

S P L I C E   E N S E M B L E



ANSIBLE

SPLICE ENSEMBLE  
ANSIBLE

Steven L. Ricks (b. 1969)

**Motor Culture** (2021)

- |   |  |      |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | I. Hank's Drive Through the Multiverse | 5:34 |
| 2 | II. Our Lady of Blessed Acceleration   | 9:34 |
| 3 | III. Disastrous Experiment             | 3:49 |

Caroline Louise Miller (b. 1988)

**Ansible** (2019)

- |   |                      |       |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| 4 | I. Antiphony         | 8:50  |
| 5 | II. Gethen / Icecaps | 10:02 |
| 6 | III. Urras / Walls   | 5:50  |
| 7 | IV. Passacaglia      | 6:11  |

Elainie Lillios (b. 1969)

- |   |                                      |       |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|
| 8 | <b>Living Between Seconds</b> (2021) | 14:27 |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------|

Total Time: 64:34

Keith Kirchoff, piano & electronics  
Adam Vidiksis, drum set & electronics  
Sam Wells, trumpet & electronics

# Artifacts of Collaboration

by Vanessa Ague

For the last ten years, SPLICE Ensemble has been developing a core repertoire for an uncommon instrumentation: trumpet, piano, percussion, and electronics. The group, comprising Keith Kirchoff, Adam Vidiksis, and Sam Wells, has grown a body of work rooted in deep collaboration with today's composers and a passion for the wealth of musical potential within electroacoustic composition. With *Ansible*, the trio presents three pieces commissioned over the last decade that each showcase SPLICE Ensemble's textural approach to electroacoustic music while exploring the universal theme of time.

SPLICE Ensemble began playing together through SPLICE, an organization that has a focus on developing concert music that uses electronics. All three members of the ensemble are educators at the organization's summer institute, where they began playing chamber music and eventually became the in-house ensemble. At SPLICE Institute, they go beyond just reading music written by participants, offering composers space to work out their ideas with the group. Collaboration is baked into their process: SPLICE views the pieces they commission as "artifacts of collaboration," music born from trust between composer and performer. Many of the works they've commissioned have been crafted over long

periods of time in the studio, concert hall, outdoors, or over the phone, born from a shared musical understanding.

The album's title work, *Ansible*, represents the first deeply collaborative effort for the group, and over the years has become a defining part of their sound. Caroline Louise Miller, the composer, had a pre-existing relationship with the trio — she's a good friend of Sam Wells, with whom she had gone to high school and undergrad — and that trust made the creative process highly rewarding. The piece was formed over the course of a year, including a weekend of open-ended workshops in New York City, during which Miller brought a series of sketches and ideas that they together sculpted into a larger work.

*Ansible* was written in memoriam for the author Ursula K. Le Guin, whose "ansible" was a device that could communicate instantaneously across the universe. The contraption appears across several of her novels and serves as a tool to explore the pitfalls and promise of communication; its potential for utopia and for disaster in equal measure. Miller's music explores these ideas — how messages across centuries or galaxies can be clear or distorted through time — through a series of supernatural hums that conjure the feeling of interstellar stardust, the vastness of outer space, and the history of social justice movements in one fell swoop (another ode to Le Guin).

The piece opens from a distance with just a couple of scrapes and a decaying piano that swirl around each other,



ringing like a toy box unearthed from the depths of the past. Eventually, it erupts in frenetic drums, a testament to its great range from the sparsest, eeriest communications to the most massive, intergalactic pulses of sound. By the time the final movement arrives, the music has grown an immense galaxy built from a gliding trumpet melody shrouded in static haze, giving one final moment to contemplate the fuzziness of time.

Steven Ricks' *Motor Culture* was made with similar attention to collaboration and time. The work explores the positives and negatives of car travel, animating a road trip through a series of phrases and recordings that conjure the sensation of being in a car and hurtling toward bliss or terror. There's a feeling of acceleration throughout, a revving engine that just won't stop, much like the ever-increasing speed of modern life. The piece begins with a bang as trumpet slices through bristling electronics; off-kilter conversation between trumpet and piano provide forward motion, during

which the two instruments follow each other at an escalating pace. But despite its propulsive energy, the work also finds moments of quiet, emerging from tumultuous riffs into ghostly whispers. It's both a raucous ride and a foreboding warning, culminating in a haunted wisp of smoke.

