

DECIBEL 'SOMACOUSTICA'

VELVET UNDERGROUND ANDERSON CAGE HOPE
 LINZ BANDT LUCIER OLIVEROS VICKERY OLLEMEN
 WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 18, 2009 - 8PM
 CALLAWAY AUDITORIUM, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN
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TURA NEW MUSIC

Award-winning Tura New Music is one of Australia's peak bodies for the production and presentation of new music events and a resource agency, promoter of new music events and advocacy/support network for Western Australian new music artists and performers.

Established in 1987 the company has presented hundreds of events featuring thousands of artists across WA, commissioned hundreds of new works, established an international class archive, facilitated dozens of projects with like-minded partners and taken new music to the far reaches of the state.

Patron - David Blenkinsop OAM

Board of Directors - Simon Dawkins, Carol Whish-Wilson, Anthony Niardone, Kylie Ashenbrenner, Marijana Ravlich, David Hodgkinson

Artistic Director - Tos Mahoney

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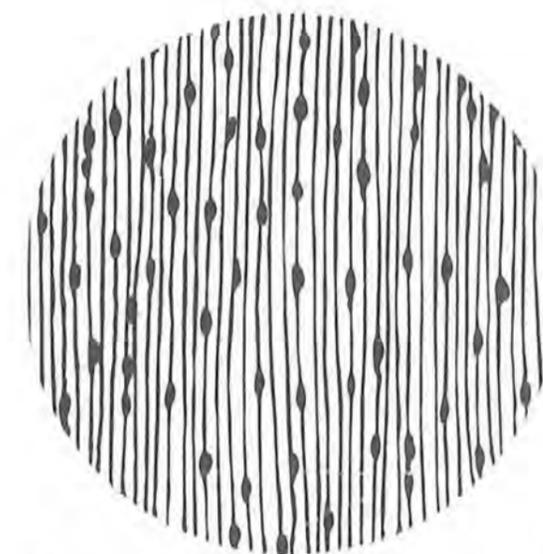
Administration - Rachael Dease

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

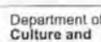
Tura New Music's annual program is supported by the Government of Western Australia through the Department of Culture and the Arts in association with Lotterywest, and the Australian Government through the Music Board of the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

DECIBEL would like to thank K. Ford (for making pick ups and the promotional photography), Andrew Ewing (live photography), Jarryd Byrd, Mikeala Davies (live recording), Chris Tonkin (UWA), Lindsay Vickery (for the title), Tos Mahoney, Gab Sullivan and our student stage managers Sam Gilles and Suzann Kosowitz.

TURA NEW MUSIC PRESENTS A SCALE VARIABLE CONCERT



decibel
somacoustica





Decibel/photo by K.Ford

PROGRAM

Laurie Anderson: Duet for violin and doorjamb (1976)

Lindsay Vickery: Antibody (2009)

Rainer Linz: Walk on Parts (1980)

Ros Bandt: Four + Five (1979)

Cat Hope: Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936 (2006)

- interval -

Alvin Lucier: Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas part 1. No. 3 (1972)

Pauline Oliveros: Antiphonal Meditation (1979)

Alvin Lucier: Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas part 3. No. 12 (1972)

John Cage: Cartridge Music (1960)

The Velvet Underground: The Gift (1968)

Decibel:

Cat Hope – Artistic Director, flutes, electronics, bass guitar

Lindsay Vickery – clarinets, saxophones, Max5 programming

Stuart James – piano, percussion, Max5 programming and performance

Malcolm Riddoch – electronics, bass guitar

Tristen Parr – cello

Dan Russell – violin

Rob Muir – sound design

Commissioned Composer for SomAcoustica: Lindsay Vickery.

Stage Managers: Sam Gilles, Susanne Kosowitz

Decibel Design: Jessyca Hutchens

Pauline Oliveros: Antiphonal Meditation (1979)

Antiphonal Meditation is an example of Oliveros' Deep Listening idea, where she attempts to transmit the way she experiences sound, its sensual nature and the power of its release and change to the audience. Oliveros describes Deep Listening as "listening in every possible way to ever think possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, of ones own thoughts as well as musical sounds" (Oliveros, 1990). *Antiphonal Meditation* is a piece that asks two groups of musicians to respond to each other in such a way as they will eventually intertwine, both musically and physically.

American composer Pauline Oliveros (b 1932) is an accordionist and composer who was a central figure in the development of post-war electronic art music. Oliveros was a founding member of the San Francisco Tape Music Center in the 1960s, and served as its director. She has taught music at Mills College, the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Oliveros has written books, formulated new music theories and investigated new ways to focus attention on music including her concepts of "Deep Listening" and "sonic awareness".

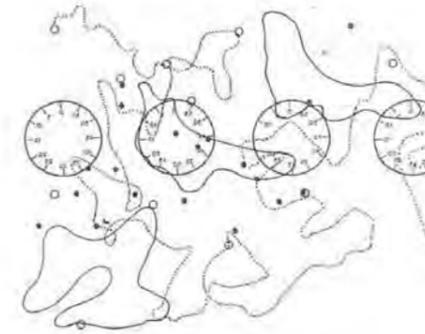
John Cage: Cartridge Music (1960)

Cartridge Music is an important piece in the history of electronic music as it is one of the first to deconstruct the turntable and use it as the only musical instrument. It employs a composition technique that is indeterminate, as the score consists of a number of transparent sheets that contain points, circles, a curved line and a series of circles marked with a stopwatch. These sheets are placed over each other and read in performance to instruct the performers when to 'play' the cartridges which may be filled with objects other than a stylus needle, or change their volume and tone, or make use of other objects. Cage also used this score to organise some of his public speeches. For Decibel's version of *Cartridge Music*, the body is the surface played by the cartridges, becoming an integral part of the instrument.

