

Dr. Jeff Roberts, composer

Biography

The compositions of **Jeff Roberts** unite his experiences as an improvising guitarist and Chinese Guqin performer with cross-cultural and stylistic influences ranging from Chinese and Korean music traditions to American and European experimentalism and avant-garde. His music has reached audiences through concerts in France, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands, Italy, China and the United States. His music has been performed by groups such as *Dinosaur Annex*, *Ensemble E-mex*, members of *Eighth Blackbird*, *Boston Chamber Orchestra*, pianist *Martin van der Heydt* *Mikrokosmos*, *Wet Ink*, *Non Sequitur*, *Bent Frequency Ensemble*, *Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra* and *Cellist David Russell*, at venues such as *Warebrook Music Festival*, *Festival Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea Città di Udine*, *Music 09 Switzerland* and *Columbia Music Scholarship Conference*. He has received several commissions including *Dinosaur Annex Music Ensemble*, *Ensemble E-Mex*, *Boston Chamber orchestra*, *Pianist Martin van der Heydt*, and soprano *Amanda Deboer*.

His compositions have received awards and recognition including, 2004 Kaske Fellowship Prize from the Wellesley Composers Conference, Bent Frequency Composition Competition selection, Internazionale di Musica Contemporanea Città di Udine finalist, Columbia Music Scholarship Conference selection, Music07/Eighth Blackbird Completion finalist and is an invited composer to the Music/09 Eighth Blackbird Festival in Blonay, Switzerland.

In 2006-2007 Dr. Roberts was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to China, to study performance and improvisation with Guqin master Li Xiangting. He was a senior scholar at the Beijing Central Conservatory of music where he studied guqin performance and improvisation as well as researched Chinese aesthetics related to Chinese traditional poetry, painting and guqin performance. He has since written a paper on Li Xiangting's improvisation and recently presented his paper 'Skirting the Boundaries of Improvisation and Composition: Poetic Impression and Spontaneous Expression in the Improvisations of Li Xiangting' at the 14th CHIME Conference in Brussels, Belgium (European Center for Chinese Music Studies). In August 2010 he will present a paper on the performer-composer model in a non-Western context and present a guqin recital at the CIMACC Conference on Creative Musicology, Cambridge University, England. He has published a book for Alfred Press titled *Guitar Atlas: China*. Along with a history of Chinese music, the book contains transcriptions of Chinese music for guitar. His work in China was initially supported with a 2005 Outstanding Beijing Scholar Award from CET Academic Programs.

As a guqin performer Jeff continues to work with improvisation and is currently involved in a composition and improvisation project using guqin and a found object sound library with MAX/MSP to form an interactive improvising/sound-processing environment. Was in residence at the STEIM Foundation in Amsterdam, in January 2010 to work to investigate the development of a sensor system for interaction with Max/MSP during live guqin performance.

Jeff also involves himself with experimental improvisation using found object percussion. In 1998 he founded the *Walden Percussion Project*. Founded on the philosophical foundations of New England Transcendentalism, the project engages both the musically trained and untrained in sound exploration and experimentation with found objects. In addition to providing an environment for raw, intuitive exploration, the project also worked to promote ideas in 20th century Western Music to people not ordinarily exposed to the music. Over the last eleven years of its existence, the project has engaged countless amateurs in the creation and performance of new works of music for found objects and conventional chamber ensembles. Projects have taken place worldwide and involved collaborations with ensembles such as *Dinosaur Annex*, *Non Sequitur*, *Wellesley Symphony Orchestra*, where amateur percussionists

work alongside professionals to perform new music. The raw, intuitive discovery process as well as the sound world emanating from the project forms Jeff's music language for composition.

Jeff's teaching has received recognition. He received a *2004 Brandeis University Prize Instructorship* and the *2005 Tufts University Experimental College Lecturer Award* to teach his class on American Experimental Music. The interdisciplinary course involves the *Walden Percussion Project* idea and splits time between academic readings and ensemble experimentation and creation. Particular emphasis is placed on 19th century American Philosophy (i.e. Transcendentalism) and the 20th century Abstract Expressionists and Experimental composers, trying to search for a universal in the spirit of the American individualist and innovative thinker.

Works currently in progress include a commission from soprano Amanda Deboer for two clarinets, piano and voice, *Walden Concerto* for orchestra and found object percussion ensemble, and a new work for violin and piano for members of Beijing New Music Ensemble.

Jeff is currently a Professor at The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies (Loyola University) where he teaches coursework on Chinese Music. He also lectures on Chinese music and Western music. Recent performance/lecture activities have taken place in the US, China, Netherlands and Switzerland. Aside from his teaching/lecturing activity he is also the music artistic director at Yishu-8 Art and Culture Space in Beijing, China.

Jeff holds BM in Improvisation from *New England Conservatory of Music*, an MM in Composition from *Boston University* and a PhD in Composition from *Brandeis University*. He spent a year in Germany on a Franz Goethe Stiftung grant studying with composer/conductor Hans Zender at the *Hochschule für Musik, Frankfurt am Main, Germany*. He was also invited on scholarship to the Darmstadt Ferienkursen für Neue Musik in Darmstadt, Germany and the l'ecole d'art americane in Fontainebleau, France.

Website:

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