

Monday Evening, December 3, 2018, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

# Juilliard Percussion Ensemble

Daniel Druckman, *Music Director*

Michelle Geffner, *Soprano*

## Princeton's Presence

JURI SEO (b. 1981) ***Four for Flexatones (2009)***

OMAR EL-ABIDIN

SIMON HERRON

EUIJIN JUNG

YOON JUN KIM

STEVEN MACKEY (b. 1956) ***Madrigal (2014)***

DANIEL DRUCKMAN, *Conductor*

MICHELLE GEFFNER, *Soprano*

BENJAMIN CORNAVACA

TOBY GRACE

SIMON HERRON

YOON JUN KIM

DONNACHA DENNEHY (b. 1970) ***Surface Tension (2015)***

JOSEPH BRICKER

TYLER CUNNINGHAM

STELLA PERLIC

YIBING WANG

*Intermission*

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

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Alice Tully Hall

*Please make certain that all electronic devices  
are turned off during the performance.*

OSCAR BETTISON (b. 1975) **Four Drums for Dresden (2012)**

JACOB BORDEN  
BENJAMIN CORNAVACA  
TOBY GRACE  
HARRISON HONOR

CAROLINE SHAW (b. 1982) **taxidermy (2012)**

SIMON HERRON  
YOON JUN KIM  
MIZUKI MORIMOTO  
LEO SIMON

ANDY AKIHO (b. 1979) **Pillar IV (2014)**

OMAR EL-ABIDIN  
EUIJIN JUNG  
MIZUKI MORIMOTO  
LEO SIMON

*Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes, including an intermission*

## Princeton's Presence

by Matthew Mendez

Though not the first institution of higher learning in the United States to offer a Ph.D. for composers, Princeton University was by far the most prestigious one to begin doing so, starting in 1965, when its department of music issued its earliest such degree. It was a natural development given Princeton's postwar track record, when it helped lead the way, among non-conservatories, in raising the intellectual, scholarly, and professional status of the compositional field—a development largely attributable to the charismatic presence of composer and music theorist Milton Babbitt (subsequently a longtime Juilliard faculty member), who effectively set the agenda for creative musical practice at the school for decades. Nor, for all the changes in style and fashion to have come and gone during the more than half-century since that first Ph.D. was granted, has Princeton ever relinquished its position as one of the leading incubators of compositional talent in this country, so that Steven Mackey, who started teaching at the university in 1985, could proudly sum it up a few years ago: "We have kept the tradition alive of being on the leading edge and going out on a limb with the vanguard of what's going on in music."

In addition to the work of three active Princeton faculty—in order of seniority, Mackey, Donnacha Dennehy, and Juri Seo—this evening's program features scores by current and recent doctoral students that offer a glimpse into the venture-some, ecumenical spirit of the university's music-making. It is not entirely by chance that so much vivid percussion music has been emerging from Princeton of late: the members of *Sō Percussion*, one of the nation's foremost percussion ensembles, have been performers-in-residence in the

music department since 2014, during which time they have collaborated closely with staff and student composers alike.

### **Four for Flexatones**

JURI SEO

*Born in 1981 in South Korea*

*Currently residing in Princeton, New Jersey*

One of the quirkier implements available to the contemporary percussionist, the flexatone is a modest handheld device consisting of a narrow steel sheet, to which is fastened a pair of metal tongues and small wooden (alternatively, rubber) knobs. Typically, the player agitates the apparatus using the wrist, producing a continuous oscillation whose pitch can be varied—a "spooky," musical saw-like sonority often employed as a comedic sound-effect. What the flexatone is clearly not, then, is an obvious candidate for extended soloistic treatment—a challenge Juri Seo's piece for a full quartet of them nevertheless embraces with relish. A quasi-theatrical offering—at one point, the performers activate the instruments with bass bows, having been instructed to wear the bows "on their backs and take them out together as samurais draw their swords" (samurai costumes optional)—*Four for Flexatones* also has them using mallets and a variety of shaking methods in order to unearth an incredible range of sounds from this humble, often-maligned instrument.

