

LA COUPURE (2001/2010)
JAMES DILLON

11.3.10

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

STEVEN SCHICK, PERCUSSION
JAIME OLIVER AND WILLIAM BRENT, SOUND DESIGN
ROSS KARRE, VIDEO DESIGN



La Coupure

The etymology of the word river (in English) in fact contains a double and apparently contradictory history deriving from the French for both 'flow' and 'sever (or cut)'

River: [ME. – (O)Fr. *Riviere*] 1. A copious stream of water flowing in a channel towards the sea or ocean, a lake or another stream.

A copious stream or flow of (something).

Used euphemistically for the boundary between life and death 1790

River: [f. Rive] 2. One who rives—who tears apart, or in pieces, who severs, divides, or cleaves. To rend by means of shock, violent impact, or pressure.
(Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

La Coupure, literally “the cut,” is the central movement of James Dillon’s massive **Nine Rivers** project, and precisely imitates the above ‘double’ image of the word river. Or to borrow from the epigrams of Heraclitus, it is a piece that is “united as opposites.” The work flows seamlessly through time as a set of extrusions from a rich sonic substrate, and in every case the sounding of a percussion instrument interrupts, in essence cuts, the flow of sound and time.

The work is composed of nineteen precisely notated modules composed for a diverse set of percussion instruments. In a collaborative process involving the percussion soloist, composer, sound and video designers, these short set pieces are arranged in sequence and placed, much like rocks in a river, within the flow of the piece. Further cutting the flow are large bass drum events that trigger grand waves of sound, and a set of “collages.” The collages are spontaneously combined excerpts from the modules. They are not improvisations, but rather instantaneously chosen cuts from the far-flung moments within piece. Since the collages often involve radical re-scorings—a cut from a vibraphone module suddenly comes to life on a set of junk metal instruments, or a drum moment might be heard on marimba--the soloist must be able to play any part of the music on any instrument. Therefore the piece must be memorized. The composer writes, “I go back to the ‘conceptuality’ of the word ‘the cut’ of the title, which not only *cuts* into the acoustic sound world with electronics but also *cuts* into the act of interpretation in a radical manner--interpretation is displaced by interpenetration.”

The first performance of *La Coupure* took place at IRCAM in Paris in March of 2000 and toured briefly in Europe at that time. For various reasons the work has not been played since. With the obsolescence of the original technology over the course of years it became necessary to re-engineer the piece. In 2008 a team was assembled at UC San Diego, including the sound artists William Brent and Jaime Oliver, and video artist Ross Karre in order to re-conceive the substantial audio and video processing required by *La Coupure*. I am grateful to them as well as to my friend and valued collaborator James Dillon, for bringing *La Coupure* back to life.--*Steven Schick*

SPECIAL THANKS to the Center for Research and Computing in the Arts.

James Dillon was born in Glasgow on 29 October 1950, and his music has been published by Peters Edition since 1982. In that year **Parjanya-Vata**, for solo cello, won the Kransichsteiner Musikpreis at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. The work's Sanskrit title refers to the ancient Vedic hymns in which parjanya and vata are the personifications of rain and wind. Dillon studied Indian music during the early 1970s with Punita Gupta, and some of the rhythmic techniques that he encountered are referred to in **Ti.re-Ti.ke-Dha**, for solo percussionist. Dillon was re-invited by Darmstadt to present new works throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. In 1983, the **First String Quartet** received its premiere from the Arditti Quartet at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

The Arditti Quartet has remained closely involved with the composer, and Huddersfield is one of the many festivals to feature Dillon's music. It mounted a large-scale retrospective in 1995. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, James Dillon worked on **Nine Rivers**, an ambitious group of large-scale pieces that the composer conceived, not as a cycle, but as a collection of works with certain 'internal symmetries'. The nine works are scored for various forces, ranging from the solo percussion and electronics of **La Coupure**, through ensemble pieces such as **East 11th St NY 10003**, to the largest works - **Viriditas**, for sixteen solo voices, and **Oceanos**. This last piece, the 'ocean of oceans', is **Nine Rivers**' delta, bringing together all the forces previously deployed throughout the series and including more than fifty musicians and live electronics. **Oceanos** was commissioned for the BBC Proms 1996, and the first performance was given by conductor Richard Bernas and Music Projects/London. As well as the BBC, commissioners for other pieces in the **Nine Rivers** series include IRCAM, Ensemble InterContemporain, the Oslo Sinfonietta and Glasgow 1990 European City of Culture.

