TempWerks:

The final works of Arthur Jarvinen and the role of composer/performers within the ensemble

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On October 2nd 2010, composer/performer Arthur Jarvinen passed away. This was just over a month before the debut his new ensemble, TempWerks, which was scheduled to perform at the Festival of New American Music in Sacramento. Art was also scheduled to be the keynote speaker for the festival. Before passing away, Art had written a brief synopsis of his intentions for the ensemble. It reads:

> TempWerks is composer Arthur Jarvinen's latest ensemble, created for the performance of his most recent musical compositions. Much of Jarvinen's current work is in the realm of live electronics. The music of TempWerks is mostly electronic, using "non-musical" devices such as Geiger counters, short wave radios, amplified strobe lights, and field recordings as sound sources, often subjected to digital signal processing.
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> Jarvinen's choice of sound sources is based in part on their aesthetic interest, but especially on their unpredictability. In marked contrast to many of his instrumental chamber works, Jarvinen's TempWerks pieces employ no loops or grooves. The scores are organized along time lines, according to internal proportions and statistical distribution of events. This is indicative of the composer's interest in finding ways to create and articulate musical forms, structure the flow and unfolding of material, and develop new kinds of musical architecture, without recourse to repetition and variation.

It was decided by me and the other members of the ensemble that, despite his passing, the concert should not be cancelled. The original line of TempWerks consisted of Arthur Jarvien, Isaac Schankler, Scott Cazan, and myself. All four of us consider ourselves "performer/composers." After Jarvinen's passing, there was a unanimous decision to ask Casey Anderson, another performer/composer and friend of Jarvinen's to step in and take his place.

It was uncertain to all of us what the program would have been like had Jarvinen been with us, but before he passed, he had already left us with five new (and very specific) scores which we know he intended on us performing. To my knowledge, these are the last works that he wrote. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the idea of TempWerks as an ensemble, take

an in depth look at these pieces that were written for TempWerks, and to project the future of what a group of this nature could be.

The works that were performed at TempWerks debut concert on Nov. 5th 2010 are as follows:

BLINDED BY ENLIGHTENMENT (AGAIN) (2010)
THREE SHORT WAVES (And A Long Board) (2009)
3 FIELD GUIDES (Plus 1) Nos. 1 (2009)
SLIDE SHOW (2010)
NUCLEAR HOEDOWN (2010)

TempsWerks had originally been scheduled to give two performances at the festival. The first was to be a 20 minute set on the opening night of the festival, followed by a full concert the next night. Due to scheduling issues created by the addition of a new member to the group so late in the process, it was impossible for the entire ensemble to be there for the first night. For this reason, I performed Jarvinen's *PERCY GRAINGER FANS THE MUSE Part II: Hardwick Rain* for solo violin and pre-recorded tape. While I do know that Jarvinen had always intended for this piece to be performed at some point during the festival, I also know that it was an earlier work which he had included, in part because I had already learned it and because it could be easily included in the programming. However, compositionally it does not seem to fall into the category of a "TempWerks piece" so it will not be discussed further here. There had also been discussion of other works being added to the program, but the ensemble was never handed scores for any of them. There was however discussion specifically regarding two additional pieces which were loosely referred to as *KILL ZONES 1, 2, and 3* and *SKEEZIX. KILL ZONES 1, 2, and 3* were designed to function as a set of interludes between the larger pieces on the

program, and were to be performed by the entire ensemble, with each member playing an electric bug zapper (which looks surprisingly similar to a black and yellow tennis racquet). The performers would "throw" a drop of water on to the electrically charged wires of the zapper, which would then create a large popping sound as well a visual spark. It was believed that these interludes would be either improvised or structured as a type of game piece. While we did have possession of the zappers, it was not entirely clear how the piece should be performed and so we though it best to exclude it from the program. The other work, *SKEEZIX* seems to have been designed as a group improvisation. This was the work that was discussed the least to the entire ensemble, however, on the last occasion that I saw Jarvinen, he and I "rehearsed" a bit of the piece and I have an idea of what it may have included. Part of what seemed to be Art's inspiration in the creation of the TempWerks ensemble was the use of somewhat unpredictable electronics. I feel like this impulse was born out of his working with no-input feedback loops which he had been exploring for years. After Jarvinen's death, his wife Lynn Angebranndt found a stack of notes that he had written regarding TempWerks in general and specifically relating to some of these pieces and gave them to me in the hope that they might fill in any missing blanks in your preparations for the concert. While most of the notes are merely sentence fragments, there is some interesting information that can be derived from them. According to these notes, *SKEEZIX* would have involved Jarvinen's manipulation of these feedback loops, coupled with myself improvising on violin. A signal from the feedback loops would then be sent to one of the other players with a laptop who would provide additional manipulation through signal processing. The same process would occur with a signal sent from my amplified violin to another player with a laptop. Again, this piece was not performed due to