### **Madrigal**

STEVEN MACKEY

*Born February 14, 1956, in Frankfurt, Germany*

*Currently residing in Princeton, New Jersey*

For listeners familiar with the traditional textbook definition of the "madrigal"—as referring to a "serious," sometimes complex late Renaissance secular polyphonic vocal form—Steven Mackey's use of the

term for a percussion-heavy piece may come as a mild surprise, even if the piece in question is also a vehicle for a female vocalist, as is the case here. However, a quick consultation of the etymological history of “madrigal” suffices to bring out the logic of Mackey’s choice: the word has Latin roots connotative of a “simple,” “direct,” straightforward song. Similarly, Mackey wrote *Madrigal* in singer-songwriter fashion, composing both words and music, something that allowed him to fashion a particularly tight link between the vocal line and the percussionists’ activity. Indeed, *Madrigal* is a kind of “study” (Mackey’s own label) of the kaleidoscope of ways an extensive percussion battery can be deployed to inflect the voice; among others, there are appearances from steelpans, a rain stick, and a melodica, a blown keyboard instrument related to the harmonica.

### **Surface Tension**

DONNACHA DENNEHY

*Born August 17, 1970, in Dublin, Ireland*

*Currently residing in Princeton, New Jersey*

For all that drums tend to be associated with the virtues of rhythm and pulse, many parts of the world are home to variations of the instrument that give special prominence to its ability to produce variable pitches. Such is the case with West African “talking drums,” and it is also true of the bodhrán, a small frame drum prevalent in Irish folk music; it is played with a small wooden “tipper” in the right hand, while the left hand slides up and down the drumhead, modifying the tension and hence the pitch. A kind of stab at modeling the “sonic ideal” of the bodhrán on a grand scale, Donnacha Dennehy’s *Surface Tension* was his attempt to let “drums ‘sing’ in their own way,” as he has characterized it. While the piece also calls for bongos,

congas, vibraphone, marimba, and timpani, its real “engine” is the set of 18 tom-toms distributed spatially among the percussionists, who manipulate their pitch by inserting plastic tubing into an aperture on the side of each drum. The players blow into the tubing to change the air pressure inside the drums, adjusting the pitch without using their hands.

### **Four Drums for Dresden**

OSCAR BETTISON

*Born September 19, 1975, in Jersey,*

*United Kingdom*

*Currently residing in Princeton, New Jersey*

Contrasted with Dennehy and his piece, British-born but longtime U.S. resident Oscar Bettison wholeheartedly embraces time-honored rhythmic paradigms in his *Four Drums for Dresden*, so named because it was commissioned for a music festival in that city. Bettison has long been attracted to music’s capacity for beauty in imperfection, especially in the rhythmic realm. He often speaks in terms of machinic metaphors and their corresponding “glitches”:

A machine is a perfect thing, whatever it is. But, as machines age and they get a bit of dirt in them, they get a bit wonky. But as they do, they almost get a little bit more human. I always come back to this idea ... if I make a machine and break it a little bit, it’s almost like Pinocchio wanting to be a real boy. The machine is trying to become human.

However, *Four Drums* actually inverts this “Pinocchio” dynamic, tasking live performers with simulating the highly intricate synthesized loops characteristic of much electronic dance music. With its four drum kits, the piece aspires to construct a kind of flesh-and-blood drum machine, and proves

illustrative, observes Bettison, of “the irony that by adding more humans one can get closer to what a machine can do.”

**taxidermy**

CAROLINE SHAW

*Born in 1982 in Greenville, North Carolina  
Currently residing in New York City*

The recipient of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize, awarded while she was still enrolled at Princeton, Juilliard Creative Associate Caroline Shaw is a multitaled composer, singer, and violinist perhaps best known to the public for a series of collaborations with rapper-producer Kanye West. Her *taxidermy*, written for a Sō Percussion visit to Princeton in 2012, shares much in common with *Partita for 8 Voices*, Shaw’s Pulitzer winner, including her trademark balance of whimsy and seriousness of purpose, and her dogged commitment to imbuing familiar sounds with the freshness of a new encounter. Though it does employ traditional mallet percussion, *taxidermy* largely places the spotlight on the unexpected musical possibilities of flowerpots, a Sō Percussion specialty. Toward the end of the piece, the performers unexpectedly recite words from T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*—“The detail of the pattern is movement”—a favorite Shaw line without “hidden” significance in this context, but which is merely intended, she indicates, to hang in the air as a resonant, fanciful incantation.

