

Frank E. Taplin '37 Auditorium
in Fine Hall
Princeton University

ESCAPES

**The
Composers' Ensemble
at Princeton**

Steven Mackey and Michael Pratt, *Directors*

Tuesday, May 15 , 2007
8:00 p.m.

THE PROGRAM

Your All-Time Favorite Marimba Piece

Alan Tormey

Douglas Perkins, *marimba*

Test Pilot

MR Daniel

Escape

Judd Greenstein

Nadia Sirota, *viola*

— intermission —

Songs from the Wasteland

Lisa R. Coons

Brian McOmer, *percussion*

Littoral

John Supko

Due East

Erin Lesser, *flutes* — Greg Beyer, *percussion*

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Your All-Time Favorite **Alan Tormey**
Marimba Piece

The modestly titled *Your All-Time Favorite Marimba Piece* is dedicated to Doug Perkins and the stellar musicianship he brings to his projects. The opening is meant to loosely invoke the m'birra, a type of African thumb piano. The music's m'biriality is marimbated, patterned portions polyphonically progress.

Alan Tormey's "webs of sound" have been called both "disconcerting" and "avant." Anthony Doerr, author of *The Shell Collector* and *About Grace* calls it "absolutely cool and unnerving, and nothing like I expected." Speaking critically, seminal composer Milton Babbitt once referred to the composer as "Alan." An opinion shared not only by the Princeton faculty, but his mother as well. Recent performances of Alan's music have been given by, among others, the Catch Quartet, The New York Miniaturist Ensemble, Ensemble Surplus, and the American Composers Orchestra. Were he still on a fellowship, he would likely buy you a Coke.

Test Pilot **MR Daniel**
Test Pilot is excerpted from a longer work exploring the intersections between histories of violence, and remembered and dis-remembered trauma. Central to the work are questions of language — the failures and successes of translation and communication (which will be especially apparent to those fluent in Spanish — and boundaries of culture, class, and generational difference. This performance is dedicated to

cultural critic Ruth Frankenberg, who passed away on April 21, 2007, and her surviving partner, historian, poet, and cultural critic, Lata Mani.

MR Daniel is a composer and sound artist who works in installation, text, video, and performance. Her work primarily concerns the creation of psycho-historical landscapes informed by multi-variant social, cultural, and scientific registers. She has studied audio production, sound design, electronic and computer music composition with Pamela Z, Steven Everett, Terri Winston, and Brian Fergus, and is a former board member of Women's Audio Mission (WAM), an international, San Francisco-based all-volunteer, women-run education and advocacy organization. Her written, sound, and video work has or will be performed or exhibited in San Francisco, Minnesota, Cleveland, Seattle, Chicago, North Carolina, and on Greek National Radio 3. Her studies also include creative writing with Junot Díaz, Marci Blackman, and Krandal Kraus. Simultaneous with her studies in sound and creative writing MR was a Health Sciences Policy Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of California at San Francisco, and then a Mellon Visiting Professor of African American and Film Studies at Emory University. MR earned a doctorate from the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where she researched the aesthetic and cultural politics of independent film exhibition, and founded the Annual Women of Color Film and Video Festival. At present, MR is a graduate fellow in Music Composition at Princeton University.

Escape

Repetition carries many meanings in music, as in the written and spoken word. It can make a musical gesture more meaningful, or less; it can provide rhythmic energy, or dissipate it; it can signify moments as celebratory or terrifying, and all else in between. *Escape* begins in a world that knows only repetition, of the uneven, quivering variety. It is uncomfortable and yet I think it is also beautiful. I will not say that the piece represents an escape from that confined world; it is not so literal or boring, I hope. But there is something to the idea of escape in this music: of looking for an exit, of perhaps finding a way out, or having one emerge, and then of (again, perhaps) wanting to find the way back in. It is a challenging narrative and I'm not sure what the outcome is, if there is even a clear one. But the pleasure, I hope, is in the journey, the story and the psychology and the performance. In that spirit, *Escape* is dedicated to Nadia Sirota, for whom this work was written, and I am excited and interested to see how she tells the tale, now and in the future. I know few musicians — in the complete sense of the word — who are comparable to Nadia and so I have written her a piece that will give her something to chew on, hopefully for a long time to come.

Judd Greenstein was born and raised in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. His music is influenced by his early background as a hip hop producer and classical pianist, combining an urban, beat-oriented sensibility with a late-Romantic classical harmonic language. He now writes mostly acoustic music for his own ensembles and for other groups and performers that

commission him. All of his post-secondary institutional educational experiences have taken place in Northwestern Massachusetts (Williams College, Tanglewood, the Bang on a Can Summer Institute of Music) or on the far reaches of New York's tri-state public transit system (Yale School of Music, Princeton University). In addition to his work as a composer, Judd is the director of NOW Ensemble, a chamber group that performs new works by emerging composers; the founder of New Amsterdam Records, a record label serving the burgeoning indie classical scene centered in New York City; the co-director of Free Speech Zone, a presenting organization for new, politically-charged music; and the co-director of VIM: TriBeCa, a concert series offering new approaches to classical music, centered in a TriBeCa art gallery. For more information, visit juddgreenstein.com.

