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The focus of this thesis is my work *for decorative purposes only* for antique objects, live and pre-recorded electronics, and improviser. The work presents an exploration of the concept of impermanence through the use of decaying antique artifacts, the continual alteration of sound-producing materials, and the use of improvisation in performance. The work is influenced by ideas developed by Alan Watts, Martin Heidegger, John Cage, and certain Eastern religions.

The piece is comprised of a sculpture of antiques that is musically activated by an improvisation that uses my own collection of objects, a constantly changing selection of pre-recorded materials, and live processing to create the music. The amalgamation of the physical sculpture and its activation through a musical performance by the improviser creates what I refer to as an interactive sound sculpture. The piece was developed through experimentation with found objects and percussive techniques, pair with electronic playback and processing.

I have performed *for decorative purposes only* eleven times and witnessed elements of the work evolve and decay over time. To demonstrate the ever-changing experience, this document contains a detailed catalog of antiques used, venue locations, and additional notes for each performance of the work. In addition to this catalog, I have provided three recordings of separate performances of the work. The audio recordings are contained as external links associated with the online version of this text.

The development and subsequent multiple performances of *for decorative purposes only* establishes impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value. My hope is that the piece will continue to evolve, develop, decay and renew over a long period of time.

IMPERMANENCE IN FOR DECORATIVE PURPOSES ONLY

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My “interactive sound sculpture” *for decorative purposes only*, for antique objects, live and pre-recorded electronics, and improviser, was developed in March 2017. The work establishes impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value through the musical activation of fragile and valuable antiques I have in my collection. The activation of the sculpture is an improvisation that uses various performance techniques on unconventional objects, a constantly changing selection of pre-recorded materials, and live processing to create the music. The amalgamation of the physical sculpture and its activation through a musical performance by the improviser creates what I refer to as an interactive sound sculpture. *For decorative purposes only* is activated only when the improviser interacts with the physical sculpture to create a sonic experience. The piece was developed through experimentation with found objects and percussive techniques, pair with electronic playback and processing. Figure 1 provides a photograph of the sculpture used in a house performance. In addition to the sculpture, the setup in the photo includes antiques that are not a part of the sculpture, such as the chair and wall hangings.

I have performed *for decorative purposes only* eleven times and witnessed elements of the work evolve and decay over time. To demonstrate the ever-changing experience, this document contains a detailed performance catalog containing antiques

used and venue locations for each performance of the work (Appendix A). In addition to this catalog, I have provided three recordings of separate performances of the work (Appendix B). The recordings are contained as external links associated with the online version of this text. Since there are no performance instructions, scores, or installation instructions for *for decorative purposes only*, this documentation serves as the only authoritative representation of the composition. The fact that there is no fixed score is, of course, another aspect of the element of impermanence contained in the work.



Figure 1. Photograph of Sculpture Activated in House Performance.

The work is influenced by a number of notable figures and entities from various disciplines, namely, philosophers Alan Watts and Martin Heidegger, composer John Cage, and Eastern religions. Their work and practice, along with my personal background, informed my concept of impermanence during the creation of *for decorative purposes only*.

Throughout this paper, I evidence that *for decorative purposes only* presents an exploration of the concept of impermanence through the use of deterioration of antique artifacts, the continual evolution of sound-producing materials, and the use of improvisation in performance. The development and subsequent multiple performances of *for decorative purposes only* establishes impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value. My hope is that the piece will continue to evolve, develop, decay and renew over a long period of time.

The next chapter will provide an outline of my background in antique collection, which is essential for an understanding of how the piece was developed, and how its eventual decay and change are important elements of the piece. In Chapter 3, I will briefly reference work by Alan Watts, Martin Heidegger, John Cage, and practices in Buddhism and discuss how it informed my concept of impermanence. In Chapter 4, I will explore processes I used as the improviser to incorporate impermanence as a concept in the sculpture and its activation through improvised performances.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTION

The interior decor of my childhood home provided an ever-changing visual experience that later in life informed impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value in *for decorative purposes only*. My family's house was a canvas for my mother to practice her remarkable interior design artistry with antiques too treasured to be resold in antique shops. These old artifacts remained untouched, like sculptures in a museum, and were valued for aesthetic purposes but rarely valued for their authentic functional purpose as objects. At the beginning of almost every season, the interior layout of our house would be altered, with newly acquired antiques taking the space of previous antiques. I observed the value of these artifacts deteriorate over time as they transitioned from authentic purpose, to aesthetic purpose, until eventually they were obsolete.

