

Embracing the rhythm of work

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Author: Kathleen Mills

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Percussionist Scott Deal acknowledges that listeners find John Luther Adams' "Four Thousand Holes" contemplative, but for Deal as a performer, it's like "scaling a mountain of ice."

The CD, a 33-minute piece for piano, percussion and electronics, was named by The New Yorker magazine as one of the top 10 classical CDs of 2011. Deal, an IUPUI professor, plays vibraphone and bells on the CD.

Deal performs the Adams piece with two mallets in each hand. That's not unusual for a professional percussionist. It's the rhythm of the work that makes it challenging.

"It has a highly complex rhythm set that is played over four musical lines, two in each hand," Deal said.

Deal, 54, grew up the son of an Air Force pilot, and lived in 17 states by the time he was 18. Beginning with his days as a high school rock drummer, he sought out electronic connections to music.

"I was into fusion when it first came out, but then I got bored with it after a while," he said.

Trained as a classical percussionist, he started with the Miami Symphony when he was a doctoral student at the University of Miami.

Deal is professor of music and director of the Donald Tavel Arts Technology Research Center at IUPUI. In addition to his teaching and research duties, Deal performs in new music ensembles, always seeking the cutting edge in the intersection of music and technology.

As a freelance percussionist, he has performed in the premieres of dozens of solo, chamber and mixed-media works. His band Big Robot combines acoustic music, electronics and visual art in a multimedia show.

"I love to introduce people to things they haven't been exposed to," he said.

Deal is also director of the IUPUI Telematic Collective, a group of student musicians who collaborate with professionals. They use high bandwidth to create original works for the stage. Using an Internet connection that is up to 100 gigabytes (an average home's connection is closer to six megabytes), Deal and his collaborators can send large files in real time. ("It's very vivid," he said.) They work with choreographers, artists, actors and writers around the world.

Deal's greatest asset as a teacher, said former student Jordan Munson, is the ability to let students and musicians find their own way.

"He's always open to hearing your thoughts," said Munson, an IUPUI lecturer. "He was strategic about how he presented it to you so you could discover things yourself."

Deal also collaborated with Matthew Burtner of the University of Virginia, on "Auksalaq," a "media-enriched" opera about climate change, that won an Internet2 IDEA award last fall. Burtner described working with Deal as a "wild ride on a fast machine."

"He asks fantastic, probing questions about music and concepts. He's so interested in every aspect of the piece."

Cynthia Pratt, professor of dance at Butler University, said that spirit of embracing the new is what makes Deal, who came to Indianapolis with his wife, Clara, in 2007, so vital to the city.

Pratt and Deal have collaborated on a number of dance and music pieces. In one, Deal arranged to have musicians at the University of Florida perform for Pratt's dancers at Butler. They were connected through live streaming.

"He is somebody who sees so many possibilities," Pratt said. "Lots of people see them, but don't bring them to reality. . . He's really rare."

"I love to introduce people to things they haven't been exposed to."

Professor of music and percussionist Scott Deal

See him

at work

Scott Deal's Telematic Collective performs with the Butler University Ballet Dance Studio at 7:30 p.m. April 26 at IUPUI in the ICTC Building, Room 152, and at 7:30 p.m. April 27 in Lilly Hall, Studio 310, at Butler University. Admission is \$5 for the program at IUPUI and free for the Butler performance. For more information, visit www.scottdeal.net.

video: Watch Scott Deal perform at indystar.com/video.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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