

A wide-angle photograph of a coastal scene. In the foreground, there is a concrete wall, a strip of pebbles, and some grass. The middle ground is a vast expanse of teal-colored water. The background is a sky filled with soft, grey clouds. The text 'Negative Capability: Works by Hannah A. Barnes' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Negative Capability:

Works by Hannah A. Barnes

"I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason..."

The title comes from poet John Keats in a letter from his own time in quarantine in 1817. I encountered it in the chaotic days of March 2020. This resonated deeply with the uncertainties of that moment, the more significant uncertainties and doubts one wrestles with, and the wonderful mysteries that are all part of making art and existing in the world as an artist. I titled the electric guitar piece Negative Capability and found that it has stuck with me over the past few years as a sort of mantra. When compiling these pieces, I found that this mantra most accurately captured the spirit of the music and made a fitting title.

This album is a culmination of and reflection upon my creative work and compositional interests from 2020 to 2022. Together, these pieces reflect my obsession with crafting musical worlds that are defined by boundaries and oppositions that are then transcended. The materials are both ordered and chaotic, pitchy and noisy, strictly bound and free-flowing, defined by sharp edges and corners and smoothed with curves, reflecting on the past and looking towards my future. Each of these pieces marked a significant step in my artistic development through its creation and contributed to the building of my own sonic universe.

Named after my piece for electric guitar, *Negative Capability*, this album consists of five works composed over a period of two years. There is a large-scale form: *five images* and *Triskelion*, the outer bounds, share canons as their primary process. Their compositions overlapped in 2020, with five images serving as a "canonic sketchbook" for processes and materials in *Triskelion*. While they share only a few materials on the surface, they are inseparable in conception, execution, and artistic concerns. The image of the triple spiral (representing life, death and rebirth) and the concept of strange loops continue to be central to my work and life philosophy.

Ramification and *Negative Capability* are two-thirds of a triptych of solo pieces linked through their noisier sound worlds and emphasis on friction sounds. Each developed independently, but the concept of "offshoots" permeates both pieces. *Not buried, but just under the surface* is my so-called "mushroom piece" that is structured as a mycelium that grows non-linearly and continuously in different directions, and it connects static sustained pitches to wobbly microtonal lines to multiphonics. With the writing of these pieces, this way of thinking rhizomatically and creating non-linear connections has become central to my thinking and is now a central artistic-research concern.

five images [7:41]

five images (2020) is a set of five compact canonic miniatures. Double, crab, prolation, and inversion canons are employed across the work to create a large-scale arch form that engages the quartet in various ways. While the canons are rigorous in their execution, they are not all intended to be heard as such, with variance in the timbre, register, and temporality of the material affecting the perceptibility and autonomy of the canonic voices.

The odd-numbered movements (i, iii, v) use the full ensemble, with iii acting as the axis and breaking point in the large-scale structure. Movements ii and iv, both crab canons, employ duos different than those used in the double canons of the outer movements and occupy a noisier and more distant landscape. Each pair of movements across this axis (v with i and iv with ii) are created as derivations from their counterparts, as if an image is reflected through a broken mirror to create a simulacrum of its pair. However, it is impossible to determine which way the axis imposes its changes and, thus, which image is the original and which is the reflection.

This work was created as a canonic sketchbook for my large ensemble work, *Triskelion*, and directly confronts the issues presented by working both with miniature forms and composing with canons in the hopes of using an old technique to make something new.

five images was composed for Ensemble Dal Niente and premiered in an empty hall on July 11, 2020.

Recorded 7.30.2024 at Experimental Sound Studios, Chicago, IL

Ensemble Dal Niente:

Hannah A. Barnes, conductor

Katie Schoepflin-Jimoh, clarinets

Benjamin Melsky, harp

Kyle Flens, percussion

Theo Ramsey, violin/viola

Producer: Hannah A. Barnes

Recording Engineer: Kate In

Assistant Recording Engineer: Xiaoyu (Alicia) Li

Mixing and Mastering: Fredrick Gifford

Ramification [10:17]

Ramification (2021) focuses on creating an idiosyncratic, (relatively) unpitched sound world and emphasizes gesture within a developing and evolving structure. This piece is most concerned with different types of surfaces and branching paths/connections between them. Sometimes materials develop linearly along these paths, while jumping suddenly from one to the next at other times.

My hope is that listening occurs on multiple levels of detail for both the performer and audience. Similar types of gestures (dragging vs scratching vs striking) occur on vastly different surfaces (gongs vs floor tom vs wood plank vs guiro vs chimes) with different implements (mallet vs superball vs mallet shaft vs brush vs nails), resulting in a range of drastically different sound qualities that seek to unify themselves, but may not always do so.

The title refers to offshoots or branches, such as on a tree or nerve, that make up the (sometimes obfuscated) structure of the piece.

Ramification was composed for percussionist Alex Garde as part of the 2021 Summer Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice.

Recorded live 11.20.2022 at Epiphany Center for the Arts, Chicago, IL, as part of the "Ensemble Dal Niente Presents Kyle Flens" concert.

Kyle Flens, percussion

Recording Engineer: Hunter Brown

Mixing and Mastering: Fredrick Gifford

Not buried, but just under the surface [11:40]

Not buried, but just under the surface (2022) reflects my obsession with fragments and nonlinear growth. I first became truly aware of fragments-as-material in the context of Romantic music and literature and extended into Modernity. I am convinced that once the atom has been split, the fragment is the primary way of being. This thinking extends into many of my works after being explored and developed in this piece.

