

Live Music Project: Seattle

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2000 MOVING PARTS: CRAFTING SOUNDS

MARCH 7, 2017 | KENT KARNOFSKI

Sound of Late: 2000 Moving Parts

Saturday, March 11, 2017 @ 8:00 pm

Flutter Studios, Seattle

Somewhere in my home, amongst the heaps of scrap paper I have around, there is a To Do list, now several years old, scrawled upon a notepad; a bunch of checked off items, except one: “Buy a Harp.”

I don't play, but as *objets d'art*, harps are remarkable pillars of craftsmanship: the wood, the strings and hardware, the assemblage. The visual anticipation of soothing sounds draws me to their constructed beauty. After the frame warps from strings' tensions, as certainly a harp frame will do, people sell them off. I want one.

As I prepared for this interview, I kept saying to myself, “Each of us must have our own harp story.” So, I asked harpist Jennifer Ellis, “What drew you to the harp?”



(Photo credit: Jason Paige and Bonnie Lyn Paige)

“*The Secret Garden* was one of my favorite books as a kid, and when the movie came out, my mom took me. There is this beautiful little harp solo in the score, and so I started poking my mom, ‘What instrument makes that sound? I want to play the instrument that makes that sound.’”

Years later, Jennifer joins us in Seattle. On Saturday, March 11, 2017 – together with Sarah Pyle on the flute and Andrew Stiefel playing viola – we’ll be listening to the collaborative trio *Sound of Late*.

The harp has some 2000 moving parts, inspiring the name of the show. I asked Jennifer to help me count to 2000. “A lot of where the moving parts come in is through the system we have to get flats and sharps.” There are 7 foot pedals; one pedal connects all of the “C” strings, one connects all of the “D” strings, one all of the “E” strings, etc.

When you move a foot pedal, it triggers a spring, which triggers a rod, which triggers the linkage, which triggers the discs, and the discs (2 per string) engage the string, fretting it like a guitar string. One disc raises the note a half step from flat to natural, and the second disc raises the note another half step to sharp. Jennifer manipulates these discs to develop sounds that most harpists try to mute.

That impetus to take things apart to understand them and put them back together is a wonderful one in our world.

I listened to some preview materials prior to the interview. There’s the identifiable harp strings providing sounds, but there’s other stuff; blurts and bits and *twongs* (I literally heard a “*twong*”); extra reverberations that help to fill spaces. **John Cale** would be proud.

I suggested to Jennifer: “The way you’re manipulating the harp, it adds texture and sounds, and it sounds like you’re accompanying yourself.”

I wasn’t far off. “Yeah! Yeah, that’s a fair thing to say!”

Many orchestral instruments play only one note at a time. The harp is played with both hands, 4 fingers each (the pinky finger is too short), so you can play eight notes at once. It’s a very rich instrument to play solo, but, says Jennifer, “it’s really fun to get the opportunity to expand and collaborate with others and play chamber music. *Sound of Late* is the best of both worlds, because you get to hear the harp solo and then you get to hear the harp with other instruments.”

In her work with the harp, Jennifer enjoys a sense of discovery; take something apart and you feel more connected with it, like something has been revealed to you. “That impetus to take things apart to understand them and put them back together is a wonderful one in our world. I hope people leave with a little glimmer of that feeling and are interested in applying it elsewhere in their lives.”

After the show, Jennifer will invite guests onto the stage to see the harp up close and ask questions.

“I hope this concert helps lift the veil and make the harp feel accessible and dynamic, interesting, and intriguing,” Jennifer added.

It’s your chance to see this beautiful object up close, and understand how it makes beautiful sounds, and develop a harp obsession of your own...

Sound of Late will perform on Saturday, March 11, 2017 @ 8:00 pm at Flutter Studios in Seattle. Full details are [here](#).

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Kent Karnofski has been a Seattleite most of his adult life. By day he is a research engineer at a local manufacturing firm, by night he is an extraordinary audiophile. In addition to his work with the Live Music Project, he is the curator and primary contributor at [CommunityNoise.blog](#).