the fact that we were all still a bit clueless as to what Art really intended to take place in the piece. I doubt he would have prepared a score, but I do think he probably had some very specific ideas about it and that it was the kind of piece that would have been created through a collaborative group effort. Before continuing to discuss in detail the works that were performed in Sacramento, I think it is worth taking a moment to discuss the contributions that Jarvinen expected from the individual members of the ensemble. Most of these works ask the performers to make significant compositional contributions to the work as a whole. While Jarvinen always give the performers the structure through which they should work, the content is, in every one of these pieces, left somewhat open to the individual performers. This will later be discussed on a piece by piece basis, but before moving on I would like to offer the concept that in each of these pieces, the performers are also acting as "sub-composers." This is not a new concept in the music world; Cage frequently asked performers to make compositional decisions, and I think that Cage was in many ways a large inspiration in Jarvinen's conceptualization of the TempWerks ensemble. But where I think things differ is that it seems that Jarvinen always intended for the individual performers to be compositional contributors to the ensemble, and that is part of why we were asked to participate in the group. Jarvinen had asked me specifically about contacting Isaac Shankler after hearing me perform a piece of his on the same program during which I premiered Jarvinen's *PERCY GRAINGER FANS THE MUSE.* It is my belief that Scott Cazan was contacted by recommendation from Casey Anderson, whom Jarvinen had originally asked to participate in the group.[1] The point of this discussion is that all

[11] Anderson, along with Lewis Keller, were both originally asked by Jarvinen to join the ensemble, but were unavailable for the performance date.

of us who were asked to play in the ensemble were asked because we were performer/composers and because that was an important part of making the group function the way Jarvinen intended. It is my opinion that these pieces would not work as well when being performed by non-composers, and that is part of what makes this ensemble unique.

BLINDED BY ENLIGHTENMENT (AGAIN)

This work is scored for four amplified strobe lights (with variable speed control), which are triggered through the use of what Jarvinen described in the score as "a J38 telegraph key." The score is laid out on a grid, with each segment marking a five second segment of time. The entire piece is exactly nine minutes. Within each of these time segments are graphical representations of how to "play" the strobe light. Indications of how to play the strobe light vary from playing 1, 2, or 3 flashes within the allotted time, to playing a quintuplet at some speed in the allotted time, to arrows which indicate a speeding up or slowing down of the pulse. The strobe lights are then amplified through the use of "a suction cup-type 'telephone pickup'." The resulting sound is a loud "pop," every time the light flashes. Of all the TempWerks pieces being discussed here, this piece probably offers the least amount of compositional choice from the ensemble, but it is still an element of the piece. While the time frame during which each event is clearly indicated in the score, there is still the freedom to play at any point within that time frame. As a composer, I found it impossible for me not to listen to the other parts as a basis for when I should execute my given events. There are two other additional factors which make the piece quite interesting. The first is that, despite the fact that all performers use the same type of strobe light and telephone pickup, there is still a slight, but

noticeable timbral difference between each players strobe light "pop." We found that due to the spatial relation of each player's speaker and the acoustical properties of the hall, this timbral difference caused the effect of an additional sort of "melody" to be created through the reverberation and resonant frequency of the room. While the sound created by the strobe light was relatively non-pitched, it could not help but bring out specific pitched material from the natural resonances of the room. I do not know if this was Jarvinen's exact intention, but I did find in his notes relating to the piece the comment that "this allows for pockets of silence (dark) that create a kind of melody," so it is clear that he in some way was thinking of this piece in a melodic sense. The other large factor in the effect of this piece on the audience is that, not only does it have a sonic component, but a visual one as well. The audience is continually bombarded by flashes of light (hence the title of the work), all of which are linked to the sonic element of the piece. This creates a more complete sensory experience.

THREE SHORT WAVES (And A Long Board)

This work is scored for either three or four performers using short wave radios, and optional signal processing. The version we performed was the version for four players meaning three of us were performing with short wave radios with the remaining player performing additional signal processing. The score for the work is completely text based with indications for when each player should begin and directions for how the piece works. Its duration is approximately 29:00 minutes. The instructions begin:

> Each player begins by bringing up the volume on his radio and starting to scan the airwaves for a signal. A "valid" signal for our purposes is any signal this is obviously intended as human communication. This includes music, speech, and Morse Code. Short wave radios will often bring in purely electronic sounds that may or may not be

> intentionally created in order to communicate. For example, one might be hearing a sequence of tones or noises repeated endlessly, or a steady continuous sound that seems to have an "intentional" quality to it. Some of these sonic artifacts may actually be encrypted messages. Others are just the by-products of the technology at work, i.e. "noise". Usually it is impossible to determine with certainty.