Over the past five years, I acquired a small collection of antique percussion instruments, along with other antique oddities, and used them as decorative sculptures in the interior of my living space. In December 2016, while rearranging a few decorative antiques I had on my desk, I started to conceptualize a piece where I would musically activate these artifacts. My intention was to re-purpose the artifacts and exhibit impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value through the development of visual and musical attributes of the antiques over subsequent multiple performances of the work.

There was a large chalkware monkey coin bank and a fragile Taiwanese drum from the turn of the century that was being used as a corner piece at the edge of my desk. Figure 2 provides a photograph of the monkey coin bank. Figure 3 provides two photographs of the Taiwanese drum. I began exploring different performance techniques for activating sounds the object possessed by tapping, scraping, and knocking on various parts of the artifacts, as well as hypothesizing ways of extending my approach to activating sounds from other antiques I had in my collection. It is clear that the artifacts deteriorate over time due to repeated use and there needs to be a continual alteration of sound-producing antiques as they broke down or were replaced. These factors determine how I improvised with the sculpture in each showing of the work. A detailed discussion of deterioration and alteration found in *of for decorative purposes only* is included in Chapter 4 on impermanence.



Figure 2. Photograph of Chalkware Monkey Coin Bank.



Figure 3. Two Photographs of Taiwanese Drum.

As the sound sculpture developed in my mind, I connected the impermanence of these objects to the writings of a number of philosophers I had been studying. In the following chapter, I will discuss a number of transdisciplinary influences that helped further the concept of impermanence in *for decorative purposes only*.

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCES

The work of notable figures such as Alan Watts, Martin Heidegger, and John Cage have strongly impacted my perspectives on impermanence and were sources I consulted during the conception of *for decorative purposes only*. In addition to the work of these individuals, I researched the practice of impermanence in Buddhism.

Alan Watts, a philosopher recognized for his interpretations on Eastern thought, discusses impermanence in the chapter *Landscapes, Soundscapes, and the Watercourse Way*, from his book “Om: Creative Meditations”.¹ The chapter’s central theme revolves around finding the line of least resistance in life, or the most intuitive and natural direction.² Throughout the chapter, Watts recognizes the past as a crutch society uses to determine the direction for the present and future. Though Watts never uses the term “impermanence” in his article, his perspective on the past/present relationship draw connections to ideas of impermanence frequently found in Buddhism.³ Watts writes in his article:

Everyone automatically assumes that the present is the result of the past. Turn it around, and consider whether the past may not be a result of the present. The past may be streaming back from the now, like the country as seen from an airplane.

¹ Alan Watts, *Om, Creative Meditations*, Millbrae, Calif: Celestial Arts, 1980, back cover of book.

² Watts, *Om, Creative Meditations*, 94-117.

³ Ibid.

If you look at it that way it makes sense. Just as the tail does not wag the dog, the past does not cause the present—unless you insist that it does.

Actually, the whole universe emerges from the present. It is all beginning now. We are present at this moment at the beginning of creation, and the past is simply echos going back through the corridors of our mind.

The past is, in fact, present.⁴

Watts' statement regarding the past as a concept that exists only in our mind, resonated with my work and how I approached each improvised performance of *for decorative purposes only*. His perspective on the relationship between past and present moments prompted me to explore ways this relationship might exist in the continual alteration of sound-producing antiques in the interactive sound sculpture. As newly acquired antiques are incorporated in the sculpture and some of the previous antiques are extracted or altered, the improviser activates new sounds using additional performance techniques on the sculpture unrelated to previous performances. In Chapter 4, I will elaborate on the processes used to create the sculpture, how sounds are determined, and explore their connections linked to impermanence.