Also shaped collaboratively, Elainie Lillios' *Living Between Seconds* closes the album with one final meditation on time. The piece uses sourced field recordings from the American southwest, largely comprising bird and insect calls, as foundation for guided improvisation. It asks the listener to notice the music's subtle changes as time progresses, unfolding in layers of sweeping textures that venture from twinkling piano to explosive cymbal rides. Each shift offers a new means of focus. By the final seconds, all that's left is the whistle of the wind. It's a fitting end to the album: What's left is the moment, presence achieved through the act of listening to music that embraces the uncertainty, surprises, and possibilities of this new musical world.

## COMPOSER NOTES

**Motor Culture** — In 2010 I was invited by my friend Ned McGowan to write a piece for his ensemble Hexnut as part of a project they initiated: WRENCH. It was inspired by the photography of Edward Burtynsky, and each composer involved wrote a piece that coordinated sound with one or more of Burtynsky’s images. At the time I was drawn to two images related to Burtynsky’s concept of *Motor Culture*, that is, all the activities of taking from the earth and production that relate to the automobile, from oil drilling to car manufacturing to freeway systems and beyond. I’ve continued to think about how the automobile influences so many aspects of my life and decided to make this piece a poetic exploration of some of those facets. The first movement, “Hank’s Drive Through the Multiverse,” takes as inspiration a children’s song by Pinto Colvig called “Honkety Hank,” a song I used to listen to from an old vinyl single my Dad had. This playful inspiration is transformed into and/or pit against a more rigorous process of color and talea that provides the underlying structure for the piece. Ultimately, I picture a sort of surreal journey that juxtaposes the playful and idealistic view of going for a ride with the more problematic features and dangers of automobile travel.

The second movement, “Our Lady of Blessed Acceleration,” steals a line from The Blues Brothers movie (which

itself features a lot of driving and an epic car chase) to suggest the ability of cars to accelerate, but also the general “drive” or push to go faster, be better, advance in technology, etc. (cue Daft Punk’s “Harder, Better, Faster, Stronger”). The constant pulse, driving rhythms, and propulsive electronics are pushing things forward in a way that suggests progress, but also perhaps has the spirit of getting out of control and heading for disaster.

The final movement, “Disastrous Experiment,” is a somber reflection on the painful aspects of automobile violence, both intentional and accidental. *Motor Culture* was commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University for SPLICE Ensemble.

— Steven L. Ricks

**Ansible** (In memoriam: Ursula K. Le Guin) is the result of a year-long, extremely rewarding collaboration with SPLICE Ensemble. A heartfelt thanks to Sam Wells, Keith Kirchoff, and Adam Vidiksis, whose artistry, dedication and honest critique have shaped this work at every stage of our collaboration.

Ursula K. Le Guin coined the term “Ansible” in her 1966 science fiction novel Rocannon’s world. The Ansible is a device that enables instantaneous interstellar communication,

alleviating the significant time lag between the transmission and receipt of messages that could previously only travel at the speed of light. In Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle*, a loosely connected group of sci-fi novels that take part within the same universe, the Ansible is sometimes present and sometimes absent — for a variety of reasons, economic, political, or because it hasn't been invented yet. In circumstances where the Ansible is absent, communication between entities is often frustrated or inflected by vast distances of time and space, causing interstellar political troubles as messages received 50 or 100 years later lose their relevance. The Ansible, an open-source, open-science communications device invented by an Anarchist physicist, is conceived by Le Guin as having utopian potentials, enabling a peaceful interstellar coalition called the Ekumen. In spite of its Utopian potential, its presence produces conflict as well, a rich metaphor for globalization. Struggles are waged for control of the Ansible technology itself, by entities who wish to capitalize on exclusive rights to its use. The rapid exchange of information across galaxies also interacts in unpredictable ways with different societies, in the very worst circumstances causing a technocracy (see *The Telling*).

The four musical movements of *Ansible* find resonances with these themes and with my two favorite novels of the *Hainish Cycle*, *The Dispossessed* (1974) and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969).

“Antiphony” is a meditation on pre-ansible communication, as messages from almost a century ago (conveyed by classical music recordings from the 1930's, 40's, and 50's) finally are received in a not-so-distant future. Keith responds by playing extrapolations on these old tunes on a decaying piano. These old recordings, first heard in “Antiphony,” are carried throughout the other three movements; snippets placed in a variety of contexts — borne on the wind from a distant house maybe, or heard broadcast over the radio. The theme of embedding the same information in a multitude of spatial and temporal contexts carries throughout the rest of the piece.

“Gethen / Icecaps” is inspired by the ice-covered planet in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It is a soundscape of creaking, melting, ice, whistling wind, glaciers, arctic fauna, and eerie voices carried by Sam's desolate trumpet solo.

