

Stuart Saunders-Smith (b. Portland, Maine, United States, March 16, 1948) is a notable and widely performed American composer, percussionist, and poet. He studied with Edward Diemante at the Hartt School of Music. In 1977, he received a DMA in composition from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where his instructors included Salvatore Martirano, Herbert Brün, and Ben Johnston. He has taught at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and also at Darmstadt. He served as executive editor of the Percussive Arts Research Edition from 1982 to 1984. His wife is the percussionist and music publisher Sylvia Smith, who has performed many of his works. His works are published by Smith Publications.

The list of performers Stuart has worked with and/or dedicated pieces to includes John Fonville, Lisa Cella, Paul Hoffmann, Jude Traxler, and his wife, Sylvia Smith. Steven Schick and Justin DeHart appear on Stuart Saunders Smith's album "The Links Series of Vibraphone Essays."

Stuart Saunders Smith is a composer of rhythmically and melodic complex music. His music recently has been driven by the notion of "line-drawing"; he composes complex melodies that interact with each other contrapuntally (vertically) and over time (horizontally). He is also interested in the utilization of text as well as the composition of systems through which performance artists from different media can interact within the same score (trans-media systems).

Smith describes himself as "a confessional composer who focuses on revealing in his music the most personal aspects of his life, in the belief that the revelations of the particular speak to the universal." His music is usually chromatic, atonal, and rhythmically intricate, with his pitch material selected in an intuitive manner rather than via the twelve-tone technique. Many of his works are theatrical, asking the performers to speak, sing, act, and perform pantomime in addition to playing their instruments. His works often feature improvisation. Approximately half of his more than 150 works involve percussion, and his works are particularly popular among percussionists. He has a preference for found sounds, and often utilizes household objects (such as plates, bowls, and tin cans) and objects found in nature (such as dried leaves, logs, and pod rattles) as sound sources. Many of his works are inspired by the environment and history of Maine, including ...*And Points North* (1990), which is about the Passamaquoddy nation of eastern Maine.

Recordings of Smith's music have been released on the 11 West, Capstone, Centaur, Opus One, O.O. Discs, Cadenza, BVHaast, New World Records, Innova, and GAC Sweden labels. He has been awarded grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Maryland State Arts Council.

He now resides in Vermont.

The Music of Stuart Saunders-Smith

Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall
January 30, 2014 8PM

Flight (1978)

Breath (2001)

Light in Each One (2007)

Shine (2008)

Notebook (1980)

– INTERMISSION –

In Hours Like These (2005)

Palm Sunday (2012)

WORLD PREMIERE

Rachel Beetz, flute

Kyle Adam Blair, piano

Dustin Donahue, percussion

Aurora Borealis

Tiffany Du Mouchelle, soprano

Steve Solook, percussion

Flight (1978)

Two solos,
Not a duet -
No compromise!

dedicated to my friend John Fonville

I've always loved the intensity and inner-movement of high notes. I've always loved frenzied activity. I've always enjoyed watching little nervous birds flitting from one thing to another - always changing the subject. I've always loved the purity (like the flute) of Brancusi's "Bird in Space."

I was also thinking about escape and finality - like there is no escape - are we just running in place?

A newspaper reporter told a nun who was taking care of lepers on an island in the South Pacific, "I wouldn't do what you are doing for a million dollars." She replied, "Neither would I."

Breath (2001)

for Kassie Baldwin and Sylvia Smith

Light in Each One (2007)

for my friend Lisa Cella

Shine (2008)

for Lisa Cella and Kevin Lewis

Music of Co-existence

Since 1995, I have occasionally composed chamber music which I call "music of co-existence," where each player has a separate part, and plays it without regard to the other players. There is no score, just parts. The music relies more on chance coincidences than performer choices. I compose this kind of music to avoid typical relationship amount the player, getting a rich blend of soloistic musical combination. Shine is an example of this kind of music.

Notebook (1980)

Dedicated to Barney Childs and the
University of Redlands New Music Ensemble

I have very ambivalent feelings about the pop music of my generation – the old standards. I grew up with these tunes – they are part of me. I find myself humming these tunes from the shower to jogging. I also hate the role of popular music in America – just part of a giant taste industry that programs people to act, think, and feel in a uniform way – easier to sell stuff to people with a mental uniform.

I love the format of a fakebook. Music for all occasions, for all instruments – tremendous variety from a few materials – very ecological really. So I thought I would make my own fakebook: *Notebook*.

I would base *Notebook* on the format and tunes of the fakebook. I picked out many of my favorites and played around with them. I was shocked to find such an incredible amount of intervallic redundancy in these tunes. I came to hate those tunes for their "hit you over the head with the same point' redundancy. My mission was clear: re-write the fakebook – improve the music (improve it to suit me of course.) I found that pop stuff, that pop junk, that pop crap so damned simple minded. Yet part of me still loves those tunes. Maybe most tunes are simple-minded. Damn ambivalence anyway! Maybe I really chose those tunes because one must begin somewhere.

I am not going to tell anyone what tunes I use – it doesn't matter. All those fakebook tunes are one tune – just like *Notebook* (with a nod to Charles Ives).

In Hours Like These (2005)

for Sylvia Smith and Christy Finn

First performed by Sylvia Smith and Christy Finn on May 11, 2006, at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. The text is *It's After One*, a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930), translated by Edward J. Brown.

Palm Sunday (2012)

commissioned by Kyle Adam Blair

Stuart has given the pianist a tremendous amount of freedom within the four movements of *Palm Sunday*. Within *Palm Sunday* the concepts of articulation, emphasis, and phrasing are concepts that are negotiated by the performer rather than mandated by the composer. These individual negotiations invoke a heightened sense of ownership and investment in the piece as one navigates the material.

The first movement is an expansive monologue that, to me, speaks to the relationship between progress in time and obsessive re-visiting of the past. The second movement is a fast, intense, jazz-like solo reminiscent of the solo playing of jazz pianist McCoy Tyner. It seems to me that the brief third movement is a sort of working-out of a Real Book arrangement for solo piano, only the harmonies are expanded far beyond the bounds of traditional jazz harmony into a much more intimate, personal realm. The fourth movement (for me, the spiritual center of the work) begins with a dense, thick adagio which gradually thins and reveals itself as one takes brief pauses to contemplate the resonances and residues it leaves behind.”
- Kyle Adam Blair