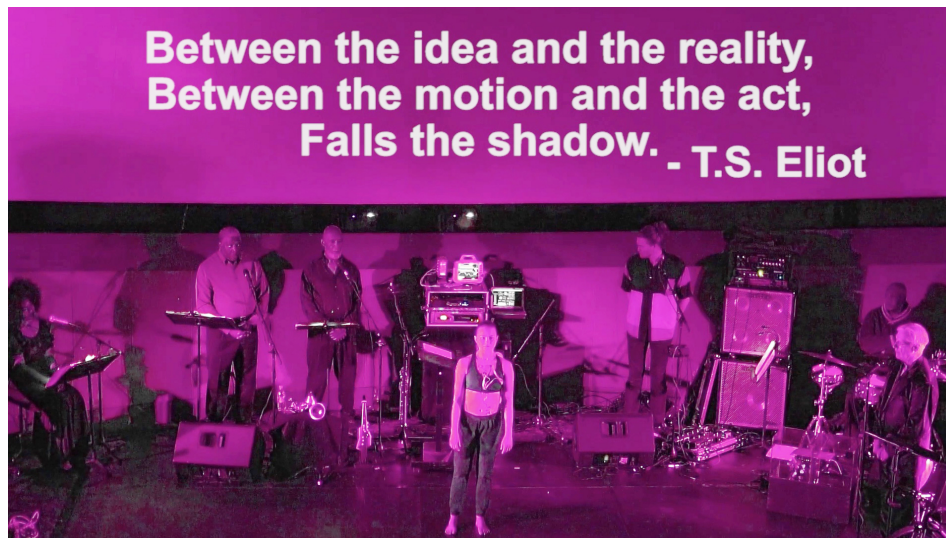


# **The Other Half: *Exploring The Hidden Music***

Louisiana Art & Science Museum, Baton Rouge, February 1, 2020

Performance held in conjunction with  
*Sound Is An Invisible Color: The Art of Christopher Janney*  
August 24, 2019 – March 8, 2020

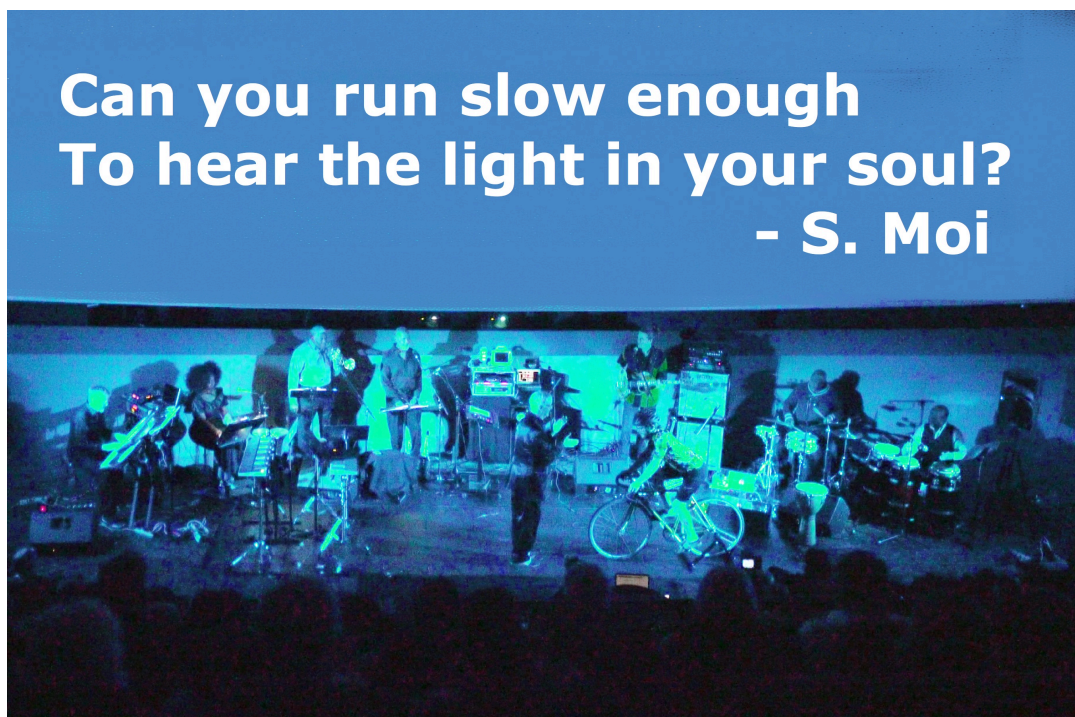
**By Elizabeth Chubbuck Weinstein, Curator**



In addition to investigating “invisible color,” Christopher Janney has long been exploring what he calls “hidden music,” which are the overlooked sound patterns found in the world around us. A trained jazz musician in addition to a visual artist, he holds a keen sense of rhythm. He applies these chance operations from the real world when composing and performing his own musical scores, which he has been staging across the globe for the past four decades. Not content to simply play music, Janney adds other dimensions to his performances, striving for an immersive, multi-sensory experience. The most recent of Janney’s performances was held at the Louisiana Art & Science Museum in Baton Rouge on February 1, 2020.