“Urras / Walls” draws on themes from *The Dispossessed*, where the protagonist constantly runs into walls and barriers of all sorts in his quest to develop the Ansible as an open-science technology. Some of these barriers prevent him from apprehending rampant economic and social inequalities that plague the capitalist society in which he is performing his research, highlighting the idea that walls both keep one side out and the other in. Toward the end of the movement, sounds from a general strike are broadcast over the radio. I used recordings of primarily women chanting, from protests all over the world, as the oppression of women worldwide is

closely linked with various economic and social injustices. During these moments, Adam Vidiksis improvises drum solos drawing on free jazz.

“Passacaglia” takes the form of a continuously shifting theme and variations, making small ripples and delays through time. The three instruments often work in a loose canon with each other. Delays at the scale of seconds register as near-simultaneity from an interstellar perspective. A broadcast of the general strike is briefly heard again on the radio, this time through the window of a passing car on a remote desert highway. — Caroline Louise Miller

**Living Between Seconds** is a work for trumpet in C, drum set with auxiliary percussion, and piano with fixed media and live electronics that explores the phenomenon of temporal expansion through mindfulness and how attending to the present moment can enhance, suspend, and/or expand temporal perception.

The journey to creating *Living Between Seconds* began by creating a meditative fixed media soundscape composition using environmental recordings captured in remote desert locations across the American southwest.\* The foundational soundscape underwent very little processing, allowing the environment’s expansive, temporally suspended nature to remain untouched. The small, detailed sounds contained within the environment — birds chirps, owl hoots, coyote howls, train hums, and others — are treated as trigger

points for foreground instrumental material, influencing acoustic gesture, texture, and timbre. Acoustic events generated from the soundscape in turn produce live, interactive electroacoustic events programmed using Cycling 74’s Max. This real-time processing expands the trio’s acoustic sound, generating “meta instruments” that further delineate the space between sound and silence, creating an immersive environment where the ensemble and electronics articulate the meditative soundscape.

Collaborating and experimenting with the SPLICE Ensemble during the compositional process was a priceless aspect of this project, allowing each member to contribute creative ideas and techniques that make this piece a dynamic, fluid collection of evolving, expanding material. Through guided improvisation, SPLICE Ensemble “lives between the seconds” of the work, articulating gestures and textures, responding to each other, to the fixed media, and to the live electronics, simultaneously creating and living in the evolving sonic landscape.

*Living Between Seconds* was made possible by a grant from the Fromm Music Foundation. The piece was commissioned by the SPLICE Ensemble and is dedicated to them with admiration and appreciation. — Elaine Lillios

\*Sounds obtained from Thomas Rex Beverly Nature Sound Libraries, [thomasrexbeverly.com](http://thomasrexbeverly.com)

**S**PLICE Ensemble is dedicated to cultivating a canon of electroacoustic chamber music for trumpet, piano, and percussion, bringing together acoustic virtuosity, live electronics, and experimental sound. Called a “sonic foodfight” by *Jazz Weekly*, SPLICE Ensemble combines instrumental virtuosity and electronic media in performances that expand the possibilities of contemporary chamber music. The ensemble consists of Sam Wells (trumpet), Keith Kirchoff (piano), and Adam Vidiksis (percussion, drum set). All three members are experienced electronic musicians and acoustic performers who collaborate closely with composers to create and perform works that integrate electronics with acoustic instruments. Since its formation in 2016, the ensemble has premiered more than 120 works by over 100 composers, playing a central role in developing the repertoire for instruments and electronics through close collaboration with artists and technologists. The ensemble also maintains a deep commitment to education through its work with students and emerging composers at the SPLICE Institute and Festival. SPLICE Ensemble has worked with composers including Elainie Lillios, Christopher Biggs, Brian Belet, Caroline Louise Miller, Alex Christie, Per Bloland, Flannery Cunningham, Robert Seaback, Joo Won Park, Steve Ricks, and Scott L. Miller, among many others. The ensemble is the resident ensemble of both the SPLICE Institute and SPLICE Festival and has been featured at venues and conferences including M Woods in Beijing, SEAMUS, the Electroacoustic Barn Dance, the SCI National Conference, Electronic Music Midwest, and New Music Detroit’s Strange Beautiful Music festival. Their recordings appear on the SEAMUS, PARMA, and New Focus Recordings labels.



