West. Marble Hammer is a blue-noiz trio with guitarist, Casey James, and bassist, Mike Alderfer. Additional interdisciplinary collaborators include Mary Beth Edelson (performance art), Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (performance art), Terry Adkins (sound & visual art), Kerry Laitala (video), Wago Krieder (video), Jay Needham (sound & visual art), David Romtvedt (poetry), Erin Taylor (sculpture), and Boris Chesakov (sculpture).

As a composer, Ron has created more than 290 original compositions for various media encompassing numerous genres. His compositions have been performed throughout North America, South America, Europe, and have been recorded on the Kreating Sound and A Caldera record labels; selected scores and editions are published by HoneyRock Publishing, Frog Peak Music, Smith Publications, and Kreating Sound.

Ron's musicological research has unearthed more than twenty unknown percussion works from the 1930s and 1940s, of which he is facilitating premiere live performances, recordings, and publication as audio CDs and/or scores, in addition to forthcoming analytical papers.

As a curator, Ron has organized more than 500 free public presentations of music and intermedia art involving more than 100 artists across a multitude of disciplines. During his tenure at SIUC he organized 73 visiting percussion artists presenting 124 events for the university and regional communities. At present he is the Instrumental Director of the Kinser Jazz Festival and coordinator of visiting percussion artists at Casper College, as well as the founder and artistic director of the Wyoming Experimental Sound Series (WyExSs).

Originally from Hermitage, Pennsylvania, Ron Coulter (b. 1978) was raised on a dairy farm and eventually earned M.M. and B.M. degrees in Percussion Performance from Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. His principle teachers include Dr. Glenn Schaft, Tony Leonardi, Dr. Stephen Gage, Feza Zweifel, John Riley, Fred Morris, Moussa Bolokada Condé, Caution Shonhai, Renold Shonhai, Erica Azim, and Nina DeCiancio.