Soon after reading “Om: Creative Meditations”, Watts' work led me to the concept of impermanence in Buddhism. As a philosopher of Eastern thought and a Zen Buddhist, Watts' work often paralleled the practice of Buddhism.⁵

⁴ Watts, *Om, Creative Meditations*, 101.

⁵ Watts, *Om, Creative Meditations*, back cover of book.

Impermanence is one of the primary teachings of the Buddha and is crucial to Buddhist's ability to move beyond suffering.⁶ There are five schemes that are addressed regarding detachment of the past: material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and as consciousness.⁷ In the online magazine article, "What are The Four Noble Truths?", author Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi explores how Buddhism is structured around impermanence.⁸ He writes in his article, "The notion of impermanence forms the bedrock for the Buddha's teaching... the mark of impermanence comes to manifestation in our inescapable mortality, our condition of being bound to aging, sickness, and death."⁹ Much of the aesthetic value my family and I have for antiques is driven by an interest in preserving the past and possessing some physical connection to it through an object. Rather than preserve these antique objects for aesthetic purposes, the Buddhist concept of impermanence encouraged me to explore the physical impermanence of the artifacts by activating the sculpture through percussive techniques to that would eventually break them down through repeated use.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* was another source I referenced in my research for his perspective on reality, existence, and being. In the article, "An Outline and Study

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, "The Four Noble Truths and Impermanence in Buddhism," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, <https://tricycle.org/magazine/impermanence-and-four-noble-truths/> [Accessed April 25, 2018].

⁷ Bodhi, "The Four Noble Truths and Impermanence in Buddhism," [Accessed April 25, 2018].

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Guide to Martin Heidegger's Being and Time,” author John Tietz explores Heidegger’s philosophical work and addresses the complexity of Heidegger’s questions.¹⁰ One of the central questions Heidegger proposed and Tietz comments on, “What is it for something to ‘be’?,” prompted me to question the purpose of the antiques I had in my collection and their aesthetic values to me.¹¹ Similar to Watts’ perspective on time, Heidegger’s question made me consider how the present performance of *for decorative purposes only* is free from the confines of previous performances. The composition could be determined by the activation of the sculpture, and never possess the same visual or sound material but still be the same work. Due to the details of his work exceeding the scope of this thesis, I will exclude further discussion of Heidegger’s philosophy in *Being and Time*.

The final influence on *for decorative purposes only* was John Cage’s percussion solo, *Child of Tree*. The musical score for Cage’s composition is a series of almost illegible handwritten instructions teaching the performer how to craft their own performance score by consulting an ancient Chinese manual of divination called the *I Ching*.¹² In the score, Cage instructs performers to build their instrumentation from a combination of found plant objects, chosen by the performer.¹³ The musical material should be improvised but the structure and instrumentation is predetermined by the performer prior to the improvisation.¹⁴ Similar to Cage’s work, the musical material in

¹⁰ John Tietz, *An Outline and Study Guide to Martin Heidegger's Being and Time*, Frankfurt am Main: Humanities online, 11.

¹¹ Tietz, *An Outline and Study Guide to Martin Heidegger's Being and Time*, 11.

¹² John Cage, *Child of Tree: Percussion Solo*, New York: Henmar Press, 1975.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

for decorative purposes only is determined by the continual alteration of sound-producing materials chosen by the improviser and their actions in performance. Both works rely on larger structures that are either predetermined or fairly solidified prior to performance.

After considering the background influences that have affected my thinking on the concept, the next chapter will address how impermanence is manifested in the work.

CHAPTER IV

IMPERMANENCE IN FOR DECORATIVE PURPOSES ONLY

Since there are no performance instructions, scores, or installation instruction for *for decorative purposes only*, the work has no boundaries or limitations as to what antiques are used and how they are activated and employed in each showing of the work. In this chapter, I will evidence the continual alteration and deterioration of the artifacts and their impact on the development of sound and formal structures produced by the improviser in subsequent multiple performances of the work. In addition to these factors, I describe ways the improviser uses pre-recorded materials to further incorporate the concept of impermanence in the structure of the music, while using live electronic components as a means to alter the timbral characteristics of antiques. Lastly, I will reference two external audio recorded performances and one external video recorded performance of the work (Appendix B): The Student Composers Concert Performance Audio, the Collage Performance Audio, and the House Performance Video. Along with these recordings, I will reference the Performance Catalog containing antiques used, performance durations, venue locations, and additional notes for each of the eleven performances (Appendix A).

