

Annie Stevens

Candidate Statement

Music embraces tradition, examines current trends, and pushes boundaries. As a percussionist, these criteria are the inspiration that guide my research and teaching in my roles as a symphony orchestra musician, chamber musician, soloist, studio teacher and ensemble director of undergraduate percussionists. My work in all of these areas is extensive, and collectively this work provides evidence of my ability to significantly benefit my profession.

Research and Creative Activities

The main forms of research and creative activity for most musicians in academia are performing and recording. I have performed and recorded musical works old and new in several formats, for a wide variety of academic and lay audiences. Many have heard me in live performances at national and international venues and conferences. Others have heard me on my commercial record albums. Some have experienced my music by viewing professionally-recorded videos on online platforms like YouTube.

A significant amount of my pre-tenure creative activity has been dedicated to my chamber duo *Escape Ten*, a percussion duo I founded in 2012 with fellow percussionist Andrea Venet. Since 2012, we have performed and lectured at over 35 universities, at four international conferences, on NPR's *Performance Today with Fred Childs*, and have received over 500,000 views on our collective YouTube videos. To receive this level of recognition in the classical music community and beyond is quite unusual for a chamber ensemble; concert invitations to conferences and on invited series are increasingly rare.

As a percussionist, one of my most important responsibilities is the commissioning of new music. When we founded *Escape Ten*, the existing duo percussion repertoire was sparse and did not suit our musical identity. *Escape Ten* has commissioned 15 new works for percussion duo from American and European composers. Our commissioned composers include notable musicians from my field including Russell Hartenberger, a percussionist, composer, and writer. In 2019, *Escape Ten* was awarded, along with Eric Guinivan, Associate Professor of Composition at James Madison University, the Fromm Music Foundation Award from Harvard University for the commissioning of a new work for percussion duo and the world premiere performance. This prestigious award has allowed performers to commission notable composers over many decades, from Luciano Berio and Milton Babbitt to Elliott Carter. Guinivan's new three-movement marimba duo is entitled *Illuminations*; *Escape Ten* premiered the piece at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens in Jacksonville, Florida in 2019, and a subsequent performance was presented at the Third European Meeting of Contemporary Percussion in Xàbia, Spain. This event brings together pioneers of contemporary percussion performance from across Europe, including Mircea Ardeleanu, who was in attendance at our concert. The music we have commissioned has made a significant impact in my field, with professional musicians around the world performing our commissions, including most recently an April 2021 performance of Aurél Holló's *Fast Lane* by members of Concerto Budapest in Hungary.

In an effort to include more BIPOC and female composers in my overall programming, I actively sought internal and external grants to commission composers from underrepresented groups. In 2020, I was awarded a \$20,000 investment seed grant from the Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science at Virginia Tech to commission African American composer Chad Hughes

for a new *Double Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra*, to be premiered by Escape Ten and the Virginia Tech Philharmonic in 2021. This funding is to provide a research partnership between Virginia Tech faculty and faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and I am the first from the Virginia Tech School of Performing Arts to receive this funding. I am also part of an interdisciplinary team of Virginia Tech faculty who have been awarded a \$21,000 grant by the Institute for Creativity Arts and Technology at VT for the 2021-22 academic year. This funding will be used to present a non-fiction cinematic and musical performance/installation in the Virginia Tech Cube entitled, *Future Monuments*, a project that reimagines Confederate Monuments, and will feature new commissions by underrepresented composers.

Sharing new and diverse music with current and future audiences is at the core of our duo's mission; as a result, recording is an important component of my research profile. Since my appointment at Virginia Tech, *Escape Ten* has published two albums: *Colours of a Groove* in 2015, and *Our Favorite Things* in 2020, the latter on the Parma Recordings – Ravello Records label. While our first album exclusively features only duos for two marimbas, *Our Favorite Things* uses a wider range of percussion instruments. In 2015, we set out to push the boundaries of our artform by asking composers to write pieces that require each player to perform on a marimba or vibraphone along with other non-pitched instruments in an idiomatic setting. The duo initially commissioned four pieces to meet these specifications, and in 2016, we were invited to present a Keyboard Showcase Concert at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Indianapolis. The *Escape Ten* concert was attended by a standing-room-only audience of more than 700, including percussionists from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Nexus Percussion Ensemble, and has led to numerous concert invitations worldwide.

In 2017, *Escape Ten* received an invitation from Leigh Howard Stevens to create the *Escape Ten Publication Series*, published by his company, Keyboard Percussion Publications. Currently, KPP has published nine commissions by *Escape Ten*. Leigh Stevens also invited the duo to create their own line of marimba mallets which will be manufactured and distributed world-wide by Mallettech. The *Escape Ten* artist series mallets are in the final stages of development and will be available to the public during the fall of 2021.

Another important area of my performance activities is the study of symphonic orchestral music. In January of 2019 and 2020, I performed as a section percussionist with the Naples Philharmonic in Naples Florida, where I performed alongside musicians who also perform with major orchestras across the United States including the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. In March of 2018, following a competitive audition, I won the Principal Timpani position with the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra conducted by David Stewart Wiley. This is a rare opportunity for any percussionist, given that there are only about 120 major and regional American orchestras, each having only one principal timpanist. It is important to note that there are currently no principal female timpanists in any American major orchestra. Critic Timothy Gaylard of the *Roanoke Times* wrote of one performance, "Among all the variegated orchestral timbres, special mention should be made for...the alert timpani playing of Annie Stevens..." (October 15, 2017).

