



Sunday, April 7, 2019, 7pm  
Hertz Hall

## Sō Percussion

Eric Cha-Beach  
Josh Quillen  
Adam Sliwinski  
Jason Treuting

### *The Keyboard Reimagined*

Vijay Iyer (b. 1971) *Torque* (2018, Bay Area Premiere)

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982) *Taxidermy* (2012)

Jason Treuting (b. 1977) *Nine Numbers 4* (2017, West Coast Premiere)

### INTERMISSION

Suzanne Farrin (b. 1976) *a diamond in the square*  
(2019, Bay Area Premiere)

Dan Trueman (b. 1968) *Selections from Nostalgic Synchronic*  
(for Bitklavier) (2017, West Coast Premiere)

Donnacha Dennehy (b. 1970) *Broken Unison* (2017, Bay Area Premiere)

*Cal Performances' 2018–19 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*



### *The Keyboard Reimagined*

The keyboard is not an instrument, but a pattern. White keys, black keys, two plus three, octaves, triads... the visual “field of play” allowed composers like J.S. Bach to conjure an entire cosmos of relationships.

As percussion instruments developed and adapted from folk origins into use for classical music, many of them acquired this physical layout. Marimbas, vibraphones, xylophones, and glockenspiels all become “keyboard” instruments.

The sound, nature, and playing style of these percussion instruments called forth a new kind of music. Steve Reich’s pieces like *Drumming*, *Music For 18 Musicians*, and *Sextet* utilized them to express ideas influenced by West African and Balinese music.

Now, Sō Percussion has commissioned a new generation of keyboard music. Reich’s *Mallet Quartet* from 2009 kicked off a new subgenre of pieces for two marimbas and two vibraphones. In that vein, new works by Vijay Iyer, Jason Treuting, and Donnacha Dennehy demonstrate the possibilities of this satisfying combination of wood and metal.

Other composers have concocted original ways of making sound and of combining keyboards with other instruments. Here, Caroline

Shaw displays her fascination with flower pots, and Suzanne Farrin explores her characteristically impressionistic sound worlds inside the piano.

Our longtime collaborator Dan Trueman has invented something truly original: a software instrument called the Bitklavier, which extends the possibilities of the traditional piano by warping and retuning its natural sounds.

### **Vijay Iyer** *Torque* (2018)

*Commissioned by Andrew W. Siegel.*

At the piano, I listen for how the contortions of the hand can suggest the surges of a body in motion. In my trio music, I’m often evolving rhythmic shapes, shaping gestural patterns with an embodied resonance, and striving to evoke specific qualities of movement with our performed rhythms. Someone once compared us to the Flying Karamazov Brothers, with their coordinated, cyclical, antiphonal actions. I see the work of the rhythm section as a ritual of collective synchrony, aiming above all to generate a dance impulse for everybody in the room.

Torque, a twisting force on a body, seems to appear for the listener at music’s formal boundaries, when one movement type gives way to another. This piece for Sō Percussion invites the

musicians to perform transformations that twist the music's temporal flow, bringing the micro-relational art of the rhythm section to this virtuosic quartet.

—Vijay Iyer

### Caroline Shaw

#### *Taxidermy* (2012)

Why “Taxidermy”? I just find the word strangely compelling, and it evokes something grand, awkward, epic, silent, funny, and just a bit creepy—all characteristics of this piece, in a way. The repeated phrase toward the end (“the detail of the pattern is movement”) is a little concept I love trying (and failing) to imagine. It comes from T.S. Eliot's beautiful and perplexing “Burnt Norton” (from the *Four Quartets*), and I've used it before in other work—as a kind of whimsical existentialist mantra.

—Caroline Shaw

### Jason Treuting

#### *Nine Numbers 4* (2017)

*Commissioned by Composers Guild of New Jersey.*

*Nine Numbers 4* is a mallet quartet for two marimbas and two vibraphones written for Sō Percussion. Inspired in some ways by Steve Reich's *Mallet Quartet*, this three-movement work explores the bowed and struck sounds of these keyboard instruments. This piece is the fourth in a set of nine, which are sequenced from solo percussionist to nonet.

All of the pieces in *Nine Numbers* translate the 9 x 9 solutions of Sudoku puzzles into notes and rhythms. The number nine, with its three sets of three, contains many wonderful symmetries and fractal-like characteristics. It allows for nesting structures at the largest and smallest levels.

In the pieces for fewer players, I sometimes ask the performers to help generate the score. In the solo, duo, and trio, the performers find their own puzzle solutions, and the score is a set of instructions to translate the numbers into music. In this quartet, I present the ensemble with a finished score based on my realization of the Sudoku. Different scores will exist for different ensembles. Most of the recognizable

elements of the pieces will remain fixed, but surface details can change depending on the Sudoku.

The complete work of nine pieces will be the second recording of my music on Cantaloupe Music after 2006's *Amid the Noise*, featuring performances by Sō Percussion, Tigie, the Meehan/Perkins Duo, Ji Hye Jung, Sandbox Percussion, and Adam Groh.

Here is the Sudoku for Sō Percussion's version of *Nine Numbers 4*:

192 456 378  
734 928 156  
658 731 924  
247 695 831  
386 147 592  
915 283 467  
421 369 785  
569 874 213  
873 512 649

—Jason Treuting

### Suzanne Farrin

#### *a diamond in the square* (2019)

*Co-commissioned by University of Colorado – Colorado Springs, the National Gallery, and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.*

The diamond in the square is a quilting pattern consisting of two objects. The inner square is rotated 45 degrees to become a diamond while the other forms its boarder. In Amish communities, the colors are usually bold and solid, giving way to intricate, nearly invisible stitching patterns that loop and connect the entire piece. The thread seems to create an invisible language whose contrasts are created through subtle changes in texture rather than color or pattern. You must adjust your eyes to see them. Diamonds in the square are found all over American folk art quilting. Probably like many of you, I recognized the image before I knew how to name it.

