
**School of Music & Theatre
Composition Studio**

PROGRAM NOTES

Gegenschein (2022) for piano and tuba

On a clear night, if it's dark enough, you might see a faint glowing spot in the night sky, caused by interplanetary dust reflecting sunlight back to earth. This phenomenon is called *Gegenschein*, German for counter glow, and is the inspiration and namesake for my piece. I want to capture the idea of something that exists without really being there - it's vague, and ethereal, and floating- yet vast, and cosmic, and humbling; to capture the feeling of looking up at the stars and realizing how small you are.

False Confidence (2022) for alto saxophone

When giving a speech or a performance, one might feel the need to wear a mask or give a sense of confidence when it's not originally there. False confidence is the need to prove confidence, and the falsely confident person covers up or cloaks their perceived inadequacies. *False Confidence* was written to convey the feeling of keeping one's self from being caught up in this sense of "false confidence" and to realize it's okay to be nervous.

Death at the Window (2021) for voice and piano

Based on the Robert Fuller Murray poem by the same title, this piece serves as a somber meditation on the question "Why didn't Death take me?" Through text painting (assisted by Death itself being personified through the piano), the piece becomes something of a duet between the narrator and Death, as the narrator ponders this question. As the piece comes to its close, the narrator comes to an answer, ending with the low tones of the piano fading to silence.

The Marvelous Three (2022) for woodwind trio

- I. Allegro
- II. The March
- III. Grand Finale

This is a three movement piece that has three distinct sections: the first being an introduction to what to expect and overall themes for the entire piece. The second movement is faster paced and the third is slower, acting as a grand finale tying all the movements together. This piece plays off the number three and uses it as a driving, creative motive.

An Exercise in Something or Another (2022) for electric guitar and fixed media

This piece is riddled with electronic imperfections and relatively drastic tempo shifts. The guitar was intentionally used to sound as little like one as possible to avoid any standard conventions of its medium. There is no specific tale to be told here, only one of pointless reflection. The story meant to be explored is the one you explore yourself, so get to work.

Serpentine Playground (2021) for clarinet trio

Serpentine Playground is an exploration and exercise in juxtaposition. The use of recognizable, traditionally tonal passages is contrasted by the use of deliberately dissonant harmony, all while underscored by a sense of rhythmic momentum and activity throughout the piece. This contrast of ideas underscores the entirety of the piece, featuring musical ideas that are both accessible to the average listener, while also presenting several ideas that may challenge the expectations of a listener with any preconceived notions on melody or harmony.

Comfy Forest (2022) for clarinet

Comfy Forest is the first piece of music I've ever written. The piece started off as an exploration of just how to write anything let alone something with a focus. As the piece came along it began to remind me of pieces that I associated with forests in video games like the *Legend of Zelda* or *Pokémon*. Once I formed that association I decided to write a piece reminiscent of those pieces from the games I love, combining two of my greatest passions in life: music and video games.

(in)congruence (2022) for trombone duo

Google says that congruence means agreement or harmony; compatibility. This piece showcases ideas of both congruence and incongruence through musical devices such as harmony and rhythm, showcasing both the beauty and ugliness of existing in dissonance and harmony.

The Thrush of the Hour (2022) for woodwind trio, video, and fixed media

A representation of the passing of time, *The Thrush of the Hour* incorporates the use of both projections and fixed audio. All of the live elements are based on different types of bird calls, ranging from the cardinal to the Malabar whistling thrush, each slightly changing over time. Each performer is given two different bird calls and small choices regarding how to play them. Listening closely to the fixed audio, foreshadowing of musical ideas later in the piece can be heard. Video projections are an altered version of the painting *My Cherie Amour* by Aimee Griffith.

In C (1964) for unspecified instrumentation

Only one page of score. No specified instrumentation, no parts. Fifty three motives, mostly minuscule. No counterpoint. No evident form. Spare instructions, with many aspects left deliberately vague. No tempo mark. And a title that's laconic in the extreme: *In C*.

This would not seem a likely candidate for a study in a series that seeks to record the process of creation and premiere of the great masterworks in the Western canon. Indeed, when confronted with Terry Riley's 1964 work, it's not unreasonable to ask, "Is this a joke?" The work seems to stand the whole idea of musical "progress" on its head. At precisely the same moment of its composition, Elliott Carter was working on his *Concerto for Piano*, a work Stravinsky was to hail as a masterpiece. Luciano Berio had almost completed *Laborintus II* and would soon start the *Sinfonia*. Karlheinz Stockhausen had just finished *Momente*. All these works fairly scream their authority, their mastery of overwhelming complexity, mirroring a complex age. They bespeak the composer as an expert in sound, a highly trained professional who is able to harness chaos and force it into a rigorous architecture. Surely, these are the true masterpieces. Riley's little scrap of score can't pretend to compete with these modernist monuments, can it?

Yet *In C* continues to receive numerous performances every year, by professionals, students, and amateurs. It has had repeated recordings since its 1968 LP premiere, and most are still in print. It welcomes performers from a vast range of practices and traditions, from classical to rock to jazz to non-Western. Recordings range from the Chinese Film Orchestra of Shanghai—on traditional Chinese instruments—to the Hungarian "European Music Project" group, joined by two electronica DJs manipulating *The Pulse*. It rouses audiences to states of ecstasy and near hysteria, all the while projecting an inner serenity that suggests Cage's definition of music's purpose—"to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences."

From Robert Carl's book "Terry Riley's In C" (Oxford University Press)

Thank you for attending. [Be sure to follow the studio on Facebook](#) to keep up-to-date on happenings and upcoming events.