

Clapping Machine Music Variations

for laptops and any number of acoustic instrumentalists.
Composed for Sideband.

~12 - 40 minutes

At the core of Clapping Machine Music Variations is a pair of laptop-based Drum Machinists. Surrounding this duo is an assortment of other instruments, some clearly defined laptop-based instruments, others more variable and traditional in type. CMMV takes specific inspiration from works by Steve Reich, Györgi Ligeti and Björk. In particular, the drum-machine algorithm was initially designed to mimic certain rhythmic processes in the Ligeti Études pour Piano, processes which also coincidentally generate the rhythmic pattern for Reich's Clapping Music (this should come as no surprise, as both composers were deeply influenced by traditional African rhythms); this algorithm is then used to generate variations on the original Clapping Music pattern, variations that are explored over the course of CMMV. More generally inspiring are pieces like Riley's In C, and Andriessen's Worker's Union, where some things are specified, other things are not, and anyone can join the party.

here's the [first recording](#), with two violins.

under some duress, i wrote a [paper](#) about this piece.

Sideband performed this piece at ICMC in Stony Brook, 2010. i don't think we have any doc.

[PLOrk performed CMMV at Princeton in April 2010.](#)

and the [So Percussion Summer Institute](#) did an insane version of CMMV in July of 2010; [very rough handheld bad audio quality recording here.](#)

i'm currently reworking CMMV so it can be performed by as few as two laptopists and two acoustic instrumentalists.

neither Anvil nor Pulley

for laptop/percussion quartet (with turntable)
commissioned by [So Percussion](#)

~40 minutes

1. **Another Wallflower** [from Long Ago]
2. **120bpm** [or, What is your Metronome Thinking?]
3. **A Cow Call** [please oh Please Come Home!]
4. **Feedback** [in Which a Famous Bach Prelude becomes Ill-Tempered]
5. **Hang Dog Springar** [a Slow Dance]

neither Anvil nor Pulley is, in short, an epic musical exploration of the "man"/machine relationship in the digital age. Unlike the anvil or pulley, the computer hides its purpose—to strike or yank will likely only break it. Even the name "computer" is a bit of misnomer: while some of us use the computer to compute, for most of us it's really a big storage bin. It's where we keep stuff. Musically, this means the computer is a really big room full of records. Or, rather, a room full of records AND a fancy record player. Ultimately, then, the computer is a tool for manipulating time; events from Long Ago and Far Away can be re-created, at least in part, here and now.

Unlike an old fashioned record player, which might wobble a bit with delightful and seemingly human imperfection, the computer is a ruthless timekeeper. I've long been interested in how differently machines and people measure time. Oddly, we assume that the machines are always "right," whatever that might mean. But, for many, the "unhuman" quality of time that machines lend to music is heard as flawed and musicians know only too well how brutally unfair, and unmusical, metronomes can seem. In the second movement of *neither Anvil nor Pulley*, the machines and the humans duke it out. The laptops provide a constant click at 120 beats-per-minute (at first; later the pulse slows to 60bpm, and then 30bpm, and then the pulses

So, the computer is a storage bin, but it also gives us nice ways to mess with the things we store. And Long-Ago might actually be Short-Ago; in musical terms, this means the computer might store something we give it, change it in some way, and feed it back to us (and back into itself) some time later, perhaps a really REALLY short time later (like, small fractions of a second later). In fact, the vast majority of "digital effects" that musicians use involve feedback of this sort. This idea is explored in the fourth movement of *nAnP*. If the woodblocks and sticks in *120bpm* represent the "1s" of the digital world, the concert bass-drum in *Feedback* stands for the "0s." It becomes a speaker that is caressed (by speaker drivers taped to its heads) rather than struck, and its output is fed back to the computer with hand-held microphones (yes, Stockhausen is again an inspiration here). The computer stores that sound for a very short period of time, works some magic, and then sends it right back out again, transformed, to the speaker-drum, where the process starts again. The result is a concert bass-drum that, perhaps incongruously, attempts to utter the glorious lines of Bach's famous C-Major Prelude from the Well-Tempered Clavier; music from Long Ago... Surrounding the concert bass-drum are an array of digital drum machines that also use feedback in unusual ways, and a real-live drummer, who attempts to survive what amounts to a brutal, accelerating, digital blender: this truly is man *versus* machine!

Composing for (I really should say "with") So Percussion is an incredible pleasure. Their collaborative and adventurous spirits (not to mention their sheer musical abilities) are awesome. In the past, I've had the privilege of actually performing my own music with them, and to this day, I've never become comfortable with that traditional (or is it?) role of the composer: sitting in the audience. I'd much rather be up there with my fiddle! Well, placed around and in between *120bpm* and *Feedback* are three fiddle tunes that sound from long ago. As a fiddler and electronic musician, I am keenly aware of how differently fiddlers and laptops deal with time, and these tunes highlight the differences, while also allowing me to cheat by *almost* performing with So Percussion. This cheating extends beyond the fiddle tunes themselves; embedded deep within *120bpm* are sounds of my fiddle, frozen in time, and somehow extracted from the computer via, of all things, a modified \$12 golf video game controller.

Check out the [score for 120bpm](#) (the scores for the rest of nAnP are still a mess), and the [instrument key](#), which includes an explanation of