COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE
PAUL VAILLANCOURT DIRECTOR  AMY GRIFFITHS SAXOPHONE
WORKS BY  CHARLES GRIFFIN  JAMES M. DAVID
NICO MUHLY  BRIAN CHERNEY  ROBERT RUMBELOW
Brian Cherney: In Gottes Gärten schweigen die Engel

In Gottes Gärten schweigen die Engel was written especially for Paul Vaillancourt and the percussion ensemble at Columbus State University. This piece, in fact, requires that one of the percussionists (in this case, Paul Vaillancourt) be a soloist, while the rest of the ensemble plays a more subordinate role. Moreover, the solo percussion part can be played separately as a solo percussion piece. To accentuate the difference between soloist and ensemble, the solo percussionist plays a number of pitched bells, gongs and singing bowls which the others do not have; these instruments provide a kind of scale or “mode” stretching over nearly three octaves and form the “backbone” of the soloist’s material. However, the soloist also plays vibraphone and marimba, as well as some small tuned drums and other miscellaneous instruments that interact throughout with the tuned gongs and bells and other instruments in his part. The other five percussionists play more conventional instruments, including three triangles each, on which they play a certain type of music three times in the course of the work. The title of the piece (which could be translated as “In God’s gardens the angels grow silent”) was borrowed from a poem of Rilke entitled “Die Engel” [The Angels] from Das Buch der Bilder [The Book of Images] and was chosen not only because it seemed to me to be evocative and to suggest certain sounds but because the piece is dedicated to the memory of a friend, John Michielsen, whom I had known for some 50 years and who passed away in September of 2006. John was a Professor of German for many years at Brock University in St. Catherines, Ontario and I like to think that he, too, would have found this poem of Rilke evocative and suggestive of music. (B.C.)

The Music

Charles Griffin: Fist Through Traffic

A composer can only really express their perception of the world through the filter of their own experience, and since my earliest musical experiences revolved around singing and drumming, I often incorporate in my writing elements of popular and/or world music that are most compelling to me, within the context of continuing a concert music tradition. Written in 1993 while a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, Fist Through Traffic is a three-movement work that comes from this impulse. The title of the work comes from a line from a Paul Simon song as an homage (I was listening to his Rhythm of the Saints album quite a lot at that time) and to reflect my sympathy for his approach to songwriting, which in the long run has also been about integrating diverse elements from outside his native experience or from outside the expectations of the genre into his personal style. (C.G.)

James M. David: Shifting Cells

The inspiration for Shifting Cells is a constantly changing sense of pulse that can be heard in many types of music. Such diverse sources as East African folk music, Balinese Gamelan ensembles, medieval isorhythmic motets, and, surprisingly, modern American drum corps employ the technique. Also common to these diverse genres is the idea of tempo modulation. This creates the illusion of a change of speed when there, in fact, is none. While listening to this piece the audience will hear a gradual slowing followed by an even greater sense of acceleration. The performers achieve this through the precise execution of rhythmic integral ratios thereby eliminating the need for a conductor or visual cues. The pitch content is based exclusively on the pentatonic scale, which is in keeping with the work’s multicultural origins. Hopefully, the various techniques involved will create a sense of constant renewal as new ideas appear, grow stronger, and recede within a seamless texture. (J.D.)

Nicho Muhly: I Shudder To Think

I Shudder to Think has two sets of contrasting material. The first is an aggressive series of tremolos on tom-toms, which evolve into detailed rhythmic patterns. The second is a broken chorale played on tuned cowbells, and marimba. The materials don’t ever fully meet until the ending of the piece. I was interested in having each player be able to explore both the militaristic and the gentle aspects of the percussion batterie. (N.M.)
Robert Rumbelow: Soundscape

A sonic, powerful work in A-B-A form, the recapitulation of the opening A section of Soundscape gives way to a virtuosic cadenza for the organ leading to a pedal solo for the organist’s feet. The composer of Soundscape, Dr. Robert Rumbelow, conducted his composition with the Columbus State University Percussion Ensemble in this unedited performance at Legacy Hall in the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts of Columbus State University in Columbus, Georgia with Jonathan Ryan, organist. Ryan’s performance was the final round of the Jordan II International Organ Competition on September 25, 2009. He received first prize as well as the Letourneau Prize for the best performance of this newly commissioned work. Legacy Hall’s organ was built in 2001 by Letourneau as their Op. 60, III/65, mechanical action.

