

No Exit: Piano Dada at Cleveland Museum of Art

by Mike Telin



This week No Exit will continue their season-long multifaceted exploration and celebration of Surrealism on February 9 at 7:30 pm in Gartner Auditorium with “Piano Dada.” The free concert takes an entertaining dive into the realm of dreams, the irrational, the unconscious and the inexplicable.

“We’re very excited about this concert because it is our Cleveland Museum of Art debut,” No Exit’s artistic director Timothy Beyer said during a telephone conversation.

The program will include five works for solo piano performed by Shuai Wang — Francis Picabia’s *La Nourrice Américaine (fast)* and *La Nourrice Américaine (slow)*, Darius Milhaud’s *Caramel Mou*, Georges Auric’s *Adieu, New York!*, and E.L.T. Mesens’ *Drie Composities Voor Klavier* — as well as a video of Tristan Tzara’s *Dadaist Anthem*.

Beyer noted that with the exception of Milhaud, Picabia, Auric, Mesens and Tzara were not composers per se. “They were artists. But these are great pieces that represent the beginning of avant-garde conceptualized music, which is prevalent today — John Cage took his cues from the Dadist’s playbook.”

The program will feature two pieces for the full No Exit ensemble: James Praznik’s *Backwards Addict*, and Beyer’s *Dinactic Perplexity Ritual*. Audiences will also have another opportunity to view screenings of *The Birdhouse*, conceived and written by Timothy Beyer and filmed by James Praznik, *breathing room (short film with live music)* by Luke Haaksmsa, and *In Fourteen Steps* by James Praznik (*short film with live music*).

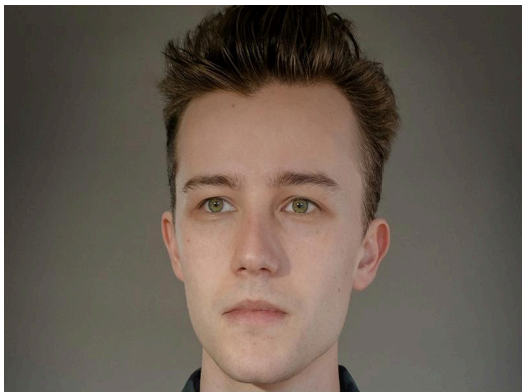
“*The Birdhouse* is a broad representation of my unconscious,” Beyer said “It’s basically a silent look at my dream world. While I’m interested in making a cohesive film, dreams don’t make sense in a logical way — although they do reveal some profound and important things. And while I wrote and directed it, James did all of the actual film work. I’m lucky to have had such a brilliant partner.”

While *The Birdhouse* is a completely silent film, in *breathing room* the music is as integral to the film as the film is to the music, as Luke Haaksma writes in his program note. All the sound effects are produced by live musicians and the line between film-sound and film-music is effectively blurred.

In his program note, James Praznik writes that *In Fourteen Steps* is a short film where the covenant between performer and audience is bound to be broken. He goes on to say that the film is a collection of his most terrifying dreams that he hopes the audience will find as funny as he does.

No Exit’s Laura King recently spoke to composer-filmmaker Luke Haaksma:

Laura King: The wonderful piece you’ve composed to accompany your film is as much foley sound effects as it is music. Please describe your thoughts around integrating these two expressions. What special challenges have you handed to the ensemble with this work?



Luke Haaksma: As someone working in both film and music, the question of the role ‘non-musical’ sound plays in film (and also in music) has always intrigued me. From the outset, placing sound and music on equal footing by asking No Exit to perform both was central to my vision for *breathing room*.

In film theory, people often speak of a “diegesis,” which can be understood as the world in which a given narrative exists. It allows us to describe traditional film scores as “non-diegetic,” meaning that they can’t be heard by the characters on screen. Having the sound and music for a film performed live presents an interesting opportunity to both highlight and dissolve this typical dichotomy.

Sound effects — or “foley” — are almost always understood to be diegetic (characters can always hear their own footsteps); but if, as in the instance of *breathing room*, the live ensemble performs both the sound effects and music, the two are literally placed in the same diegetic space, and therefore become more adhesive to one another. This adhesion creates a context to explore a question that many composers working in more traditional

concert settings regularly ask with their work, namely “what is the difference between sound and music, and when does one become the other?”

Of course, asking No Exit to perform both foley and music presents them with unique challenges — which they’ve handled beautifully. Balancing synchronization with musical expression is tricky, and the way they’ve interpreted the score to distinguish between moments of foley and moments of music is quite impressive. I’m very thankful for the effort they’ve put into realizing my piece!

Read the complete interview [here](#).

Concluding our conversation Beyer said, “We were encouraged by the great response we received from the first two sets of concerts. We hope people will come out for this program too — I think it will be an amazing experience.”

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