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Creativation brings community into 'Crepescule' composition

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By SUSAN JONES

"Crepescule," a composition modeled after the music and innovative style of jazz pianist Thelonius Monk, is at the center of Creativation — one of the signature events for Pitt's Year of Creativity.

'CREPESCULE' and CREATIVATION

When and where: 5-7 p.m. March 20, Pitt Sports Dome

Directions: Main entrance is located off of Robinson Street Extension, behind the Cost Sports Center, and rear entrance is accessible from Avalon Street in the Hill District.

Parking: A shuttle will be available outside of the Soldiers & Sailors Parking Garage entrance on Bigelow Boulevard, departing garage every 30 minutes, starting at 2:45 p.m.

Composer Douglas R. Ewart will bring his massive organized improvisation, "Crepescule," to the Pitt Sports Dome on March 20 and everyone — especially the neighboring Hill District community — is invited to attend and interact with art, music, dance, puppetry, martial arts and more.

Ewart, who was in Pittsburgh for the second time last week and will return March 14, said the name Crepescule — which means "twilight" — comes from Monk's piece, "Crepescule with Nellie." Ewart's original composition was "primarily focused on music, or it was

supposed to be. I did it in a park, and as I got started writing, I thought, 'Wow, you know I could expand this.' It was going to be done in a park that has a lake in the center. And I decided, well, I could have musicians playing from boats, I could get sculling team, which I did.

"I added puppetry, dance, martial arts. Almost any practice or discipline, I started pulling in, and as the years went by, more and more things were brought in," he said. "The idea is, there are no boundaries to what we do as creative artists."

He's been going around Pittsburgh to recruit professional participants, both individuals and ensembles, from many different fields. Some of the people he's talked to include a Capoeira group — a Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines dance, acrobatics, and music — and a puppetry organization. Students from the Manchester Bidwell Corporation of Manchester Craftsmen's Guild will display horticulture and photos of famous local artists and musicians.

He's also met with community members about the program and been teaching children how to make simple instruments, such as shakers and rain sticks, and how to play them, so they can participate too.

Nicole Mitchell Gantt, head of Pitt Jazz Studies and campus coordinator of Creativation, said this will be the first time that the Pitt Sports Dome, which was opened in 2017 and sits at the top of the Hill District, has been opened to the neighboring community. Gantt said they'll make sure the gates are open from all sides to allow people to come in that day. Anyone can register to attend here.

"I feel that part of my role here as the director of Jazz Studies is to help to support and encourage community collaboration," she said. "And this is a wonderful opportunity for people to learn about each other and also for the University to be generous and to provide something fun for everyone."

The core group of active performers at the event will "represent Pittsburgh in all of its diversity," Gantt said. Creativation is a multi-generational celebration, both honoring community elders and teaching young people about music, community and culture. There's also an environmental aspect of the event. Reclaimed materials will be used to create the simple instruments. And, of course, there will be food trucks.

Ewart said the celebration will start outside and then the participating artists will move in a procession into the dome and around the perimeter. This will be followed by a musical invocation and meditation, and a salute to four or five community elders.

The performers will then go to pre-chosen areas of the dome to demonstrate their art. Visitors can move around to hear different music and see various performers. After about 30 minutes, there will be an interactive portion, during which the musicians and dancers might perform near people who are creating a mural or making instruments.

The active participants and visitors will then gather in a circle and different groups will be invited into the center of the ring to perform. When the circle reforms, those gathered will recite some mantras, such as "One small wind can raise much dust," which Ewart says signifies that the individual is a very powerful entity that can influence a community.

Underlying all the performances is Ewart's composition "Crepescul," including some additional music created just for this event. "Each time, there's some new aspect to it, but there's a structure that is there already."

Ewart said he has created celebrations with “Crepescule” at more than 20 locations, including Chicago, Paris and Philadelphia. He and Gantt both belong to Chicago’s Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

Gantt said Crepescule Creativation at Pitt is “a huge ambitious undertaking, but it’s also, I think, a perfect way for us to see all the creativity that’s happening on campus and in Pittsburgh and it makes space for all of these creative people to interact and for audiences to come experience, almost like a living exhibit.”

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