Scored for organ and percussion quartet, Soundscape explores many of the sonic possibilities of the pipe organ and accentuates these with a wide array of battery percussion, gongs & other metallic instruments, and keyboard percussion.

James M. David: The Locomotive Geryon

The Locomotive Geryon is based on two objects that came together in my mind during the early stages of the work’s conception. First is Dante’s Geryon: a monstrous creature with the head of a man, the body of a snake, and the tail of a scorpion. The beast moves with terrific speed as he transports Dante and Virgil further into the depths of the abyss.

“Behold the beast who bears the pointed tail, who crosses mountains, shatters weapons, walls! Behold the one whose stench fills all the world!” — Canto XVII, Inferno, Dante

Second is a Harley-Davidson V-twin motorcycle: agile yet hulking and menacing. The bizarre creation then takes the listener past a strange gallery of images, each attempting to evoke the beauty and fear of a powerful machine. Originally written for saxophone and piano, Paul Vaillancourt arranged this version for large percussion ensemble in 2008. (J.D.)
Paul Vaillancourt

Paul Vaillancourt (B. Mus. Université d’Ottawa, M. Mus. McGill University, DMA SUNY Stony Brook) Associate Professor of Percussion at Columbus State University, has been a featured soloist with the St. Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic, the National Arts Center Orchestra, the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra, and at the Banff and Aspen Music Festivals. Recent concerto performances have included Michael Daugherty’s Raise The Roof with the CSU Wind Ensemble and Jennifer Higdon’s Percussion Concerto with the CSU Philharmonic. He has had various performances broadcast by NPR, CBC and Radio-Canada and is in demand as an instructor and composer of Scottish pipe band drumming. He is a founding member of several innovative contemporary music ensembles including The Furious Band, STRIKE, with pianist Jeff Meyer and the Fountain City Ensemble, with whom he has premiered works by Alexandr Radvilovich, Brian Cherney, J. M. David, Chen Yi, Daniel Koonzt, Perry Goldstein, Daniel Weymouth, Matthew Welch, Brooke Joyce, John Fitz Rogers, and many others, in the U.S., Canada, Japan, China and Russia.

Reviews of STRIKE’s recent CD project Convergence describe “Vaillancourt’s beautiful marimba sounding miraculously even and effortless.” STRIKE tours of China and Russia included performances at the Beijing Modern Music Festival at the Central Conservatory, Tianjin Conservatory and SoundWays New Music Festival in St. Petersburg.

As a conductor, Vaillancourt has given the U.S. and world premieres of chamber works by Brian Cherney, David Lang, Steven Gellman, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, Eric Moe, John Parcell, Sidney Hodkinson, Jack Beeson, R. Murray Schaeffer, Jefferson Friedman, Nico Muhly as well as the opera Comala, by Eastman School of Music faculty Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon at the Palace de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Vaillancourt contributed to the recently released commercial recording of the opera (Bridge Records) as a performer, which earned the composer a nomination as a Pulitzer Prize finalist.

While completing his D.M.A. at the State University of New York in Stony Brook studying with legendary pedagogue Raymond DesRoches, he performed with Pulse, the New Jersey Percussion Ensemble and the Orchestra of the S.E.M Ensemble.

Vaillancourt has recently recorded for Luminescence Records, Albany, CRI, Tzadik, Naxos, New Chris Records (Live In The Studio-with the jazz trio BE3), and Alien Jazz with the Robert Orr Trio. He is endorsed by Bosphorus Cymbals and is a Pearl Education Artist.

THE PERFORMERS

Columbus State University Percussion Ensemble

The CSU Percussion Ensemble is directed by Schwob School of Music faculty artist, Paul Vaillancourt. Year after year this ensemble continues to perform at the highest artistic level, dazzling audiences with their subtlety, precision, and remarkable communication. In addition to the list of works premiered—by composers James M. David, Matthew Welch, Eric Moe, John Parcell, Brian Cherney, Fred Cohen and Nico Muhly—the group performs and records music from the traditional percussion ensemble repertoire, including works by Davidovsky, Varèse, Jolivet, Cage, Stravinsky, Antheil and Reich.

The collaboration with Matthew Welch in 2004, entitled The Self And The Other (a double concerto for bagpipes, piano and percussion ensemble) serves as the cornerstone for the composer’s CD Dream Tigers, released on John Zorn’s Tzadik label renowned for its support of contemporary music.

