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MY CIRCUIT FROM THE SLAB BEGAN TO RISE

CRAIG SMITH

In Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein: or, the Modern Prometheus*, the giant that Victor Frankenstein assembles from cadaver parts is intelligent, articulate, perceptive, and longs for human contact. He is also so hideous to behold that even his creator can't bear to be around him.

As seen in horror films, especially those starring Boris Karloff, the creature is equally monstrous of aspect, virtually mute, and intrinsically gentle. He kills first by accident, then from terror, and finally for revenge. The creature is doomed from the start by man's hubris and misuse of power. The real villain isn't the monster: it's his maker.

Philip Mantione's one-night creative project for the Santa Fe Complex is titled **FrankenCircuit**, and rather like Victor's creation, it involves a marriage of art, science, faith, research, audacity, and electricity. Fortunately, it's intended to delight, and it will be much easier to control than Dr. F's vanity-inspired simulacrum. At least, that's the plan.

FrankenCircuit is the collaborative product of more than 15 musicians, computer programmers, engineers, and artists, with Mantione as ringmaster. It consists of seven kinetic sculptures assembled from used mechanical parts and circuitry, simultaneously set in motion, and then accompanied by a combination of ambient sounds and a composed score.

The shebang begins with live music and spoken-word performances from 7 to 9 p.m. on Saturday, June 13.

At 9 p.m., a knife switch will be pulled, **FrankenCircuit**'s component parts will begin to move and chatter, and the experiment will be on its way. After two hours, the switch will be reversed and the monster put back to sleep forever. All monies raised and donated during the event go to support Santa Fe Complex, which opened in June 2008.

"I wanted to do something for this first anniversary," Mantione said in a recent interview at the Complex, which is a severe-looking yet welcoming space near the Railyard. It is used for performances, workshops, computer programming and media classes, and similar events presented by community groups and the complex itself.

"This place is about art and technology. I thought, maybe we should refer back to the basics of stuff for technology: electricity and using electricity, plus the idea of theater, and animating things all at once. Things that are separate but part of one large organism. I woke up one morning with this in mind and said, it's so absurd, it's so ambitious, they'll never do it. But I have to get it out of my head. Well, we're doing it."

Mantione is a composer who works in various media including electronic music, sound installations, and acoustic music for voice, chamber ensembles, and orchestra. His wife, Alysse Stepanian, is a

visual, video, and conceptual artist as well as a writer. Their work has been heard and shown around the world including in China, Armenia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C.

Their most recent collaboration in Santa Fe was T = 2.7K, which was performed at the Center for Contemporary Arts last November. It featured video by Stepanian, live electronic music by Mantione, and playing by trumpeter Ron Helman, who used a special electronic trumpet mute.

"I started as a composer, both classical and contemporary, then I started combining the two," Mantione explained. "Around 2005, I started collaborating with my wife, doing multimedia installations with video and mechanical processes. Our last one was in Berlin. I love visual artists. They have a totally different conception on creation [than musicians]."

"We moved here from New York in 2005. We had previously lived in Los Angeles for 13 years before moving to New York, and when we started looking for a new place, we tried various places in Northern California. None of them worked out, for various reasons. We had been here once before, and thought, well, why not try Santa Fe? And it worked out perfectly, all at once."

Mantione said that he had no difficulty persuading people to be part of **FrankenCircuit**. Besides Stepanian, they include James Brody, Tristan Chambers, Stephen Guerin, Victoria Hughes, Simon Mehalek, Frank Rolla, Steina, Woody Vasulka, Ismael Retzinski, and Flamingo Pink! (the nom de performance of singer-songwriter Megan Burns).

"This is about the collaboration between arts and sciences," Mantione said, producing a floor plan of the project. The layout has been intentionally designed to conceptually resemble an electrical circuit. "The defining parameters are these black lines," he said, pointing to the plan. "They will be made of gaffer's tape on the floor. Inside each of the squares will be one of the sculptures. The only change from this will be, we've moved the main speakers" -- he indicated them with taps of his finger -- "over by the office instead of over here by the door.

"It's going to be a supernormal kind of thing. There's a knife switch to start and stop it, and each sculpture will have a contact mic on it to pick up the ambient sounds it makes. I envisioned the aural experience -- wait, what's the term of envisioning something in terms of hearing?" he laughed. "I'm conceptually hearing a lot of mechanical rhythm sounds, random rhythmic sounds.

"Those independent aural components will be run through a mixing board with individual lines. James Brody is writing a piece that will be played through the board also [Archipelago Venice, made up of ambient sound recorded all around the Queen of the Adriatic]. All of these things will be mixed. You'll hear the local sound of the piece when you're next to it, but also hear the combined sound from the speakers."

The sculptures sound interesting, in the same way that a device you're assured will comb your hair rather than cut off your head sounds interesting. Some are untitled, while others have names such as ImxCocteau, Binary Clock, and Prometheus. The effect of their combined "performance" will be a surprise to everyone, including Mantione. As he noted, the installation will start two days before the show, and then there will be one sound and action check to make sure everything goes according to plan. At least they don't have to count on a conjunction of chemical, surgical, and meteorological

events, as Victor Frankenstein did.

"The thing about this space is, it is so multipurpose; this show is one night only. It's a lot of work, and it's astounding so many people have wanted to become part of it. It's something I would do, but I don't expect other people to do.

"The idea of this piece is the theater of the moment, the impact of the moment," he said. "For theater to happen, you have to have a point in time for a start, and like in any opera, a climax." For **FrankenCircuit**, "There will be buildup before, then two hours of performance. And you're going to want to stay till they shut it off." <25C0>

details

<25BC> **FrankenCircuit**

<25BC> 7-11 p.m. Saturday, June 13

<25BC> Santa Fe Complex, 632 Agua Fría St.

(entrance on Romero Street)

<25BC> \$25, \$20 students & seniors; tickets available

by calling 216-7562, from sfco

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