Drawings that extend beyond the frame, 'shadow pieces' that begin after the last measure of a work, and the branching growth and communication of mycelium were all on my mind while composing this duo. Involving materials including wobbly microtonal lines, unstable false-sustains, and fragile multiphonics, *Not buried, but just under the surface* is complete in itself, yet remains a fragment. The abstract and the unspoken hint at more beyond themselves.

The title of this piece comes from a painting by Chicago-based artist Caroline Kent, which I discovered through the Art Institute of Chicago.

Not buried, but just under the surface was composed for Chicago-based duo Garden Unit.

Recorded 6.3.2023 at Rockwell Studios, Chicago, IL

Garden Unit:

Julia Ansolabehere, bass clarinet

Cameron Roberts, tenor saxophone

Producer: Hannah A. Barnes

Recording Engineer: Hannah A. Barnes

Mixing and Mastering: Fredrick Gifford

Negative Capability [11:02]

Negative Capability (2020) is built on a scaffolding of physical gestures with a variety of implements and their resultant sounds. Beginning with scratching and scraping with fingernails, an implement inseparable from the performer, the gestures progress to a sponge and then to a bow, demanding each time that the performer move further and further away from their initial physical connection to the instrument. Gestures move from regular to irregular and from static to dynamic along one axis of the strings. Reverb and freeze pedals grasp at the noisy detritus of the action's resulting sound, seeking to find meaning in the chaos even when perhaps there is none.

While the guitar is detuned and muted to avoid explicit pitch, as if the instrument is caged and restrained, the frozen remains of the gestures pulled out of context by the pedals inevitably highlight unpredictable and volatile pitch content within the noise of the action. These artifacts are combined with the inescapability of the fundamental resonance of the instrument and hum of the amplifier. Even while the material evolves and disintegrates, this backbone to the sound world remains as an elemental sonic identity. While the structural and material scaffolding is rigorous in its construction, the sonic details accentuated as a result of the action and captured by the freeze pedal are unpredictable. It is impossible to anticipate exactly what the sounding result will be, and it is useless to do so; instead both the performer and listeners must surrender to the gestures and noise.

Negative Capability was composed for Jesse Langen, mostly during a period of great uncertainty, mystery, and doubt.

Recorded 7.27.2023 at Rockwell Studios, Chicago, IL

Jesse Langen, electric guitar

Producer: Hannah A. Barnes

Recording Engineer: Hannah A. Barnes

Mixing and Mastering: Fredrick Gifford

Triskelion [11:02]

Triskelion (2020-2021) takes its name and large-scale structure from the neolithic triple spiral carvings on the Newgrange passage tomb in County Meath, Ireland. Older than the Great Pyramids of Giza but only rediscovered in the late 19th century, the passage tomb was intricately designed containing an inner chamber that illuminates only once annually with the light of the winter solstice. The exact ritualistic and spiritual meanings surrounding the tomb and the spiral etchings that decorate it have since been lost to time, but they allude to the concept of spiraling time and life, death and rebirth. The imagery of the triple spiral informed the structural characteristics of this piece, as well as the strange loops and changing hierarchies of the piece's musical materials. The three large variational sections that make up the piece all start from the same place and subsequently spiral out in a different direction. Boundaries between the different types of materials and the strictness of the canonic processes erode in each successive variation, leading to something new emerging from prior obfuscation and erasure.

Triskelion is interlinked with my quartet *five images*, which served as a canonic sketchbook for this work. One piece informed the other, and vice versa. Although the two pieces in their completed states share only a few surface materials, they are linked on a deeper level than may first appear.

Triskelion was composed as my Master's thesis for DePaul Ensemble 20+ over the course of a spiritually challenging and engaging year; it premiered a year later. In June 2023, I visited Newgrange for the first time to witness the triskelions myself.

Recorded live 2.3.22 at Gannon Concert Hall, Holtschneider Performance Center, DePaul University, Chicago, IL (world premiere)

DePaul University's Ensemble 20+:

Michael Lewanski, conductor

Max Mika, flutes

Kyungyeon Hong, oboe/English horn

Max Reese, clarinets

Peter Houdalis, bassoon

Sarah Bryant, horn

Rhys Edwards, trumpet

Ryan Christianson, trombone

Sam Johnson-Vrooman, percussion

Lain Skow, percussion

Ben Kronk, violin I

Laura Duggan, violin II

Michelle Manson, viola

Chad Polk, violoncello

Nate Beaver, double bass

Recording Engineer: Michael Sportiello

Mixing and Mastering: Fredrick Gifford

I am incredibly grateful to all who helped make this possible, from the early stages of composing through premieres and re-recordings and to this finished disc. These pieces came about through valuable and life-giving collaborations with musicians who let me ask questions like “Show me the weirdest objects in your percussion studio!” I am grateful that these pieces have remained as “alive” as they have; the musicians and I kept discovering more over the course of repeat performances and recording sessions since work on the first of these pieces began in the challenging circumstances of 2020. Over four years later now, each of these pieces has continued to grow and develop, both within the confines of their own scores and performances and into the larger ecosystem of my creative work. I am excited to present these pieces in dialogue to create a cohesive listening journey. My main hope is always that listeners encounter something surprising.

I would like to give a special thank you to everyone who made this possible, and to everyone who supported these pieces and me from their original composition through premieres and re-recordings, and into the future.

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To Fredrick Gifford – thank you for all your mixing and mastering and coaching.

This album is dedicated to my parents, Rob and Lisa-Ann Barnes, in gratitude for their endless, unwavering love and support.

— Hannah A. Barnes, October 2024

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All works by Hannah A. Barnes, ASCAP
All photography, design, and liner notes by Hannah A. Barnes

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