

Paul STEENHUISEN - PROGRAM NOTES

PIECE: Hobo Action Figures

33 years after my birth, the year that Varèse died, 26 years to the day after Germany invaded Poland, I drove down I-5 to Stockton, then Bakersfield. Rather than going to Los Angeles, I turned left and went to Barstow, looking for the markings and any sign of Harry Partch. There are dogs there - it's safe here - they'll give you food - good luck. The wind blew warm across the open landscape, and a single, old police car patrolled the boiling street, Adam 12, a sign of order. My neighbour at the campsite drank Budweiser, shot the cans when they were empty, drove his truck 50 metres to the campsite toilet, hollered, shook, and drove back. The over-chlorinated pool was an attractive neon hole in the parched earth. Spiders plunged to their death, drawn in by something, the difference maybe. We hit Las Vegas, dirty and bright, some slots gleaming, some out of order. Without thinking, I licked a pink flamingo. I can still taste it. I'm sure you can imagine. After a night at the Jockey Club, we went straight back out there, to Mead Lake, where we watched large immigrant families catch dinnerfish, counted UFO's in that blue night sky, and fire-cooked corn on the cob and beetroot in tinfoil husks. Iron orange soil stuck to your skin and absorbed the sweat. Places you see in every commercial still looked artificial, even when you touch them, even without the glowing frame. I washed my scarred hands, and went to the zoo to start life as a composer in residence, wondering "What will happen?" To touch it is to change it. There's no love without touching. Without sifting through your fingers.

First performed by William Street and friends at Convocation Hall, University of Alberta.