

21 Improvisations

1. Sometimes the instruments themselves can suggest structure. My game here was to keep the piano inside the sound of the cymbals and gongs while George made metal music. 2:23
2. This is a cross-pulse piece, where various interweaving pulses generate the musical story. 2:59
3. The brushes set the mood, but otherwise this is a calm, free moment of just listening. 2:35
4. A finger-damped piano string leads the pulse, and the percussion leads the story. 2:48
5. This piece seems to pass by like landscape. There were no pre-agreements, no game, *Just Play*. When we heard the playback one of us said, "This is our symphony," and the other said, "Yes." 6:09
6. In this piece (which rhymes somewhat with #2 and #4), the percussion sets the pulse and the piano guides the story. It is the conclusion of what seems to be Act I of the set. 2:52
7. The percussion music is all metal, and the piano part is inspired by an African 3:2 cross-rhythm. How could such a soft lullaby come from metal? 3:53
8. The piano leads this "motif" piece—a few ideas tossed around in many variations. It seems to me the most compositional of all the pieces on the CD. 3:25
9. We started out with the piano staying inside the special tonalities of the gongs and cymbals, but the music led us to its own mysterious ending. 3:11
10. The percussion tells the story in this pulse piece while the piano holds the pulse. The trance-like quality maintains, even

- through the sudden snare drum roll near the end. It's the sibling of #4. 5:09
11. With exquisite subtlety, George plays a single hand-drum, and I play the pictures inside of it. 2:06
12. This piece reminds me of the gamelans of Indonesia. It seems calming to hear, and was calming to play. It pairs with #7, and closes the second section of the CD. 4:13
13. Cymbals lead the music in what could be an Act III overture. 1:36
14. The gongs and their strange tunings lead us—where? Weird lights? A rain forest in a city? A perfumed cave? Gentle listener, fill in your own strangeness here. 3:21
15. The percussion leads a cross-pulse piece, an energetic companion to #4 and #10. 2:26
16. In this one I pay homage to my secret 19th century romantic self. It doesn't take long, though, before that gives way to: 2:07
17. A scherzoid Interlude led first by brushes, then sticks. 1:33
18. This is like the game *Who Leads* in that the story-telling is passed equally back and forth between the players. It is also as close as we get (in this collection) to jazz, the musical family home we were both raised in. 2:24
19. Although this begins like another gamelan piece (similar to #12), the music breaks through that texture to take unexpected directions. 2:41
20. This is another pure *Just Play* piece: no game. 3:11
21. Finally, let's relent a little and give this one a title: *Georgian Owl*, an even and equal flight into the night by George & Al. 2:42

GAME



NO GAME

George Marsh
Percussion

W. A. Mathieu
Piano

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GAME / NO GAME
George Marsh & W. A. Mathieu

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Game History

Viola Spolin characterized the original theater games she introduced as "...a timeless moment when all are mutually engaged in experience. You don't know what's going to happen, and that's where the joy is, the everlasting spiral." In the 1950s, as theater games emerged in the culture, artists were learning a new definition of the present, which seemed limitless and beckoning.

In 1959 I became the musical director of The Second City Theater's founding company. As part of our training program, under Viola's watchful eye, we developed theater games designed to musicalize the actors' perceptions. Mutual trust was the key. When George and I met in 1964, we began to invent musical games to guide us through the uncharted territory of free music. As we discovered our musical kinship, we found two other like-minded players (Rich Fudoli, winds, and Clyde Flowers, bass). As the Chicago Improvising Players, we developed a repertoire of games arranged in series and performed as Game Symphonies.

I joined San Francisco's Committee Theater in 1967, where theater games were already a flourishing source of discipline and inspiration. The San Francisco Conservatory hired me to teach improvisation as a required course. Clyde and George moved to the Bay Area in 1968, and we three became the core trio of The Ghost Opera Company, featuring gifted students in the Conservatory and many guests from around town, including actors from The Committee.

By 1970, free improvisation was in the air, and game playing was well on its way to becoming a standard training method for both actors and musicians internationally. Meanwhile George and I have had four decades of collaboration to develop our work and trust. *Game/No Game*, recorded between 1999 and 2002, represents not so much the games themselves as their end result: the musical mutuality that games engender.

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Some Useful Games

Here are a few games that have proved useful over many years:

Sparse as Possible asks the musicians to play as little as they possibly can and still be playing. The resulting economy thins and clarifies the texture.

AA, BB, CC is a memory game, useful in compositional playing. The ensemble improvises a brief phrase, then, after a pause, attempts to repeat it exactly, which is impossible, but in the attempt, one hears new details with new ears.

One Leads asks the other players to play only what supports the lead player.

Who Leads passes the leadership back and forth without visual cueing.

Pulse establishes a non-metered pulse—that is, any individual pulse can serve as "one".

Cross-Pulse allows several pulses to interweave and even change speed.

East/West spontaneously shifts the quality back and forth between receptive and expressive.

If It Ain't Baroque asks the players to repeat short figures until the urge to change is felt; the change must occur gradually as possible.

Gather Ye is a texture game where you play only what you hear the others playing.

Syllogism consists of three phrases, improvised collectively, called *thesis*, *antithesis*, and *synthesis*.

Just Play is the apotheosis of games, where all instructions and preconceptions fall away, and trust and pure wakefulness preside. It is the game of no game.

About Game/No Game

When George and I play together we tend to hear compositionally, that is, we try to weave coherent stories told through musical ideas. Surface texture, which is like the atmosphere of a story, does arise, of course, but strictly musical ideas drive the narrative from the inside. This means remembering (as best we can) what we've been playing. Consequently the pieces are short, typically three or four minutes. In the table of contents on the back panel, we've numbered the pieces, but left them untitled because no matter how hard we try to find names for them, for us they remain simply pieces that sound the way they sound.



—Liner notes by W. A. Mathieu, 2004

George Marsh became a professional drummer in Belleville, Illinois at the age of fifteen. His early experiences included work with Sam Andria, Jimmy Williams, and Barbara Streisand (before she became a super star). Although primarily self taught, he studied percussion with Tom Siwe and Jack McKenzie at Champagne-Urbana and later played with the Lyric Opera, and many great Chicago jazz musicians. Since 1968 he has lived in the San Francisco area where he has performed and recorded with musicians such as John Abercrombie, Mose Allison, Joe Henderson, David Grisman, Terry Riley, Denny Zeitlin, Pauline Oliveros, Tom Buckner, Mel Graves, Julian Lage, Randy Vincent, and many others. George teaches at UC Santa Cruz and Sonoma State University, and has written a unique drum instruction book, *Inner Drumming*, which deals with the flow of energy inside the drummer's body as it applies to four-limb performance. He has composed music for the movies *Black Stallion* and *Never Cry Wolf*. George Marsh can be contacted at Marshdrum@aol.com



William Allaudin Mathieu is a pianist, composer, teacher, and author. He has composed varied chamber and choral works, made numerous solo piano recordings, and written three books on music. Allaudin was a disciple of North Indian vocalist Pandit Pran Nath for 25 years, and has studied African music with Hamza El Din, jazz with William Russo, and European classical music with Easley Blackwood. In the 1960s, Allaudin spent several years as an arranger/composer for Stan Kenton and Duke Ellington, and was the musical director for the Second City Theater and The Committee Theater. In the 1970s, he served on the faculties of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Mills College. In 1969 he founded the *Suffi Choir*, which he directed until 1982. The last two decades have been devoted to composition, performance, and teaching from his home in Sebastopol, California. Allaudin Mathieu can be contacted at ColdMountainMusic.com

