

January 07, 2011

## 2011-01-07: For professor and composer, a musical breakthrough

Kara Shemin  
*Northeastern University*

---

### Recommended Citation

Shemin, Kara, "2011-01-07: For professor and composer, a musical breakthrough" (2011). *News@Northeastern*. Paper 779.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d20002022>

This work is available open access, hosted by Northeastern University.

## For professor and composer, a musical breakthrough



Ron Smith is the first Northeastern professor to be awarded a commission by the prestigious Fromm Music Foundation. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill

**January 7, 2011**

Associate Professor of **Music** Ron Smith has been awarded a commission by the Fromm Music Foundation — Northeastern University's first faculty member to win this honor.

The Harvard University-based foundation chose only 12 of more than 200 applicants for a commission, which grants a composer the money to create a work of his or her choice and have a musician or ensemble bring that music to life.

Smith will compose a piece for Vicky Chow, whom he met a year ago at an electronic music festival at the Beijing Conservatory in China, where she performed a piece of his music. Chow is the keyboardist for the New York-based contemporary chamber music ensemble Bang on a Can All Stars, which is part of the renowned contemporary orchestral group Bang on a Can.

Smith will spend the next year working on a 25-minute piece using a mix of piano and interactive electronics.

"To work with a very accomplished performer and with interactive electronics in that situation will be quite interesting, especially for such a large piano piece," he said.

Chow will play a keyboard connected to a computer, which will respond in a pre-determined way based on the software Smith will create using the music programming language Max/MSP.

In her live performance she could, for example, play a single piano chord and the computer's programmed response might be to play back an entire scale or a violin solo, Smith explained. The software, which will be calibrated to adjust to Chow's tempo in real time, adds to the complexity of the piece, as Smith will have to electronically create and design the sound for each instrument he incorporates.

The Fromm commission marks the start of an eventful year for Smith. In February and March the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players will premiere Smith's "Four Movements" and in April the Del Sol String Quartet will perform his 16-minute long "String Quartet No. 3 (with electronics)."

He is the only Northeastern professor to win recognition from the Barlow Endowment for Music at Brigham Young University, which commissioned the string quartet piece.

For more information, please contact Kara Shemin at 617-373-2802 or at [kara.shemin@neu.edu](mailto:kara.shemin@neu.edu).

### Archives

The following news stories and features are available. For information about older content, please contact University Communications and Public Relations at (617) 373-5471.

#### 2011

January  
February  
March  
April

### Share



Like

32 likes. Sign Up to see what your friends like.