The act of determining what is a valid signal and what is just "noise" becomes a compositional choice. The score then takes the valid signals and breaks them into two "classes," with Class 1 signals being "those that are obviously human communication" and Class 2 signals being "those that seem like they could be intentionally produced," but that "determining what qualifies a signal as Valid, Class 2 is left to the performer." Again, this is another compositional decision for the performers to make. The fourth member of the ensemble (performing the signal processing) is asked to "process and manipulate the signals of the other three." It is also noted that "this part is essentially an improvisation."

Aside from the compositional decisions of the performers, there is another extremely important factor in creation of the work in any given performance, and that is the availability of short wave signals. It can be extremely difficult to receive a short wave signal in a concert hall. The score specifies that is should be "determined in advance that the radios will actually receive short wave signals in the performance space," and that "if this is determined not to be so, the pieces should not be performed." Through many discussions I had with Jarvinen, I know that he wavered back and forth on this decision. While the piece is ultimately more unique when using a live signal, is it truly necessary for the piece to be successful? Despite the fact that he says the piece should not be performed if a signal cannot be acquired, I know that he also intended on having us prepare pre-recorded "performances" of the piece in the event that no signal could be received. But aside from this decision, even if a signal can be picked up, it does not mean

that there will be anything broadcasting at that given moment. The question then (with this work and some of the others as well) is perhaps, what makes the piece, "the piece." The content of the piece can never be the same twice, yet the piece always feels more or less the same.

3 FIELD GUIDES (Plus 1)
Nos. 1, 2 & 3

This work is scored for "three or four performers playing field recordings" and contains three different versions (Nos. 1, 2 &3) of the piece which may be realized with respective durations of 19 minutes, 38 minutes, and 57 minutes. The score itself is largely text based with the inclusion of 3 graphs (of 19 minutes each) which give indications as to "certain playback details." These graphs are for the 3 required players. There is a fourth graph (57 minutes in length) to be used when a fourth player is included. The version TempWerks performed is No. 1. It seems that Jarvinen had always intended for us to perform this version, for reasons I suspect to be related to the length of the piece in relation to the total program length. The thing that seems most important to discuss about this piece is the following indication in the score:

> Each performer provides his/her own field recording, which may be of anything whatsoever, provided that he or she personally made the recording. That is to say, each performer brings and audio document of personal listening experience to the performance.

Jarvinen is specifically asking for the individuality of each performer to be brought to the piece in order to create the composition; that is to say, this score cannot be realized without the performers compositional input. Jarvinen states later on in the score that:

> It is of no concern what combination and types of recorded materials are used to realize *3 Field Guides*. However, consideration should be given to the fact that at least three, possibly four layers are all part of the mix. Therefore, a recording of all-out war might make inclusion of a recording of ice melting a meaningless juxtaposition of materials. Apropos the possibility of such a mix, a sound check/rehearsal should be done so as to determine a reasonable balance/mix for the various recordings. The nature of the recorded material may mean that, by definition, one track is always going to be over or under balanced in relation to others. However, it is advisable to make some level of adjustment, such that a relative balance is achieved, without any given track being entirely lost or completely dominating. This will be a matter of musical/aesthetic judgment, in part determined by the nature of the recorded materials. But it is desirable that all recorded material have their moment to be heard, whether alone, or in some relation to other layers.

Again, Jarvinen is asking the performers to make a "musical/aesthetic judgment" as to what the final result of what any single realization of the piece might be. When it came time to create our realization of this piece with TempWerks, this is what we spent the bulk of our rehearsal time trying to fine tune. Between the four of us, our field recordings all had drastically different dynamic ranges, and they weren't even that different from one another; the range could have been much bigger. However, what will always remain more or less the same from performance to performance of this work is the relationship between the distribution of material with in the ensemble. The execution of events and their duration and relative volume do not change.[2]

[2] This is not entirely true for the fourth performer, who may begin at any point in the graph's 57 minute cycle when performing the first version of the piece.

SLIDE SHOW

SLIDE SHOW is scored for "four channels of audio playback, four players." It is, of all the works discussed here, the most rigid in terms of its form and notation. The piece is exactly 8 minutes long, and like *BLINDED BY ENLIGHTENMENT (AGAIN)*, it is divided into 5 second segments, charted along a grid. There are only two options within each 5 second segment: play or do not play. What is played in that time is a "slide." Jarvinen states:

> Each player should prepare ahead of time forty-eight "slides", i.e. audio files for playback in performance. Each slide should be exactly 5 seconds in duration. Any sort of sounds may be used, for example, field recordings, electronically generated sounds, samples, etc."

