

By Gary France

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Joel Davel

Pushing Boundaries

Percussion and Technology Series



The year 1977, as a student at the Crane School of Music, I was first introduced to the world of electronic music composition. Immersed in a black room with quadrophonic speakers, a spaghetti of multi colored patch cords around my neck, I would explore electronic improvisation on the most advanced music synthesis instrument available on the planet: The Buchla Music Easel¹. Certainly, as a drummer percussionist, this weekly adventure with sound craft and improvisational composition allowed me to dive deep to experimental music at the cutting edge.

I first met Joel Davel at the Percussive Arts international Convention in 2006. He was presenting a session on the Marimba Lumina and Lightning² Wands Midi controllers. Fascinated to reconnect with my inner geek I connected afterward with Joel and discussed "all things Buchla".

"Joel Davel has toured and recorded with a variety of groups featuring original music and premieres by some of today's leading composers. Davel has been a core member of the Paul Drescher Ensemble's Electro-Acoustic Band for 15 years, an ensemble that has collaborated directly with composers such as Roger Reynolds, Martin Bresnick, Alvin Curran, David Lang, John Luther Adams, Ingram Marshall, Terry Riley, and Steven Mackey as

well as many young contemporary composers.

Joel Davel and Paul Drescher often perform as a duo that features invented instruments with musical material inspired by pieces they performed in live accompaniment of dance companies which include the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company, Nancy Karp + Dancers, ODC/SF, and the Allyson Green Dance Company. The duo has performed in numerous venues, which most notably Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

Davel's primary interests are in non-traditional instruments, interdisciplinary work and performing original contemporary music both written and improvised. Davel's diverse percussion career includes performance and recording credits with groups led by electronic diva Amy X Neuburg, percussionist William Winant, violinist Kaila Flexer, guitarist Jack West and guitarist David Tanenbaum. He has made frequent appearances as a solo electronic percussionist at the San Jose Tech Museum of Innovation as well as at other events such as the Other Minds Film Festival, and at the Experience Museum in Seattle. With tenor John Duykers, Davel recently premiered Max Duyker's two-character opera, "Apricots of Andujar."

Davel's earliest professional experience as a musician for provocative summer theatrical productions encouraged him to apply his skills at composition, and even juggling and acting. In the role of composer-performer, Davel has been a significant on-stage presence in his solo accompaniment for The California Shakespeare Theater, choreographer Claudine Naganuma, and choreographer Allyson Green. His performance at Symphony Space illicitly: "manipulating two small batons-he looks like a hyperactive magician casting abracadabra spells into the ether-Davel was as much

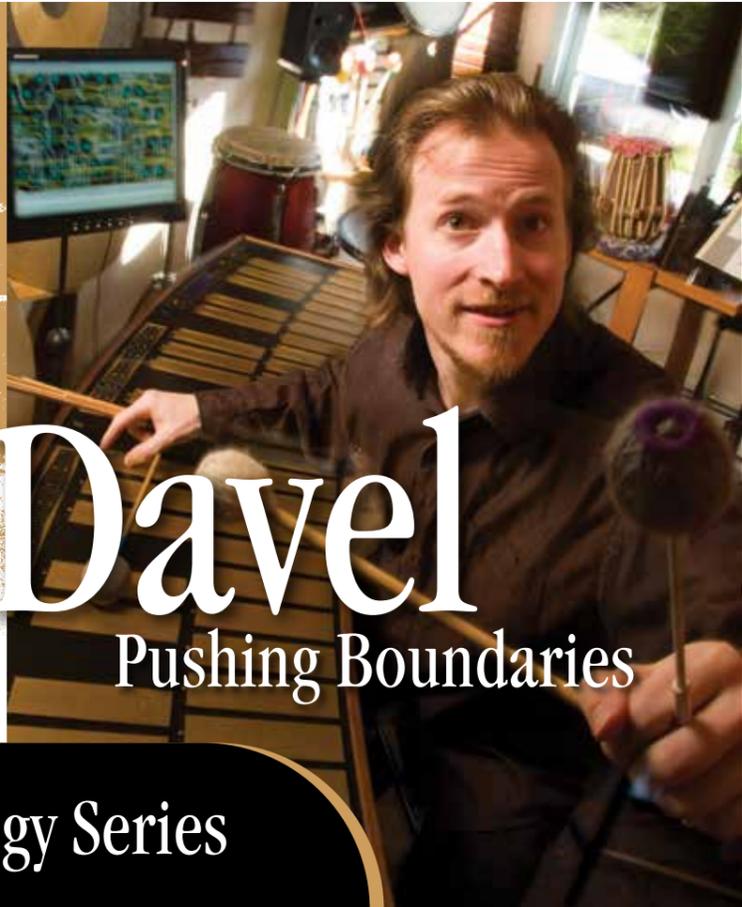
a dancer as Green, moving with a concentrated focus that made him fascinating to watch." --*Newsday* Expanding upon his training in acoustic percussion, Davel is most often noted for his musical approach to the use of electronics. His appearance at a Lincoln Center event prompted the *Wall Street Journal* to comment: "percussionist Joel Davel blew everyone away with his virtuosic improvisation on the Marimba Lumina, an electronic invention that emulates and extends the vocabulary of conventional mallet instruments, and the [Buchla] Lightning, played by waving wireless wands in space."