John Cage (1912–1992) was an American composer, philosopher, poet, music theorist, artist, printmaker, and amateur mycologist and mushroom collector. A pioneer of chance music, electronic music and non-standard use of musical

instruments, Cage was one of the leading figures of the post-war avant-garde. Critics have lauded him as one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition *4'33"*, the three movements of which are performed without a single note being played. Through his studies of Indian philosophy and Zen Buddhism in the late 1940s, Cage came to the idea of chance-controlled music, which he started composing in 1951.

[image: One of the interpretations of the score used in tonight's performance.]



The Velvet Underground: The Gift (1968) *The Gift* appears on *White Light/White Heat*, the second Velvet Underground album, and features John Cale reading a short story written by Lou Reed when he was

a college student. The narrative focuses on college love, poverty, sexual promiscuity and ends in decapitation. On the original release, this track was created with all the spoken word in one channel of a stereo mix, and the 'band' in the other, making use of an instrumental track that was originally developed from live band jams during the brief time in which Lou Reed was ill and unable to perform with the band. In the spirit of the original jam, DECIBEL recreates this track with a similar spirit and John Cale's voice present in his original glory.

The Velvet Underground was an American experimental rock band formed in New York City, New York. First active from 1965 to 1973, The Velvet Underground first gained a degree of fame and notoriety in New York City in 1966 when they were selected as the house band for Andy Warhol's Factory and his Exploding Plastic Inevitable events. The band's music and lyrics challenged conventional societal standards of the time, and broke ground for other musicians to do the same. The band favored experimentation, and also introduced a nihilistic outlook through some of their music. Their outsider attitude and experimentation has since been cited as pivotal to the rise of punk rock and, later, alternative rock. Members and collaborators include John Cale, Lou Reed, Nico, Maureen Tucker and Sterling Morrison.

[Image: the original cover of the white light/white heat album by the velvet underground]



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second DECIBEL concert. Decibel is a group of Western Australian musicians, composers, improviser's and sound artists who are devoted to the realisation of music where acoustic and electronic instruments are represented in musical works. In each DECIBEL performance, electronic instruments are treated as just that: performed instruments in their own right with their own sound quality and presence. The traditional stereo PA is rarely used at a DECIBEL concert since placement of performers and instruments in the space is an integral element in the sonic design of every DECIBEL concert. DECIBEL encourages the creation of new works for this combination as well as the representation of works by Australian and Western Australian artists, established and emerging.

Som/Acoustica began as an idea for a program of works that examine acoustic phenomena and its effect on the human body: vibration, wave beats and other things that happen to the body when it shares space with sound. However, as the pieces evolved in rehearsal and composition, a variety of different approaches were developed to the theme of music and the body. Works were honed and developed to have that DECIBEL characteristic – a respect for electronic devices as musical instruments in their own right.

Some works on this program explore the very physics of the listening process. Alvin Lucier's works invite us to examine the magical characteristics of sound itself, where as my own work attempts to provide other ways of listening. Pauline Oliveros is interested in the ideas and process suggested by the very act of listening and performing, examining the body's implication in this process, as does Ros Bandt through her rigorous rhythmic patterns. Laurie Anderson uses the performers body in a very specific and idiosyncratic way, as docs Rainer Linz by making his performer move around the performance areas. John Cage offers up an idea for an instrument that actually plays the body itself in the Decibel rendition of the piece, and Lindsay Vickery takes inspiration from the behaviour of our internal biology as a compositional starting point. The Velvet Underground simply provides us with a simple reminder of our very physical mortality.

Decibel aims to provide programs that combine a wide variety of musical styles in each program, demonstrating just how versatile both electronic and acoustic instruments can be. Each composer brings something unique to the program, and we hope that though each Decibel concert you may learn about another great aspect of music, a new and exciting composer or just enjoy listening.

Cat Hope

Cat Hope

Artistic Director, DECIBEL

15 November 2009

<http://www.dccibel.waapamusic.com>

PROGRAM NOTES

Laurie Anderson: Duet for violin and doorjamb (1976)

The violin has been a key part of Laurie Anderson's career as a composer and performance artist. *Duet for violin and doorjamb* is an early work that exemplifies Anderson's wit and creative approach to technology. Pick up microphones are attached to the doorjamb that the performer is encouraged to 'run into' with the bow. The electric violin is played back through a speaker in the room on the other side of the door, and can only be heard clearly when the performer swings opens the door with their foot.



American artist Laurie Anderson (b 1947) is known primarily for her multimedia presentations, but she has cast herself in roles as varied as visual artist, composer, poet, photographer, filmmaker, electronics whiz, vocalist, and instrumentalist. Initially trained as a sculptor, Anderson did her first performance-art piece in the late 1960s and became widely known outside the art world in 1981 when her single *O Superman* reached number two on the UK pop charts. As a composer, Anderson has contributed music to films by Wim Wenders and Jonathan Demme. She has created pieces for National Public Radio, The BBC, and Expo '92 in Seville.

