

Finding the electricity of the music

BY MAGGIE ANDERSON

THE DAILY EDWAN

Amid a rare, vintage 1969 Moog IIIP Synthesizer, a Mackie 3208 Mixing Console, and various other panels of plugs-in and dials forging a virtual cockpit in the UI Electronic Music Studios, Lawrence Fritts gathers sounds, breaks them into pieces, and reassembles them to compose his brand of music.

"I learned how to do wiring before I learned 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 illuminable calculator as a boy. He made his first electrical device at 3 years old and began piano at 8 years.

As the electronic-music director, Fritts worked jointly with graduate students Paul Brenner and Rachel Foote, who use technology to compose *Flow Interrupted*, the recording of which they will play at the Electronic Music Concert at 8 p.m. on Sept. 4 in Clapp Recital Hall.

The program will also include *Faktura*, by Boston composer Dennis Miller, *Cyborg Jungle Dance* and *Toy Story Terrorist*, by UI graduate student Todd Papke, *Prelude from Songs of Discord*, by Brian Vlasak, and the world premiere of Fritts' *The Boy Kicked the Ball*.

As in other music forms, the process of creating electronic music begins with generating and compiling the sounds needed for the piece. Next, the sounds are transformed using software through granular synthesis to make new sounds, a process by which the composer directs the large block of sound. The composer uses a second



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

software program to manipulate the sounds and reappropriate them in an original way.

"It's like a jigsaw puzzle," said Foote, who is working toward a master's degree in composition.

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 wavelets, to create an entire composition. These slivers of sound are less than 1/100th of a second long, and he recalls feeling frustrated using this painstaking approach.

"After about six months of work, I was getting sounds about one second long," he said. "It was a very disheartening moment."

Foote'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, while digital sound consists of granules of information. Though digital sound is easier for composers to work with, many feel it lacks the rich warmth of 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 wolf 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 something you can go to a concert hall and see." He cited its use in

the music of composer Marco Beltrami in the movie *I Robot* as an example. The UI's Electronic Music Studio has been in existence for 41 years, and currently, nearly 20 students participate through classes and performances.

Come get your FREE...

• Coffee • Latté • Espresso Shots

Mon., 8/29 thru Fri., 9/2 • 8am-3pm

TONY'S GRILL

A BREAKFAST HOUSE

320 East Burlington (Corner of Gilbert & Burlington)

Carry-Out 354-6600

Hours: M-W 7am-10pm • Open Thursdays 7am through Sundays 2pm
OPEN 24 HOURS THURSDAY • FRIDAY • SATURDAY - FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE!

CONCERT

Electric Music Concert

Directed by

Lawrence Fritts

Presenting *Flow Interrupted*,
Faktura, *Toy Story Terrorist*,
Cyborg Jungle Dance, *Prelude*
from Songs of Discord, and
The Boy Kicked the Ball

When: 8 p.m. Sept. 4

Where: Clapp Recital Hall

Admission: Free

MEET THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC MAKERS



Rachel Foote

Musician



Lawrence
Fritts

Director

Foote 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 knee-jerk reaction might be to say it's not music," Foote 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."

E-mail: DJreporter@maggieanderson.com
maggie-anderson@uiowa.edu

Students!
& Everybody