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A premiere piece to celebrate the percussive arts

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A premiere piece to celebrate the percussive arts



JEREMY FLEMING (3)

THE OUTDOOR CONCERT started at one in the afternoon with the sound of the wind, thanks to a half-dozen percussionists blowing air through paper tubes as they wandered from place to place. That was followed by the sounds of rocks being rubbed together, the rattle of maracas, the various frequencies of whirly tubes in motion, and blasts from assorted conch shells.

Then drummers and more traditional percussionists, who were spread out over several acres near the Furman lake, joined the concert in full force. One rather unusual hour later, the United States premiere of *Inuksuit*, a work for percussion ensemble by Alaskan composer John Luther Adams, was in the history books.

The April 16 performance — part of Furman Engaged, a campus-wide celebration of engaged learning — featured the Furman

Percussion Ensemble and 35 guest performers from seven states. Among them was Steven Schick, Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California at San Diego and Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music.

Approximately 200 listeners were encouraged to wander freely through the performance area during the concert. As Adams has written, “This work is intended to expand our awareness of the never-ending music of the world in which we live, transforming seemingly empty space into a more fully experienced place.”

Inuksuit, which takes its title from the huge stone monoliths that the Inuit use to orient themselves in the windswept Arctic, is scored for anywhere between nine and 99 percussionists. It was co-commissioned by Furman and made

its world premiere in 2009 at the Banff Center for the Arts in Alberta, Canada.

Adams, who was on hand for the performance, is known for his interest in marrying music to landscape or some other aspect of nature. He was the subject of a profile in *The New Yorker* two years ago and received the 2010 Michael Ludwig Nemmers Prize in Music Composition.

“The interesting thing about *Inuksuit* was that the performance site gave just as much life to the piece as the performers themselves,” said Omar Carmentes, the Furman music professor who directed the performance. “It was a unique experience to try and interpret how the music of the piece relates to the music of the site.”

— VINCE MOORE