In addition to duo and orchestral work, I also perform as a soloist. In 2017, I appeared at Carnegie Hall, playing Gene Koshinski's, *Concerto for Marimba and Choir*. Electroacoustic percussion solo repertoire is an important part of my research, with conference performances at the International Computer Music Conference, The Society for Electroacoustic Music in the

United States conference, and the New Interfaces for Musical Expression conference. Aside from these noteworthy conferences, my research activity in the electroacoustic area is mostly conducted in the Virginia Tech Cube, a state-of-the-art research and performance space with over 140 surround sound speakers. I created my own series in this space entitled *Resonance on the Walls*, an immersive concert experience that combines cinematic visual art, electroacoustic music, and amplified acoustic music. Music on this series includes solo performances by myself and performances by the Virginia Tech Percussion Ensemble. As part of my research goal to create and disseminate new electroacoustic works, I have helped commission five electroacoustic percussion solos, as well as commissioned six electroacoustic percussion ensemble pieces. The most important of these works include Drew Worden's, *Volume of a Cube*, for 18+ amplified percussionists, and Eric Lyon's, *Marimbas Everywhere*, for six marimbas and live electronics, which was supported by Lyon's 2018 Guggenheim Award.

In recognition of all of these activities described, I was recently presented the 2020-2021 Excellence in Research and Creative Scholarship Award by the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Tech.

Teaching

My course load regularly includes teaching Applied Percussion Lessons to percussion majors and minors, directing the Virginia Tech Percussion Ensemble, and teaching Class Applied Percussion to music education majors. Additionally, I have developed and taught an independent study course, Percussion Pedagogy and Literature, and I am currently developing a Virginia Tech course proposal to make this a regular offering.

I teach a well-rounded percussion curriculum and aim to produce students that will be successful in any musical arena. My curriculum includes study as a soloist on instruments like the marimba and vibraphone, snare drum, and multiple percussion set-ups; as well as the study of chamber music, orchestral percussion repertoire, drumset and world percussion styles. As part of my diversity and inclusion initiatives, I seek opportunities through collaborations across campus for students to learn from renowned musicians from diverse backgrounds including Ghana, Tanzania, Panama, Cuba, Columbia, Spain, Egypt, and the Middle East. For example, in 2018, I was awarded a \$5,000 departmental diversity grant which allowed for the creation of a Virginia Tech West African Drumming Ensemble, led by guest lecturer, Otu Kojo, of Ghana. For my continued efforts in advancing diversity initiatives, I was recognized by the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences with the Diversity Award in 2019.

My Virginia Tech percussion students have experienced much professional success. In 2017, the Virginia Tech Percussion Ensemble was awarded first place at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention's University Chamber Music Competition in Indianapolis. Graduates of my studio have found immediate employment as music educators after graduation; six former students currently hold positions in Virginia, Maryland and Georgia. Denver Nuckolls ('19), is attending the graduate percussion performance program at the University of North Texas where he received the Voertman-Ardoin Scholarship. Jennifer Webbert ('20) has co-founded a recording studio in Norfolk, Virginia called First Wave Recording studios, and current sophomore Miranda Hughes was awarded second place in the 2020 Green Vibes Vibraphone Competition.

Regarding my teaching during the pandemic, in the spring of 2020, I quickly transitioned my courses to the online format and searched for technologies that would aid me and my students

in the virtual environment. In recognition for my use of creative technologies, I was recognized by Virginia Tech's Technology Enhanced Learning and Online Strategies office (TLOS) for my outstanding remote teaching and presented my methods in a virtual seminar. I have also been invited to present a lecture on these topics at the National Association for Music Education Northeast Regional Conference in April of 2021.

Service

In 2017, *Escape Ten* was invited to the College Music Society National Conference in San Antonio to perform at Roosevelt High School. We performed an outreach and engagement concert that impacted about 80 underserved high school music students, several of whom were familiar with *Escape Ten* prior to our performance. Additionally, my involvement in the Percussive Arts Society includes having been elected to the Board of Advisors for a three-year term, adjudicating competitions, and serving on the music technology committee from 2014 to 2020. In 2017, I hosted the Percussive Arts Society Virginia Day of Percussion, a large-scale event at the Moss Arts Center that brought over 200 percussionists from around the region to Blacksburg.

Even with the ongoing pandemic, I continue to receive invitations to perform at venues on the national scale, with future performances taking me to the Eastman School of Music, the Leigh Howard Stevens Summer Marimba Seminar, the Tau Beta Sigma National Convention in Michigan, and the North Carolina Percussion Symposium. I have already initiated, and am looking forward to building a summer study abroad program in Alicante, Spain, where students will have the opportunity to study chamber music. I am also a member of the newly formed faculty quartet at Virginia Tech, *Ensemble Slancio*, and we have secured funding to commission works and publish an album featuring underrepresented composers. With all of my activities in creative scholarship and research, teaching, and service to my profession, my work continues to further the mission of the School of Performing Arts and Virginia Tech, and positively influence the caliber and reputation of the Department of Music.