



Devon Fornell

Improvisation Outside

Handwritten musical notation on a page of manuscript paper. The notation consists of ten staves of music, each with a measure number on the left margin: 17, 23, 29, 35, 41, 47, 53, 59, 65, and 71. The music is written in a single system with various notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mp*, *mf*, *pp*, and *ff*. There are also some handwritten annotations like "broken string" and "End of transcript".

On Devon Fornelli's *Garden Performance*, 9 May 2020
Matthew Royal

Devon Fornelli's musical improvisation of May 9, 2020, recorded in his back yard in St. Catharines, Ontario, is an artist's on-the-spot response to the then seven-week-old isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The work is a free-form, non-idiomatic improvisation, so, unlike, say, a jazz improvisation, there is no underpinning harmonic progression or steady beat to direct the listener. The performer/composer uses a mixture of traditional percussion instruments and other found objects to form a dialogue with sounds from the surrounding space, and to reflect on and question the mood engendered by that space. Fornelli himself states that his main concern is 'to get a sense of which instruments in my collection will speak or resonate closely with the environmental sounds'. Therefore, the aim here is similar to that of his 2015 performance marking the opening of the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts in downtown St. Catharines. As Fornelli explains, 'In 2015, the main theme was the reverse sound signal made by the work vehicle as well as the crickets. The wind and the traffic and a few birds were the inspiring forces for this latest installation.'

The camera shot shows most of the instruments used, arrayed almost haphazardly on a table. Some are off-screen, as is most of Fornelli himself, with only a hand being visible on occasion. This static staging, with the main actor off-stage, gives the whole work a sense of disconnectedness – an almost-absence of humanity – that fits the mood of isolation perfectly. (We only see Fornelli's face at the very end, as he is turning off the cell phone on which the recording was made.) The instruments on screen at the outset are as follows (from nearest to farthest): a woodblock, a manual car horn, a samba whistle within the curve of the horn, a shaker (the dark grey cylinder), more shakers connected by rubber bands (the orange objects), a pair of black maracas, a Chinese opera gong to the right of the maracas, a variety