The Mills College at Northeastern University Music Department,
Center for Contemporary Music, and Performing Arts Center present

Mills Music Now 2022-2023

Laetitia Sonami with SUE-C, Paul DeMarinis, and James Fei

Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Concert Hall
February 4, 2023 8:00 pm

Laetitia Sonami, SUE-C, Paul DeMarinis, James Fei

100 TRILLIONS , An interstellar travelogue (2023, premiere)
Laetitia Sonami, Paul DeMarinis: analog and digital instruments, voice;
SUE-C: live video, animated objects

SPARROWS and ORTOLANS
James Fei: electronics;
Laetitia Sonami: t*he lady's ball,* mugic

SONG of TSAR (2023, premiere)
Laetitia Sonami: the Spring Spyre

100 TRILLIONS , An interstellar travelogue (2023, premiere)
Laetitia Sonami, Paul DeMarinis: analog and digital instruments, voice;
SUE-C: live video, animated objects

It takes 100 trillions years to transmit a signal from one galaxy to another. It takes another 100, give or take, for a response to come back, at which point one's intentions may have changed… (there are also plenty of galaxies where signals just get lost or ignored.)

The three observers are scattered across the universe and don't know of each other's existence. They call out anyway, sending signals towards the only visible destination they share.
(Based on the fact that 33.4 billion light years is the most distant measured galaxy and that astrophysicists believe the universe to be 96 billion light years across, the title and the proposition are highly inflated.)

Loosely based on Italo Calvino's "Cosmicomics", the performance plays on the dispersion and reception of signals, self-preservation and fabricated realities.

Expanding on their previous 100 Millions streaming performance from 2020, the artists continue their exploration of (mis)communication using vintage synths, hand-cut picnic plate records, machine learning synthesis, home-made instruments, and live hands-on cinematic imagery.

100 Trillions is the second collaboration between these three artists. DeMarinis and Sonami created and performed *Mechanization Takes Command* which was premiered at Ars Electronica in 1991. SUE-C and Sonami's two live film performance *I.C.You* and *Sheepwoman*, were performed in venues across the United States and Europe in 2006-2010.

SPARROWS and ORTOLANS
James Fei: electronics;
Laetitia Sonami: t*he lady's ball,* mugic

James Fei and Laetitia Sonami started their improvisational collaboration in 2013.
While the materials and techniques used by the two musicians differ significantly, both employ tactile interface coupled with electronic systems that exhibit complex behaviors. Sonami performs with her most recent instrument, the *lady's ball* . The l*ady's ball* is an attempt at reducing a performative system to its simplest, yet expressive form. Gestures are analyzed and fed into trained models in Max-MSP. Fei's setup consists of analog circuits driven by multiple feedback loops, often on the brink of instability. Signals are recursively routed-through and converted-between audio and control voltage. Circuit elements are also modified by touch, integrating the non-linearities and the immediacy of the body with the electronic processes.

SONG of TSAR (2023, premiere)
Laetitia Sonami: the Spring Spyre

The Song Tsar series is inspired by the 1735 bell in Moscow which was never rung. This historical event led Sonami to imagine the sound of objects and places which were either never sounded, or silenced.

The exploration of latent space with the Spring Spyre, itself composed of an empty space, feels akin to the creative process in general. Which sounds come forth from silence and how do they migrate into fleeting formations? What comes out of this emptiness as its surface vibrates?
The first part focuses on vagrant remnants, gathering and dispersing, while the second part focuses on formation.
Constructed around a web of springs whose signals are analyzed through neural networks which in turn control the audio synthesis in real time, the *Spring Spyre* can exhibit a wide range of sonic behaviors depending on its training terrains. Three thin springs are attached to pick-ups on the metal wheel and generate audio signals when touched, rubbed or plucked. While the actual springs are never heard, the features extracted from these audio signals are sent to the Machine Learning software (Wekinator & RapidMax) which controls the audio synthesis in real time. Musical "terrains" are prepared thru intensive training with the neural networks and offer a set of sonic possibilities which vary in predictability. When sounds move in unpredictable way, like some crazy birds, they can be "caught" and immobilized temporarily for further modifications.
Song of Tsar # 1 was performed at the Vancouver New Music Festival (2021) and differs in the focuses and concentrations.

What unites these three very different performances, aside from bodies and electricity, is their emergence from a silent, latent space. Thank you for coming!

Laetitia Sonami
Laetitia Sonami is a pioneering sound artist and performer known for her innovative use of technology in her work. She began her career in the late seventies and quickly established herself as a leading figure in the world of experimental music and sound art. A pioneer in wearable technology, she created the *lady's glove* in 1991 and performed world-wide with this unique instrument for 25 years. She has since been applying machine learning to real time audio synthesis with her most recent instruments the Spring Spyre and the *lady's ball*. Sonami's work often explores themes of embodiment and the relationship between the body and technology, and her performances are known for their meditative, immersive qualities. She has exhibited and performed her work at major international festivals and venues and has also taught and mentored many young artists in the field. https://sonami.net

Paul DeMarinis
Paul DeMarinis has been making noises with wires, batteries and household appliances since the age of four. His works combine interactive software, synthetic speech and noise with obsolete or impossible media. He has exhibited and performed throughout North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. His audio works are available from Lovely Music, Black Truffle Records and on his Bandcamp site. https://pauldemarinis.org

Sue Slagle (SUE-C) is an award-winning artist, engineer and educator whose work in "real time cinema" presents a new, imaginative perspective on live performance. Her performances blend cinema and technology into an organic, improvisational and immersive act, created from live cameras, light pads and video algorithms. She has always pushed the boundaries of human-computer interaction, employing emerging technologies and inventing many of her own, both through performance and tinkering with hundreds of students in her well-established teaching practice. https://www.sue-c.net

James Fei
James Fei (b. Taipei, Taiwan) moved to the US in 1992 to study electrical engineering but lost his way in music, becoming a composer, saxophonist and electronic musician. Works by Fei have been performed by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the S.E.M. Ensemble, Bang on a Can All-Stars, MATA Micro Orchestra and Noord-Hollands Philharmonisch Orkest. Recordings can be found on Leo Records, Improvised Music from Japan, CRI, Krabbesholm and Organized Sound. Fei has taught at Mills College since 2006, where he is Professor and Director of the Center for Contemporary Music. https://www.jamesfei.com

Thank you to Brendan Glasson (sound engineer), the amazing (and courageous) last MFA class from the Mills College Music Department, Jeremy Wagner (training the AI models of DeMarinis and Sonami's voices), Alexander Zendzian and Steed Cowart.

Mills Music Now 2022-2023

Raven Chacon
Vaux Composer in Residence
Saturday, March 18, 2023 | 8:00pm

Signal Flow
Friday, March 31-Saturday, April 1, 2023 | 8:00pm

Mills Performing Group
Saturday, April 8, 2023 | 8:00pm

Barbara Strozzi, Venetian Virtuosa
Schola Cantorum San Francisco – Paul Flight, director
Sunday, April 16, 2023 | 3:00pm

X Sound
Lulu Thompson
Thursday, April 27, 2023 | 8:00pm