The options then of what can be played in that 5 seconds of time is quite open to the individual performers. Personally, I chose to approach the selection of my "slides" from the perspective of a composer. I made the decision to pull only from pop recordings[3] and very consciously selected specific portions of songs. Curiously, all four of us decided to mostly pull our "slides" from pre-existing recordings of pieces (mostly pop and classical recordings). This resulted in two things happening. First, each performer's catalog of slides was in essence a short "mixtape," incredibly unique to each person's individual personalities and interests. The piece then begins to function not only as a concert hall work, but also like 4 personally curated "sound exhibitions." Second, due to the extreme use of "popular" music,[4] the piece may also be considered a "plunderphonic work."[5] The best moments of the piece occur when the

[3] With the exception of 6 slides which I reserved to play pure sine tones.
[4] Meaning music which is easily recognizable by the listener rather than suggesting it is music that everyone likes.
[5] The term "plunderphonics" was coined by composer John Oswald to refer to works that are created through recontextualization of recognizable pre-exiting audio tracks.

unlikeliest of sounds are played in combination, through pure chance, creating a texture one could never have accomplished through their own compositional decisions.

NUCLEAR HOEDOWN

While Jarvinen never specifically told me so, I cannot help but think that *NUCLEAR HOEDOWN* was written, at least in part, with the respective talents of each member of TempWerks in mind. It is scored for Geiger counter, violin, digital signal processing (two players) and recorded excerpt. It is the most flexible of all the TempWerks pieces in terms of notation and structure. The score is simply a description of a sequence of events. It reads:

> Geiger counter begins, with signal sent to Laptop One. No Geiger signal is heard yet, as such (signal is fed to laptop pre-fader).
> Laptop One receives signal from Geiger counter and uses the pulses to trigger drum set sounds (standard kit). The sequence of drum samples should be random, not a pattern.
> After drums are established, Laptop Two fades in, using Geiger pulses to trigger acoustic bass sounds, random pitches. This signal should be delayed, so as to be out of synch with the drums. If possible, vary the delay rate so as to not fall into a fixed temporal relationship with the drums.
> After the drums and bass texture is well established, violin begins, improvising in response to the other materials. (The Geiger counter continues to feed signals to the laptops, but is not yet heard as a sound of its own.)
> Eventually, the drums and bass should begin looping back on themselves, piling up layers until the texture is as dense as possible, a blur. At this point the Geiger counter sound should fade into the texture. The drums and bass should then fade out, gradually, leaving the Geiger counter and violin improvising together.
> After a short while, introduce the recording of the beginner violinist, playing a fiddle tune.
> Geiger and violin continue briefly with the recording, then fade out, leaving fiddle recording to play out to end.

Despite the fact that these instructions are very specific, the proper execution of this piece requires a great deal of effort and contribution from the performers involved. It is clear from

the instruments used and the personalities involved, who Jarvinen intended to play each part; I would play the violin, he would play the Geiger counter, and Isaac Schankler and Scott Cazan would each work with signal processing. These were the specific talents that each of us had and Jarvinen seemed to have written the piece with the intention of exploiting those talents. While the piece could be done with other players, I feel that the outcome would be radically different.

The Future of TempWerks

There will be no other works written by Jarvinen for TempWerks, or any other ensemble. But what Jarvinen has left us with is the framework for what I feel is a unique ensemble, which can continue to grow and innovate. The ensemble can function much like the works he wrote for the group, as a structure within which the individual members may contribute. Towards the end of our preparation for the Festival of New American Music performance, all four of the members of TempWerks felt that it was a group worth continuing in the future. Our intention is to continue to play these works of Jarvinen's as part of our repertoire, but also for members of the ensemble to write our own works for the ensemble. We are all performer/composers and we all have the potential to function as multi-instrumentalists. Additionally, we feel that the group can offer a unique opportunity for other composers who might wish to work with such a non-traditional ensemble. One such composer

is Chris Kallmyer.[6] Kallmyer, whose work tends to be cite-specific, has already approached TempWerks about creating a concert length work, in collaboration with the ensemble, to be performed in the Berkley Museum of Art this coming April.

Ultimately, I believe that TempWerks is a model for the ensemble of the future. Part new music ensemble, part rock band, part improvisation collective – there is really no way to define what TempWerks is. It might be all these things or none of them…the only way to find out is to keep moving forward.

[6] Kallmyer has worked closely with all the members of TempWerks in other contexts.