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Heart of Louisiana: The Laptop Orchestra

(Source: [Fox 8 New Orleans](#))

"We're really trying to bend the boundaries of what is music and trying to explore what we'll be doing in 10 years, 20 years, but doing that today," says Dr. Stephen David Beck, director of the LSU School of Music.

They call themselves the Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana, a group of LSU music students -- most working on their doctorate degrees -- who have a passion for digital technology.

Student Danny Holmes says, "In experimental music, which we try to come up with new universes that aren't typical, so unlike having a physical instrument we can create a set of rules for making music that you couldn't find with a violin or a flute, and then try to write music for that."

It's similar to what's happened in the past when other instruments were created, whether a piano, a violin or saxophone. Each new instrument opens up a new world of musical possibilities.

Student Nick Hwang says, "The orchestra kind of came out of a class where we were learning to program computers for music and we decided why don't we get a group together and do this all the time, where it becomes a musical ensemble."

Beck says, "This is really no different from a string quarter or a chamber ensemble except that we have different laptops each performing different kinds of tasks or different kinds of musical ideas."

Sometimes, each stroke of the keyboard produces a different sound. But for this composition, each "player" launches different pre-programmed musical sequences, feeding off what other players and doing and building to a wall of sound.

Hwang says, "Maybe you're playing and you notice that your other performers are building up to this climax and everyone knows that it's happening."

The Laptop Orchestra has taken its original sounds to the stage, performing like any other musical ensemble. But they know their creations are an acquired taste. All they ask for is an open mind.

Faculty member Jesse Allison says, "Any time I have new people come I like to say, basically if you have 10 pieces on the concert, two of them you are going to absolutely love. Two of them you will absolutely hate, and the rest of them you will find interesting, but won't like them."

Student William Conlin says, "We're not trying to just make crazy noises that sort of push your buttons. We're trying to create something that's powerful and meaningful and relevant today."

It just may take a while for this new form of music to go mainstream.

If you want to hear more, the Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana will have its annual gala performance at the Manship Theatre in Baton Rouge on March 10. During that concert, the audience will be able to join in by using their own mobile devices - a cell phone, tablet or laptop. For more information, go online to <http://laptoporchestra.lsu.edu>.

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