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Electro-acoustic Dance composition: Practicality and pragmatism

For piano and fixed media

Ian Evans Guthrie
Calvary University

PRESENTED AT

ATMI National Conference 2025
Thursday, October 30, 2025
Spokane, WA

Paper/Performance (25 minutes)

ABSTRACT

Live sound manipulation is attractive to composers and performers, and for good reason. Yet, some venues are completely unprepared for such setups, no matter how impactful the sounds may be. This is especially the case when composing for dance, especially in the “black boxes” where there may be no instrumental area, and dancers need the full stage. Furthermore, the variety of rehearsal spaces dancers will use in the course of preparing for a work can make the electroacoustic setup even more challenging. If that was not complicated enough, fewer and fewer dance companies have full-time, professional musicians, especially those who understand live electronic manipulation. What kinds of digital music are most suitable for dance music? Is there an inherent sacrifice in writing for dance companies?

Since most genres of dance taught in academies today are based on set choreographies (not improvisation), variables tend to contradict the dancers’ aesthetics and comforts. Live electronics—mostly fixed or even improvised—are possible, but there are more reliable alternatives.

Fixed media (with careful orchestration, and proper performance technique) can solve it. First, fixed media is the easiest to trigger for the technicians. Second, it negates the need for an elaborate setup. Third, and most importantly, it is the most versatile for improvisation-phobic dancers, and the most adaptable from one dance space to another.

Yet how do you create music that is fixed, yet still mimics a live environment? This presentation aims to demonstrate exactly that!

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

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Ian Evans Guthrie is a composer, performer, researcher, and collaborator, composing for acoustic and electroacoustic media from soloist through full band and orchestra. He has received the Mile High Freedom Band 2021 Commission, 1st prize for the Noosa-ISAM and Arcady Composition competitions, 2nd prize for the American Prize, a nomination from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and other accolades. Many of his works have been performed worldwide by the Mile High Freedom Band, Northwest Symphony Orchestra, Moore Philharmonic Orchestra, fEARnoMUSIC, Ensemble Offspring, Interlochen Summer Arts, and others. His works will be featured in upcoming concerts in The Philippines, New York, Idaho, and elsewhere. His most recent commissions include ones from Northwest Symphony Orchestra, Keum Hwa Cha, and others.

He has served on various committees, including SCI, where he is the Marketer, NACUSA, where he is the Treasurer, and CFAMC, where he is the Membership Coordinator.

He maintains an active piano career, and has won 2nd prize in the Great Composers Competition: Music of America and many other awards. Additionally, he accompanies for the Interlochen Summer Camp, University of Missouri-Kansas City, and other organizations. He is also an MTNA Nationally Certified Teacher in Piano.

Guthrie received his Doctor of Music as an Instructor of Record from Florida State University, where he studied composition with Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Stephen Montague, Clifton Callender, Mark Wingate, and Ladislav Kubik, and piano with Heidi Louise Williams. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Music at Calvary University. For more information, please visit ianguthriecomposer.com.