[image: Laurie Anderson performing Duet for violin and doorjamb in 1977].

Lindsay Vickery: Antibody (2009) World Premiere

Antibody explores a formal structure based on biological principles of mutation. Five musical cells, heard in their entirety at the beginning of the piece, are subjected to two layers of increasing "mutation" through the processes of deletion, duplication, inversion, insertion and translocation. In the first layer the score, read from laptop, is gradually reassembled, transforming the five cells into hybrid arrangements. The live performances of the five musicians are transformed electronically, employing analogous processes of mutation to create a second layer.

Western Australian composer and performer Lindsay Vickery (b1995) has created a consistently innovative body of work, notably drawing on non-linear formal structures, interactive music and improvisation. As a performer he has played an important role in the Australian New Music scene as a founding member of Alea, Magnetic Pig, SQUINT and HEDKIKR and now Decibel. He has had significant collaborations with The California Ear Unit (USA), the MATA Ensemble (NYC), Scintilla Divina Ensemble (GER), Cat Hope, Jon Rose, Clocked Out, skadada and The Tissue Culture and Art group, performing at the Shanghai, Perth, Adelaide and Sydney International Arts Festivals, as well as Music at the Anthology (NYC), NWEAMO (Portland and San Diego) and the LA County Museum of the Arts Music series.

Rainer Linz: Walk on Parts (1980)

Walk On Parts is a work for multiple reeds where parts can be chosen to be played in different orders, instruments or groups. DECIBEL have created ensemble parts using the sampling capability of the computer program Max5, which prerecords the clarinets in different parts of the performance space, and plays them back in others, allocating the computer scored parts as part of the live performance.

Melbourne composer and sound artist Rainer Linz has a long involvement in radio, music theatre, instrumental and electronic music. Together with Richard Vella, Linz founded the NMA (New Music Articles) in 1982 with the aim of encouraging musicians, composers and sound artists to write about their work as a way of informing the general public, and creating wider musical debate. His recent collaborative work includes the stage piece *Banalities for the Perfect House* and the interactive gallery installation *infolge. New Listener* is a series of computer programs where a music or sound composition can be adjusted to the listener's preference. Linz was a recipient of the Australia Council New Media Arts Fellowship for 2002/3.

Ros Bandt: Four + Five (1979)

Four + Five is a piece for any instruments and uses the dynamic of the pulse and its relationship to rhythm to push the work forwards. The rhythmic patterns may be retraced and repeated, and the group decides the pitches beforehand. The work becomes quite complex as rhythmic patterns come up against each other and the performers control the dynamic and form. DECIBEL is playing this work at the same tempo as a human heartbeat.

Ros Bandt is a composer performer and sound artist based in Melbourne who is passionate about combining ancient and modern sonic practices. Her sound research has included building a medieval Pythagorean recorder and she directs the Australian sound design project on line at the Australian centre, The University of Melbourne. She was the first woman to be awarded the Don Banks Composers Award in 1990, and has won many international awards for installation, radio art and composition. Her compositions reflect different integrations of acoustic, live electronics and studio manipulation.

Cat Hope: Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936 (2006)

This is a work that encourages embodied listening, where musical works are experienced by more of the body than just the ears, and can only be experienced in live situations. The Abe Sada project is a series of works for multiple bass instruments in different locations and situations, published together in the *Abe Sada Songbook* Vol. 1. *Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936* is for performer's under raked seating, and uses bass frequencies to vibrate the seating structure and enable the audience to 'listen' to the music physically through the structure.

Cat Hope (b1966) is an accomplished composer, sound artist, performer, songwriter and noise artist whose practice is an interdisciplinary one that often crosses over into video and installation. She has written soundscapes for dance and theatre companies as well as completed commissions to write music for film (winning the Pandora's Box Film Festival Best Score award in 2000) and pure music works. Cat is a classically trained flautist, self taught vocalist and experimental bassist who plays as a soloist and as part of small ensembles, such as Gata Negra, Lux Mammoth and Abe Sada. She tours often and her work is published worldwide. She is a lecturer in Composition and Music Technology at WAAPA, ECU.

[image: a performer under the stage at the premiere of Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936 in 2006]



Alvin Lucier: Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas (1972)

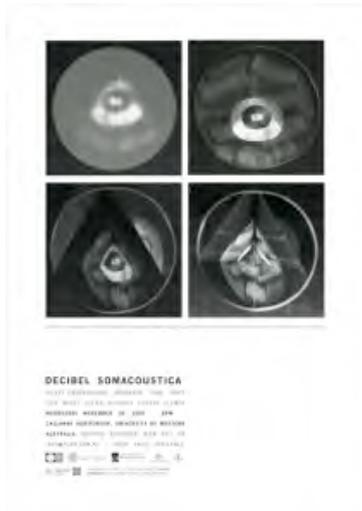
Part 3, No. 12 Violin and 2 sine tone generators.

Part 1, No. 3 Flute and 2 sine tone generators.

Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas is a series of works for instruments and sine tone generators. They are influenced by science and explore the physical properties of sound itself: resonance of spaces, phase interference between closely tuned pitches, and the transmission of sound through physical media. The instrumentalist plays against the two tone generators, which are set to specific frequencies not found on the tempered scale. The slightest movement of the listener's body will change the way the sound is perceived. Lucier's work is musically rich while simultaneously exploring the many acoustic phenomena and auditory perception.

Alvin Lucier (USA b1931) is one of the most innovative composers of his time, a pioneer and central figure in the world of experimental and electronic composition and performance. In conjunction with Robert Ashley, David Behrman, Gordon Mumma and others, Lucier helped form the Sonic Arts Union in 1966, one of the key experimental composition and performance groups of the late twentieth Century. His recent works include a series of sound installations and works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, and orchestra in which, by means of close tunings with pure tones, sound waves are caused to spin through space.

Concert 2: SomAcoustica



November 18th

8pm

Callaway Auditorium

University of Western Australia

as part of Tura New Music's [SCALE VARIABLE](#) series.

Download the [SomAcoustica program](#).

A selection of works that study acoustic phenomena and its effect on the human body: vibration, wave beats and other things that happen to the body when it shares space with sound.

“..a wonderfully immersive evening from Decibel who are filling a vital niche in the Perth music scene.”
The West Australian Newspaper.

Featuring:

The Velvet Underground: The Gift (1968)

Alvin Lucier: Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas (1972)

Laurie Anderson: Duet for violin and door jamb (1976)

John Cage: Cartridge Music (1960)

Pauline Oliveros: Antiphonal meditation (1979)

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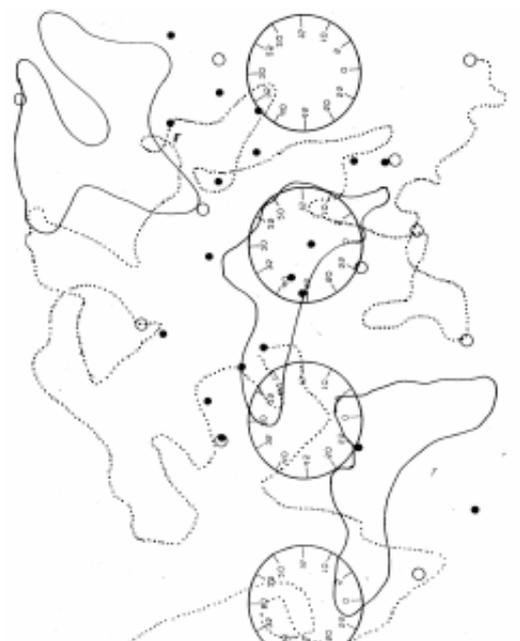
Ros Bandt : Four + Five (1979)

Rainer Linz: Walk on Parts(1980)

A new commissioned work by WA composer Lindsay Vickery



This event is
 auspiced by Tura
 New Music



One of Decibel's interpretations of
 John Cage's Cartridge Music

Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936
 2006

This is a piece for 1 – 8 bass guitarists performing under naked seating in a theatre.

The performers must all be beneath the seating, and this should not be apparent to the audience until after the performance is complete.

Amps should be 300W of tube amp, with 15" speakers. Place these against the seating structure: poles, under seats etc.

A video may be used to send some visual stimulus to the audience, but this must be abstract as to not let the audience know what is under the seats. Close ups of body/skin works well, sent via a live feed to a screen in the main 'performance' space.

Feedback is permitted and can be manipulated with the body.

Use knives as plectrums.

Play as slowly and low and loudly as possible.

Do not play any note above the pitch of the A string (55 Hz), but you may detune higher strings. Detuning lower strings is encouraged.

Strive to feel the seating structure vibrate.

Play for 20 minutes.

Silence signals the end.

Cat Hope

Score for Cat Hope's Abe Sada: Sada

Abe 1936



Lindsay Vickery Antibody excerpt

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Somacoustica program notes

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[image: Laurie Anderson performing Duet for violin and doorjamb in 1977].

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The Gift appears on *White Light/White Heat*, the second Velvet Underground album, and features John Cale reading a short story written by Lou Reed when he was a college student. The narrative focuses on college love, poverty, sexual promiscuity and ends in decapitation. On the original release, this track was created with all the spoken word in one channel of a stereo mix, and the ‘band’ in the other, making use of an instrumental track that was originally developed from live band jams during the brief time in which

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decibel somacoustica



8pm Wednesday 18th
November 2009

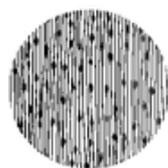
Somacoustica is a program of works investigating acoustic phenomena and it's effect on the human body: vibrations, wave

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beats, performance processes and things that happen to the body when it shares space with sound. The program features open works from the late 1970s composers Ros Bandt and Rainer Linz (Vie), as well as recent works by Western Australians Cat Hope, Hannah Clemen and a new commission for the full ensemble by Lindsay Vickery. Laurie Andersen's work for a violinist in a door jamb, a listen and response work by Pauline Oliveros, Alvin Lucier's works for instruments and sine tone generators, and John Cage's piece for turntable styli - interpreted on the body - represent key pieces in the mediation of the body and sound. For Somacoustica John Cale's unforgettable recitation of a Lou Reed text is presented in its original form on LP record as Decibel recreate the spirit of the Velvet Underground's cornerstone work of 1968, The Gift.