Amy Griffiths

Amy Griffiths (B. Mus. North Carolina School of the Arts, MM Arizona State University, DMA Louisiana State University) has made countless appearances as a soloist, chamber musician, and recitalist. She can be heard in various diverse musical settings from classical solo and chamber music to jazz and popular music and her performances have been broadcast by NPR affiliates throughout the United States. She has performed with the Phoenix Symphony, the Atlanta Opera, and is a founding member of the Fountain City Ensemble, with whom she has toured the US and Japan. The 2011-2012 concert season featured Griffiths as soloist on the Dahl Concerto with the CSU Wind Ensemble at the CBDNA/NBA Southern Division Conference and a residency with the FCE at the Aries Composers Festival at Colorado State University. Griffiths teaches at Columbus State University’s Schwob School of Music in Columbus, Georgia and is on the faculty of the Sewanee Summer Music Festival. Amy Griffiths is an artist for Selmer saxophones. Her website is www.amygriffiths.net.
The Carson McCullers Composer Residency Program was a collaboration between Columbus State University’s Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians and the Schwob School of Music. Made possible by contributions to CSU’s Capital Campaign, the program annually commissioned an internationally-known composer to write a new work for the CSU Percussion Ensemble to be premiered during their week-long residency in Columbus.

The first residency recipient was Dr. Eric Moe from the University of Pittsburgh. The commissioned work *I Have Only One Itching Desire* (2006) was based on the drumming from the Jimmy Hendrix song *FIRE*. The ensemble’s recording was released on the Naxos label as part of a compilation disc of Eric’s recent chamber music entitled *Strange Exclaiming Music*.

Prof. Brian Cherney was resident composer in 2007. He teaches composition and the history of Canadian music at McGill University and is one of Canada’s leading composers. He has been commissioned by virtually every professional new music group in Canada including the Montreal, Toronto and Quebec Symphony Orchestras.

Nico Muhly, resident composer in 2008 is probably best known for his work in film (*Joshua*, *The Reader*). He has also been commissioned by the Boston Pops, Chicago Symphony and New York Philharmonic, and has collaborated with such artists as Bjork and Philip Glass.

**Acknowledgments**

Recording engineer and editing (except track 5): Mark Owens

Mastering and editing (track 5): Bradford Andrews

All works were recorded in Legacy Hall, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts, Columbus State University, Columbus GA

*Shifting Cells* by J. M. David © 2008 C. Alan Publications (ASCAP)

*Soundscape* by Robert Rumbelow © 2009 C. Alan Publications (ASCAP)

*I Shudder to Think* by Nico Muhly © 2008 St Rose Music Publishing (ASCAP)

*In Gottes Gärten schweigen die Engel* is available at the Canadian Music Centre in Montreal

*Fist Through Traffic* available at charlesgriffin.net or steveweissmusic.com

This project was funded by the Schwob School of Music, Carson McCullers Center for Writers and Musicians-Columbus State University and the Gunby Jordan Organ fund.
CHARLES GRIFFIN (b. 1968)
Fist Through Traffic (1993)
1 Fist Through Traffic [2:09]
2 Industry [3:10]
3 Once a New Yorker [3:18]
Christopher Dye, John Phillips, Justin Baker
Jeremy Stuckey, Steven Smith
Daniel Bowden, percussion
Amy Griffiths, solo saxophone

JAMES M. DAVID (b. 1978)
4 Shifting Cells (2008) [7:02]
David Owens, Chris Butler, Patrick Hardin
Kelsey Adams, percussion

NIKOLAI MUHLY (b. 1981)
5 I Shudder To Think* (2008) [8:48]
Stephen Shealy, Chris Butler, David Owens
Justin Baker, Paul Vaillancourt, percussion

ROBERT RUMBELOW (b. 1965)
6 In Gottes Gärten schweigen die Engel* (2006) [15:03]
Justin Baker, Chris Butler, David Owens
Daniel Bowden, Patrick Hardin, percussion
Paul Vaillancourt, solo percussion
Matthew Price, conductor

JAMES M. DAVID (b. 1978)
7 Soundscape for organ & percussion ensemble (2009) [10:01]
Stephen Shealy, Chris Butler, Diana Sharpe
Paul Vaillancourt, percussion
Jonathan Ryan, organ
Robert Rumbelow, conductor

TOTAL TIME 59:16

* McCullers Composer Residency commission  ** World premiere version for alto saxophone and percussion orchestra (arr. Paul Vaillancourt)