

# Fields of Vision, Limits of the World: Contemplating New Contexts in Contemporary Music

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## Abstract

*This paper addresses social stigma towards disabilities through the medium of contemporary music. It opens with the author's observations about the existing public view of people with disabilities or special needs. A premise develops for why this view exists, why it should change, and how new music may encourage dialogue about progressive ideas for such change. The author envisages a concert event that applies the notion of encouraging contemporary thought through modern music, and designs the event to revitalize public perception of disabilities. The paper speculates on the potential usefulness of certain contemporary works, shifting from a performer's interpretive process to audience reaction. Together, these works presented here posit limits not as limits, but as segues into a deeper understanding of the human condition.*

*Each piece contains unique considerations about human limitation. Magnus' "vs. computer" requires an aural adaptation of computer gaming; Lucier's "Vespers" and Pizaro's "ricefall" pay homage to navigational and aural beauty that are manifest by blindness; Hosokawa's "Sen VI" touches on the psychological power of physical gesture and its tie to vision; and Lucier's "Duke of York" points to the rediscovery and recovery of memories. These pieces help reshape the perceptions of disabilities, turning limitations into enabling possibilities.*

## 1 Introduction

"I seem to be a phenomenologist in some ways; I would rather discover new sound situations than invent new ways to put materials together. Whenever I think of changing direction, of making something more popular or attractive to a larger audience, I lose interest very quickly, so I follow my instincts and continue making pieces with brain waves, echoes, room resonances, vibrating wires, and other natural phenomena, and try to put people into harmonious relationships with them."

(Alvin Lucier, 1977, p. 194)

As with natural phenomena in an artistic medium, art in different contexts has the potential to challenge and connect human beings. This paper applies such philosophy to an imagined concert event. The current perspective on disabilities is one in need of imminent change; here, I offer a contemporary music concert as a cultural catalyst for such change. I propose that new music can have a strong cultural impact on listeners by invitation of contemporary thought, and that new music could carry an unexpected civic duty.

## 2 On Handicaps and Limitations

When I was 9 and my sister was 3, I began to understand what it meant to be the sibling of a developmentally disabled child. My family, just like many others, went into early denial about my sister's permanent disabilities. Families with special members often choose to hide or keep quiet about their child, hoping to protect against those who might not understand. Conversely, society's exposure to the needs and lives of these people remains minimal.

With the passing of the American Disabilities Act, heightened awareness has led to further development in special programs and assistive technology. Market and government forces are paying more attention to disabled communities, building new infrastructure to accommodate these groups. In the meantime, disabled individuals and their supporters continue to fight to establish ways for them to live more independently. Why is it that these everyday people still struggle in the shadows? Technology is starting to incorporate people with special needs, but are we?

### 2.1 Away with words

Handicapped. Disabled. Retarded. We use these words to describe someone who is impaired or incapable of performing activities in everyday life. Differently-abled. Special needs. These are our euphemisms for the distinction between 'them' and 'us'. We could choose any words to express the difference, but beneath our distinction lies a deeply seeded reaction that bears sympathy and a sense of relief that *we* did not end up like *them*.

At present, our social and political infrastructure seems to reinforce the linguistic phenomenon. Our public

institutions' answers to handicapped needs include the likes of ramps, wheelchair lifts, handlebars—all practical and available technology with little, if any, attention to aesthetic detail. Corporations contribute to research in assistive technology when it is lucrative, necessary, or required by law. As a result, disabled individuals are forced to go well out of their way to acquire basic services and items they need to sustain their own lives, or risk falling behind.

From a legal standpoint, the category of 'disabled' entitles these citizens to obtain certain assistance or financial benefits. Contrastingly, this label does little to embrace the disabled as part of our average American society. The disabled face implicit discrimination in social and physical structures considered inherent in everyday life. Present society expects them to have special needs because current infrastructure does not provide them with integrated alternatives. In essence, society, government, and markets are further limiting what these people have access to.

## 2.2 Event types and the audience divide

Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world.

