Student Recital Series
“FAT CHARLIE’S BAR MUSIC”
Contemporary Music Theory & Contemporary Aural Skills II Final Concert
Thursday, May 9, 2024
12:00 PM
Recital Hall

PROGRAM

PHASE I – Music Concrète

Polyvagal
A Real Scream
Luck of the Draw, Pt. 1
Is That Brando?
We Talkin Bout’ practice?!

PHASE II – Synthesis Projects

Riding with My Alien Friend
The New West
Synth Around
The Way the Ants See
Jayla Eats Salad
Current
Boss Battle Beats
Synth Playground
Fallout Rave
Do What You Want
(Is It A) Waste of Time

Silas Ashby
Victor Wright
Matthew Diaz
Brandon Taylor
Allen Madison
Brandon Taylor
JonLuca LaPorte
Bryan McNeela
Sam Dion
Jack Holston
Trent Starzynski
Mac Heelein
Emil Lockett
Owen Vaugh
Jayla Herring a.k.a Jae Ivlie
Allen Madison
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Composer Biographies (In Alphabetical Order)

**Silas Ashby**: Both his parents being art majors, creativity and self-expressionism have always been a cornerstone of Silas's life. He has always loved the act of creating and the level of play that comes out of it. His music echoes this, constantly synthesizing whatever source he can use to create sounds and textures only he can visualize. Currently, he is flourishing in the act of exploring the industry, playing and studying world music in the Northern Illinois Thai ensemble, producing the college’s southeast asian studies podcast, composing music for an unreleased video game project, and mixing the music for the unreleased movie “a jar full of Christmas the by director Candice T. Cain. Before entering the industry, he enjoyed making music on causally with his friends under the Spicy Lemon Tree band and with his parents in the still active band Time and Material.

**Matthew Diaz** is a world musician who’s classical trained in double bass. Originally from Miami, Florida he became in love with world music through the rich Latin Jazz community and growing up with all different cultures and music from those cultures. He also dabbles with the stranger side of music with music concrete and modern classical music. With influences from cosmo sheldrake, and more. He’s main area is the music of Mexico with research done about the son jarocho folk music.

**Sam Dion** is a musician and photographer from Decatur, Illinois. Ever since Sam was a kid they were interested in sound and creating new sounds. Sam got their start at making music through building radios and amplifiers that intentionally created ‘unwanted’ sounds. In 2023 Sam produced their band the Kittens: From Mars only album called Real Nowhere which had themes of isolation, exclusion, and dealing with problems drawing unwanted attention. When writing music Sam is able to conceptualize music that helps explain who they are as a person in a way that words or visuals typically can’t. Sam’s music can be described as eerie and spacious, typically creating longer, slower music. Sam has also composed for strings and was able to have their first piece “Denial of Fall” played for the first time live for an audience in 2023.

**Mac Heelein** is a Musician, Artist, and Producer based in Chicago. As an artist, he is constantly exploring innovative ways to merge diverse music styles. Equipped with a background in classical viola and a newfound interest for music production, Mac is on a mission to blend traditional and contemporary sounds, forging a path entirely his own.

**Jayla Herring also known as Jae Ivlie**, is an American Rapper/Singer & songwriter who originates from the Southside of Chicago. She emerges with a bold, edgy sound and surprisingly confident lyrics. Some of her influences include Rihanna, Mary J. Blige, J. Cole, & Kanye West. She began writing music around the age of 8 years old. In 2021 she began uploading music to YouTube starting off with remixes to songs such as Back in Blood, Beatbox, and more. After seeing how good she flowed on beats, she began working with DJ Kin Kinetic and Kangoo Kidd who decided to help guide her in perfecting her artistry. In 2022 she dropped her first album Class of 2022. Inspired by Kanye West’s Graduation, the album was to not only showcase her talent, but also celebrate her graduating from high school as the album followed a school themed structure. Since dropping her album, she continues to perfect her craft and is breaking out and evolving into the well-rounded artist that she has always dreamed of being.
Jack Holston: Based in Chicago, I am an audio engineer, mix engineer, music producer, live sound engineer, and musician. My expertise lies in recording and producing with analog equipment into Pro Tools and Ableton Live, where I also handle the majority of my mixing tasks. I regularly record large ensembles, chamber orchestras, jazz bands, guitars, live drums, analog synthesizers, piano, and many more. A large majority of my recordings are broadcast live, where I also handle the visual components i.e. camera movement/positioning, video capture, and video editing. I also have my own recording project entitled 'Crawling Vines,' where I write, record, produce, and mix the entirety of the songs. I have amassed several hundred thousand streams across all music platforms.

