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Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana concert unfolds with electronics, rocks and other non-instruments

LSU REVEILLE

When a musical ensemble takes the stage at a concert, the artists quietly file in after being announced, taking position in their assigned seats in front of their assigned instruments.

So imagine the surprise of the audience when the musicians of the Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana descended the stairs of the Digital Media Center theatre haphazardly clacking rocks together in their palm of their hands for about five minutes straight.

The [Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana](#) concert was anything but normal. Yet, the charming, experimental nature of the music from a variety of non-instruments— rocks, small circuits, marbles, leaves, grocery bags and much more — kept the audience intrigued (and sometimes a little scared).

[image 1] The Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana musical ensemble takes their places on stage in the LSU Digital Media Center on Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2023, in Baton Rouge, La.

Madison Maronge

[image 2] The table the Laptop Orchestra of Louisiana performed on was full of their trinkets and circuits, including a bag of rice, a whisk, leaves, and some pieces of paper. All were used during the concert on Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2023, at the LSU Digital Media Center in Baton Rouge, La.

Madison Maronge

After the first "rock" piece, the ensemble sat on a neon lit, rainbow-gradient backdrop and began to fiddle with their individual items and laptops, producing sounds that were barely music-adjacent. Humming frequencies, piercing alarms, and objects rattling opened the show abruptly.

The show became a series of different music numbers, including Pauline Oliveros' "Horse Sings From Cloud" and Carl Bergström-Nielsen's "Towards an Unbearable Lightness."

Experimental music and digital media junior Olivia Lunsford has always loved the use of real-world, earthly sounds in music.

"We go to these extreme lengths to use not real instruments to make music, which helps me in my actual music making," Lunsford said thinking back on what she learned the course focused on this concert.

The theatre was filled with these physical sounds that played off of one another, literally, as the musicians eyes dart back and forth to each other in response to a nefarious noise. Other pieces served as a collective effort, as the sounds swelled together into something bigger than just the tap of a sound bowl or the wiggle of a loose-leaf sheet.

Faculty director Jesse Allison said the course that produces this concert, MUS 4270, has been structuring this performance all semester and, more importantly, how to interact with the ensemble.

"Some of the pieces that are performed have scores that everyone is trying to follow and kind of find their place in that score, and then others have created their own scores to collaborate with each other: how to organize, how to respond, what events to have, things like that," Allison said.

Allison credits the music directors, Dylan Burchett and Erin Demastes, with teaching the musicians how to improvise and work with each other to create and interpret new sounds, resulting in a couple improv slots during the concert.

The concert came to end and all of the students, those who have been working toward this concert all semester, stood proudly and smiled as they took their final bow, inviting people to the stage to see the gadgets and ask about the process.

After finishing this course, experimental music and digital media senior Andrew Valentine said he will take the lessons he learned here into his future endeavors.

"Now, I rethink sounds I wouldn't have necessarily produced before. Using something physical and then possibly modulating it in a program...like you'd never know that I used a rock to make a beat," Valentine said.



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