Finding the electricity of the music

BY MAGGIE ANDERSON

Amid a rare, vintage 1966 Moog IIIP Synthesizer, a Mischke 2208 Mixing Console, and various other pieces of plug-ins and dials forming a virtual cockpit in the UI Electronic Music Studio, Lawrence Fritts gathers sounds, breaks them into pieces, and reassembles them to compose his brand of music.

"My second lesson in the strings was to learn how to play piano," said the UI associate professor of composition and theory. "Under the direction of his engineer father, he built an alarm for his bedside clock and an illumino calculator as a boy. He made his first electrical dot at 3 years old and began piano at 8 years.

As the electronic-music director, Fritts works jointly with graduate students Paul Brenner and Rachel Fote, who used technology to compose "Flow Interrupted," the recording of which they will play at the Electronic Music Studio concert at 8 p.m. on Sept. 6 in Clapp Recital Hall.

The program will also feature Reflections, by Boston composer Dennis Miller; Cyborg Jungle; and To Story Territory, by UI graduate student Todd Papke. "Flow from Songs of Discord," by Brian Vinak, and the world premiere of Pinto's The Boy Kicked the Ball will also be presented.

In other music forms, the process of creating electronic music begins with a virtual and compiling the sounds needed for the piece. Next, the sounds are transmitted using software through granular synthesis, which enables the composer to use the帝王 block diagram.

The composer uses a special software program to manipulate the sounds and reorganize them in an original way. "It's like a game of puzzles," said Fote, who is working toward a master's degree in composition. "Within the sounds, we are able to create a new piece of music." Twenty years in the making, "The Boy Kicked the Ball" is inspired by the linguistic theory that basic verb and noun structures are elaborated upon to create entire languages. Applying this school of thought, Fritts used exceptionally small bits of sound, known as grains or granules, to create an entire composition. These layers of sound are less than 1/1000 of a second long, and he recites falling frustrated using this painstaking approach.

"After about six months of working with sounds about one second long," he said, "we were very disheartening results." Fote's and Brenner's piece, "Flow Interrupted," is based on a comparison between vintage analogue and digital sound. Analogue sound is a smooth, continuous stream, whereas digital sound consists of granules of information. Though digital sound is easier for composers to work with, many compositions still contain analogue sound. The piece also incorporates such an eclectic combination of sounds as oboe, viola, and wolf calls.

"The key is to create an emotional response," Brenner said, adding that colleagues have commented that the wall calls in the piece can raise goose bumps. Although electronic music may seem unusual to listeners, he said, it is "prevalent, but people don't think of it as someone playing the piano and saxophone with a 30 throws." He cited his use in the music of composer Marco Beltrami in the movie "Blade" as an example. The UI Electronic Music Studio has been in existence for 41 years, and currently, nearly 20 students participate through classes and performances.

The Electronic Music Studio, where artists such as Lawrence Fritts compose music, is shown in 1997.

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MEET THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAKERS

CONCERT
Electric Music Concert
Directed by Lawrence Fritts
Presenting Flow Interrupted, Fallout, Toy Story Terrestrial, Cyborg Jungle Dance, Prelude from Songs of Discord, and The Boy Kicked the Ball
When: 8 p.m., Sept. 6
Where: Clapp Recital Hall
Admission: Free

Fote and Brenner urge listeners approach electronic music free from expectations. "If it's something you know nothing about and you're not used to, your knees will wobble, might be to say it's cut music," Fote said. Brenner agreed. "At the very least, music is organized sound," he said. "A lot of modern music really pushes the idea of what music is and how it works!"

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