*Arthur Schopenhauer,*  
"Psychological Observations," Studies in Pessimism (1851)

To gather support, organizations focus on special-made events for specific kinds of participants. The disabled have enrichment programs such as the Special Olympics, promotion through VSA Arts, summer camp foundations, and community partnerships. Normally-abled people also volunteer or offer financial support through somewhat more removed activities such as auctions, galas, and gourmet food-tasting [Appendix 7.1]. Both event types earn much needed support for disabled communities; however, neither promotes holistic social integration, a concept seemingly vital to ensure a place for the disabled in society.

It is natural for individuals to participate based on their interest or capacity. Perhaps a modified goal of disability event planners should be to promote inclusion, mutual awareness and understanding in order to dispel social division. Events may be designed so that people of varying abilities still have unique, meaningful experiences together. Such creative situations where people share and learn from one another can help to rebuild the community.

## 3 An Interpretive Context

In my experiences, specific pieces of contemporary music have sparked me to think differently about the world. For performers, these pieces present challenges that go beyond traditional practice and technique. For listeners and observers, these pieces also invite one to shed expectations of what can and cannot be described as music. Relevant pieces are listed below and described in further detail in Appendix 6. A discourse on the learning obstacles

performers might encounter is found here in Section 3. The paper then presents an extensive discussion on possible audience reactions to the pieces within the context of the event (Section 4).

“**vs. computer**” (2006) by Cristyn Magnus

“**Duke of York**” (1971) by Alvin Lucier

“**Vespers**” (1968) by Alvin Lucier

“**ricefall**” (2004) by Michael Pisaro

“**Sen VI**” (1993) by Toshio Hosokawa

### 3.1 New methods, new vocabularies: finding harmony in a game-piece and translating shared memories into acoustic beating

Performers communicate using a musical vocabulary specific to each piece. Examples of existing vocabularies can be found in American jazz, which follows rules about scales and chord progressions; and in Western classical music, drawing on a rich history of performance practice. Musical vocabularies of the twentieth-century avant-garde become even more complex, governed by the intrinsic symbols of a graphically notated score (as with Stockhausen, Feldman, or Xenakis) to a composer's personal philosophies (as with John Cage).

In two of our pieces, a player is asked to expand his skills beyond the common musical vocabulary. “vs. computer” demands a mastery of coordination between aural, visual, and computational cues, while the “Duke” implicates the creation of an innovative or alternative rehearsal method.

In “vs. computer,” the percussionist has three jobs: (1) to play a video game that makes musical decisions reliant on ear-hand-eye coordination, (2) to interpret a freshly generated score during each play, and (3) to perform the score such that the computer can recognize the performer's phrasing. A performer's most basic task is to control the movement of a game piece according to four *interpretive guidelines*. Each guideline consists of a binary pairing criterion describing the speed and the dynamics of an attack relative to the previous move:

1. to move the square up: play fast and loud
2. to move the square down: play fast and soft
3. to move the square right: play slow and loud
4. to move the square left: play slow and soft

The performer then shapes his interpretation using instrument selection (choose up to 22), relative phrasing, and variety of attack.

Instrument choice builds the foundation for what Magnus calls the “underlying grammar and a developmental algorithm.” (Magnus 2) To create the underlying grammar, the instruments must be selected and arranged in a progression, where instruments are clustered together based on similar sonic qualities. The number of chosen instruments is a parameter used by the developmental algorithm to generate a score, forming the overall structure

for the piece and the game. The score itself is graphical, with note heads appearing as a series of differently-sized circles dispersed above, on, or below any one of a stack of three lines (the stave). Larger note heads represent louder volumes, while smaller ones indicate quieter attacks. Distances between notes are relative; there are no fixed tempos, dynamic, or phrasings.

The key to a successful game play, i.e. to be winning, comes from one's ability to communicate a move to the computer. By extension, this means being able to control the sound of the instruments. The performer makes choices based on the direction the game-piece should move by blocking off phrases and applying the appropriate interpretive guideline. The implementation of a phrase that is in fact, sufficient, constitutes the performer's most difficult task: conveying a change of state to the computer. For example, a player might try to use a *ritardando* to change from a *fast-soft* to *slow-soft* in the middle of a densely notated passage. The computer will not recognize this change in state. Instead the computer looks for a computable shift in the density of notes over time—in other words, shifting from many notes in a certain length of time to very few notes in the same amount of time. On interpretation, Magnus indicates, "To play slowly, you must play slowly enough that the densest passage is perceived as slow; to play quickly, you must play fast enough for the sparsest passage to be perceived as fast." (Magnus 2) A player must learn to make an explicit move or risk being misinterpreted by the computer.

