



TaxACT tax software is

FREE x 3 =

- ✓ Prepare **FREE!**
- ✓ Print **FREE!**
- ✓ E-file **FREE!**

taxact.com Start your FREE Tax Return

Home | Entertainment | Music

Festival illuminates fusion of music and technology

The University of Minnesota's Spark festival lights the way for new directions in electronic music.

Michael Anthony, Star Tribune

Last update: February 17, 2006 - 4:59 PM



People on the University of Minnesota campus are going to see -- and hear -- strange things this week: electronic crickets, for instance, on the walls of the Weisman Art Museum. Elsewhere, at various places, a young man will set up a video projector and computer and start dancing, playing music and projecting his image onto a computer screen.



British sound artist Scanner is a featured guest artist for the 2006 Spark Festival of Electronic Music and Art at the University of Minnesota.

Music

[Jazz star Maria Schneider goes home](#)

[Festival illuminates fusion of music and technology](#)

[Duluth band is fast as Turtles](#)

[Toby Keith goes to the movies](#)

[Charles Dutoit returns triumphant](#)

These divergences from the norm are courtesy of the fourth annual Spark, a six-day festival of electronic music and art presented by the School of Music. It opens Tuesday night with a performance at the Whole at Coffman Union by the rock-jazz quartet Electropolis playing its original score for the 1920 silent film "Genuine: The Tale of a Vampire."

Based on the notion that "weird is good," to quote festival director Douglas Geers, Spark is bringing performers, composers and scholars to the university from 12 countries to participate in lectures, performances, master classes and multimedia installations,

Top read stories

[Minnesota actress charged with covering up TV investment scam](#)

[Homegazing: You can have it for . . .](#)

[Culpepper plans on playing for Vikings](#)

[Wolves might pull the trigger again](#)

[Men's 1,000-meter speedskating: U.S. gold, silver](#)

Top emailed stories

[Syl Jones: Pornography Option is defacing black culture](#)

[Medicare drug woes hit low-income enrollees hard](#)

[Jazz star Maria Schneider goes home](#)

[Men's hockey: Gophers 3, Denver 2](#)

[Lords of the Arctic](#)

TRANS GLOBAL VACATIONS

[*View Details](#)

Top Jobs

+ More Top Jobs

CNC Swiss Machinist
Pneumadyne Inc

Special Education
Carver Scott Ed Cooperative

Marketing
American Red Cross/ST Paul

Receptionist/Admin Asst
Homstar Usa

Management -

Dental - Rda
Wayzata Dental

Maintenance Person F/T
Marathon Management

Hospitality
Fredrikson & Byron, P.A.

Finance
ISD 191

ANALYST-Catastroophe Risk

nearly all of them free.

Among the special guests this year are composer Alvin Lucier, whose works have long explored the way sounds and spaces affect one another, and British composer/artist Scanner, who creates multilayered sound pieces that often draw on the hidden noises of the modern city.

Lucier will give the festival's keynote lecture at 11:15 a.m. Friday in Anderson Hall, and several of his works will be presented in the concerts, including "Silver Street Car for the Orchestra," a piece for amplified triangle played by Heather Barringer of the Twin Cities ensemble Zeitgeist. Scanner will be interviewed at the Whole on Wednesday night and then will participate in a live Internet performance, mixing feeds from the members of free103point9.org, a musical group in New York City.

"24 Beet Stretch," by Swedish composer Leif Inge, will be on display Wednesday through Saturday in the lobby of Ferguson Hall. "He took Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and stretched it out, using computer software, to make it 24 hours long. It's really amazing," said Geers. "it's like using a microscope on sound."

Evolution of electronic music

All of this is intended to show how music and technology have fused in recent years and how far electronically generated sounds have come since the 1970s, when a composer like Morton Subotnick would walk onstage -- at the Walker Art Center, as some will remember -- with his black box, set it on a table, push a few buttons, and the audience would hear his latest composition.

"In the '70s, electronic music went commercial," said Geers, who joined the faculty of the School of Music in 2002. "With things like the Moog synthesizer, every rock band could buy one and play it. But then the academics, once they saw it being used by pop musicians, stopped doing all these things that were similar to what pop musicians were doing and looked for another way to go."

The '80s, in turn, became the age of MIDI, the various Musical Instrument Digital Interface systems, which allowed computers to interact with one another but which, in Geers' view, resulted in an array of musical clichés, "People started buying these synthesizers that were prepackaged with sounds, and they didn't really explore sound anymore," he said. "Then in the '90s, computers became fast enough that we could actually control sound in real time, so that now the big thing is performing. Like, if you were to ask me what my instrument is, 15 years ago, I would have said 'classical guitar.' But now I say 'laptop.' "

Besides being a composer whose music has been performed

Housekeeping
Department Manager
 Bluefin Bay Resort
Accounting - Tax
Accountant - State &
Local
 Bemis Company, Inc.
Engineering:Entry-
Level Civil Engineer -
Water Resources
 Mead And Hunt Inc
Technical Sales
Engineer
 Fraisa Usa Inc

Analyst
 Benfield
Sales Executive
 Robert B Hill Company
Attorneys
 Balogh Becker Ltd
Director of Nursing
 Copperfield Hill

throughout Europe and the United States, Geers plays in a trio for which the instrumentation is violin, laptop and laptop. "We think of what we do as sort of chamber music," he said, "but it's also related to jazz because we're improvising a lot."

Geers also directs the studios for Sound, Technology and Research at the School of Music, and teaches a course in electronic music that is now required for composition students. "We start with basic things, like how to make and mix a recording," he said. "So even if they only write string quartets in the future, that's a skill that's valuable to them. Then we go into sound synthesis and how to build their own real-time and electronic instruments and how to manipulate video and sound together."

He started Spark in 2003. Then it was just a two-day event with a few performances and lectures. A grant from the McKnight Arts and Humanities Endowment has allowed the festival to expand.

So what's Spark's weirdest happening? Geers named the concert Friday night at Ted Mann Concert Hall. "Whatever you think is weird, you're going to see at that concert," he said. "There's an Alvin Lucier piece for piano and teapot. There's a piece for dancers with computer sounds. There are pieces for traditional instruments with computer sounds. There's a piece for the violinist Maja Cerar where she puts on glowing lights and dances in the dark, and the computer watches her and projects images based on what she's doing. There's another dance piece where all the music is drawn from the voices of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. But, like I said, for me, weird is good."

Spark

What: A festival of electronic music and art with lectures, concerts, master classes and multimedia installations.

When: Tue.-next Sun.

Where: Various locations in the West Bank Arts Quarter on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota.

Tickets: All events are free, except 9:30 p.m. Sat. concert at Nomad World Pub, 501 Cedar Av. S., which is \$5. A complete schedule of events is at www.spark.cla.umn.edu. or 612-626-8742.

Michael Anthony • 612-673-4445

Get the Star Tribune delivered to your home each day!

[Click here](#) to subscribe.



Copyright 2006 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.

[Feedback](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Member Center](#) | [Company Site](#) | [Company Directory & Contacts](#) | [Company Jobs](#) | [Advertising Information](#) | [Newspaper Subscriptions & Service](#) | [eEdition](#) | [Classroom Newspapers](#)

425 Portland Av. S., Minneapolis, MN 55488 (612) 673-4000