

A Thousand Mornings

REBECCA ABRAHAM, Dartmouth College, United States

ALBERT ZHANG, Dartmouth College, United States

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1 PROGRAM NOTES

This dance performance centers the Magical Musical Mat (MMM), a musical instrument that amplifies physical touch with sound. First prototyped in 2018 at UC Berkeley, this instrument turns acts of touch such as hand-holding, hugging, and high-fives into the basic gestures for music-making. Where a piano is activated by pressing its keys, the MMM is activated when two people's fingers meet.

Because this instrument "plays" music with physical contact, it blurs movement-making and music-making into the very same act and poses an exciting new premise for the process of composing and choreographing. What happens when dance is not merely responsive to sound, but necessary to its very creation? How can we explore the meaning of physical intimacy through the music that its touch can now create? We bring two dancers experienced in contact improvisation to the MMM to explore these questions.

2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Magical Musical Mat is made up of two conductive floormats, a microcontroller, and a system for audio generation. In the performance context, we use a laptop running Ableton Live or Max/MSP to generate sounds. The microcontroller reads differences in contact resistance between the two mats as sensor input for the audio generation system.

This performance is part of a project that attempts to nurture the Magical Musical Mat's artistic possibilities. The MMM began as a tool for embodied design research at UC Berkeley, exploring communication through music and touch with non-speaking autistic children. It was piloted by <placeholder>, and further developed by <placeholder>, one of the co-authors. As the MMM emerges from its original research context, we are excited by the outcomes of pushing an existing Digital Musical Instrument into interdisciplinary creative territory.

We brought together two dancers and a cinematographer over a series of experimental workshops to explore the MMM's potential as an interactive dance system. Our first improvised movement experiments are documented in a short film (see media links), and we have since worked up to a choreographed performance using similar sonic material.

The MMM's hybridity between sound and touch takes us to an unknown and thrilling creative territory; its premise asks us to invent new approaches to choreography and composition, to explore the subject of physical intimacy and human contact, and to rethink sound when it is born from bodily movement.

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Fig. 1. Experimental workshop setup

3 PERFORMANCE NOTES

The two dancers require an area of about 7 x 7 feet to set up with the mats. The performance is about 10 minutes but can be adapted to be a few minutes shorter or longer. It works best in a setting where audience members can be close to and around the performers, in order to best capture subtle movements and close contact. The performance has optional audience interaction aspects. For example, we can have audience members record speech to be used as sonic material for the MMM. Also, we can bring willing audience members into the performance by forming longer chains of touch between the two mats. Apart from the performance, the MMM setup allows anyone to interact with touch and sound, and we like to allow the MMM to exist as an installation on its own while it isn't being actively used for performance.

We would need NIME to provide a speaker setup, adapted to the venue or space, that can take stereo audio input from a Macbook.

4 MEDIA LINKS

- Video: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/73t1e7hy62d4ogc3bql1/h?rlkey=mtjl643jaquogrnwdhz9xa5n&e=1&dl=0>

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COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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