

# The Virtual Percussion Festival

## The ALIVE Project Brings the World of Percussion to Winnipeg

BY ALLAN MOLNAR

Stewart Smith and I created the ALIVE Project (Accessible Live Internet Video Education) in January 2004 as a practical way for us to collaborate as music teachers. Stewart applied this idea with his students at Minnetonka School in Winnipeg and at the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Music. I worked the concept into my classes at Brooklyn College, where I was on a temporary assignment in the music education department.

The technology and infrastructure needed for this type of collaboration are now available on a worldwide (and affordable) scale. Anyone interested in connecting can do it with a computer, Web cam, instant messaging software, and an adequate connection speed (for good audio and video quality).

The ALIVE Project was quickly embraced by the University of Manitoba, who asked Stewart to act as the Director of Distance Education for its Faculty of Music. Stewart and I subsequently used the ALIVE Project model to facilitate a series of guest lectures and community outreach.



Stewart Smith (l) and Allan Molnar (r)

On April 30, 2005, the Virtual Percussion Festival brought some of the world's most accomplished musicians to the Winnipeg music education community via the Internet. This project was funded by the University of Manitoba with additional assistance from the Louis Riel School Division and my personal sponsors, Sabian Cymbals, Latin Percussion, and Pro-Mark Drumsticks. This event was held at Minnetonka School in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

### STUDIO DRUMMING CLINIC

Terry Silverlight kicked off the Virtual Percussion Festival with a workshop on studio drumming. He discussed a "day in the life" of a studio musician who has to be prepared to adapt to anything and everything. Terry is a true pro who has spent a lot of time tweaking his studio mix to maximize the audio quality of these video conferences.

### LATIN PERCUSSION CLINIC

The Virtual Percussion Festival took place one day after the release of Apple's "Tiger" OS, which features a multi-point video conferencing capability. Switching to the new OS this close to a major event proved to be impractical, so we used two computers to simultaneously beam in Memo Acevedo from New York City and Ruben Alvarez from Chicago. Ruben and



Ruben Alvarez and Memo Acevedo

Memo did a great job interacting with each other as they presented an outstanding workshop on Latin percussion performance.

### JAZZ DRUMMING CLINIC

The Collective has been a mainstay of the New York music education community for over 25 years. We were very pleased to beam in their representative for this event, Peter Retzlaff. Peter's jazz drumming workshop was an excellent example of the great work currently being done at The Collective.

### UASTEEL AND ALLAN MOLNAR

The University of Arizona Steel Band, UASSteel, beamed in for a performance. This ensemble is under the direction of Mike Sammons and featured U of A Artist-in-Residence Robin Horn on drumset.

Gary Cook, Director of Percussion Studies at the U of A and PAS President-elect brought greetings from the Percussive Arts Society. Many members of the Manitoba PAS Chapter were in attendance at the Virtual Percussion Festival.

U of A Coordinator of Percussion Technology Norman Weinberg also joined the event from Tucson. Norm has made many contributions to PAS, and his support of our project is much appreciated!

Our only technical glitch happened while I was soloing with the UASSteel ensemble: We lost our video conference connection! Fortunately, UASSteel percussionist Cynthia Barlow also acts as the U of A Fine Arts Computer Network Services Manager and was able to get us reconnected. Cynthia has helped me out on many occasions with technical advice and troubleshooting. She's a *great* person to have in the band!

### GUEST APPEARANCE BY PETER KATES

Our "working lunch" included a visit to Norway and an onsite workshop/performance. Peter Kates lives in Bergen,



Allan Molnar performing with the University of Arizona Steel Band



University of Arizona Steel Band

Norway, where he is Principal Percussionist of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and head of the percussion department at the Grieg Academy. Peter joined us in a discussion of the potential this technology brings to the music community.

#### ONSITE JAZZ PERFORMANCE

Alvin Atkinson, Jr., Artist-in-Residence at the University of Manitoba joined forces with U of M Director of Jazz Studies Steve Kirby to present an excellent workshop on their respective roles in the rhythm section.