Calvin Horsley is a Recording Engineer, Producer, and Multi-Instrumentalist based out of DeKalb, Illinois. Specializing in, but not limited to, his home genre of indie folk rock he can hold his own in a plethora of different styles such as Emo, Jazz, and Country-Western. Along with these skills he is an accomplished performer having played at esteemed venues such as Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City, and frequently performs at the Castle Theatre in Bloomington, IL as well as Schubas Tavern in Chicago.

JonLuca LaPorte is a musician, composer, and engineer from the Chicagoland area. He has played in many bands and orchestras throughout his playing career. JonLuca’s compositions have been described as cinematic and expressive. His band and orchestral background gives him the knowledge and experience to write small chamber works to big orchestral and band works. JonLuca strives for quality work and offers nothing but his best because he wants to make sure the people listening to his work truly enjoy it and are left wanting more.

Emil Lockett also known as GEMINI, is an emerging artist from Chicago. He has an alternative style and way of making music that helps tell a story in a creative way. He collects inspiration from his life experiences. He mixes and produces most of his own music. Emil draws inspiration from Kendrick Lamar, TY Dolla Sign, and Brent Faiyaz. He makes sure his work is polished before he releases something, valuing the quality of his work over the potential commercial success of it. This allows him to write fun, catchy, relatable lyrics that can connect to people. He treats his music as if they were paintings; each harmony, EQ shift, and instrument being a different layer of the painting that’s part of the final image.

Allen Madison is an American violinist, artist, and record producer. As a classically trained black violinist, his main influences are rap and classical. It is very clear when you hear the music. The sound is a sense of rough, carelessness of rap, met with the very detailed, elegant, light vocals & melodies which stem from the side of classical music.

Bryan McNeela is a sound/ light engineer located in Chicago IL. While studying recording arts at NIU I am also currently working as a sound engineer at the Egyptian Theater in Dekalb IL as well as being assistant theater technical director for the Dekalb School district. I also work as a freelance sound / light designer at St Patrick High School and Loyola Academy for their plays and other events. I have experience setting up, installing, and using Analog and digital mixers and powered or passive speakers as well as setting up and using multiple Shure and Sennheiser wireless mics for mixing actors and musicians. I enjoy collaborating with other engineers and learning other people's processes for mixing sound for plays and concerts. I also have experience recording audio and mixing using DAW’S such as Pro Tools.
Trent Starzynski is a composer and producer with hands-on experience both inside a DAW and traditional live performance. Trent grew up with a multi-talented musician for a mother that encouraged them in their natural draw to music which called them in like a siren song. They then spent over a decade in all manner of vocal groups across every genre, learning everything they could about any form of music they could their hands on. Having always had a fascination with instruments of all varieties, Trent has accumulated knowledge and hands-on experience with over a dozen instruments hailing from every family and several world cultures. Trent has notably performed on NBC News, worked with world music groups like Il Troubadora, and debuted music for well known composers such as Gwyneth Walker. Most recently Trent has been focused on electronic music, playing in a gamelan ensemble, and studying folk and bluegrass music to add to their repertoire. Always looking to the future, Trent plans to continue to expand their horizons while working on their new concept album to be released late 2024.

Brandon Taylor also known as BrandodaProducer, is a Music Producer/ Audio Engineer/ videographer that brings a unique ear to the music industry with his creative ways of Sound and booming drum patterns. He’s proficient in FL Studios, Ableton, and Pro tools. He also uses Serato DJ. Brandon is multiple eggs in the basket type of person because not only does he produce he also has a catching eye for art in any form and a good ear for artists as he branches off to different genres and explores people's dreams. So, if you want to be great invest with Brandodaproducer cause not only will you find your sound you can also find your style.

Owen Vaughn is a multi-instrumentalist, producer, and mix engineer based in the southwest suburbs of Chicago. With influences from many diverse genres such as hardcore, indie, and emo, he can craft a beautiful cacophony of sound that uniquely blends many key aspects of these genres. His powerful, melodic, and raw style of production and performance perfectly exemplify his ability to work with most genres and execute them accordingly, comfortably, and effectively, whether in a studio or live scenario. Additionally, having years’ worth of live performance experience, ranging from performances at The Canopy Club, to Reggies, to upcoming shows at Subterranean and Beat Kitchen in Chicago, he continues to excite and enthral audiences with his electrifying and passionate stage presence. Looking ahead, Owen Vaughn is eager to be a driving force in pushing the envelope of music and shattering perceived boundaries with his keen and wildly creative mind as well as exemplifying a core value of the industry which is to encourage unity as a triumph over division.

