

PROGRAM NOTES

Exquisite Drones is a work for cello & electronics composed after an “exquisite corpse,” a collaborative game played by surrealist artists to create bizarre & intuitive drawings while not knowing the other participants' contributions.

Wick turns the group-work of the game into compositions written separately in isolation by three composers of idiosyncratic practices expressing their personal relationships to sustained tones. Their isolation results in a disjointed juxtaposition, leaving Wick the task of connecting them with his cello in spaces of humming, growling, Morse code, cacophony, and words that cease to mean anything.

This work is about “not knowing,” as the irregular vibrations of a relentless hum create unpredictability in a long-held tone. Within the vibrating stillness of these drones exists a whole world of possibility, where melody and rhythm may separate and unite in a generative way.

The work brings together three pieces written by:

Drone I ('Coil'): inti figgis-vizueta

Time has felt both unmoving, yet fleeting this past year - having a clock ticking down next to every back-to-back Zoom call brings something of an involuntary awareness. It's most certainly affected my writing, with reduced rehearsals and less opportunities to interface requiring more certainty and less flexibility in my work.

Coil works to disrupt that for me. The piece is an extensive process of listening, recording, and layering through the ears of cellist Wick Simmons. Responding to an old audio fragment, time stretched from a rhythmic, harmonic phrase to a droning, slowly unfolding space, Wick brings forth rich spectrums of resonance, intonation, and gesture. Voices from the other rooms, open tunings, silo'd pacings, and fragments of the recording process are retained and meld into this work, seeking breath and space for a live navigation of its many, yet unbreaking, moments.

Drone II: Conrad Tao

When Wick approached me about taking part in an exquisite corpse-style piece with "drones" as a jumping-off point, I was eager to dive into the not-knowing. In our conversations, Wick described my section as the "torso" of the overall piece. And so I've tried to write music that sits in the gut, beginning with a sweaty industrial hum, which then hollows itself out, filling with both cello gestures and human speech, before dissolving into a cloud of morse code, harmonies prismatically shifting.

Drone III: Jack McGuire

I like to collage samples into choppy melodies and loops, and in this piece I wanted to only use sounds made by Wick as the musical material. Short loops repeating become long rhythmic drones, and the live cello part weaves its way between the collage, making it difficult to discern the live and sampled elements.

