

# Duo make beautiful noise in unusual performance

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**W**HAT do empty toothpaste boxes, scarves, scraps of paper and a gold chain have in common?

They're all used by pianist, Kathleen Tagg, to create an array of beautiful sounds, not conventionally heard from a piano.

In *Breath and Hammer*, which showed twice at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, Tagg and American clarinetist, David Krakauer, stretch their instruments to realms beyond the norm.

It's fascinating to watch as Tagg's hands move nimbly between playing on the keys to making magic inside the lid of the grand piano.

She plucks its strings as though it were a harp and presses different types of scarves against them to dampen the sound in various ways. At times she plays the keys with one hand and with the other, manipulates the piano's bowels.

A toothpaste box makes for humorous watching as it bounces across the strings, making them vibrate in an interesting way.

A paper or a gold chain placed across the strings while Tagg presses the keys, has a similar effect, but creates a different pitch.

At times, she uses her hands to drum against the side of the piano.

Three cameras are used during the performance and the live video recordings are projected onto a screen for the audience to see exactly what Tagg is doing.

Much of Krakauer's accompaniment on clarinet either has a Middle Eastern feel or is informed by Eastern European Jewish klezmer music – a form of celebratory, dance music.

The Grammy nominee's virtuosic playing of the clarinet pushes the instrument into its highest ranges, sometimes piercingly so.

In a piece which he composed called



Pianist Kathleen Tagg and clarinetist David Krakauer stretch their instruments to realms beyond the norm in *Breath and Hammer*.

*Rattlin' Down the Road*, Krakauer blows into the clarinet, making strange, airy noises, while Tagg uses the hairs of a cello bow to play the piano's strings.

In the pair's final piece, Krakauer begins the traditional klezmer song, *Der Heyser Bulgar*, with an improvised solo

and ends the piece with an exceptionally high-pitched, impossibly long-sustained note, by using the circular breathing technique.

Although some of the pieces played during the show are composed by Tagg or Krakauer, others are composed by the

likes of John Zorn, Emil Kroitor, Kinan Azmeh or Roberto Rodriguez and arranged by the pair.

Krakauer describes their music as "multi-cultural and deeply personal".

The sound has many layers as they make use of live looping during the

performance as well as pre-recorded ensembles.

Both Tagg, a South African, and Krakauer are based in New York.

● They perform at the Youngblood Gallery in Cape Town on Thursday.



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