

# Flannau Duo: New Works for Piano and Percussion

By Kyle Flens and Jonathan Hannau

**F**lannau Duo — Jonathan Hannau, piano, and Kyle Flens, percussion — are very excited to present at a PASIC virtual concert a diverse repertory of music by some of their favorite living composers. Each composer has taken a unique approach to the piano and percussion instrumentation, and has allowed the group to explore new ways of presenting concerts to their audiences. All of the performances were filmed live at previous Flannau Duo concerts.

Han Lash's "C" is a piece about the expansion of material in a motor-like, additive process. Its anchor and beginning are the C-octaves, which spin out of the rest of the material in relentless perpetual motion. This piece is a core part of Flannau Duo's repertoire, often used as an opener for concerts to break the ice. It's fast, fun, and requires tight-knit, even playing together for the duration of the piece with little to no room for breaks.

Igor Santos is the first composer Flannau Duo commissioned. The starting point for "Carve" is the act of engraving and chiseling into various materials. Any surface featuring grooves, slits, or indentations is used on both piano and percussion to represent — in sound — this idea of carving. The object being sculpted remains ambiguous; however, the narrative focuses more on carving as a means of self-discovery, hinting at nostalgic harmonies within a textured, granular soundscape. Practically speaking, minimally prepared piano and a great selection of percussive instruments make this a fun and easy-to-prepare piece. The music consists of variations in loops of groovy motives, the rhythms interlocking between the players, a staple in Igor's compositional style.

"Teach Yourself to Fly From This Pale Blue Dot" by Boston-based composer Evan Williams was originally written for Brianna Matzke and Chris Graham for the Response Project. What came of this collaboration was a beautiful work for electronics, piano, and percussion. The piece is inspired by the con-

cept of the Golden Record, sent to deep space contained in both Voyager I and Voyager II. The piece imagines the journey of these probes through interstellar space. As they travel alone far beyond our planet, will their components degrade? Will they encounter dangerous spatial phenomena? Will they encounter



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intelligent life? Or will they simply drift away never to be seen or heard from again? The music contains gestures played out of time in response to randomized electronic cues (recordings from the Golden Record). From there the piece opens up to driving ostinatos and beautiful, lush harmonies. Big tremolos and intense moments flow in and out while the electronics swirl a menagerie of interesting audio clips and space-like sounds.

Starting with an excerpt from the stream-of-consciousness of Stephen Dedalus (James Joyce's literary alter ego), "A very short space of time through very short times of space" by Hannah A. Barnes develops and reflects musical materials in different sonic spaces that accumulate, rupture, and otherwise transform. Hannah is interested in volatile and fragile materials that seem contradictory. Instead of seeking resolution, they strive for alchemical transcendence. James Joyce's poetic prose in *Ulysses* embraces the inherent volatility of life and moves rapidly, catching glimpses of everything possible between life's extremes. Materials in the piece are, like Stephen Dedalus' thoughts, mutable and constantly decontextualized, fragmented, and recombined. The piece was composed for Flannau Duo in early 2024 and came to life through collaborative exploration. Hannah hopes that performers and listeners each find something surprising in this maximalist powerhouse of a piece.

Ania Vu's "2+" focuses just on two notes: F and F-sharp. From this jumping point she imaginatively takes us through a multitude of different characters and textures, creating a spontaneous and high-energy piece with complicated rhythms and virtuosic playing. Originally written for the McCormick Duo, Flannau Duo often performs it due to its dramatic shifting moods. It's a great piece to get audiences engaged with a piece of contemporary music that focuses on one of the most dissonant intervals in Western tradition, the minor second.

Carola Bauckholt is a German composer whose works are absurd, charming, and expertly written. Unique sounds and unconventional ways of playing instruments permeate almost all her compositions. Flannau combined her two pieces "When they go low we go high" and "Geräusche" to make for a fun exploration of sound and performance practice. "When they..." is an exploration of the piano where the performers play credit cards on the tuning pins of the piano, resulting in a "frog" like sound, which eventually evolves into the use of wine corks and vocal noises. "Geräusche" was written in memoriam to John Cage where the duo plays a selection of found objects, creating for a plaintive, very "Cageian" exploration of sound and form. Both duos are examples of Jon and Kyle playing on the same instrument. "When they..." is effectively a piano duo, and "Geräusche" a percussion duo.

Alex Temple's "Sugarhocket" was originally commissioned by Jonathan's toy-piano duo "Plucky Pluckers," then brought back to life by the Flannau duo. Written for two amplified toy pianos and a reverb pedal, its charming and quirky rhythmic hockets eventually give way to the cutest bossa nova ever written. Its

engaging and challenging rhythmic features make for a good performance piece and guarantee some good chuckles from the audience along the way. This also acts as a piano duo.

We hope listeners enjoy this snapshot of what Flannau Duo does best: performing refined and artful music in a lighthearted way. Contemporary music concerts tend to be too serious/formal in our opinion, so we treat our concerts like an informal get-together with friends!

**The Flannau Duo** is a dynamic, new-music loving, tour-de-force ensemble combining piano, percussion, electronics, improvisation, and absurdism. Flannau Duo is made up of pianist Jonathan Hannau and percussionist Kyle Flens. The duo takes pride in eclectic programming, not adhering to any specific musical aesthetic. Flannau Duo performs in the Chicago area and beyond, exploring a multitude of sounds, styles, and moods from composers and artists from every musical corner. The duo is fiscally sponsored by Fractured Atlas. Flannau Duo was funded in 2023 by a DCASE Artist Grant. For more information visit [www.flannauduo.com](http://www.flannauduo.com) or follow the Instagram page at [@flannau\\_duo](https://www.instagram.com/flannau_duo). PN

## KEYBOARD

### Composite Duo

Keyboard Clinic / Performance

#### "Opposing Notes"

This clinic/performance will feature the world premiere of "Opposing Notes" by Parker Fritz, a new work for alto saxophone and six-mallet marimba commissioned by Composite Duo. The session will focus on the technical possibilities of advanced six-mallet marimba technique and ways to collaborate with composers to create more musical possibilities. "Opposing Notes" represents a bold collaboration between two instruments from distinct sonic worlds, utilizing the complexity of advanced six-mallet technique to expand the marimba's expressive range while interacting with the lyrical and dynamic capabilities of the saxophone.

Composite Duo, founded by percussionist Mei Shyuan Chiou and saxophonist Parker Fritz, is a collaboration focused on innovative projects that combine saxophone and six-mallet marimba music. Mei Shyuan and Parker have commissioned new music for their ensemble as well as solo music for six-mallet marimba. Through their performances and educational outreach, Composite Duo continues to push the boundaries of percussion and chamber music, offering fresh perspectives on contemporary musical expression.