

**Syndicate for The New Arts to present
Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room***

by Mike Telin



On Friday, February 19 at 7:00 pm in St. John's Episcopal Church in Ohio City's Hingetown neighborhood, the Syndicate for The New Arts will present their own rendition of Alvin Lucier's classic of minimal tape music, *I am Sitting in a Room*. The evening will also launch the Syndicate's residency at the Church in partnership with St. John's Institute.

First performed in 1969, the work featured Lucier recording himself reciting this text:

I am sitting in a room, different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I'm going to play it back into the room again and again until any semblance of my speech with perhaps the exception of rhythm is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.

The recording was then played back into the room and re-recorded, a process that was repeated until the words became unintelligible and were gradually replaced by the pure harmonies of the room.

“This will be our own rendition of Lucier's brilliant piece,” [Syndicate](#) executive director Joshua Rosner explained during a recent interview. “We thought it would be nice to christen our residency by using the sanctuary itself as a piece of music. In our version, everyone including the audience will recite the text together. I think it will be an interesting experience to hear how our collective voices disappear into the room. When

Lucier first performed it, it was just him onstage speaking the text. But I think our re-arrangement of the piece allows the audience to take ownership of the space, and to be contemporary musicians for just a bit. It will also allow the people sitting in the room to immerse themselves in the reverberant frequency of the sanctuary.”

Rosner pointed out that Lucier has a stutter when he speaks, and the work was a way for him to deal with a disorder that he has had his entire life. “The idea was that his voice would become part of the room. As you play the recording into the room over and over again, his speech patterns — or the mistakes that happen in his speech — disappear into the room.”

Regarding the text, in a June 2014 [interview](#) with *The Guardian*, Lucier explained that he created it in the moment: “I sat there and thought, ‘I’ve got to say something...I’ll tell them what’s happening.’ I just wrote it out and that was it. It could have been anything,” the composer recalled.



The St. John’s residency comes at an exciting time for the Syndicate: last summer they became a 501(c)(3) organization, and now the ensemble has a space to rehearse, experiment, and present free concerts, all of which will advance their efforts to demystify contemporary music. “We’re going to be offering at least two open rehearsals so people can see how newly-composed works are actually put together, and they can watch the artists try to figure out how everything works,” Rosner said. “We also have a great community partner in St. John’s. They and the Episcopal Diocese are very supportive of the vision that we have for the space as a welcoming place for contemporary music and for discussions surrounding arts in general.”

For the Syndicate, the residency is also an opportunity to join in the revitalization of the burgeoning Hingetown neighborhood. “It’s about a local ensemble becoming a part of what is happening in Hingetown,” Rosner said. “With The Bop Stop and Transformer Station already thriving, it was just a matter of time before there was another venue added to the list. We’re really excited to be present in the neighborhood. For us, being a neighbor is really important.”

Because [St. John’s](#) doesn’t have a congregation, the residency is also helping the Church redefine its place in the neighborhood. The arts are an important part of the Institute’s plans. “I am very excited about the partnership with the Syndicate,” Timothy Holcomb, St. John’s Institute development assistant, said during a telephone conversation. “I like the fact that they take chances with their music. It’s beautiful, but it also challenges listeners. If you look at the history of St. John’s, it’s played an important role in challenging society, from the Underground Railroad to the Civil Rights movement in the ‘60s and the American Indian movement in the ‘70s.”

Originally from Kansas City, Holcomb came to the area to attend Cleveland State University, where he earned his master’s degree in Urban Planning. Since taking the job at St. John’s Institute — a 501(c)(3) organization — he has spent a lot of his time getting to know the neighborhood by attending Block Club and community meetings at Lakeview Terrace and conducting surveys. “I’m in love with this job,” Holcomb exclaimed. “This is an exciting time, to be able to figure out what the St. John’s of the future will be. I hope that over time the arts community and the diverse population of the neighborhood will truly come to share the same space.”

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