A performer who is proficient in executing the guidelines can abandon the score altogether and follow non-notated cues for game play. Similar to the traditional Pac-Man videogame format, the visual interface contains a window showing the 2-d location of the performer's game piece (a colored square) in relation to a game piece the performer can capture (a black square). Using just the window and interpretive guidelines, the performer plays the instruments in order to 'speak' to the computer and control the direction his piece moves. If quadrophonic spatialization is available, the performer can bypass visual aids and just *listen* in order to determine his location relative to the black squares. Because there are no written descriptions of what to listen for, the performer must learn the spoken vocabulary of the computer. Through practice, the ideal performer will be able to understand what his next move should be based on the computer's response to his location.

In "Duke of York," the challenge is less about rehearsing than it is about rehearsal. Lucier's fascination with acoustic beating and near-unisons is evidenced in his many pieces for solo instrument and pure wave oscillator, including "In Memoriam Stuart Marshall" (1993), "In Memoriam John Higgins" (1984), and "Charles Curtis" (2002). Contiguous with this area of Lucier-an aesthetics, "The Duke of York" seems to refract the concept of acoustic beating into the realm of human memory. The piece asks a vocalist and a synthesist to share in the process of recalling

a single memory. The vocalist recreates a selected text as closely as possible to the way he or she remembers it, while the synthesist emulates it to further perfection. The result of their efforts is an approximated memory—not an exact replica, but its closest possible reproduction by humans.

Achieving an approximated memory in performance is not as straightforward as it would seem. To be able to perform an exact replica seems quite feasible through practice and rehearsals. To preserve the state of near approximation—in other words, a *beating memory*, a different rehearsal approach might be necessary. A duo needs to consider how to rehearse in order to preserve the most authentic meeting of memories between the vocalist and the synthesist. Performers who ignore this point and perfect their rendition risk creating a completely different performance altogether, with the "Duke" becoming no more than the means for someone to create their own piece. A better interpretation would be sensitive to the language of Lucier, conveying the undulating moments where memories begin to meet.

### 3.2 Being blind: navigation and communities

For many including myself, the notion of losing one's eyesight provokes an unthinkable sense of vulnerability, longing, and hopelessness. In spite of these thoughts, it has been said that the loss of one sense strengthens the intensity of another. Both Lucier's "Vespers" and Pizarro's "rainfall" are inspired by experiences that exist because of blindness. Each piece invites a large cluster of performers and listeners into the acoustic life of someone or somebody blind.

For a blind person, independent living is contingent on one's ability to navigate through streets, at the supermarket, in the library, and even on the Internet. Not unlike their seeing counterparts, blind people can know their location by taking cues from the sonic environment. One might hear the rumble of a nearby train station, the toll of a church bell, birdcalls at a crosswalk, or a voice reflecting down a tunnel. Sensations and reverberations unique to each location can help guide a person from one destination to the next.

"Vespers" pays homage to those who use a method of aural navigation called *echolocation*, where one locates objects based on returning echoes. Echolocation, however, is not to be confused with the navigational techniques of blind people. Instead, it highlights the exploration of an unknown environment using an unfamiliar means. The participants of this piece are restricted from their ability to see or touch (they wear blindfolds or sunglasses in a darkened room). Players make simple clicks with their mouths or special "clickers." These clicks bounce off obstacles, other participants, and walls, helping players to navigate their paths within the room.

One man's delight in the beauty of sounds on surfaces is manifest in a quote from John M. Hull's *Touching the Rock*: "Rain has a way of bringing out the contours of everything; it throws a colored blanket over previously invisible things;

instead of an intermittent and thus fragmented world, the steadily falling rain creates continuity of acoustical experience.” Hull writes about changes in his perception as he gradually became blind. His story inspires Michael Pisaro’s “ricefall,” a piece that has players pouring rice on various surfaces in order to activate diverse sounds. As rice falls on a panel of metal, stone, wood, plastic, leaves, and rice, listeners hear the natural resonances of each type of material, experiencing the character of a texture without ever having to see or touch it.