And perhaps also like you, I was raised in the atmospheres of women's work. The body hunched over a piece, the collecting and dis-



cussion of fabrics, yarn, and needles, the meditation of the mind over repetitive tasks. I loved to participate in these projects, though I did not have nearly the skills of the women in my family. They could mend, create, and transform objects (and people) through interwoven fibers. In this work, the fibers are given sound. A collection of strings from yarns to lobster cord move through the piano as if on a loom. The workers are hunched over their art and are slowly separating from their physical bodies, which is exactly what I saw my grandmothers do as they sat in the evenings with their crochet, their knitting, their quilting, their...

—Suzanne Farrin

### Dan Trueman

#### *Nostalgic Synchronic* (for Bitklavier) (2017)

Like the prepared piano, the prepared *digital* piano feels just like a piano under the hands and often sounds like one, but it is full of surprises; instead of bolts and screws stuck between the piano strings, virtual machines of various sorts

adorn the virtual strings of the digital piano, transforming it into an instrument that pushes back, sometimes like a metronome, other times like a recording played backwards. The virtual strings also tighten and loosen on the fly, dynamically tuning in response to what is played. *Nostalgic Synchronic* is a set of eight études I composed to explore the prepared digital piano, inspired by John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes*, György Ligeti's *Études* and *Musica Ricercata*, Nancarrow's *Studies*, and Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*.

I have long been interested in the differences between mechanical time and how we actually feel and articulate time as biological creatures. This goes back to my experiences—shared by many!—practicing with a metronome, and has continued through my recent piece *neither Anvil nor Pulley*, commissioned by Sō Percussion. Directly inspired by an instrument created for *neither Anvil nor Pulley*, the prepared digital piano is driven by Bitklavier, the most recent software instrument I have built to explore

these ideas. One thing I am particularly excited about here is how *accessible* the technology is; in the past, I've made pieces and software that are a pain to setup and use, but in this case, all the player needs is a standard 88-key MIDI keyboard and a laptop. So, in a real practical way, this is the first technologically grounded piece I've made that can be easily put in the hands—literally—of lots of people, both amateur and professional.

I am thrilled that Adam Sliwinski, who I have worked with for years as part of Sō Percussion, has taken such a shine to these pieces. While it may seem odd to have a percussionist play this music, it actually makes great sense, as is apparent in the recordings we have made. He has also played a crucial role in the development of these works—I showed him the first couple while they were in progress, and I really had him in mind when I was working on the rest of them.

—Dan Trueman

**Donnacha Dennehy**  
*Broken Unison* (2017)

*Co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall and Cork Opera House.*

With *Broken Unison*, I took the opportunity—joyfully I might add—to re-engage with questions of abstract compositional technique after a period writing more semantically charged music for operas and “kind-of-operas.” The work is full to the hilt with various ways of dis-

rupting unisons, from antiphonal interchanges through staggered chorales to a fairly dizzying use of canons of various hues, from the airily spaced to the breathily close, so close that they veer towards a kind of fractured unison at times. I became even more ambitious with some of these ferociously close canons after hearing how well the Sō Percussion players executed them while I was trying out early drafts of the piece! Paradoxically, perhaps, as the music tends more towards actual unisons in its latter parts, its mood becomes progressively broken and dark. Maybe there is a semantic undertone after all.

I think of the dialogue between pattern and texture in this piece as a kind of magic realism. I limited myself strictly to equal-tempered pitched instruments, despite the fact that much of my recent music plays with microtones to create a kind of harmony/timbre based on the overtone series. Here, instead, the very close canons transform in and out of something akin to a jingly-jangly pulsating resonance, the overtones spilling over each other.

Strictly in nine sections, the piece really separates into three larger parts—each accumulatively made up of a greater number of smaller sections (two, three, and four respectively)—and each demarcated by the varied iteration of a type of material defined by the employment of very bright, close canons starting in C and then slipping away semi-tonally in a manner influenced by the harmonic language of Gesualdo's later music.

—Donnacha Dennehy

**ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

With innovative multi-genre original productions, sensational interpretations of modern classics, and an “exhilarating blend of precision and anarchy, rigor and bedlam” (*The New Yorker*), Sō Percussion has redefined the scope and role of the modern percussion ensemble, placing it at the leading edge of 21st-century music.

This season, Sō Percussion premieres new percussion quartets by Vijay Iyer, Angélica Negrón, Suzanne Farrin, and Julia Wolfe (co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall and the

Los Angeles Philharmonic); performs at the National Gallery of Art, UC Santa Barbara, the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs, and Stanford University; and plays Steve Reich's complete *Drumming* for the Celebrity Series of Boston, among other dates. To begin the season, Sō performed David Lang's *man made* at the Chautauqua Festival and Caroline Shaw's *Narrow Sea* with Dawn Upshaw and Gilbert Kalish at Ravinia, and celebrated the tenth season of the annual Sō Percussion Summer Institute (SōSI).

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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Sō has recorded more than 20 albums; appeared at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Walt Disney Hall, the Barbican Centre, the Eaux Claires Festival, MassMoCA, and TED 2016; and collaborated with Shara Nova, Bryce Dessner, Jad Abumrad, JACK Quartet, Buke and Gase, the Mostly Mozart Orchestra and Louis Langrée, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel, among others.

This season, Sō Percussion celebrates its fifth year as the Edward T. Cone Ensemble-in-Residence at Princeton University.

Sō Percussion thanks Pearl/Adams Instruments, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth drumsticks, Remo drumheads, Black Swamp Accessories, and Estey Organs for their sponsorship.

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