

Michael Jones

The Promise of Escape

Percussion works by Pluto Bell, Nicholas Deyoe & Scott Wollschleger

The Promise of Escape

Michael Jones, percussion

Pluto Bell

1 **A Moment or Two** (13:40)

Nicholas Deyoe

2 **Lullaby** (12:38)

Scott Wollschleger

3 **trace-escape-horizon** (36:15)

Total: 62:33

The pieces on this disc are a representative sample of some of the most meaningful solo work that I've undertaken since the pandemic. They are, in some ways, a kind of capstone to my time spent in California, where I lived from 2017-2025. I am forever grateful to the people and places that nourished me during this time. Each of the pieces on the disc have a distinctly personal nature to them. Pluto and Nick's pieces in particular are a kind of homage to the communities I discovered in San Diego and Los Angeles. In recent days I find myself living more towards Scott's neck of the woods in New York, and so this disc could be a portrait of these two star-crossed contemporary music communities through the medium of percussion.

Pluto and Scott's pieces are both commissions, and share a similar origin story. My desire to work with each of them originated in the almost-accidental discovery of some of their other works: Pluto's *Moving Like Icebergs Against Each Other* and Scott's *American Dream*. Here were two pieces that constructed sumptuous, melancholic, and at

times pleasantly-agonizing worlds, and I found myself completely smitten by them. To my delight, I found that neither had written any solo percussion music in this vein (with a notable exception being Scott's theatrical collaborations with Kevin Sims), and I approached each asking if they'd take a chance on me. They accepted, I gave them almost no guidance on what to make, and we now have their two strange and beautiful works that I'm so happy to share.

Nick's piece is different in that, as his program notes identify, it has passed through a fair number of hands already (though, I would wager still fewer than ten). My engagement with it therefore is more similar to how one might engage with any "repertoire" piece: looking (but not too closely!) at what others have done, and remaining conscious of the fact that performance of this work is already situated within an interpretive community. This is especially at front-of-mind when one considers Brian Archinal's already formidable interpretation of the work: from the very beginning the standard was very high. My attraction to the piece largely came from how different each of these takes on the

work was, and yet each captured the mercurial melodic and timbral material that weaves Nick's piece together so compellingly. I hope that its inclusion on this disc will encourage others to pick it up as I did.

When curating this CD I admittedly didn't have any kind of coherent aesthetic framework. This is more of a portrait disc than anything, and each of these pieces is a biographical episode within the larger series of debts I have to individuals and communities who have helped shape my artistry. Still, now having gathered them together I can't help but notice how there are vectors of mutual-ity across these works, their composers, and the underlying aesthetics. Each is weirdly magical; they oscillate between melancholy and optimism in a way both distant and intimate. Each seems interested in percussion as a medium that is more ritualistic and tactile, fleshy, even, than conventionally percussive (Nick notes my performance as a kind of mantra, Scott identifies my turning of an acoustic object in space, etc.). For my part, I credit these works with helping to turn my attention to percussive objects and their interactions, both in their brightness and their shadow. Every percussive attack, be it a striking or a bowing, is a duet that results in a sonic cloud of relations, a billowing vapor rushing out of the room towards open air. Beckoning, these pieces ask what would happen if we chose to follow.

— Michael Jones

Pluto Bell · **A Moment or Two** (2021)

“A bell began to ring merrily up there, a bell that for at least a second made his heart palpitate for its tone was menacing, too, as if it threatened him the fulfillment of his vague desire. The great bell soon died away however, and its place was taken by a feeble, monotonous little twinkle.”

— Franz Kafka, *The Castle* (translation and excerpt from *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* by D&G)

“There is the background noise, then a noise in the midst of that background noise, and suddenly... there’s the river of Time.”

— Michel Serres, *Genesis*

A snowy road, bounded by grey buildings with no discernible features. Your way is blocked by a tightly packed group of pilgrims, supplicants or perhaps prisoners. Their heads uniformly bowed under dull hoods, their hands, their feet are bound together by a great web of rope. Some of the bindings have barely the slack required for the form to shamle forward. Others walk evenly, dragging knots behind them on the ground.

You try to pass through an opening on the right as the road turns left. As you approach the sheer density of the rope and the forms arrests you. Any attempt to pass around or through is far more likely to entangle you in their bonds or their limbs. You fall in just behind. As a group they lurch, halt, and surge but keep steady apace with your gait. The road under their passage, which ahead you presume must be uniform with white and fresh snow, is a turbulence of black footprints. Frozen mud pierces the snow.

Your ankle folds around a rock. Later, dazed, you stand and the empty road is identical in both directions, the grey buildings are silent. You doubt already your memory of the group, their alien progress. To your horror the footprints in the snow lead uniformly in all directions. Sometimes a single dress shoe in clear relief, sometimes a ditch traced dragging knots, cutting toward the gloomy buildings as often as toward open road. A set of prints leads confidently this way or that and then ends abruptly. You cannot find among them your footprints.