Victor Wright is a musician based in Geneva, Illinois, whose stylistically diverse works reflect his plethora of inspirations. Genres include rock, electronic, hip-hop, metal, ambient, dance, orchestral, and more. Since getting involved with music at the age of seven, Victor has amassed a wide variety of musical influences, which facilitate an open-minded approach to creativity with equal measures of experimentalism and accessibility. Victor has experience with multiple instruments (guitar and piano) and multiple DAWs (ProTools, Ableton, and BandLab), and has performed live from Cleveland, Ohio to Edinburgh, Scotland. Wherever you want to go, Victor Wright will take you there!
Program Notes (In Performance Order)

**Polyvagal by Silas Ashby:** Psychologists who practice Polyvagal theory believe that there are 3 states to the body's autonomic nervous system. The Ventral Vagal system is connected, calm, and social. Present when a person is experiencing low negative arousal it is a grounded and mindful place. As negative arousal increases the body descends its autonomic staircase, into the sympathetic nervous system. Rage and panic compete for control in the body as the nervous system gives adrenaline and fight or flight begins. But things can always get worse, continuing down the ladder we reach the oldest part autonomic system: the ancient Dorsal Vagal system. When you can run no more, you collapse. The Dorsal Vagal shuts down the body to conserve energy, but your body believes things to be hopeless. The Dorsal Vagal is the numbness and hopelessness before death. Take an audio trip down the system's ladder, ending up collapsed and defeated.

**A Real Scream by Victor Wright** is a musique concrète piece that utilizes the 1951 recording sessions of the iconic “Wilhelm Scream” sound effect, used in hundreds of famous films. By incorporating this manufactured sound of pain, and placing emphasis on the sound director's request for a “real scream”, this piece represents the falsehood of emotion in a variety contexts. Whether feigning distress for sympathy, or as a form of virtue signaling, or even a tool of manipulation, there are many connotations to be explored when considering the difference between a fake scream and real one. How “real” are the emotions that we show to others? What consequences are there for failing to delineate between genuine and false emotions anyway? If all the twisted, warped, and mutated sounds produced throughout this piece signify anything, then those consequences must be quite dire…

**Luck of the draw Pt.1 by Matthew Diaz,** is about gambling and luck. In Pt.1 it’s about the casinos and other controlled means of luck that plays on human psychology to play around with human confusion to make sure they still in the casino.

**Is That Brando by Brandon Taylor:** As you listen to Is that Brando? You start to wonder who Brando is? And why is this guy telling me to Shut Up. Now even though he’s being very rude about finding out if that’s Brando or not. Just Know he’s curious to find out if that’s his friend that he believed in making it big in the Music industry on Tv. But instead what if the guy that's asking very aggressively is Brando and he’s just dreaming about making it big but the last thing he heard was “Ayo Shutup Is that Bra...” and as he hears this voice the dream him is falling deeply into a dark room where he starts coming back to reality. **Welcome.**

**We Talkin Bout’ practice?! by Allen Madison:** This piece was inspired by the Steve Reich song that we listened to in class. There was a certain eeriness that I loved about the piece, and the tension it built. I decided to use a sample that I am familiar with, which made this project very fun for me. It’s a clip from Allen Iverson’s practice interview. Please enjoy, ‘‘We Talkin Bout’ practice?!
**Riding With My Alien Friend by Brandon Taylor**: Alien buddy as we wander around the city of Chicago with nothing to do but to explore beyond boredom. As we keep driving you might receive contact or better yet get high but you will be fine because we're just going on a little drive (Sarcastically). But as the ride comes to an end there will be a little surprise but no worry because your with the Guyzz. So Buckle up if you're scared, sit back n Chill. Enjoy the Ride!!!

(Warning) : You are not with a safe driver and you will feel a little bit floaty but it will be okay because aliens will always keep us safe.

**The New West by JonLuca LaPorte**: This piece is heavily inspired by the themes of old Western movies. With a dramatic introduction and big sweeping melodies, *The New West* is reminiscent of Western themes like *The Cowboys*, *Magnificent 7*, and *The Good the Bad, and the Ugly*. What this piece does differently is that instead of having a full orchestra with percussion and a choir, it only features 2 synthesizers.

**Synth Surround by Brian McNeela**: When I first started writing this piece I was not sure where to start and I was just having fun listening to all of the different Synthesis. After I found some that I like the sound of I added more notes and tried to put them in a good order so you could hear them all clearly. Finally, I added a lot of panning to make it feel like you are being surrounded by synthesis. I would like to add more in the future and experiment by adding other instruments like drums to fill in some of the empty spaces.