Alteration

When *for decorative purposes only* was premiered at the University of North Carolina Greensboro Student Composers Concert in March 2017, four types of antique

objects were used: a Taiwanese drum, four small hand bells, two vintage glass soda bottles, and an old pod rattle. Over the course of the next ten performances, alterations were made to the sound sculpture that provide me as the improviser with an extended palette of unique sound characteristics through newly collected antiques. I also developed new methods for activating the antiques using additional performance techniques on objects previously included in the sculpture.

Two types of alteration processes were developed as I began to incorporate newly-acquired objects in the sculpture. The first alteration process categorized groups of antiques by similar sound characteristics and physical properties. I began to search for more handbells so I could develop elaborate harmonies and melodies through a wider range of pitches that extended beyond the four notes from the original performance. Figure 4 provides a photograph of the four handbells used in the premiere; Figure 5 provides a photograph of the 30 handbells collected over the course of eleven months.



Figure 4. Four Handbells from Premiere.



Figure 5. Thirty Handbells After Eleven Months.

The second process was influenced by the intuitive method John Cage's *Child of Tree* employs for collecting found plant objects. In Cage's percussion solo, he instructs the performer to collect found plant objects to improvise with during performance, but provides little guidance for what plant objects should be selected.¹⁵ Specifically, the only required plant objects the percussionist should use is a pod rattle and the infamous amplified cactus.¹⁶ I would intuitively search for antiques with appealing timbral characteristics in antique malls, Goodwill Stores, and yard sales or be gifted antiques by family members and friends, but never restrict the work to include specific objects.

¹⁵ John Cage, *Child of Tree: Percussion Solo*, 1975.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

While some antiques fluctuate in and out of the sculpture, there are a few that have appeared consistently in each showing of the work. I continue to explore new performance techniques to use on these objects so I can create a new palette of sounds without introducing new antiques. For example, the Taiwanese drum and glass bottles have been utilized in every performance, though their musical purpose and the approach to activating the objects have been altered through overblowing to produce overtones and whistling on top of blown notes.

Deterioration

Unlike the alteration processes I frequently use to determine my selection of antiques and techniques for activating objects, the process of physical deterioration has not been a determining factor for how I interact with artifacts until recent performances. Rather than rejecting nonfunctional instruments that have broken down, I embrace the decay of the object and continue to re-purpose it by exploring new performance techniques for activating the object. Over time, the physical properties of both the African djembe and Taiwanese drum have deteriorated through repeated use. Specifically, the drumhead of the djembe deteriorated while rehearsing for the UNCG Auditorium and Duke Energy Center performances. By the second performance, the drumhead had stretched out to the point where it was no longer resonant when struck. Rather than removing it from the sculpture, I explored other timbral characteristics I could achieve with the drum such as scratching the drumhead and knocking the frame with my knuckles. Eventually, I took the djembe out of my sculpture completely because the Taiwanese drum was able to produce the same sounds and I was experiencing

difficulties traveling with the djembe due to its large size. Meanwhile, the condition of the Taiwanese drum has worsened to a condition where the skin has begun to pull further away from tacks nailed into the smooth wooden side of the drum. Though the drum can still produce a resonant tone when the drumhead is struck by hand, the resonance will begin to diminish with repeated use similar to the djembe.

Structure

When antiques rotate in and out of the sculpture for each performance, the structure of the piece is altered as sound characteristics are no longer available. In the Elsewhere Museum Opening in December 2017, I introduced three newly acquired antiques into the sculpture: a brass spittoon, old conducting batons, and a large white ceramic bowl. I also extracted the African djembe from the performance due to its deterioration from the prior two performances. Since the absence of the djembe left me with fewer percussive objects to create rhythmic gestures, I replaced the highly rhythmic section that I used in the previous performances. In its place, I inserted a section structured around sustaining rolls on the ceramic bowl, brass spittoon, and Taiwanese drumhead. All three antiques had dark and hollow tones, that when combined, created a warm and dense texture that characterized the entire section. Figure 6 provides a graph showing the different structures and objects used in the Student Composers Concert Performance Audio, the Collage Performance, and the House Performance. These recordings are included as external links.