### 3.3 Gesture, physical control, and the hearing impaired

The opening pages of “Sen VI” incorporate large, graceful arm gestures based on the preparatory strokes in Japanese calligraphy. Hosokawa’s score uses tied, empty measures to indicate circular movements that are sometimes followed by a strong attack (e.g. *sfffz*), and sometimes followed by no attack (e.g. silence and another preparatory motion). The performer decides how to execute these gestures; as a performer, I will describe two methods I have worked with.

There is a relationship between gesture and physical impact that traces either a *disjointed attack*, where the gesture ends before the attack is initiated; or an *exaggerated attack*, where an unnecessarily large gesture is connected to and immediately precedes an attack. In the disjointed attack, the performer must incisively thwart the kinetic energy that would otherwise impact and sound the drum, severing the preparatory motion from the impact that follows. In the disproportionate version, he must bind an unnecessary amount of movement into a particularly strong and loud attack.

The law of conservation of energy in modern physics tells us that the full potential energy of an object about to be dropped will be equal to the full kinetic energy as the object makes its final impact on the ground. In percussion performance, a performer executes an attack using the gesture he finds necessary to execute the sound. “Sen VI” pulls at the heart of this notion by asking us to control not only a sound and its precision, but also the mechanical direction of our motion leading up to that sound. For many, the achievement of an *sfffz* translates into a deliberate, instantaneous explosion of sound, the result of potential energy released from an unwinding movement in body. An *sfffz* in “Sen VI” contrastingly comes after a protracted, controlled movement of preparation. A performer must learn to spread his motion of execution, yielding the deftness of momentum to a movement form with a slower and more precise acceleration.

The implications of performed gestural choices in “Sen VI” may affect certain listeners in different ways. In a recent personal interview, a linguistics student in the field of American Sign Language revealed that deaf individuals are visually tied to sound. She explained that an individual with

a strong visio-auditory connection associates the loudness of sound with the size of its accompanying gesture. In addition, varying levels of hearing impaired-ness and different dependencies on ears mean that one deaf person could perceive sound very differently from the next. If a deaf person were to watch a performance of “Sen VI,” would a preparatory motion that preserves momentum but lacks a resultant attack actually *sound* for that person? Furthermore, would the inspirational content of the piece be lost based on a deaf person’s ability to “see” a sound that is not actually there? Perhaps this person would have a more normal-hearing experience if he were closer to the setup where vibrations from the drums are more easily felt. Here we have a cognitive twist: normal-hearing listeners perceptually limited by what they can in fact hear.

A point worth noting is that deafness does not mean that one cannot hear, only that there is something wrong with one’s ears. The real question is whether or not a person with limited hearing can fully understand the pathos of a piece such as “Sen VI”. By extension, a blind person would almost certainly lose Hosokawa’s choreography and attention to the “nothingness before the stroke” [Appendix 7.2] without supplementary assistance of some kind. Then again, one cannot rule out the possibility that someone with perfect vision and hearing misunderstands the piece entirely. The connection someone has with art differs from person to person, regardless of his abilities—or lack thereof. “Sen VI” does not deserve criticism for its latent “inaccessibility” to everyone. Rather, it deserves attention for pointing to a strong tie between image, movement, and cause and effect. Can gesture actually speak louder than sound?

### 3.4 Rediscovering one another: memory recovery and the “Duke”

Memory loss resulting from Alzheimer’s or dementia is common in the United States. An estimated 4.5 million Americans with Alzheimer’s disease suffer from profound memory loss, or *amnesia* [Appendix 7.3]. As of present day medicine (through 2006), there is no cure or known cause for Alzheimer’s. A common suggestion given to a victim’s loved ones is to share old memories with them by using objects of historical personal significance, e.g. photographs, songs, old belongings. Built on shared memories, personal ties, and imagined identities, the “Duke of York” is a natural tribute to those who have lost or are losing their memory and sense of identity, and to those fighting to recover and preserve these victims’ quality of life.