**Pillar IV**

ANDY AKIHO

*Born February 2, 1979, in Columbia,  
South Carolina*

*Currently residing in New York City*

One of the special challenges of writing for percussion lies in accounting for its “choreographies of the possible”: for example, a sequence of sounds that may strike the composer as perfectly straightforward on paper, if distributed across a sufficient number of instruments, each of which can require a wildly different playing technique, can be impossible to perform in person, especially given physical and logistical constraints. In this respect, having a background as a percussionist can be a distinct advantage, a principle eloquently illustrated in the work of Andy Akiho, a Caribbean steelpan specialist with a rare gift for reimagining the sonorities of all manner of “phones” and “spiels.” In Akiho’s virtuosic, propulsive *Pillar IV*, numerous techniques are availed to defamiliarize a relatively conventional percussion set-up: drums struck on their shells; scraped vibraphone tubes; and the bars of keyboard percussion played not only on the “wrong” side, but with sticks rather than the usual mallets. In so doing, Akiho introduces something of the vigor and aplomb of “trashcan percussion,” as is often encountered in New York’s subways, into the rather different environs of the concert hall.

*Matthew Mendez is a New Haven-based critic and musicologist with a focus on 20th- and 21st-century repertoire. He is a graduate of Harvard University and is currently a Ph.D. student at Yale. He was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.*

## Meet the Artists



**Daniel Druckman**

Percussionist Daniel Druckman is active as a soloist, chamber and orchestral musician, and recording artist. He has appeared in concert throughout the U.S., Europe, and Japan; in recital in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Tokyo; and as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composer's Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic's Horizons concerts, and the San Francisco Symphony's New and Unusual Music series. He has been a member of the New York Philharmonic since 1991, serving as associate principal percussionist, and has made numerous guest appearances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Da Capo Chamber Players, American Brass Quintet, Orpheus, Steve Reich and Musicians, and the Group for Contemporary Music. Druckman has also participated in chamber music festivals in Santa Fe, Ravinia, Saratoga, Caramoor, Bridgehampton, Tanglewood, and Aspen. An integral part of New York's new music community, both as soloist and as a member of the New York New Music Ensemble, he has premiered works by Steve Reich, Elliott Carter, Jacob Druckman, Aaron Jay Kernis, Oliver Knussen, Poul Ruders, Milton Babbitt, Ralph Shapey, and Charles Wuorinen, among many others. He has also collaborated with Gilbert Kalish and Wu Han at the Chamber Music Society, Leif Ove Andsnes at Zankel Hall, and Colin Currie at Carnegie Hall. Druckman is chair of Juilliard's percussion department and director of the Percussion Ensemble. Born and raised in New York City, he is the son of composer Jacob Druckman, and received his bachelor's and master's degrees at Juilliard in

1980. Additional studies were undertaken at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood.



**Michelle Geffner**

Hailing from New York and Hong Kong, Michelle Geffner is a fourth-year undergraduate Vocal Arts student at Juilliard studying with Sanford Sylvan. She has performed such roles as the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Diana in *Orpheus in the Underworld*. In past seasons she has sung in scenes as Despina in *Così fan tutte*, Nannetta in *Falstaff*, and Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro* while attending the Italian immersion program, La Lingua della Lirica, in Novafeltria, Italy. Geffner is honored to perform new works and is passionate about expanding the horizons of classical music.

*Anna Schoen-René Fund of New York Community Trust, Dr. and Mrs. Gottfried Karl Duschak Scholarship*

### Juilliard Percussion Ensemble

The Juilliard Percussion Ensemble was founded in the late 1960s by Saul Goodman and has since been led by Roland Kohloff and its current music director Daniel Druckman. The ensemble appears annually at Alice Tully Hall, where in recent seasons it has performed percussion music from China; explored works by Gerard Griskey, Beat Furrer, and Rolf Wallin; celebrated the 85th birthday of George Crumb; surveyed the works of the founders of Bang on a Can: Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe; and honored the 50th anniversary of the influential percussion group, Les Percussions de Strasbourg, by performing three seminal works from its extensive repertoire. The ensemble has appeared in concert throughout the New York area,

including guest appearances at the Danish Wave festival at Merkin Hall, New Works/October series at Miller Theatre, Cutting Edge series at Greenwich House, and at Carnegie Hall in several Perspectives performances curated by Maurizio Pollini and Leif Ove Andsnes. In 2014 the ensemble

performed Steve Reich's *Drumming* with Colin Currie and in 2016 joined forces with Juilliard's AXIOM ensemble for a celebration of Reich's 80th birthday, performing Double Sextet, Mallet Quartet, *City Life*, and Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices, and Organ.

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