**The Way the Ants See by Sam Dion** is a story about ants and what they see when they are walking on a hot summer day from place to place, up a tree, down a tree, and back home again. The thoughts they have while seeing the world that they are only a small part of go by. Kind of like an ant having a panic attack, a mental crisis, about perspective and where they fit in.

**Jayla Eats Salad by Jack Holston** is an original synthesis piece featuring a psychedelic atmosphere jam-packed with dissociative modulation and stereo play. This piece sounds like a panic attack, with crescendos leading to unpredicted explosions, isolation, and distortion. Make sure to eat your salad, as this piece might cause a sudden pulmonary embolism.

**Current by Trent Starzynski**: The name current is in reference to both the electrical and oceanic senses of the word. Like the ocean current it drags you out to a sea of sound, however, more akin to its electrical reference, it never stops moving in wild and unpredictable ways.

**Boss Battle Beats by Mac Heelein** is a short project inspired by retro game aesthetics exploring themes reminiscent of classic gaming experiences. Many of us have encountered that moment in a video game where we believe we've reached the end, only to be surprised by the sudden appearance of the final boss during a dramatic cutscene. Acting almost as the entrance music for this climactic encounter, this piece also captures the usually unheard essence of the final battle, where the player steadily gains momentum and ultimately emerges victorious.
**Synth Playground by Emil Lockett:** What started off as a project just to get a grade out of the way soon turned into a synth piece that showcases a little bit of Emil’s thought process. He created this piece with the infamous SpongeBob episode, "Karate Choppers", in mind. Specifically, the scene where Bikini Bottom was made into chrome in the future. He hoped to achieve this by manipulating the wave lengths, frequencies, and shapes of the synths. He also added in some chords as a music factor in the piece. The chords reminded him of the music heard throughout the episode and the scene of the chrome Bikini Bottom. This scene always reminded him of a playground in some sense, this piece invokes that same feeling of nostalgia in him.

**Fallout Rave is a project by Owen Vaughn** which embraces dancing and smiling through your worst times. In this case, the scene is a world on the brink of fallout. The sirens are blaring, the end is near, so what better time to live it up? Owen Vaughn crafted this project to encourage audiences to embrace their hardest of times with a smiling face and to know that all things must end even bad ones.

**Do What You Want by Jayla Herring (Jae Ivlie)** is a piece is structured around a Plagal chord progression using various types of synths. The I & IV chords are prominent throughout the piece. This piece was inspired by an old-school funk type feeling that I had. I wanted to make something that sounded funky and retro. The piece is called “Do What You Want” due to it having such a free feeling throughout it.

**(Is it A) Waste of Time by Allen Madison:** This piece was inspired by the other classmates who took this class. I made a few different drafts of the synthesis project, and decided to make one last version after hearing everybody else’s songs. What did their songs have that mine doesn’t? What does my song have that their’s doesn’t? This is the mindset I had while creating this song. As always, you know I have to put my own little twist on it…… enjoy (Is It A) Waste of Time.

**A Peaceful Contemplation by Mac Heelein** is a project delving into the intricate labyrinth of the mind. We’ve all experienced those moments when our thoughts demand more attention than we'd prefer, and eventually, we succumb to the intrusion of the random thoughts we wish to evade. Though not a direct reflection of my personal psyche, this piece delves into the tranquil yet up-beat persistent battle between focused attention and its absence.

**In the Forest by Matthew Diaz** is a piece that uses plagal, songwriter and doo-wop schemas along with several audio clips of birds and water running to transport the listener into a forest and guides them upon a small journey into a serene forest

**The First Schema Song by Bryan McNeela** is the first song I've ever written and I enjoyed it a lot. At first, I had no idea what to do or how to write a song so I just picked some instruments and added some notes. After a while, I realized that it kind of sounded like a mess and I needed to clean it up a little bit so I panned some of my instruments and got rid of some of the more unnecessary tracks which made it shorter but I think it sounds a lot better now. I wish I had more time to make it longer but I was having a hard time thinking about what to add, I plan on coming back to this to add more in the future.
**Same Mouth by Silas Ashby** is difficult to understand, yet intriguing nonetheless. Inspired when I looked at a cardboard box full of different varieties of chips and realized they all came from the same company. It is a song decrying consumerism and the hold that companies have over culture and thought. It speaks against conformism and warns about the dangers of apathy. That is if anything in the song was intelligible. I wanted both a dirty yet digital feel, a vibe I achieved through my heavy use of overdrive and vocoding, both making it hard to even make words out.