The provocative qualities of music prove both mystifying and unmistakable in Douglas Simon’s interview with Lucier. In it, Lucier shares two stories about people who had lost their memory and were able to find it again through music. One story is about a woman with amnesia. Those who took care of her played her every song they could think based on who they thought she was. In time, these songs helped her regain her memories, and she

eventually recovered. (Lucier 124,126) The other story tells of a man completely paralyzed and non-responsive to everything. On some nights as he was watching TV and listening to the radio, he would suddenly start singing along with what was playing, immediately returning to his paralyzed state once the song finished. This occurred every once in a while and was otherwise all he could ever do.

“The Duke” prompts us for various modes of interpretation. On a philosophical level, the piece suggests that the evocation of memory can build and fortify relationships. On a level of performance, “The Duke” provides a frame for performers to map memories that conjoin idealized moments in time. With practice and a highly adept synthesizer, it seems likely to achieve a near-exact replica of any given memorial artifact. However, our previous discussion about “beating memory” suggests that an exact replica is potentially undesirable.

The non-universal effect of an individual observing this process might be that a re-created memory provokes or heightens the emotional state of a listener. Perhaps a re-created memory also sparks an individual’s latent memories. It could be that many listeners play a guessing game of “*Name that Memory!*” Perhaps all or none of these responses occur, and yet, the effect of the piece is not that something profound happens to audience members, but that the audience realizes the potency of the invocation of memories. Lucier’s stories described how triggering the musical memories of two memory loss victims allowed them to regain some semblance of themselves, even if only for a brief moment. Could it be that the retrieval of memory proves as significantly valuable as the memory itself?

## 4 Event Experiences

This section complements the previous dialogue on context and interpretation. Here, we create an event designed to broaden the understanding and appreciation of disabled persons. By placing the five pieces into a context of human limitation, adjustment, and transcendence, the event strives to realign public viewpoint and alleviate social stigma towards individuals that are handicapped, disabled, or have otherwise special needs. Any threads about social or cultural connections that arise during the event will be further linked to understanding an ever-increasing specific knowledge of music. If this event takes place, any new knowledge about social and cultural connections or perceptions of limitations will serve as a first contribution towards the theorization of an artistically based cultural sociology.

### 4.1 Order of Events

From my experience, individuals learn best about themselves and their community when they are together in open community forums. In addition to concerts and exhibits, this event will encourage community dialogue with

supplementary forums for discussing emergent ideas about disabled communities and art. To accommodate typical working schedules, the event would be held on a weekend, lasting midday through early evening. A rough itinerary includes:

- i. Concert I: “Vespers,” demonstration and performance, 45 min.
- ii. Break with food, installations and other media, 1 hr.
- iii. Concert II: 60 min.
  - “vs. computer” (solo);
  - “Duke of York”;
  - “vs. computer” (duo version);
  - “Sen VI”;performance talkback
- iv. Break: 15 min.
- v. Concert III: “ricefall,” 20 min.
- vi. Closing remarks

### 4.2 Concert I: “Vespers”

Lucier’s “Vespers” is a piece about aural exploration. It should be played in a space well suited to long reverberation times and easy placement of obstacles. Concert I opens with a 10-15 minute demonstration describing how the piece works and how to navigate using echolocation devices, e.g. clickers or SonDols [Appendix 7.4]. The actual performance (which I propose to be at least 30 minutes long) should have enough rehearsed players to make the performance and space relatively interesting. This piece stands alone in concert in order to redirect expectations about the length of the piece and the mental conditioning that this type of piece requires [Appendix 7.5].

Questions about the performance space, the number of participants, and the effectiveness of the experience are related to each other. The performance should take place in a highly resonant environment with capacity to host a large number of participants (at least 20). The space should allow non-performing participants to experience the navigational event. For practicality and ease of finding a location, a gymnasium with balconies is sufficient; performers perform on the gymnasium floor and audience members sit in the surrounding wings. A more ideal space could be one where audience members experience the piece closer to the level plane of the performers. This space would have a sturdy, wire-mesh floor on which obstacles are placed and navigational activities occur. (In the case of an empty space, Lucier’s score calls for obstacles such as stacked chairs, large plants, or human beings to be placed in the performance space.) Beneath this mesh floor, audience members could then sit or walk around to listen to a more representative spectrum of the environmental layout.