Structure and Objects in Three Performances of *for decorative purposes only*

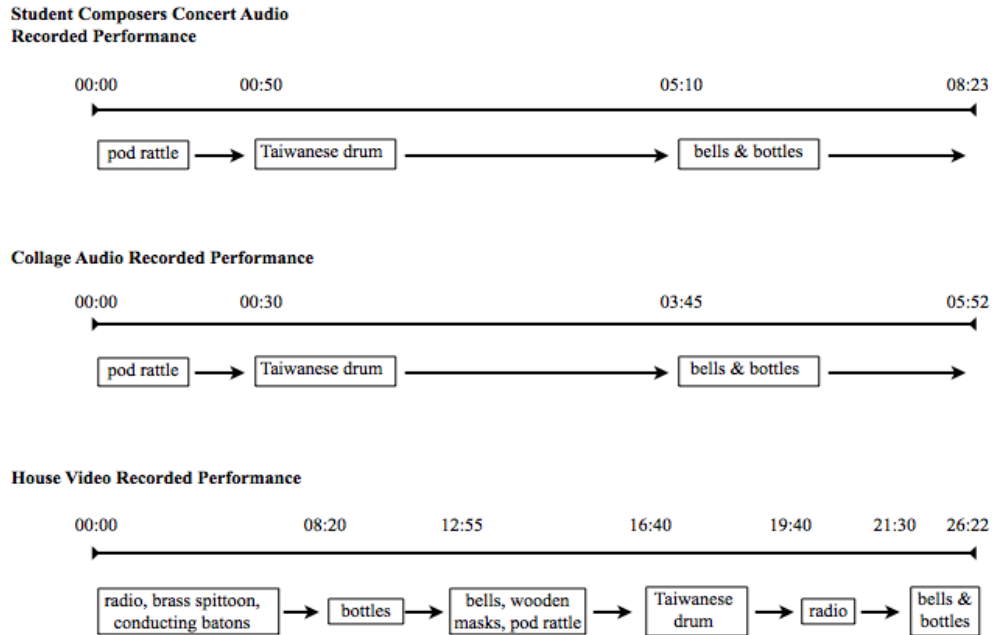


Figure 6. Structure and Objects in Three Performances.

Electronics

The electronic components of *for decorative purposes only* provides me with additional methods for incorporating the concept of impermanence in the structure of the work. While the deterioration of antiques and the alteration of sound-producing materials influence the large-scale sections of the sound sculpture, prerecorded fixed media samples influence the musical content I improvise. I pre-record improvised material ranging from 30 to 120 seconds. In live performance, I trigger these samples to playback with varied amounts of processing such as delay, granular delay, and reverberation. The

musical function of these recorded samples is to provide material to influence my improvised phrases, as well as to provide an accompaniment and introduce three or more layers of material at a time. The musical characteristics of these samples vary but the material is consistently sparse and nondirectional to avoid the pre-recorded material from taking precedence over the live improvised gestures.

To avoid frequent repetition of samples, or the permanence of a sample, I mirror the same alteration and deterioration processes described earlier in the chapter. This is achieved through the processes of erasing previously used samples, adding further layers of sound material on top of previous samples, and altering the live processing and musical characteristics of previous samples. In Figure 7, I provide a table evidencing how these processes were utilized throughout multiple performances.

Changes in Samples Since Student Composers Concert Recording				
Sample Source	Processing Effects	Alterations to Sample	Additions to Sample	Sample Removed/Replaced
Shaking old pod rattle	Lightly processed with “ping-pong” delay effect lasting roughly 6 seconds	Increased signal of “ping-pong” delay effect	Light reverb	Later removed and replaced by radio static from vintage radio
Taiwanese drum: Fingernail scrape on drumhead	Light reverb, sustained scrape	Re-recorded the scrape as a rhythmic ostinato	N/A	Later removed and replaced by live performance of the scrape
Taiwanese drum: long sustained roll	Light reverb	Length of sustain roll varied per performance	Frequency of dynamic swells throughout the sample	N/A

Figure 7. Changes in Samples Since Student Composers Concert Recording.