Program:

Alvin Lucier	Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas (1972)
Laurie Anderson	Duet For Violin and Door Jamb (1976)
John Cage	Cartridge Music (1960)

The Velvet Underground	The Gift (1968)
Hannah Clemen	a-cne lha-mo (2000)
Pauline Oliveros	Antiphonal Meditation (1979)
Cat Hope	Sada Abe 1936 (2009)
Ros Bandt	Four + FiVe (1979)
Rainer Linz	Walk on Parts (1980)
Lindsay Vickery	Antibody (2009)

Decibel is a new music ensemble devoted to the performance of music where electronic and acoustic instruments feature side by side. They foster and support Australian music and emerging Western Australian composers in the genre, <http://decibel.waapamusic.com> »

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Decibel's noise makes sound sense

CONCERT

Decibel Ensemble
Calloway Music Auditorium,
UWA.

Review: Rosalind Appleby

Experimental ensemble Decibel's second concert focused on the effect of sound on the human body and presented reverberations that made the body tremble, piercing sine waves, and a piece about a man having his head sawn off.

But the entertaining program was less frightening than I expected and was delivered with

a mix of serious intent and fun. In Laurie Anderson's comic Duet for Violin and Doorjamb, Dan Russell's violin bow was restricted by the width of the door frame and the percussive tapping of the bow on the frame added rhythm to his folksy improvisation.

Then followed a series of mostly well-executed and marvellously varied works, including Lindsay Vickery's Antibody and Rainer Linz's Walk on Parts where Vickery played successive clarinets and used the recorded sounds to build an evocative ensemble piece.

In John Cage's Cartridge Music, Decibel director Cat Hope, Malcolm

Riddoch and Stuart James used the cartridge picks from record players to scratch and "play" on different parts of their bodies. Ros Bandt's Four + Five was less successfully delivered.

Alvin Lucier took our ears to another level with an exploration of high-pitched overtones. Hope's Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936 at the other end of the sound spectrum simultaneously soothed like a foot spa and terrified like a thunderstorm.

It completed a wonderfully immersive evening from Decibel, who are filling a vital niche in the Perth music scene.

The West Australian

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30 November 2009

Decibel

18.11. and 10.09.2009 // Perth // WA

by [Kelly Curran](#) and [Ben Hamblin](#)



Image: Cat Hope, artistic director of Decibel

These two reviews by our WA contributors Kelly Curran and Ben Hamblin bring us up-to-date about one of the latest developments of new music in Western Australia: the exciting new ensemble Decibel.

Pulse - Pulsation - Sensation (18 November 2009)

By Kelly Curran

What an amazing evening! From the moment the audience was immersed in darkness at the onset of the concert, until the click of a stylus being removed from a record at its conclusion, Decibel had me completely enthralled. This exciting, new chamber ensemble, based in Perth, is directed by [Cat Hope](#), head of composition and electronic music at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. The ensemble seeks to present works which combine acoustic and electronic instruments, incorporating innovative and varied uses of the performance space itself. These approaches worked very successfully tonight, as the audience fed off the energy and enthusiasm of the performers who demonstrated the versatility of both forms of instrument, in isolation and in combination.

This, the second concert by Decibel, was comprised of works written from 1960 to 2009, encompassing a wide range of notation, scored traditionally, graphically, literally and electronically. The performance space operated somewhat like an extra member of the ensemble, in the way in which it was maximised and toyed with, and this added to the audience's feeling of involvement. Because of the open nature of many of the works, this specific concert can never be identically repeated, which also increased the audience's appreciation of a unique, live, performance event such as this.

In darkness, a black-suited violinist appeared through a door to the rear left of stage. Lit from below by a dim spotlight, his image was silhouetted in large, ghoulish form on the wooden panels behind. Here, the scene was set for the opening piece, Laurie Anderson's *Duet for violin and doorjamb* (1976). As Dan Russell played his electric violin in the doorway, the tip of the bow began to bang into the doorjamb, which had been fitted with contact microphones. The frog of the bow soon also joined in the fun, as it too commenced its battle with the doorjamb. Russell then incorporated the percussive doorjamb strikes into his rhythmic violin playing, obviously enjoying the moment. From time to time, he opened the door behind him with his foot and/or back to reveal an added depth of sound, as a speaker lay just beyond. When he decided it was time to finish, he simply ceased playing and walked casually back through the door to signify the work's conclusion. This light-hearted piece demonstrated the creativity and wit of both the composer and the performer, and was one of the highlights of the night.

Listeners were then led on a very different path, with the world premiere of *Antibody* (2009). This latest offering by Perth composer, woodwind player and Decibel member, Lindsay Vickery, was written specifically for this event, and utilised all Decibel performers - the composer himself (clarinet), Cat Hope (alto flute), Tristen Parr (cello), Dan Russell (violin), Stuart James (keyboard) and Malcolm Riddoch (electronics). Whilst the score is traditionally notated, it was presented to the performers on laptops. The work consists of five sections of varied tempi, each made up of nine bars (twenty-seven beats) of

alternating metre. Variety and order of metre are the same in each section, enabling for interchange of bars between sections. To begin, each instrument played the entire score together, commencing with a chorale texture, followed by various short melodic motifs, flurries and extended techniques. Things then got more interesting for performers and listeners, as laptops showed only nine bars at a time, which could be made up of a mixture of bars from any of the five sections. Each new set of nine bars was randomly determined using MaxMSP software, while earpiece click tracks gave performers a basic tempo. MaxMSP was also used to sample, process and mix each instrument, with this electronic bed becoming increasingly pervasive. Focussing on interpenetration and mutation of musical phrases, Vickery succeeded in demonstrating his intentions, as his work took listeners on an unpredictable journey through luscious, evolving textures and intriguing colours.