In school, my teachers claimed that students learn best by example. By extension, the principle of echolocation is best understood by applying it to navigate a real area. This concert gives all interested event-goers the opportunity to be part of the piece. Participation will require an early sign up

to secure a clicking device and a commitment to one 3-hour rehearsal in the actual performance environment.

### 4.3 Late Lunch Break

A food intermission (approximately one hour) gives attendees the opportunity to read related literature, view short films and artist installations, and mix socially. Food will consist of fruits, drinks, and common snacking items with healthy and vegetarian options. Film ideas and installations currently include (1) a short film taking the point of view of a child who can never grow old; (2) an interactive robot installation where a person tries to figure out what sort of task he or she must accomplish, how each robot functions, and how each robot accomplishes its specific task; and (3) an interactive installation that stimulates all senses (touch, taste, vision, hearing, smell).

### 4.4 Concert II: Magnus, Lucier, Hosokawa

Concert II follows a more traditional format. Audience members receive a booklet describing the performers' interpretive choices and the connective tissue behind the choice of repertoire. (Note: For people unable to read, a professional reader or interpreter will be provided per request.) The booklet includes a performer's process of learning "vs. computer," a brief description of the performative direction taken in "Duke of York," short research sections related to each piece, and other elements as described in the Section 3 of this paper.

The concert opens with the original solo version of "vs. computer," performed at a length chosen by the performer. "The Duke of York" is next, followed by the two-player version of "vs. computer" (currently under progress) and finally "Sen VI." The external programming structure for Concert II is based on an ordering symmetry: a solo, followed by a duo, duo, and solo. The first and third performances would be respective solo and duo versions of "vs. computer." The juxtaposition of "Duke of York" with "vs. computer" highlights the relationship between two performers; the performers first work together to approach unison, and then diverge in a competition founded on mastery of the ability to use personal vocabularies to communicate with a computer.

An audience member's response to "vs. computer" may change based on a reading of the program booklet. Those reading the program notes *before* the performances of "vs. computer" might try to listen for perceptible correspondences between the performer and the computer. In this case, game-playing becomes the main focus of the piece. This person might ask how to play the game, how to know if you are winning or losing, and how to know the game is over. On the other hand, listeners who are unaware of the piece's original premise might not perceive or realize a fundamental connection between the instruments and computer sounds. Their attention might direct itself to the construction of the percussion setups (often fascinating for

people new to percussion music). Perhaps attention shifts to the heavy concentration of the performer, who rarely removes his eyes from the screen. Listeners might ask, "What exactly is the computer doing? Is the performer triggering the electronic sounds? How does he know which instrument to hit? What *is* he hitting?"

Overall, either course of questioning is productive. The first response describes how we as listeners form ideas about how a human element and a computer counterpart influence one another based, drawing on our contextual knowledge of the piece. The second response reaches a similar point, except that it draws upon physical observations for assessment (i.e. the percussion setup, the performer's orientation to the setup, the performer's orientation to the computer and his interaction with it).

Negative reactions are another set of responses we cannot ignore, but these reactions are not necessarily bad. For example, a person might not regard "vs. computer" as an actual piece of music; instead, the piece is seen as nothing more than a video game or random notes generated by a computer. Granted this aesthetic reaction, this person cannot refute that the performer in fact still plays the game with a special kind of interface that expects to understand a special vocabulary. The only unproductive reactions we could receive are those lacking curiosity, those with a self-proclaimed "full understanding" of the inner workings of the piece, and of course, 'non-responses' coming from those who had fallen asleep.

"Duke of York" has the potential to elicit a wider variety of reaction due to the material of each memory example. A high-level reaction could be how an audience member views the evolving relationship of the vocalist and the synthesist. A general reaction might be fascination with the synthesist's ability to convincingly alter a person's voice. Some might come away confused at the notion that this is an actual piece of music and not some theatrical smorgasbord or two-person variety show. Others might read the notes, watch the performance, and still feel they have missed the point—unconvinced by or unable to make a connection between the reproduced memories. Some listeners might resonate with memories that remind them of their own past; others might make social or generational assumptions about the memories the performers chose to play. A program note could clarify the performers' intent and choice of examples based on one of Lucier's three prescribed paths (for "strengthening personal ties", "making new friends," or "uncovering hidden identities"). Finally, it could elucidate the point that memory can be used to provoke thoughts regarding the reconstruction of relationships, storytelling, and the shared experience of someone else's memories.