Dillon says that he embarked upon the **Nine Rivers** project in part to escape the frustratingly 'atomistic' nature of a composer's activities. The intricate references of this massive and complex meditation on time range from environmental concerns to the nature of musical language connected through the metaphor of the river. Other grouped works include: **L'évolution du vol**, a song cycle for female voice and chamber ensemble; the violin series that makes up **Traumwerk**, of which the first book, for two violins, won the 1997 Royal Philharmonic Society award for chamber-scale composition; and **The Book of Elements**, a cycle in five volumes for solo piano inspired by the pianist Roger Woodward, Volume 5 of which won Dillon a rare second Royal Philharmonic Society Award in 2003.

In January 2005, Dillon completed his **Fourth String Quartet**, which was premièred in March 2005 by Quatour Diotima. This work earned Dillon a unique third Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Chamber Scale Composition, and was praised by the RPS for its "imperishable musical values and active awareness of the tradition of string-quartet [...] a reminder that Dillon has made one of the most distinctive contributions to the music of our time". Current projects include a large scale multi-movement work, **Anthropology**, and a new piece for the Orchestre de Paris..

Dillon is closely associated with a number of the world's leading contemporary music ensembles and soloists. He has been a guest lecturer at many universities throughout the world, and was named Distinguished International Visitor by New York University in 2001-2002. In 2003 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Huddersfield. In 2007 he was appointed Professor of Composition at the University of Minnesota. He lives in London and Minneapolis.

William Brent's research spans the disciplines of performance, composition, computer science, and engineering. He holds a Ph.D in music from UC, San Diego, where he studied in the computer music area with Miller Puckette, F.R. Moore, and Shlomo Dubnov. Presently, William is an Assistant Professor of Audio Technology at American University in Washington DC. His electroacoustic performance projects combine human- robotic- and computer-realized sound, and are controlled by software written in the SuperCollider and Pd programming environments. In addition to concert-based projects, William is also active in the areas of remote network music performance and interactive sound installation. Current research areas are signal processing techniques for timbre identification, and the relationship between gesture and sound in the performance of live computer-based music. He is the author of timbreID: an open source library of Pd objects designed for real-time timbre analysis and identification.

Ross Karre is a percussionist and temporal artist based in San Diego, CA. He works with a variety of media and practices ranging from contemporary classical music to experimental multimedia performance incorporating video, sound, lighting, and theatre. He attended Oberlin Conservatory (B.M. 2005) and UCSD (DMA 2009). He has worked extensively with Steven Schick and red fish blue fish. He co-founded the percussion group EnsembleXII under the direction of Pierre Boulez in Lucerne, Switzerland. He works as a freelance artist and musician as he pursues a second terminal degree (MFA Visual Arts) at UCSD.

Percussionist, conductor and author **Steven Schick** was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. For the past thirty years he has championed contemporary percussion music as a performer and teacher, by commissioning and premiering more than one hundred new works for percussion, many of which are foundational works in the percussion repertoire. Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego and a Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. He was the percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars of New York City from 1992-2002, and from 2000 to 2004 served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland. Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group, "red fish blue fish," and director of "Roots and Rhizomes," a summer course on contemporary percussion music hosted at the Banff Centre for the Arts. In 2007 assumed the post of Music Director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus, and is regular guest conductor of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE).

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CONCERT SCHEDULE

October 6 : Charles Curtis (cello) / Aleck Karis (piano)
October 20: James Newton (composer, flutist)
November 3: Steven Schick (percussionist)
November 17 : Palimpsest (new music ensemble)
January 12 : Wet Ink (new music)
January 26 : Aleck Karis (piano)
February 8 : Palimpsest (new music)
March 9 : Kartik Seshadri (sitar)
April 13 : Formalist Quartet / Mark Menzies (violin)
April 27 : Telematic Concert / Mark Dresser (contra-
bass)
May 18, 20, 21 : Chamber Opera

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