



Avant to believe: NMD at MOCAD.

## Sonically different

**THE JOKE SURROUNDING** performances of contemporary classical music is that oftentimes there are more people on the stage than in the audience. Classical music is a niche genre as it is, and contemporary works — also referred to as “new music” — can tend toward the esoteric. Perhaps that explains why, up until last year, new music performances in Detroit were few and far between. But the summer of 2007 saw a marked change in the cultural milieu of the city — the Detroit Symphony Orchestra launched its 8 Days in June festival, introducing some avant-garde compositions to a more mainstream audience, and New Music Detroit, the city’s first collective devoted to performing contemporary classical compositions, was formed.

The six members of New Music Detroit are all accomplished musicians affiliated with the DSO who have a familiarity with and passion for the work of contemporary composers. The genesis of NMD coincided with the development of a 12-hour new music marathon at the CAID in September of last year, curated by member Ian Ding. For what amounted to their second performance ever, of a genre of music completely foreign to the average music fan, more than 300 people showed up. “It reinforced what we already knew,” Ding says, “Detroit is a music-loving town.”

Ding and his compatriots — Daniel Bauch, Gina DiBello, Adrienne Ronmark, Erik Ronmark and Robert Tye — are building on the unsuspected success of that first marathon, with a second — *Strange Beautiful Music II*. The featured composers are DJ Sparr and Marc Mellits of New York City and Detroit’s own experimental god-head, Frank Pahl. New works by all three composers will premiere at the event, and all three will be performing alongside New Music Detroit.

The rest of the lineup is heavy on post-minimalist works, experimental sounds and improvisation, performed by some of the most talented musicians in Detroit. Besides Pahl, notable local performers include the Motor City Jazz Orchestra performing works by Frank Zappa, Herbie Hancock and Steely Dan, and noise musicians Slither and Graveyards. “We really wanted the marathon to have even more of a Detroit imprint,” Ding says of the lineup, “And give the audience a well-rounded look at new music.”

For audience members who may be daunted by the thought of 12 hours of avant-garde and experimental music, Ding has these words of advice: “Bring open ears. It’s tons of music that’s different, unique, really dynamic and sonically different than what a lot of people are used to hearing — especially live. Hearing this repertoire live, especially in Detroit, is really amazing.” —Megan O’Neil

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Strange Beautiful Music II takes place Sept. 6, at MOCAD, 4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit; 313-832-6622; a complete schedule is available at [newmusicdetroit.com](http://newmusicdetroit.com). Tickets are \$12 for the day, \$8 after 8 p.m.