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## 'Laptop Orchestras' to Give Unprecedented Performance

(Source: [The Wall Street Journal](#))

"Laptop orchestras" in seven locations — from Stanford University to Louisiana State to Queens University in Belfast — are scheduled to perform together tonight, virtually, as part of the first Symposium on Laptop Ensembles and Orchestras, which is being held in Baton Rouge.

Musicians and technologists, many of them based on college campuses, have increasingly been making use of the sonic capabilities of laptops and related gear to create unorthodox pieces that demand performance techniques far afield from what you'll see if you go to hear the New York Philharmonic. The Birmingham Laptop Ensemble deploys "kitchen items, bells and cellos" as well as "kinetic controllers such as iPhones, Wiimotes, Xbox Kinects," according to a piece published in January in the Financial Times. The FT's Alex Newman explained:

"What binds this gamut of noise-creation together is programming code, says Jeff Snyder, [Princeton Laptop Orchestra's] associate director: "Generally, each composer writes new code for each piece . . . if the composers are writing new code for their pieces, then they have the ability to make it do exactly what they want, and it opens their horizons for what is possible."

This might mean allowing players to improvise within certain sonic parameters, or directing them to follow a more traditional musical structure. The possibilities are practically endless, with the route from composition to performance constantly being played with.

Roger Dannenberg, an associate research professor of computer science, music, and art at Carnegie Mellon, will conduct the multiple participating orchestras tonight from Baton Rouge. "The speed of light is a limitation for us," he says in a statement, "so I won't be able to control the beat. But I can give cues for the orchestras to play with different textures or sound."

Sideband, a spinoff of PLOrk, the Princeton ensemble — the granddaddy of these groups, founded in 2005 — will be playing in Baton Rouge (although I'm not sure whether they're taking part in the group concert). Here's footage of them performing a piece called "In Line," by Jascha Narveson, last year, at the Open Ears Festival, in Kitchener, Ontario, which gives a sense of what to expect from a laptop group.

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