

ephemera

Bridge Music Project – Very Heavy Metal

While not technically ephemera, the [Bridge Music Project](#) has an historical and ephemeral feel that I felt would be right at home on the ephemera blog. Joseph Bertolozzi is forging a unique identity as a 21st century musician with works ranging from full symphony orchestra to solo gongs and many of his compositions can be heard at [JosephBertolozzi.com](#). After reading the following interview with the composer, I think you'll not only agree, but want to rush out and get a copy of his amazing CD. The Bridge Music CD is on the Delos Label (DE 1045) and available online (Amazon, etc.) and in all major music stores.



ephemera: Tell me how the Bridge Music concept came into being?



JB: In September 2004, after returning home from a performance at the US Tennis Open on "The Bronze Collection," my solo percussion project, my wife made a striking gesture toward a poster of the Eiffel Tower in our room as if the Eiffel Tower were a cymbal or gong, with the word "bong!" And I said, 'Of course!' Everything vibrates, why not the Eiffel Tower?

After considering the possibilities, I realized quickly that I don't have any contacts in Paris nor do I speak French. So I searched for a suitable domestic monument, remembered Eiffell was one of the preeminent bridge architects of his time and thought a suspension bridge would not only have a lot of surface area from which to play, but also have a harp-like visual. With the knowledge that the Hudson Quadricentennial was approaching in (then) 5 years, I looked over the Hudson River and found that the Mid Hudson Bridge had the most positive attributes: 90 percent of the surfaces to be played were reachable from its sidewalk; it was situated in a beautifully scenic spot; had its shores close enough together to make the event intimate (unlike, for instance, the Verrazano Narrows Bridge further down river which is so long that they had to compensate for the curvature of the earth).

I went ahead with a full-out plan to do 5 live concerts to be financed with corporate advertising, but the timetable for raising the funds came at the very worst time: July-Sept 2008, just when everything was going into the tank. Subsequent months only saw corporations circling the wagons, so I had to come up with an alternate project, and a sound art installation fit the bill. Now, after having recorded the music from the sampled sounds, one can walk onto the bridge's pedestrian sidewalk and push a button at the towers to hear the music from speakers mounted overhead, or tune to 95.3FM in the park's flanking the bridge to hear a 24/7 radio broadcast.



ephemera: Truly, this is a wonderful concept. What challenges or obstacles did you encounter recording this music? How do you overcome these challenges?

JB: Convincing the New York State Bridge Authority to allow me to use their bridge in this fashion was the single most important hurdle. I did my homework and presented my plan to them in engineering terms. Then after having their permission to pursue the project, I contacted the municipalities involved (on both sides of the river, don't forget), the chambers of commerce and businesses to convince them of the economic benefits of creating a cultural/tourist attraction in their neighborhoods. Basically I was addressing their interests first; after all this is a public installation.



Ephemera: You should come play a bridge in Asheville—over the French Broad River. Believe me; no one would think you're crazy here. What did you discover as you embarked on this amazing recording project?

TB: Many people thought I was crazy, that it wouldn't sound like anything except noise and that it was just un-realize-able. I anticipated this, but it was only after I had achieved its success that I learned how many MORE people thought I was crazy!

ephemera: What are your favorite elements/recordings from the project?

TB: I like the scale and innovative use of the medium. My favorite track is "Meltdown." Every available surface of the bridge is used in this piece, a calling card, as it were, to the public that this is what a bridge can sound like. The poet Goethe is attributed with saying "Architecture is frozen music." I decided to use this great work of bridge architecture and melt it back into music.

ephemera: What resources do you recommend to anyone interested in recording ephemeral sounds like the ones in Bridge Music?

TB: I can only tell you that there are so many sampling devices out there, to use the one you are most comfortable with. I did this with professional grade software, but on a shoestring budget. We used Saw, Kontakt, and Finale and an infinite amount of patience. It's also good to keep in mind that I went through an extensive vetting process by the Bridge Authority to gain permission to do this, and the whole enterprise took five years to complete.

ephemera: Thank you, Joseph.

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