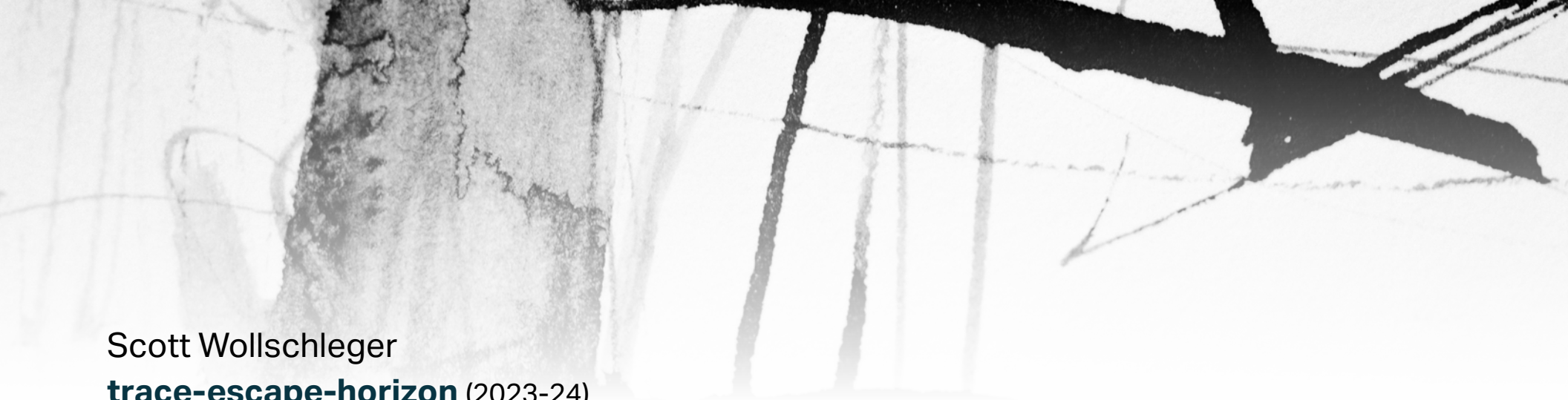
— Jesse Quebbeman-Turley



Nicholas Deyoe · **Lullaby** (2011)

Lullaby was written for Brian Archinal and premiered at Gaudeamus Muziekweek in 2011. The original concept was to explore the darkness of classic lullabies and children's stories. The drums and woodblocks are meant to feel melodic, colored by the glockenspiel. The initial pitches of the glockenspiel are meant to offer subtle harmonic accompaniment and context to the implied melodies played on the drums. Lullaby-like melodic phrases weave throughout but take time to be heard in that way. By the end of the piece, the roles have changed and the glockenspiel has made its way to the surface, eventually leaving the drums behind entirely. In the 14 years since this piece was first composed, it has been beautiful to watch it develop its own life in the hands of other percussionists. Each with their own strategy for tuning the drums, creating entirely different relationships between them and the glockenspiel. Changes in mallet choice, pacing, and general weight of attack make this feel more personal from one player to the next than any of the other percussion music I have written. Michael Jones' approach is austere and understated, as though the music is a solemn ritual only meant to be experienced by the person standing inside the setup. Michael's approach feels like being invited inside of a personal mantra so that one can hear the universe through their ears.

— Nicholas Deyoe



Scott Wollschleger

trace-escape-horizon (2023-24)

In *trace-escape-horizon* the percussionist conjures a magically fragile sonic situation. The first part of the work uses only two pitches, often harmonics, which playfully flicker and blend together in a constantly shifting manner, much like the way light glistens on the surface of water. The vibraphone harmonics are created in two different ways: one by striking the metal bar with a mallet and the other by lightly touching the metal bar as it is bowed softly. While writing, I imagined Mike gently holding up a nearly ungraspable and delicate microscopic sound sculpture for us to listen to and observe from different cochlear angles. As the piece progresses, new sounds are introduced and the range of the vibraphone is expanded upwards.

In *trace-escape-horizon*, you, as the listener, are encouraged to become lost in the sound and to allow your mind and ear to wander freely. The work embraces a hyper-analog aesthetic, both acoustically, and in the compositional process that was deployed to generate the music.

While composing the work I developed various procedures of disorientation and I tried to eliminate any sense of development. The music was written entirely by hand, in ink, on homemade staff paper. At times the score resembles something a child might innocently draw. The aim was to imply a sense of floating ambiguity that would be reflected both in the music and its interpretation.

The title of the work comprises three words that stayed with me as I reflected on the music. The score is a map that traces my steps of disorientation and constant forgetting. The idea of the horizon has a special place in my understanding of what an artist does. For me, the artist holds open the door to the future. What that future is remains totally unpredictable and not-yet-determined; we unveil horizons for others to soar towards and to lose themselves inside of. The horizon invites us to proceed into its boundlessness with a sense of mystery, weirdness, hope, and the promise of escape.

