



Evan French, composition

"CHAMELEON"

Click (2025)

Evan French (b. 2002)

Haven Axline, Emily Mendoza, Zachary Milburn, and Gerald Mendez, percussion

Quartal-Life Crisis (2025)

Alyssa Abbott, soprano saxophone | Bany Villarreal Hernandez, alto saxophone
Joshua Elmore, tenor saxophone | Jeffrey Grexton, baritone saxophone

'Twas Once Called Earth (2025)

Isabelle Ceballos, soprano

Dizzy (2025)

Matt Amato, timpani

INTERMISSION

Stage Fright (2025) *(audio playback)*

no signal (2024) *(video playback)*

Pale Blue Dot (2024/2025) *(audio playback)*

I. From this distant vantage point

Triptych (2025) *(video playback)*

- I. Sea
- II. Land
- III. Sky

Cattle Call (2025) *(video playback)*

*This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Music in Theory & Composition.
Evan French is a student of Dr. Sarah Wald.*

PROGRAM NOTES

Every so often I like to challenge myself to compose a piece with stark limitations as creative provocations. *Click* was born from one such constraint: *What if all the drums and cymbals from a drum kit disappeared, leaving only the sticks—and the drummer?* What kind of music could they make? As it turns out—quite a lot. What began as more of a concept than a concrete composition—shadowed by doubts about how it might resonate with performers or audiences—has since grown and transformed in ways I would have never imagined. In *Click*, each performer blurs the line between musician and mover through the interplay of rhythm, texture, and subtle choreography. Whether as solo voices, paired off, or in bold unison, their interactions create a uniquely layered contrapuntal landscape.

Quartal-Life Crisis is a saxophone quartet that captures the turbulence of young adulthood. Today's transition into adult life feels more daunting than ever—shaped by a lack of financial education in schools, a culture that relies on digital answers over human connection, and an economy that places traditional milestones like owning a car or home increasingly out of reach. To me, quartal harmony—built upon the interval of a perfect fourth—embodies the ambiguity and suspended tension of this phase of life. Its “up in the air” quality mirrors the organized chaos young adults have to navigate every day.

'Twas Once Called Earth marks my first venture into vocal composition, set to Ed Hoffmeister's poem “Can Earth Be Earth?” It serves as a stark warning about the consequences of unchecked greed and environmental destruction. The piece opens with a musical cryptogram of “Earth”—E, A, Re (D), and Ti/H (B)—a motif that is transposed and reshaped throughout. Amidst its chromatic wanderings, the motif stands as a solemn reminder: Earth will continue drifting through space, with or without us.

Text:

Can Earth be Earth when all its trees are gone,
And sudsy waters have become unfit,
And poisoned life no longer greets the dawn
With raucous sounds that death has caused to quit?
Will trees no longer wave, with limbs unfurled,
On hapless Earth, that e'er in orbit roams?
Will human ego sacrifice the world
To satiate its lust for pompous homes?
Will distant Space look down on orb that's bald
And ask, "Wise Poet, can you name that sphere?
Its surface pocked with stumps? What is it called?"
And Poet sadly says, "Wide Space! I hear
'Twas once called Earth. But now, bereft of mirth,
I weep. That treeless orb's no longer Earth."

—Ed Hoffmeister

Dizzy is a solo timpani piece designed to musically evoke a sense of disorientation—for both the performer and the listener. It begins with a brief, wandering cadenza that quickly erupts into driving, syncopated rhythms, punctuated by glissandi and other pedal-based effects. The chaos builds until it collapses into a suspended moment of stillness—the eye of the storm. But this calm is short-lived; the opening rhythms return with newfound urgency, spiraling out of control as the piece hurtles toward its violent end.

Stage Fright is an experimental work for snare drum and audio playback, delivered through a conduction speaker—a device that transmits sound directly into the surface it rests on. I discovered that, with precise

control of velocity and volume, certain MIDI instruments can produce a percussive “punch” that mimics a snare drum strike when played through a conduction speaker directly into the head of a snare drum. The piece explores the mental and emotional disorientation of performance anxiety—and, fittingly, features no live performers at all.

no signal is an electroacoustic soundscape for solo vibraphone and audio playback, exploring technology addiction and the essence of human experience. The vibraphone shifts between leading and supporting roles, set against a backdrop of glitchy, microtonal electronics that clash with its resonance. Midway through, natural sounds—rain and thunder—interrupt the digital chaos, creating a juxtaposition between the synthetic and the organic. The listener is repeatedly drawn into the technological sound world, only to be pulled back to the grounding familiarity of nature. In the end, a warped reprise of the opening reminds us that while technology may evolve endlessly, it must never replace authentic human connection.

Pale Blue Dot is a meditation for orchestra based on the writings of astronomer Carl Sagan in his 1994 book “Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space”. Sagan’s inspiration for the book came from a photograph taken in 1990 by the Voyager 1 space probe as it left our solar system. The photo, nicknamed “Pale Blue Dot”, was taken at a distance of approximately 3.7 billion miles from Earth. Within the photo, Earth measures less than a pixel, a tiny speck against rays of scattered sunlight reflected by the camera. “Pale Blue Dot” was the last picture Voyager 1 took before NASA lost contact with the probe. The first movement of the piece can be best described by a passage from Sagan’s book:

From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

—Carl Sagan, from “Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space”

I wrote ***Triptych*** to amplify my feelings of awe and admiration for planet Earth and its many remarkable animal inhabitants. Whether wandering in the depths of the ocean, exploring the rocky surface of our planet, or soaring high above us in the skies, the natural beauty, surprising adaptability, and sheer diversity across the animal kingdom is simply breathtaking when you think about it. *Triptych* was written almost entirely upon instinct; I assembled the footage of wildlife before I put down a single note. I then formed several sketches at a piano based solely on what I felt as I watched portions of the footage back repeatedly. The result is a sort of crash course tour of the animal kingdom and its many wonders.

I began writing ***Cattle Call*** after discovering how many cowbells the Sac State percussion department had stored away in a closet—around twenty the last time I counted. I cut that number down to a modest eight, threw in a couple egg shakers, and voila! A dynamic and accessible percussion duet with minimal set-up. I felt like a video would really beef up the appeal of *Cattle Call*, and what more would anyone want to see alongside a cowbell duet than cows? My mother earned her Master’s in Animal Science from UC Davis where she specialized in dairy genetics, and I remember seeing all sorts of cow-themed knick-knacks around the house as I was growing up. Because of this, I’ve always seen cows in a special light.