**Snow Blind is a project by Owen Vaughn** which explores the intricacies of human emotion. Why do we long for the past? What is it we all so desperately want back? These are a few of the questions that populated his mind when constructing this piece. In Snow Blind, the droning organ, accompanied by the low and stagnant base line lays the foundation for a somber tune that is quickly interjected by a piercing guitar melody. The guitar melody is a stark contrast from the rest of the tune and is left to the listeners interpretation as to what this could represent. Could this be the intrusiveness of one's own thoughts and emotions, or could it be something entirely different? The track ends with the drums by themselves, not only giving the song time to breathe and reflect, but for the audience to do so as well.

**Not in the Mood by Emil Lockett:** While he was coming up with the beat, he felt a fun energy around it. He was hearing something fun, so he made a fun quick song. Emil used a “Childhood Piano” instrument because the sound reminded him of the 2016 hit, “Broccoli” for some reason. The lyrics describe Emil’s pet peeve of having his music interrupted while in public. While writing the song, he was thinking about multiple times in which he’d been stopped in public despite obviously not wanting to be bothered and the awkward experience of trying not to sound too disinterested but still staying polite.

**Every day by Jayla Herring (Jae Ivlie)** features the I & V chord progression throughout the song. These chords are heard within the bright synth sounds in the chorus. This song was inspired by me forgetting to do a task. I said to myself, the term “Every day, it’s something”. This led me to just taking the term and just being silly with it. The piece was not intended to be taken seriously, so I thought to just have fun with it. This piece is different because it features some aspects of hip hop and some aspects of what almost sounds like techno with the melody.

**A Stagnant Implosion by Victor Wright** is a schema-based piece, based on a slightly modified doo-wop progression for the first half of the piece, as well as incorporating a hopscotch progression via the repeated synth arpeggio in each half. That first half of the piece heavily incorporates more rhythmic elements, with prominent synth bass and some relatively ornate drum patterns, while the second half leans into a more ambient direction, adding more melodic and harmonic layers as it goes along. The overall trajectory of the song starts off as a precisely organized system before falling into a formless limbo, eventually reconstituting itself into a more optimistic iteration by the end. This musical narrative can lend itself to a variety of interpretations, although it was primarily inspired in the moment by my own personal experience throughout this past semester. Everything was off to a good start, locked into a reliable pattern of productivity and focus, but I was thrown into a murky abyss of stress and procrastination as soon as that scaffolding fell away. However, I was able to pick myself back up and scrape together a positive outcome in the end.
Significance by Trent Starzynski is a piece utilizing the songwriter schema but embellished with a double plagal progression. Significance is about being seemingly insignificant in the grander machinery of the universe and yet still being an identifiable piece of it. Your actions may not seem to matter from a macroscopic lens and yet it still matters for no other reason than the fact that you believe it does.

I Wanna Go Home by Sam Dion is about wanting to go home and not being able to. About not being able to reach a certain place, or imagine a certain place. Just like having an idea but not being able to realize it. When you have an idea of home, where and what is it? When writing this song ideas came easy but no end goal was in sight, a melody was there but no lyrics.

Patch of Heaven by JonLuca LaPorte is all about triumph. This folk song depicts a family of settlers who have just completed the long and strenuous journey that was the Oregon Trail. With this major feat under their belt, they can now start their new life. But rather than dwell on the hardships and loss of the journey, they celebrate their perseverance and patch of heaven to call their own. Patch of Heaven is an ode to the joy and triumph we feel when overcoming what may feel like an impossible task, and to keep perceiving so we can each find our own patch of heaven.

Peers, a song composed by Calvin Horsley, is a fun track haunted by the reality of falling behind. The interlude represents the confusion and feelings of loss that watching your peers live out their dreams while you yourself are stuck in the day-to-day. This bittersweet feeling is encapsulated by juxtaposing fun-loving choruses featuring two rockin’ guitar solo’s and a confused, garbled interlude. Meant to evoke the rebirth of the phoenix this takes the listener on a journey from optimism to a jagged realization and back around again to acceptance and perseverance.

Cool to Be Weird is an original composition by Jack Holston and Owen Vaughn. The song was recorded and produced by Jack, and the lyrics were written and sung by Owen. Its creation began by assembling a drum loop. After that, guitar was recorded and then double-tracked. Lyrics came next. And finally, a groovy bassline tied it all together. Cool to Be Weird sounds like it was found on an underground alternative radio station because of its catchy hook and Lo-fi production. When crafting the song, everything came out very naturally, with the bridge being the only head-scratcher. This [bridge] developed after a day or two when Jack decided to change it up entirely. Now the bridge is sparkly, bouncy, and fun—An interesting deviation from the otherwise melancholic vibe throughout.