Of all the pieces including "ricefall", "Sen VI" takes the most traditional form of Western-notated music. Hosokawa wrote this piece to highlight the Zen view of calligraphy, what Steven Schick describes as the "pregnant silence before the stroke." (Schick, chapter 5) Placing "Sen VI" at the end of a concert of unconventional music is purely

incidental, but it might have benefits. Because it follows four pieces with built-in functionality, audience members could expect “Sen VI” to have a similar affectability. People may inductively frame the performance in order to make connections between the piece and the context of the event.

Any reactions from hearing or seeing impaired individuals are very important. What are these people grasping about piece without being able to both hear and see? Deaf individuals have written accounts indicating they “hear” differently by responding to gestural cues or palpable vibrations. How would *these* individuals react to the piece? Would a blind person be eliminated from experiencing Hosokawa’s calligraphy, or can a blind person feel the presence of gesture, finesse, or tension before the stroke? These culminating questions suggest that art forms invite new interpretations based on varying abilities of the senses.

Concert II finally closes with a talkback session between the performers, the audience, and available composers. At this time, anyone may ask questions, share comments and provide feedback. A brief break follows.

#### 4.6 Concert III: “ricefall” and closing

Following the break, “ricefall” peacefully closes the event. Unlike “Vespers,” this piece would be played by a fixed number of performers. If more than one full 4x4 grid is feasible, the grids can be placed evenly around the audience.

This piece is directly inspired by a blind man’s account of listening to his environment on a rainy day and the sound of rice as it hits different surfaces. Placed at end of the event, it is used to amplify a beauty that arises long after the traumatic experience of losing ones ability to see. It symbolically sends the audience home with these parting thoughts: that losing a treasured ability does not mean losing the ability to enjoy life, and that limitations might soon reveal possibilities and experiences worth living for.

By the time the performances are done, an area for afterthoughts will be ready for participants and performers. This area would contain a “response box” for persons who want to share any parting thoughts in writing. There will also be a donation box with proceeds going to relevant organizations. Audience members would also have the option to mail their comments or donations from home. Collections of responses would be collected and analyzed to understand the outcome of the event.

### 5 Saying Goodbye

Early in this paper, we questioned whether or not a concert such as this could fulfill a civic responsibility. Maybe there is a political need to evidence civic responsibility for the respect and regard of education in art and music. There are undoubtedly arguments against the notion that music should be used or thought of in a functional manner. As long as art does not primarily seek to

be a political tool or catalyst, it can benefit those who are open to experience it.

In the end, this is just another thematic new music concert. Each piece stands alone in the convictions of the composer who wrote it. Not everyone will be convinced that some piece of music will impact someone in some profound way. Reciprocally, these reactions will not change the music. This music is not supposed to be popular, nor are its performances intended for “the masses.” Likewise, the interpretations of these pieces should not contain or try to force a dogma on listeners. Instead, these pieces are performed to move the people it will, lifting them to states, thoughts, or conclusions they would have otherwise not had.

## 6 Appendix A: Repertoire

### 6.1 “vs. computer” (2006) by Cristyn Magnus

“vs. computer” is for solo percussion and computer. The software interface uses Miller Puckette’s PD software to coordinate the computer’s visual interface, i.e. the score, game board, translation of input, and performer’s controls. Much like an old-fashioned Pac-man game, the performer gains points by moving a green square around a virtual game-field and capturing black squares. He must follow interpretive guidelines to make each move while interpreting a score generated in real-time. The performer is asked to choose an array of instruments and mallets that exploit a broad range of dynamic and pitch. Once arranged, these instruments form a musical scale that the computer uses to move a piece on the virtual game board. These decisions also influence the algorithmic generation of the score. The performer’s ability to play the game affects successfully affects the sonic progress of the music itself.