Titled *Exploring the Hidden Music: Louisiana*, the 70-minute performance was composed and choreographed by Janney. From Boston, he brought his regular collaborators, sax/vocalist Stan Strickland, keyboard player Ed Grenga, bass player Wes Wirth, dancer Deyana Popov, and technical director Aaron Pereira. Janney also incorporated the talents of several local musicians, namely trumpeter George Bell and vocalist Quiana Lynell, together with percussionists Herman Jackson and Gregory Ward.

Janney's performance took place inside the museum's Irene W. Pennington Planetarium, a darkened, immersive environment. The stage was bathed in slowly changing monochromatic colors that transformed the ambience with each musical piece. Quotes projected overhead provided insight into the artist's creative process.



For the opening sequence, Janney created a series of sound collages mixed with instrumentation in a nod to the Museum's Louisiana location on the banks of the Mississippi River. There were the familiar blasts of a steamboat horn and spoken passages from historical Louisiana text. Also included were sound bytes from famous films including Erin Nicholas's *Beauty and the Bayou* and Marlon Brando's "Stella" from *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

In all, ten "experimental R&B" compositions were performed, each flowing into the next without stopping. Janney structured some of the works to make them relevant to the local audience, incorporating "second-line" trumpet phrases and spoken word in the Creole language. He embellished these performances mixing rhythms of Funk, Blues, and Zydeco.

Janney finds inspiration for his compositions from the revolutionary work of John Cage (1912-1992) to the many styles of Miles Davis (1926-1991) and James Brown (1933-2006). Like Cage, who believed music could be found everywhere and made from anything, Janney takes tangible objects and turns them into instruments: the rhythmic sounds of a bicyclist pedaling (*Raunch*),

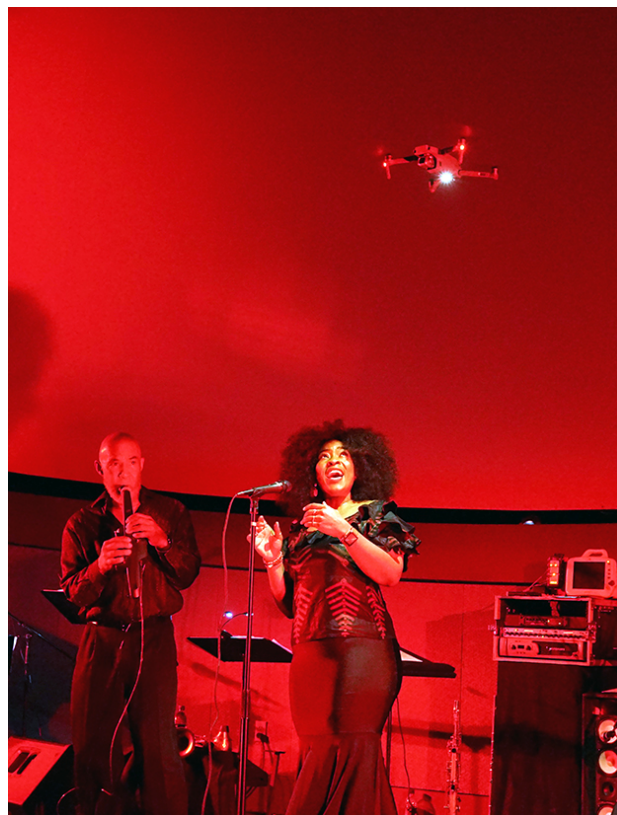




or childhood toys bouncing (*Bumble BeeBop* or *Bebop?*),



and even a drone humming (*Drone Drone*).





These objects set the pace around which Janney scored the more traditional instruments. Janney refers to his explorations of these hidden rhythms as “physical music.” He regards them as an extension of his efforts to transform the invisible, such as light, color, and music, into a relatable and tangible experience.



Janney’s most notable composition *HeartBeat* best illustrates this concept. In this piece, the amplified sound of a dancer’s heartbeat provides the “beat” for the live musical composition. He composed the piece in 1983 for then-Twyla Tharp principal dancer Sara Rudner. In 1998, performer Mikhail Baryshnikov asked them to set it on him as part of a two-year solo tour.

Janney created a special version of *HearBeat* that was performed as the finale in *Exploring the Hidden Music: Louisiana*. Clad

appropriately in red, performer Deyana Popov began to move while Janney recited medical text over the amplified



pulse of her heart, all in “real time.” As the piece progressed, her movements and heart rate increased. The piece continued with the musicians singing a complex collection of rhythmic phrases, a variation of “jazz scat” over the heartbeat pulse. The vocals then evolved into a ballad composed by Janney titled “What Is A Heart?” and sung by Quiana Lynell and Stan Strickland.

After reaching a furious crescendo and fading away, only the sound of the dancer’s beating heart was heard until she walked to the modified heart monitor and turned it off. The performance ended in a heavy, poignant silence; a palpable reminder that the most important music of all is the rhythm of life itself, hidden deep within us.

Image captions –

Stage set for *Exploring the Hidden Music: Louisiana* at LASM.

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Bicyclist Drew Faust with band performing in *Raunch* at LASM.

Greg Ward, Herman Jackson, and Christopher Janney performing *Bumble Bebo* at LASM.

Quiana Lynell and Stan Strickland performing *Drone Drone* at LASM.

Sara Rudner performing *HeartBeat* in 1983.

Mikhail Baryshnikov performing *HeartBeat* in 1998.

Deyana Popov performing *HeartBeat* at LASM.