Pamela Z
Other Rooms

Saturday, March 20, 2021 at 8:00 p.m. ET
Virtual Concert, Live from San Francisco, CA

Photo credit: Donald Swearingen
Funding for this concert is provided by the Edward T. Cone Endowment and a grant from the PNC Foundation.
ABOUT THE MUSIC

David Lang writes: It has been exactly one year, almost to the day, since the world shut down. The big world, the real world, the world we all live in. And of course, when the real world shut down the music world shut down with it. All those concerts canceled, all those musicians suddenly unemployed and unemployable.

We have all had to make the best of it. At the Institute that has meant that we have had an entire year of our live musical culture, all moved online. As I wrote for our first concert of the pandemic, COVID has made us all virtuosos, negotiating how to deal with lost lives and lost work and lost connection to each other.

We are not out of the woods yet – this concert tonight is still online!

But things seem to be moving towards a brighter future. We have a vaccine, the casualty numbers of the disease are trending downward, we have some optimism that things are going to change for the better, soon. And all across the musical landscape people are making plans for what live music will feel like when we reopen.

The question behind all the thoughts about reopening ends up being a philosophical one: how changed will we be by what we have just gone through? The music we make, how we make it and how we share it are reflections of our connection to each other and to the public space. How will our COVID experience change the music we listen to, or how we listen to it?

There may be a desire to imagine a future that forgets that we were ever here, that we will want to snap back to our previous musical lives, rushing back into concerts and operas, crammed close together, all breathing on each other. The music that might be written for that future would be brash, and optimistic, and loud, and confident.

Or we might imagine a more cautious return – limiting seating, still wearing masks in public concerts, avoiding crowds and crowded concert halls, still spacing ourselves out from each other, still remembering our fear of contagion. The music that might be written
ABOUT THE MUSIC

for that kind of future could remember our fear, it could be quieter, more anxious, more introspective, more interested in making us pay attention to ourselves, and our own inner lives.

In truth, it is hard to predict how we will feel when COVID ends, until COVID ends.

At this moment, music is in a kind of equilibrium, between our desire to experience the joyousness of live performance and the limits of the technological mediation necessary in order to experience it. Luckily for us, there are musicians like tonight’s artist whose work lives in the world where live performance and technology meet.

Pamela Z is a San Francisco – based composer, performer, installation artist, instrument builder and technologist. Her work represents a true hybrid of the human and the technological – she builds objects with electromagnetic sensors in them that can respond to her movements, triggering samples and electronic sounds. And then she sings. Beautifully.

What Pamela Z has created is a kind of theater of movement and response. It is possible to imagine her electronic gear as a kind of stage set. She is surrounded by machines, at first all silent but programmed and ready to react. The movement through space of Pamela herself is the trigger that animates the machines - the sounds spring to life, as her gestures and choreography interrupt their magnetic fields.

What makes the interface between the human and the synthetic so powerful is that they need each other for us to hear them – Pamela needs the electronic sounds to accompany her song, while the machines need live performance to make their sounds manifest. Without the person, the machines are silent. And with the person, there is music.
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pamela Z is a composer/performer and media artist working with voice, live electronic processing, sampled sound, and video. A pioneer of live digital looping techniques, she processes her voice in real time to create dense, complex sonic layers. Her solo works combine experimental extended vocal techniques, operatic bel canto, found objects, text, and sampled concrète sounds. She uses MAX MSP and Isadora software on a MacBook Pro along with custom MIDI controllers that allow her to manipulate sound and image with physical gestures. Her performances range in scale from small concerts in galleries to large-scale multi-media works in theaters and concert halls. In addition to her performances, she has a growing body of installation works using multi-channel sound and video.

Pamela Z has toured extensively throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan – performing in international festivals and venues including Bang on a Can at Lincoln Center (NY); La Biennale di Venezia; San Francisco Symphony’s SoundBox, the Japan Interlink Festival; Other Minds (San Francisco); and Pina Bausch Tanztheater’s Festival (Wuppertal, Germany). She has received commissions to compose live and fixed-media scores for choreographers and film/video artists. Her large-scale, performance works, including Memory Trace, Baggage Allowance, Voci, and Gaijin, have been presented at venues like the Kitchen in New York, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Theater Artaud (Z Space) in San Francisco, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, as well as at theaters in Washington D.C. and Budapest. Her one-act opera Wunderkabinet inspired by the Museum of Jurassic Technology (co-composed with Matthew Brubeck) premiered at The LAB in San Francisco, and was presented at REDCAT in LA and Open Ears Festival in Canada. She has shown work in exhibitions at the Whitney Museum (New York); Savvy Contemporary (Berlin); the Tang Museum (Saratoga Springs NY); the Dakar Biennale (Sénégal); Krannert Art Museum (IL), and the Kitchen (NY).
Ms. Z has received commissions from chamber ensembles including Kronos Quartet, Eighth Blackbird, Bang On A Can All Stars; Ethel, Del Sol Quartet, California E.A.R. Unit; Left Coast Chamber Ensemble; and Empyrean Ensemble. She is currently composing a work for soprano Julia Bullock and the San Francisco Symphony. She has collaborated with a wide range of artists including Joan La Barbara, Joan Jeanrenaud, Brenda Way (ODC Dance), Miya Masaoka, Jeanne Finley + John Muse, Shinichi Iova Koga (Inkboat), and Luciano Chessa. She has participated in New Music Theatre’s John Cage festivals, and has performed with The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Her interactive web-based work Baggage Allowance can be viewed at baggageallowance.tv where it is permanently installed.

Pamela Z is the recipient of many honors and awards including the Rome Prize, the United States Artists fellowship, the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Doris Duke Artist Impact Award, a Robert Rauschenberg Foundation residency, the Herb Alpert Award in the Arts; the Creative Capital Fund; the MAP Fund, the ASCAP Music Award; an Ars Electronica honorable mention; and the NEA Japan/US Friendship Commission Fellowship. She holds a music degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder.
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ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE PROGRAM

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