— Scott Wollschleger

Biographies

Michael Jones is a percussionist and conductor based in upstate New York. He has been described by *Fanfare Magazine* as a “phenomenal player” whose “restraint... carries the music through with otherworldly sounds.” His work focuses on championing new pieces of the 21st century as well as works from the 20th century avant-garde. He is particularly interested in touch, resonance, and the enchanted currents of sounding objects. Composers he has worked closely with include Scott Wollschleger, Nicholas Deyoe, David Macbride, Kevin Good, pluto pell, and Matt Sargent. He has performed at the LA Philharmonic’s Noon-to-Midnight Festival, The Ojai Music Festival, The Other Minds Festival, Monday Evening Concerts, The Dog Star Orchestra Festival, and the Hartford New Music Festival. He’s completed residencies at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik (Germany), The Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (Alberta), The Nief Norf Summer Festival (Tennessee), and others. He’s appeared in the past as a member of the William Winant Percussion Group and red fish blue fish. He regularly performs as member and

co-founder of the flute/percussion duo Offscreen, with Alexander Ishov, and the piano/percussion project Duo Refracta, with Shaoai Ashley Zhang. He currently teaches at Bard College.

Pluto Bell is a Los Angeles-based composer and musician whose work focuses on texture, temporality, and the phenomenological experience of listening. Emerging from LA’s experimental music scene, their compositions often employ dissonance and displacement in relation to familiar musical conventions, shaping affect and perception over time. Bell’s practice is oriented toward materials and performers, treating instruments, objects, and bodies as active sites of inquiry. Their work has been performed in the U.S. and Europe at venues including Café OTO, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Zebulon, and at festivals such as Darmstädter Ferienkurse and Göteborg Art Sounds. Across contexts, their work is informed by a reading-heavy practice and sustained engagement with theory and poetics.

plutobell.bandcamp.com

Nicholas Deyoe is a Los Angeles based guitarist, composer, and conductor. He is a member of the dark-ambient electric guitar duo KillDry with Jay Sorce and ethereal doomgaze quartet Serpentine Transmission. His music has been called “intriguingly complex and excitedly lush” by the *LA Times*. *The New York Times* wrote that Deyoe’s a new(er) anxiety “contrasted filigree lightness and explosive loudness...without seeming to strain for effect.” Drawn to sounds that are inherently physical, his music combines the use of noise, delicacy, drama, fantasy, brutality, lyricism, and cathartic joy to create a diverse sonic experience. As a guitarist, Nicholas strives to further the already vast sound world of the electric guitar by experimenting with microtonal tunings, non-conventional instruments, preparations, bows, beer cans, and lots and lots of pedals. His recordings appear on Orenda, New World, Populist, New Focus, Hat Art, Sono Luminus, Spektral, Innova, and Microfest.

nicholasdeyoe.com

Scott Wollschleger is a composer who grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. His music has been highly praised for its arresting timbres and conceptual originality. Wollschleger “has become a formidable, individual presence” in the contemporary musical landscape (*The Rest Is Noise*, Alex Ross), and his most recent piano work was praised as a “small masterpiece” (*The New York Times*, Seth Colter Walls). His distinct musical language explores themes of art in dystopia, the conceptualization of silence, synesthesia, and creative repetition in form; a musical blend that jazz pianist and blogger Ethan Iverson describes as “Morton Feldman meets Thelonious Monk meets H.P. Lovecraft.” Wollschleger’s concert works can be heard in the United States and abroad. Following lightly in the footsteps of the New York School, Wollschleger received his Masters of Music in composition from Manhattan School of Music in 2005, where he studied with Morton Feldman’s protégé Nils Vigeland. For 10 years Wollschleger was a Co-Artistic Director of Red Light New Music, a 501c(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to presenting and crafting contemporary music.

scottwollschleger.com



A Moment or Two (1) was recorded April 3, 2022
at Conrad Prebys Music Center Studio 268/203, La Jolla CA
Recorded and mixed by Douglas Osmun
Produced by Pluto Bell

Lullaby (2) was recorded May 20-21, 2023
at Warren Lecture Hall Studio A, La Jolla, CA
Recorded by Douglas Osmun
Produced and mixed by Nicholas Deyoe

trace-escape-horizon (3) was recorded May 8-9, 2024
Warren Lecture Hall Studio A, La Jolla, CA
Recorded by Christian Cummings
Produced by Scott Wollschleger
Mixed by Ryan Streber
Published by Project Schott New York

Mastered by Ryan Streber, Oktaven Audio, NY

Images: Annie Spratt, Unsplash
Design & layout: Marc Wolf, marcjwolf.com

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