### 6.2 “Duke of York” (1971) by Alvin Lucier

The “Duke” is for two performers: a vocalist and a synthesist. The vocalist chooses any number of texts or vocal utterances (either written, performed or recorded) and orders them in ways determined by his or her relationship to the synthesist and the particular purpose of the performance. The performers first decide which one of three purposes they will use to sculpt their performance: to strengthen personal ties, to make friends with strangers, or to uncover clues to hidden families and past identities.” (*Vespers*, Lucier 324) In strengthening ties, the performers select shared childhood memories, arranging them in order of their emergence in their awareness. In making friends with strangers, the vocalist makes assumptions about the synthesist and selects examples the synthesist may have remembered or known, arranging them in the order they might have emerged in the synthesist’s awareness. In uncovering clues to hidden families and past identities, any vocal examples (including memoirs, musical works, or biographies of real or fictitious people) can be arranged in

any order or in temporal or geographical clusters. The vocalist tries to mimic the examples exactly as he remembers. The synthesist electronically alters the vocalist's voice to approximate the synthesist's own memory of the example.

### 6.3 "Vespers" (1968) by Alvin Lucier

"Vespers" is written for any number of players using echolocation devices to navigate in the dark. The performance environment for the piece is a room almost entirely darkened and full of either planted or existing physical obstacles. Each performer is given a device for echolocation (e.g. a SonDol or clicker) and starts the performance in a corner of the environment. Once the piece starts, the performer continuously explores his environment using only echolocation, making acoustical decisions based solely on their usefulness in navigating the room.

### 6.4 "ricefall" (2004) by Michael Pisaro

"ricefall" is for a grid orchestra of any multiple of sixteen players with rice and different surfaces. Each player sits in a specific square on the grid and follows his own score, pouring different amounts of rice on a square surface. A surface is either made of metal, plastic, wood, stone, leaves, or rice. Each of the 16 variations of the score details the amount of rice to pour per minute (e.g. 1-2 grains per second, intermittent pour, continuously poured). The 18-minute piece is framed by two single minutes of silence.

### 6.5 "Sen VI" (1993) by Toshio Hosokawa

"Sen VI," is written for solo percussion and is tied to the visual significance of gesture. Inspiration for these gestures comes from the art of Japanese calligraphy and the use of a significant, expressive gesture before each brush stroke. During the piece, the performer activates vocal noises and uses only hands and soft mallets to play skin drums and a single crotale.

## 7 Appendix B: Notes

7.1 In April of 2006, executive director of the Independent Living Center of Kern County described the fundraisers that brought in most financial support to the Center.

7.2 "Nothingness before the stroke" refers to the Zen view of calligraphy that "meaning is found in the pregnant silence just before the actual stroke of the brush," referenced in Chapter 5 of Steven Schick's book, *The Percussionist's Art*, University of Rochester Press, 2006.

7.3 From the Alzheimer's association website, <http://www.alz.org/AboutAD/statistics.asp>, accessed 2006 June 04, in reference to the article by L.E. Herbert, P.A. Scherr, J.L. Bienias, D.A. Bennett, D.A. Evans, "Alzheimer

Disease in the U.S. Population: Prevalence Estimates Using the 2000 Census" *Archives of Neurology*, 2003.

7.4 A SonDol is an echolocation device that works by creating clicks and tracking echo response times.

7.5 This suggestion for framing the piece comes from the May 19, 2006, performance of Lucier's "Music for Solo Performer" for percussion and enormously amplified brain waves (1965) in Warren Lecture Hall Studio A at the University of California, San Diego. Five graduate students (including myself) spent months preparing for our performance. We programmed the piece at the beginning of the concert to maximize our time to tune the instruments with the speakers. Rehearsals leading up to the performance lasted at least 25 minutes without interruptions or silences. However, for the final performance, we chose to use silences as structural parts of the piece. When we used silence early in the actual performance, the piece prematurely as some audience members began to clap. There are outstanding questions about the presence of visual cues between the brain-wave 'performer' and the audience, or the 'performer' and the performing assistants. But ultimately, we speculate the audience had clapped due to unconscious expectations about the *length* of the piece in proportion to its placement on the concert schedule.

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