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Computer Music Concert Feb. 25 combines technology and art

By Larry Wood

For most concerts in the School the Music, the lights are usually on, but for the USC Computer Music Concert, "Current Beats," Feb. 25, the lights will be out.

The atmosphere for the performance, which begins at 7:30 p.m. in the Recital Hall, will immerse the audience in sound from works for percussion, electronics, and other forms of media. The concert is free and open to the public.

"The music is challenging to the ear and the mind and, in some cases where it's mixed media, the eye," said Reg Bain, who teaches composition and theory and whose specialty is real-time interactive technology for music composition.

"In a sense, attending this concert is a bit like entering a cave with only a candle to light your way. It changes your perspective on things. At first, it's a bit disorienting, but in a positive way, a way that might cause a paradigm shift for members of the audience, hopefully providing them with an opportunity to look at music in a brand new way."

Preparing for a computer music concert takes time. Besides writing the notes, a composer may need up to a year to learn to program the computer and master related hardware and software. Just setting up the equipment for a concert can take up to four hours. But the results are an interesting creative merger of musician and machine.

"One works with the computer as a tool in the same way that composers in the past have worked with traditional instruments," said Bain, who has directed computer music studies at USC for more than 10 years.

"You can have a percussionist playing into a computer, and the composer has written a program to alter that sound, usually in a predictable way, but sometimes in an unpredictable, yet algorithmic way. That kind of musical transformation was simply not possible in a live concert until recent innovations in real-time interactive technology made it possible."

With the help of School of Music recording engineer Jeff Francis, the concert will feature 5.1 surround sound.

"Just as people experience 5.1 surround sound in their living room to watch movies, they can come to this concert and experience the same thing in our School of Music Recital Hall," Bain said. "This is the first time we've done this."

South Carolina composers Rob Howiler and Ronald Keith Parks and percussionists N. Cameron Britt and Kristin Clark will be featured guest artists. The program will include:

- "No, It's Just You," by Rob Howiler, live-interactive music for computer, electronics, and performer
- "Londonderry Ire," by Logan Young, mixed media for loops, quatrains, and stills for percussion ensemble, CD, and video
- "No Stopping Any Time," by Amnon Wolmon, for marimba and CD
- "Tweek," by Rob Howiler, live-interactive music for computer, electronics, and performer
- "Afterimage 3," by Ronald Keith Parks, for percussion and real-time interactive digital signal processing computer
- "Exit," by Bik Lee, computer-generated composition
- "Illusions," by Sophocleous Charalambos, mixed media for computer-generated composition with animation.

"The aspect of interactivity is really a new media concept:



Reginald Bain, music

If you go ...

What: USC Computer Music Concert

When: 7:30 p.m. Feb. 25

Where: School of Music Recital Hall

Admission: Free

Information: Reg Bain, music, 7-8183 or rbain@mozart.sc.edu.

you don't just prepare the work, you actually make the work flexible enough so that in performance the computer collaborates with you to produce the music," Bain said.

"People who come to the concert should be prepared to experience something new. It's yet another interesting example of knowledge from two seemingly distinct disciplines—technology and music—being married in the creation of a new work of art."

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