Davel continues to work with synthesizer pioneer Don Buchla, as he has since 1993, building innovative electronic music instruments. This work has included development of the Buchla Lightning, an infrared spatial controller, and Marimba Lumina, an RF interface designed to expand mallet performance beyond traditional roles into new electronic realms. In 2008, Davel created Absolute Deviation, a venture dedicated to continued creation and support for Marimba Luminas. His primary teachers have included Rich Holly, Robert Chappell, Cliff Alexis, Tele Lesbines, John Ruka, and Willie Winant. He holds a Bachelor's of Music from Northern Illinois University and an MFA from Mills College.³

Joel Davel tours Australia with Double Duo featuring composer Paul Drescher. He is performing at the Canberra International Music Festival and will be in residence at the ANU School of Music.

Endnotes

1. <https://emhistory.wikispaces.com/1963+Buchla+Synthesizers>
2. <http://www.buchla.com/lightning3.html>
3. Biography Joel Davel, 2013



At the Edge with Multi-Percussionist J.B. Smith



I first met J.B. Smith while pursuing postgraduate studies at the University of North Texas in 1985. His encyclopedic knowledge of percussion literature and history combined with a virtuosic "all around" technique was matched with a warm and gracious personality. Through out the past thirty years we have stayed in touch often discussed the possibility of his visiting down under. In May 2013, *Desert's Edge Clarinet-Percussion Duo*, J.B. and Clarinetist Robert Spring, will visit Australia performing at the Canberra International Music Festival as well as joining the ANU School of Music as Artists in Residence.

"Dr. J. B. Smith is currently Professor of Music and the Coordinator of Percussion Studies in the School of Music at Arizona State University. He is internationally recognized as a performer, composer, educator and conductor having performed and with a wide spectrum of artists including Steve Reich, Daniel Lentz, George Crumb, Chinary Ung, Sal Martirano, Chou Wen Chung, Lou Harrison, Morton Subotnick, Mary Ellen Childs, Arthur Weisberg, Alex Acuna, Robert Spring, John Bergamo, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, Liam Teague, Robert Chappell, Brad Dutz, Anthony Braxton, Rita Moreno, Carol Channing, Don Rickles and Clay Aiken.

He is director of the ASU Contemporary Percussion Ensemble that was featured in performances at the 1991, 2002 and 2006 Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. As a member of the Desert's Edge Clarinet-Percussion Duo with Dr. Robert Spring, Dr. Smith performed at the Music Educator's National Conference in 1994 and the 1992, 1995, 2002 and 2004 Clarinet Fest International Conferences. The duo has given concerts throughout North America, Europe and Asia. He served as principal percussionist with Ensemble 21, a contemporary

music group under the direction of Arthur Weisberg, and as principal percussionist with The Daniel Lentz Group which performed at the Interlink Festival in Los Angeles, the Bang on a Can Festival in New York and the Festival Musica Visual in Lanzarote, Canary Islands. He has also recorded and performed with the internationally acclaimed Summit Brass and The Phoenix Symphony. He has recorded for Koch, Summit, Centaur, Rhizome Sketch, Fontec, Leo, Canyon Records, Potenza and Whole>Sum Productions. His CDs Apparitions for Percussion, First Reflections and At the Desert's Edge are available from Amazon.com. Percussion Solo 2011 and LIVE Chamber Music with Percussion are available from TresonaMultimedia.com.

He received his Bachelor of Music Education degree from Baylor University where he studied with Dr. Larry Vanlandingham, his Master of Music in Percussion Performance and Literature degree from the University of Illinois where he studied with Prof. Thomas Siwe and his Doctor of Musical Arts

degree from the University of North Texas where he studied with Dr. Robert Schietroma. Previously, Dr. Smith was on the music faculties of Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas and Humboldt State University in Arcata, California. He has written articles for *The Instrumentalist*, *The Canadian Band Journal* and *Percussive Notes*.

A music educator for over 30 years, Dr. Smith has integrated innovative methods and technology into his teaching. In pursuit of techniques to improve his students' sight-reading and rhythm skills he developed two computer-based systems: Flash Tracker and Solo Duets. Flash Tracker uses a flashcard approach to encourage musicians to quickly recognize notated music. The computer program displays the music, listens to musicians' interpretations and analyzes their performances. Performers are graded on note accuracy and rhythmic precision. Solo Duets consists of a series of two part exercises. Musicians record both parts using readily available multi-track recording software to evaluate rhythmic accuracy. Both programs are available from jbsmithmusic.com.

Dr. Smith is active as a composer, with numerous works published by C. Alan Publications and J. B. Smith Music. As a clinician, he has appeared at the Music Educator's National Conference, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention and over 100 colleges and universities in North America, Asia and Europe. Dr. Smith proudly endorses Pearl Drums, Adams Percussion, Zildjian Cymbals, Mike Balter Mallets, Remo Drumheads and Grover Pro Percussion.¹

Endnotes

1. Biography provided by J.B. Smith