

Listen to

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

on WRTI 90.1 FM Philadelphia or online at wrti.org

Saturday, March 3rd, 2007, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

- Harold Davidson (1893-1959), *Auto accident* (1935). [University of New Mexico Percussion Ensemble](#), Christopher Shultis. Live recording. 3:40
- Gerald Strang (1908-1983), *Percussion music* (1935), first movement. UNMPE, Shultis. Live recording. 2:40
- [William Russell](#) (1905-1992), *March Suite* (1936), *School March*, *Wedding March*, *Funeral March*. UNMPE, Shultis. Live recording. 2:50
- [John Becker](#) (1886-1961), *Vigilante* 1938 (1938), excerpt. UNMPE, Shultis. Live recording. 2:15
- [Johanna Beyer](#) (1888-1944), *IV* (1935), *University of Illinois Percussion Ensemble*, Thomas Siwe. *Equilibrium EQ 62*. 1:56
- Johanna Beyer, *IV*, *Essential Music*, Linda Bouchard. AER 1991/3. 2:06
- [John Cage](#) (1912-1992), *Second construction* (1940). *Amadinda Percussion Group*, *Hungaroton HCD 12855*. 7:34

On this *Discoveries* we enter the fascinating world of the percussion orchestra. We listen to music from the WPA years of the '30s and '40s, music written for “the most significant new chamber ensemble since the string quartet,” according to [Christopher Shultis](#), Professor of Music at the University of New Mexico and our guest in the studio. His knowledge of percussion, conducting, American music, and the life of John Cage in particular make Chris the ideal guide. He'll tell us how, and why, Fleisher was a clearinghouse for these exotic sounds. He'll also tell us why he had to wear safety goggles during the performance of Harold Davidson's *Auto Accident!*

Johanna Beyer, a German composer living in the U.S., approached the Fleisher Collection with the idea of adding “percussion orchestra” works to the growing collection of orchestral music. This was when the Works Progress Administration's music projects were gathering steam in the mid-'30s. The magazine *New Music*, edited by Henry Cowell and financed largely by Charles Ives, started to include these works, so this music and these composers were already known to then-Curator Arthur Cohn. He gave the go-ahead, and soon, music by these “ultra-modern” composers started to end up on Fleisher shelves next to more traditional contemporaries such as Richard Strauss and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

While the music is unusual at first blush, it's really not that strange. Since much of it was used to accompany dancers, most of the pieces employ square and repeating rhythms. Melodic elements abound, even when some of the instruments are sticks and stones! In actuality, all of it is beautiful, elegant, and spirited. And some of it is just plain fun, like the crashing glass plates in the Davidson (there's where the goggles come in).

Notice the two versions of Beyer's piece. They sound completely different because she didn't say what instruments to use; the performers get to choose. And John Cage's piece is one of the first to use “prepared” piano, where foreign items are placed inside the instrument. It can be hauntingly beautiful. So much of these techniques and instruments have since been used extensively in film and popular music, but it all started in the 1930s, and the Fleisher Collection was there to help.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of WRTI. *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* uncovers the unknown, rediscovers the little-known, and takes a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music in the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).