After the stage was again darkened, Vickery walked to a music stand, turned on its light and began playing his first part on clarinet. For Rainer Linz's *Walk on Parts* (1980) one performer played a series of parts, in random order, one after the other, at different music stands, using different reed instruments. Parts were each recorded and played back with other parts to produce the 'ensemble' effect. It was most entertaining and amusing, watching Vickery turn off a light on a music stand, stroll to another, located on stage, outside, or behind the audience, and play each new instrument. This demonstrated the performer's skill across a wide range of clarinets from contrabass to E flat and also showed his jovial and creative spirit. The strength of this piece tonight definitely lay in its unique presentation.

All acoustic performers returned to the stage for the first and only piece of the evening to contain no electronic devices, *Four + Five* (1979). This minimalist composition by Ros Bandt can be played by any instrumental combination - tonight it featured alto flute, contrabass clarinet, cello, violin and grand piano. The work, consisting of twenty bars of varying metre, to be repeated and revisited at performers' will, maintained a very steady pulse, despite contrasting and conflicting rhythms. It moved along at a lively and bouncy pace, with dynamics gradually changing, directed by the group as a whole. Excellent communication between players was clearly evident, as the ensemble sounded like one being, right up to the final unison note - a mesmerising and exquisite performance.

For those who had not yet read the program notes, the next work by Cat Hope would have come as quite a surprise. *Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936* (2006) was performed entirely underneath the audience who sat on raked seating. Focussing on bass frequencies, the piece could be experienced by the whole body, not just the ears. Bass guitars, electric cello and contrabass clarinet sent vibrations and sensations through the whole seating structure and room. A variety of low rumblings could be felt and heard, as audience members were completely surrounded and immersed. Personally I felt like I was in a hulking spaceship in a galactic battle - it was fantastic!

After interval, the physical properties of sound itself were explored through Alvin Lucier's *Still and Moving Lines of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas* (1972). Out of a series of works for different instruments and sine tone generators, Decibel presented *Part 3, No.12*, for violin, and *Part 1, No.3*, for flute. In the first example, the two sine tone generators each played a frequency either side of F, and the violin moved between them. Slight distinctions and differences could be identified as the sounds interacted so minutely. The physical movement and position of the listener also affected the tone in this exercise in auditory perception. The second example for flute operated in a similar fashion, but utilised a lower pitch - this piece seemed slightly more varied and organic than the first, perhaps due to the nature of the instrument, and due to the way the smallest change in breath control and embouchure can impact on its tone. The two pieces were separated by a contrasting work, which was a good decision, enabling listeners to focus on both equally, whilst maintaining overall forward momentum of the concert.

The work bookended by the Lucier sonic explorations was a composition for ensemble by Pauline Oliveros - *Antiphonal Meditation* (1979). As with the earlier Bandt composition, this piece required

heightened awareness and communication between players, but this score is comprised purely of written instructions and a diagram, as opposed to conventional music notation. Two groups of instrumentalists (or singers), in this case a) violin and cello, and b) flute and contrabass clarinet, face each other on stage. The first group is asked to 'spontaneously ... make a sound together,' which the other group should then echo or imitate. This was another delightfully unpredictable work. The alternated playing between the two groups produced a wide range of colour and effects, which were constantly transforming and developing, underpinned by manipulated samples on the laptop. In open ensemble works such as this, one of the challenges is when and how to conclude. Again demonstrating their well-honed communication between each other, the two groups began overlapping and ended together in a wild, unison flurry.

Grandfather of chance music and non-standard use of musical instruments, John Cage, applied many of his conceptual ideologies to the next work, *Cartridge Music* (1960). Here, the only instrument is the cartridge on the arm of a record player. Before the audience there were some tables in a semi-circular arrangement, behind which stood Hope, Riddoch and James. On the tables lay an assortment of objects, including the graphic score. Hope and Riddoch had a ball, using cartridges in as many ways as they could... except to play records. The cartridges and arms were connected by leads to individual speakers, so every noise was amplified. Some of the more outrageous and amusing uses were combing hair, brushing teeth and positioning a slinky into the cartridge. The performers couldn't help showing their enjoyment, with grins and smirks, which helped to connect to the audience, who were also highly entertained.

All six performers returned to the stage for the concluding work, a version of the Velvet Underground's *The Gift* (1968), reworked by Decibel for live ensemble and turntable. John Cale's narration of a short story, written by Lou Reed, from the original recording, began playing on the turntable. While not attempting to pick up every word and meaning of this spoken text, I was more appreciating its sonic contribution to the overall texture. The cello set up a bass riff, joined by small drum kit, then the piano commenced repeated quavers. Violin soon joined the mix, adding a few variations to its ostinato. Finally, Vickery added his alto saxophone to the established groove, interjecting with some very high, sustained and squeaky notes imitating the electronic feedback from the original. The ensemble continued to maintain a tight, steady pulse until the end of the spoken voice on record, as the evening concluded with an understated click.