Alvin Atkinson, Jr.

#### A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

We resumed the online workshops with a visit from Dom Famularo, who joined us from the Cape Breton Drum Festival and seemed to jump right off the screen and into the room as he interacted with the audience. Talk about transcending the medium! Thank you to Bruce Aitken, Artistic Director of the

Cape Breton Drum Festival, for helping to make this happen.

#### WORLD DRUMMING CLINIC

Stewart and I began the ALIVE Project as a collaboration between just the two of us, but soon saw the potential of connecting with other artists. One of the first to join us was Aldo Mazza, who beamed in from Montreal. Aldo has been a strong, positive force in the percussion community for many years. I first met him in the early eighties when he was touring with Repercussion. I reconnected with Aldo at a Repercussion performance in Toronto in the mid-nineties and was invited to join the KoSA family in 2000.



Aldo Mazza

Aldo's spirit and vision for KoSA runs parallel to our vision for the ALIVE Project, and we always welcome the opportunity to collaborate and explore new horizons with him!

#### BRUSH TECHNIQUE CLINIC

Stewart and I have known Jack Mouse for 30 years. We first met Jack when we were attending the Saskatchewan Summer School of the Arts Jazz Week in the mid-seventies. The faculty included some of the best talent in the industry, including this young drummer from Emporia, Kansas. Jack taught at the camp for many years and inspired countless musicians through his dedication to quality education.

Jack is currently based in Chicago where he is established as a "first call" performer and educator. His workshop on brush technique was extraordinary, and he was ably assisted by his wife, Janice Borla, who facilitated the techni-



Jack Mouse

cal end of Jack's presentation. One of our next projects will originate from the Janice Borla Vocal Jazz Camp in Chicago this summer.

#### ORCHESTRAL PERCUSSION CLINIC

I am sure that years from now, when I look back on this project, my fond memories will have very little to do with the technology but will center on the people we connected with. Morris "Arnie" Lang has been a wonderful friend to me since I first met him at KoSA in 2000. His talent and experience in the music business is unparalleled.

It was a tremendous pleasure to bring Arnie into this project. I know that Stewart especially enjoyed the workshop in September, 2004, where he received an online crash cymbal lesson from Arnie—an experience that was quite unusual for Stewart since he is a low brass specialist!

Brian Willson is a colleague of Arnie at Brooklyn College. It was our pleasure to include his talents as a percussionist, composer, and educator in this workshop.

#### KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY LATIN JAZZ ENSEMBLE AND ALLAN MOLNAR

The Kansas State University Latin Jazz Ensemble has been going on the road with me. We performed together in Stockholm at the 2004 PAS Day of Percussion (October 2, 2004), The Virtual Percussion Festival in Winnipeg (April 30, 2005) and at The Distillery Jazz Festival in Toronto (May 28, 2005). This ensemble, under the direction of Kurt Gartner, has the best "road chops" of any group I've ever traveled with; they are always there when I log on and never seem to experience jet lag!

#### LOOKING AHEAD

PAS has proven to be the ideal community to bring this project to reality. PAS President Rich Holly recently performed at the Toronto Distillery Jazz Festival with me via video conference and, once again, helped to support and take this idea to a new level. We look forward to exploring this project through the PAS Technology Committee, KoSA, and through independent projects as we continue to push the boundaries of these developing technologies.

Allan Molnar resides in New York where he teaches at Lehman College and The Collective. Previously, Molnar was active as a percussionist and educator in Toronto, Canada. He spent over 20 years teaching instrumental music in the Toronto school system, where he successfully brought many elements of professional music to the classroom by way of his MIDI-assisted band program. He continues to work as a resource teacher for the Canadian Teachers Federation through the Sharing Teaching Excellence program, is a faculty member of the KoSA International Percussion Workshops, and serves as Chair of the PAS Music Technology Committee. Allan's Website is

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