

Eclectically, and electrically, musical

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— Lawrence Fritts, associate professor of composition and theory

BY SCOTT MCCALLUM
THE DAILY IOWAN

When walking through the halls of Voxman Music Building, your ear catches many sounds. You hear the graceful hums of a team of violins. You also hear the rumble of the bass drum as the percussionists practice their beats. If you listen closely, you might also be able to catch the alien drones and off-kilter buzzing pervading from the office of Lawrence Fritts.

"The University of Iowa is a very good place for a composer," he said. "It's a very intense artistic community. From the performers to the theory and musicology areas, there's a lot of very interesting research being done here and very interesting ideas."

Fritts is an associate professor of composition and theory, and he looks more like a teacher than a musician. His balding head is surrounded by a ring of long gray hair, spectacles adorn his face, and he is of medium height and build. He teaches composition for solo instruments, voice, and ensembles. Nevertheless, it's his electronic-music creations that bring him the most recognition.

A large amount of his electronic or "electroacoustic" music is unlike what you may think music should sound like. Much of it is devoid of any recognizable pattern or beat. Fritts will distort sounds on his computer through the use of audio-editing applications to create otherworldly compositions. Any sound is considered for use, and that may include the human voice, a popping balloon, a chair scratching across the floor, or a bottle of pills being shaken.

Sounds are pieced together constructing an eclectic mix of various tones, hums, and reverberations. Many of the layers may be the same audio snippet but sound drastically different after being renovated by Fritts

SHOW
Lawrence Fritts with the UI Chamber Orchestra
Monsterology
When: May 1, 3 p.m.
Where: Clapp Recital Hall
Admission: TBA

on his computer.

A good example of this technique is found on his 2002 composition "Minute Variations." He takes a vocal sample of a fast-talking Australian, Chris Mann, reading a piece of text. Each successive minute of the five-minute song brings a new variation in the overall sound (hence the title).

Fritts has collaborated with artists from, and had his music played, across the globe. Japan, Germany, Italy, France, New York, and Chicago are a few of the locations that have played host to his music. That's an impressive list of cities for someone who started out playing in his garage.

The dream of playing in a rock band came to a screeching halt when he was diagnosed with tendinitis in his wrist at the age of 24. Rather than forgoing music altogether, he enrolled at the University of Chicago to study composition.

"Moving into composition was a very natural thing," he said. "My songs were getting overly complex. They were battle songs because, you know, you're changing tempo and changing key. People couldn't dance to it, and they'd go away scratching their heads."

Fritts loved the social interaction with the people at the university — being associated with highly motivated and intense people fed into his desire to keep learning. That motivation is something that he tries to pass on to his own students.

"We look at the piece to see what's working, and what the problems might be. Is there a concept behind the piece, and how can that concept be more fully developed?" he said.

He keeps an open mind to every possibility in his profession, but he seems to be content with the life he has at the UI. In his current job, he has the ability make the kind of music he wants to create and gets satisfaction from enriching the lives of his students through teaching.

"I don't have any plans to not do this. This is the ideal life for me," he said. "I've been sort of developing this and projecting this since I was in my early 20s."

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