Suited up in black and white, a la *Reservoir Dogs*, the cool characters of Decibel presented a stimulating, mind-expanding program that will not be soon forgotten. The choice and order of repertoire was a particular strength of the concert, performed to world-class standard. Instruments were played and played with; listeners' pre-conceived notions of music were put to the test; works were experienced with more than just the ears. This was a concert which succeeded in being challenging, without being inaccessible. I only hope that this was not a one-off, and that Decibel bring the *Somacoustica* program to more audiences near and far. I am most eager to attend the next concert offering by this ensemble in 2010.

Tape It (10 September 2009)

By Ben Hamblin

There was something alluring about sitting in a classical music auditorium scattered with amplifiers, studio monitors, leads, projectors, cables, and, best of all, reel-to-reel tape players; it gave that feeling of anticipation about what the newly formed ensemble, Decibel would produce. Composer Cat Hope directs and performs in the ensemble that is made up of a great range of Perth talent, including Dr Malcolm Riddoch, Lindsay Vickery, Stuart James, Tristen Parr, Rob Muir and Dan Russell; a combination of great

instrumental performers and intuitive electronic musicians.

The Ensemble's inaugural performance also corresponded with the opening night of the Totally Huge New Music Festival, run by Tura New Music - a ten-day new music festival featuring works of various artists from around the world. Decibel seemed to sum up the festival, with an auspicious mix of music from new music pioneers, through to local works, including a commissioned work by WAAPA composer in residence, Daniel Thorne.

The concert kicked off with a modern interpretation of William Burroughs, *Electronic Revolution*. Following the idea by Burroughs, Decibel cut up TV news reports from a current affairs program. With the video of the news report playing on a small TV without any visual manipulation, the accompanying audio gradually degraded, from audible news reports about the swine flu epidemic into a dense layering of conventional electronic manipulation.

Spatial aesthetic was tested in Warren Burt's *Another Noisy Lullaby*, a work written especially for Decibel. With Tristan Parr on cello positioned to the side of the audience, and Lindsay Vickery perched up behind the audience on bass clarinet, the performance also included Cat Hope (flute) and Dan Russell (violin), with no one as the central focus of the work in spatial performance array. Each player was equipped with a tape player, playing faint electronic sounds on cassette tapes. The minimal lighting of the music stand lights alone aided the audience's attention to sound, which heightened the delicate piece. The timbral qualities of the four instruments at extremely quiet dynamics made for a really alternate atmosphere. Often new music falls into a situation of loudness, whereas in this case, Burt has used restrained dynamics to create a wonderful sensation of spatial delicacy.

A recurring theme of the night, possibly not intended as a focal theme, was the projection of scores onto a screen. Often acting as a master score for the players to follow, the projections allowed the audience to (attempt to) follow the players. However, in many cases, graphic scores proved difficult to follow from an audience perspective and seemed to deter from the incredible improvising from the ensemble. The first piece to benefit from the projected score was ensemble director, Cat Hope's new work *In The Cut*. With a score that outlined a steady decline as its macro-structure, microstructurally it included some wonderfully subtle interaction between performers. With a variety of acoustic instruments, as well as a bass guitar, and turntable, the piece successfully narrates a seemingly basic structure that is transformed into the piece's conceptual idea, degradation.

Mauricio Kagel's piece *Prima Vista* was another projected score piece, with the ensemble split into two groups of three. Perhaps the most complex score of the night to follow, the piece featured two separate scores for each ensemble, with numerous instructions sprawled across the scores. The piece was written for 'slide pictures and undefined sound sources' and Decibel modernised it into a self-automated score projection. Sonically, the piece was intriguing, with a seemingly indeterminate structure making for an ever-progressing, shifting structure.

I'm not sure how many exact interpretations of Brian Eno's music for airports have been attempted since tape machines have slowly been phased out, but Decibel not only attempted it, they pulled it off marvellously. Returning from the interval to see three tape loops stretched across the entire stage gave a sense of nostalgia, and for those who knew the piece, a sense of interest to see how Decibel could perform a live interpretation of a studio project by Eno. *Music for Airports* was composed as a piece of unobtrusive music, designed as a soothing, low-volume work. Decibel transformed the work into a live scenario, and added a live trio to the tape loop recordings of that same group. As the tape machines cranked into action, the warm, gentle sounds of the tape reels washed through the auditorium, as the three tapes rustled their way around the reels. The trio were careful not to overpower the loops as they subtly interacted with their own tape loop recordings. The ensemble performance was as 'tape-esque'

as it could be, and created a beautiful melding of tape and instruments that sent the audience into a meditative state, only broken with the clunk of the stop button to halt the tape reels at the conclusion of the performance

Transit of Venus, a new work by Lindsay Vickery, composed for three acoustic instruments and electronics was another excursion into the world of indeterminacy; a piece with a self-automated score and a click track. For the night, it was for alto flute, violin and cello. With the players having to follow exact instructions on a projected score, being chosen at random by the laptop, the piece formed its own performance-unique structure. As John Cage insisted, nothing is silence, and (even if unexpectedly) Vickery's piece briefly passed through passages of silence that acted as subtle additions to overall structure. Cat Hope, Tristen Parr and Dan Russell performed this piece with amazing detail, adhering to the projected instructions with such passion that gave the piece a fascinating shape.