**Steven L. Ricks** (b. 1969) is described in *BBC Music Magazine* as a composer “unafraid to tackle big themes.” He creates work that is bold, innovative, ambitious, and diverse, often including strong narrative and theatrical influences. He writes for specific performers and performance situations and works towards unique moments that capitalize on interesting convergences. For the past 15+ years Ricks has also been active as a performer on trombone and laptop (live electronics), most notably with colleague Christian Asplund through the RICKSPLUND free-improvisation duo. Ricks has performed and recorded with RICKSPLUND and other artists, including Douglas Ewart, Vinny Golia, Anne La Berge, Ron Coulter, and Oğuz Büyükberber. He has received commissions and awards from the Fromm Music Foundation, the Barlow Endowment, SCI, and The Center for Latter-day Saint Arts, among others. Recordings of his music appear on multiple labels, including Bridge Records, New Focus Recordings, Neuma Records, Albany Records, pfMENTUM, Vox Novus, TryTone, and Comprovis Records.

Ricks is a professor in the BYU School of Music where he teaches music theory and composition. He is currently a member of the Board of Advisors for the Barlow Endowment (2026-30), and was formerly BYU School of Music Composition and Theory Division Coordinator (2016-24), Editor of the Newsletter for the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (2012-19), and director of the BYU Electronic Music Studio for 20 years (2001-21).

**Caroline Louise Miller** (they/them) is a US composer based in Portland, Oregon. Common themes in their work include affect, ecology, labor politics, tactility, and the materiality of media, often within dreamlike musical spaces that incorporate field recordings and electronic textures with acoustic instruments. They have enjoyed wide-ranging collaborations and have been supported by numerous grants, fellowships, and commissions; including from Seattle Modern Orchestra, Alarm Will Sound/Matt Marks Impact Fund, New Wave Opera, Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program, SPLICE Ensemble, Ensemble Adapter, Portland Jazz Composers Ensemble, Guerilla Opera, Transient Canvas, and others. Their music is performed nationally and internationally. In 2014, Miller worked as an artist-in-residence aboard a Scripps Institution of Oceanography research vessel in the Philippine Sea. Field recordings from the ship were used to compose the score for a feature-length experimental documentary by Lyndsay Bloom about daily life aboard the ship. Miller’s multimedia installation *Here There: (Re)collecting Labor on the American Railway*, co-created with artist Stefani Byrd and featuring a score recorded with Alarm Will Sound, incorporates field recordings and video footage taken at endangered historic sites in Northern California, and has been exhibited internationally. From 2012-2017, Miller organized and curated an annual cross-disciplinary collaborative arts showcase at the Birch Aquarium in La Jolla. Miller is currently Assistant Professor of Sonic Arts

at Portland State University, where they teach courses including electronic music composition, songwriting, studio production, and music for visual media. They hold a Ph.D in Music from UC San Diego.

Acclaimed as one of the “contemporary masters of the medium” by MIT Press’s Computer Music Journal, **Elainie Lillios** creates works that reflect her fascination with listening, sound, space, time, immersion, and anecdote. Her compositions include stereo, multi-channel, and Ambisonic fixed media works, instrument(s) with live electronics, collaborative experimental audio/visual animations, and installations. She also performs live electronics with ESC Trio collaborators Chris Biggs and Scott Deal, and with Origami Sound Society collaborator Mark Nagy.

Elainie attributes her success to the many professors whose patience and fortitude helped her explore and understand creativity, intent, technique, experimentation, professionalism, composition, and other important life lessons. She continues to be inspired by her many former students whose explorations and successes make her proud to have been a small part of their journey as musicians and humans. Elainie counts herself fortunate to have numerous colleagues and friends in the field who have become her “other” family – her collaborators and performers, SPLICE colleagues, UK and European acousmatic composer clan, and other amazing

humans. Thank you ALL for making this journey an AWE-SOME one!

Elainie retired from Bowling Green State University in May 2025 but continues sharing offbeat and often eccentric ideas about composition and experimentation through part time teaching at Western Michigan University. She serves as SPLICE Institute Director ([www.splicemusic.org](http://www.splicemusic.org)) and teaches there as well. She also fundraises for and builds homes at Project Mexico ([www.projectmexico.org/homebuilding](http://www.projectmexico.org/homebuilding)) and explores #vanlife with husband Michael Thompson and dog Dude.

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Recording producer: Jeffrey Means

Editing: David Pasbrig  
Mix and mastering: Scott L. Miller  
Producer: Keith Kirchoff, Adam Vidiksis  
Executive producer: Sam Wells  
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SPLICE Ensemble..... [splicemusic.org/ensemble](http://splicemusic.org/ensemble)  
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