These pre-recorded samples are a pivotal influence on the material I improvise. Since these samples either develop and/or are erased over time, they heavily impact the impermanence of large-scale structure and smaller structures in *for decorative purposes only*.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

For decorative purposes only conveys impermanence as a concept of aesthetic value through the deterioration of objects, the continual alteration of sound-producing materials, the re-purposing of decorative antiques, and the use of an activated sound sculpture that produces a guided improvisation. My perspective on impermanence was informed by works and practices in philosophy, art, and religion. The ideas and concepts I derived from Watts, Heidegger, Cage, and Buddhism largely influenced my conceptual approach to *for decorative purposes only*. In addition to this research, my personal background and experiences growing up around antiques contributed to the conception and performance approach. Through the processes of deterioration of artifacts and the continual alteration of sound-producing materials, I, as improviser, am able to assemble divergent sound sculptures for each performance. As the improviser, my use of the pre-recorded and live electronic components provides me with an additional technique for developing the concept of impermanence in the structure of the performance. All of the processes and techniques create an approach that values impermanence that is recognizable over the work's performance history. My hope is that the piece will continue to evolve, develop, decay and renew over a long period of time.

Finally, *for decorative purposes only* has prompted me to further explore additional perspectives on impermanence, especially in the disciplines of neuroscience and social practice. In recent projects, I have started to research these unfamiliar ideas in hopes of including them in my future works.

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APPENDIX A

PERFORMANCE CATALOG

Performance Catalog			
Date	Concert	Location	Antiques
March 2017	Student Composers Concert I	UNCG Recital Hall, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 4 small hand bells - 2 vintage soda bottles - Pod rattle
May 2017	Composers Concert Series: Lowell Fuchs & Michael Standard	Eyedrum Music & Art Gallery, Atlanta, GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 8 small hand bells - 3 vintage soda bottles
September 2017	Collage Concert	UNCG Auditorium, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - Broken African djembe - 12 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - Metronome - 2 wooden masks
September 2017	Collage Concert	Duke Energy Center, Raleigh, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - Broken African djembe - 12 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - Metronome

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 wooden masks
October 2017	Research Methods in Social Practice Workshop & Performance	UNCG Art Building, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - Broken African djembe - 12 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - Metronome - 2 wooden masks
December 2017	Elsewhere Exhibition Opening: December	Elsewhere Living Museum, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 12 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - Metronome - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons - Ceramic bowl

January 2018	Video Performance	Atlanta, GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 16 small hand bells - 3 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons
January 2018	Works by Anna Wallace & Lowell Fuchs	Greensboro Project Space, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 16 small hand bells - 3 soda bottles - Vintage radio - Hanging bells - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons - Wooden soda crate
March 2018	BEAMS Marathon Festival	Brandeis University, Boston, MA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 16 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons - String bells

April 2018	Composers Exchange Series	University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 16 small hand bells - 2 soda bottles - Vintage radio - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons - String bells
April 2018	Graduate Recital	Greensboro Project Space, Greensboro, NC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taiwanese drum - 16 small hand bells - 4 soda bottles - Vintage radio - 2 wooden masks - Brass spittoon - Conducting batons - Metronome - Chalkware monkey coin bank - Wooden soda crate - Sleigh bells - Four hanging bells - String bells - Clay frog coin bank

APPENDIX B

PERFORMANCE RECORDINGS

Student Composers Concert Performance Audio Recording

Date: 03/03/2017

Location: University of North Carolina Greensboro Recital Hall

Recording Duration: 08:32

See external links associated with the online version of this text

Collage Performance Audio Recording

Date: 09/09/2017

Location: University of North Carolina Greensboro

Recording Duration: 05:52

See external links associated with the online version of this text

House Performance Video Recording

Date: 01/10/2018

Location: Private House

Recording Duration: 26:22

See external links associated with the online version of this text