The penultimate piece almost turned into a bit of a comedy routine between Dan Russell and Tristen Parr. The piece by Ernie Althoff, *Front Row* is an interesting investigation into alternate methods of 'scoring' a piece. The performance saw Cat Hope, Malcolm Riddoch and Stuart James sitting in the audience with individual tape players that acted as audio-cues for the performers on stage. Dan and Tristen were equipped with a series of musical toys and percussion instruments that were to be played upon cue from the tape players. The interaction reached two levels, the interaction between tape and performance, and the interaction between the two performers.

Dan Thorne's new work *We'll Never Know* was an exploratory look into the combination of live performance with pre-manipulated recordings. With the live trio receiving input through headphones to stay in time, Dan managed to juxtapose processed samples of instruments against a live version of themselves. The work digressed beautifully into a wash of complex timbre between the live ensemble and the backing track. With auditory similarities to the works of Steve Reich and Michael Nyman, Thorne created a wonderfully crafted electro-acoustic work that capped off a delightful night, exploring the possibilities of acoustic instruments and electronics.

Event details

Decibel: SomAcoustica

Works by Vickery, Bandt, Hope, Linz, Lucier, Anderson, Cage, Oliveiros, The Velvet Underground
presented by Tura New Music

Callaway Music Auditorium, Crawley, WA

18 November 2009

[More details](#) in the AMC Calendar

Decibel: Tape It

Works by Vickery, Althoff, Burt, Hope, Thorne
presented by Totally Huge New Music Festival & Tura New Music

WAAPA Music Auditorium, Perth, WA

10 September 2009

[More details](#) in the AMC Calendar

Further links

Decibel (<http://decibel.waapamusic.com/>)

Tura New Music (www.tura.com.au/)

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Subjects discussed by this article:

- [Decibel](#)
 - [Walk on parts](#) by [Rainer Linz](#)
 - [Four + Five](#) by [Ros Bandt](#)
 - [Another noisy lullaby](#) by [Warren Burt](#)
 - [Front row](#) by [Ernie Althoff](#)
 - [Antibody](#) by [Lindsay Vickery](#)
-

Kelly Curran has recently completed her Bachelor of Music (Hons) at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, majoring in composition. Several of her chamber works have been performed around Perth, and she has also composed for dance and film. She was recently nominated for a West Australian Screen Award for best score for the short film *Silent Beauty*. She is currently researching postmodern approaches to chamber music.

Ben Hamblin is an electronic musician and composer from Perth, WA. He is currently in his last year of the Bachelor Of Music (Music Technology) course at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. He composes spatial, atmospheric, electroacoustic music, either in live performance or non-realtime production. Ben is interested in the idea of using limited sound sources to create pieces of vast depth and obscurity; testing the inaudible structure of a sound.

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DECIBEL

Callaway Auditorium, Crawley

19/11/09

For a classical ensemble, **Decibel** are pretty rock'n'roll. Of course their artistic director Cat Hope frequented the Perth rock scene for ages, electronics man Malcolm Riddoch plays in noise outfit Abe Sada, and cellist Tristan Parr is part of Schvendes and Fall Electric, so it makes sense that, although they perform contemporary avant-garde classical works, there's also a streak of anarchic energy about them too. The *Somacoustica* recital was a fitting display of this multi-modality, both beginning and ending with pieces by artists that, despite or regardless of their experimental nature, also operate within the popular. Laurie Anderson's *Duet For Violin And Doorjamb* began the evening on a suitably conceptual, note. The overall concept behind *Somacoustica* was the exploration of sound within space, and by amplifying a doorway and having a violinist stand within it so that his bow hit its sides, this concept was given both an engaging and

humorous introduction. Lindsay Vickery's *Antibody* saw the whole ensemble processed and reassembled through live electronics, whilst Vickery himself performed Rainer Linz' *Walk On Parts*, playing four different reed instruments and again through electronic intervention, soloing with himself. Ros Bandt's *Four + Five* added melody and musical structure in the form of short pulsing parts that overlapped each other in a gorgeous invocation of rhythm, whilst Hope's *Abe Sada: Sada Abe 1936* ended the first half in a visceral climax whereby the ensemble played beneath the raked seating, with bass tones offering the most physical invocation of *Somacoustica*'s concept. The second half began with Alvin Lucier's *Still And Moving Lines Of Silence In Families Of Hyperbolas*, whereby sine tones were bent and warped through the introduction of violin and flute. Incredibly minimal in nature, both ably exemplified the physical phenomena that occur through sound. These were interspersed around Pauline Oliveros' *Antiphonal Meditation*, whereby two groups improvised in tandem, whilst John Cage's *Cartridge Music* saw Hope and Riddoch invoke an almighty ruckus through turntable stylus' placed in contact with all manner of sonic ephemera, including their own bodies. Finally, the Velvet Underground's *The Gift*, whereby a single stereo image of John Cale's infamous monologue was underscored by a gorgeous rendition of the original, truly brought the night and the concept together. It was a fitting close to a recital that, though steeped in the form and ritual of classical music, certainly displayed its share of edge and attitude.

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