Songs from the Wasteland **Lisa R. Coons**
Songs from the Wasteland was originally meant to be violent rant against the disposable nation syndrome; I imagined a percussion sculpture of junk metal and an angry piece that would hint at my feelings after seeing the small town where I grew up in Missouri all but destroyed by the machinery of Wal-Mart, and the downtown where I came of age a wasteland without the shops or craftsmen that I remembered. The problem came when I started to make the sculpture — it was just too much fun.

I'm afraid that all of my anger and politics disappeared while spending the summer walking through the junkyard, hitting anything I could find to test the resonance and pitch, and dragging it back to the barn

to weld. I ended up having more fun than I can remember on any other project, while my dad patiently (and bravely) helped me learn (or re-learn) the equipment of his shop; the whole experience became about the beautiful sounds we heard in the metal and the process of building something that sang.

This piece wouldn't have ever happened without my family, and it was much like being on the farm again working together; it is more about love and cooperation than anger or frustration. I have to thank my little sister for all the times I asked for her to listen, my dad for many, many hours of time and expertise spent helping me put this thing (and the several before it) together, and my mom for all of her aesthetic input and her first-aid knowledge (it healed nicely). I'm proud to say that my husband, a fantastic drummer, is the one who has really found the voice of this instrument — he's performing the première tonight and is the only one who really seems able to make the sculpture sing. There are no forms of signal processing on the sculpture, the only sounds are acoustic, and those picked up by a homemade contact mic and controlled with a volume pedal.

Lisa R. Coons acquired a special affinity noise composition, found sounds and abstract art growing up around equipment and metalworking on a farm in northeast Missouri. She studied composition with Dr. James Mobberley and Dr. Chen Yi at the University of Missouri-Kansas City during her undergraduate degree, and also received a Masters degree from SUNY Stony Brook. Presently a graduate student

in music at Princeton University, Lisa composes primarily for smaller chamber ensembles, and recently her work has begun to expand to include works for turntables and homemade instruments.

Littoral

John Supko
As its title indicates, *Littoral*, by John Supko, might be expected to provide a map of the 'shoals,' so to speak, that outlines its musical ambitions and delights. But grasp tightly the bulwark for the journey, which explores the unexpected depths that punctuate any shoreline. It might be useful to think of these program notes as akin to an old map: helpful, as old maps once were for intrepid sailors who had little to guide them but sea and sky and rumors from distant places, but dangerous to rely upon too heavily.

Littoral is a voyage hewing to the shore of an allusive music. The listener is seated, as if at the prow of a ship, surrounded not by sea but by recorded sounds of water and tones and spoken words emanating from five speakers (and one sub-woofer) and by live sounds from two instrumentalists. As different musical styles are intimated, and as ideas and imagination are focused by poetry and prose layered amidst electronic and acoustical sounds, a modernist musical texture seems to ebb and flow into something which dissolves modernism with evocations of sea and birds; and as time seems to slow and speed, a feeling of journey is conveyed.

To create these impressions the composer amalgamated and synthesized field recordings of the sea, his own voice processed by computer, and the recorded

voice of a poet. And he employed acoustical instruments: flute, alto flute, and piccolo; and an array of percussion, including almglocken (cow bells), Thai gongs, vibraphone, marimba, glockenspiel, 12 pitched woodblocks, and drums. (The flute and percussion are played by Due East, Erin Lesser and Greg Beyer, who commissioned the work, and premiered it March 10, 2007 at Lewis and Clark College, Portland, Oregon. *Littoral* is dedicated to them.)

But the prevailing sensations are evoked by a set of electronic sounds — heard in counterpoint — fashioned from 37 musical lines. After each line was composed, it was processed by a virtual instrument and then recorded in five to seven realizations, creating a composite sound which is in flux among five to seven versions of itself. After the composer invented the melodic lines he gave them (as well as other recorded sounds) a position in space by mapping where the sounds surround the listener physically.

The duration of a performance of *Littoral* is about 35 minutes in one movement with one time signature, 5/4. The movement can be heard as having four sections, each having two subsections (1a, 1b; 2a, and so on). The work is fully notated and rigorously crafted: the final eight minutes are a retrograde of the beginning.

Littoral is an autobiographical work that pays homage to two of the composer's teachers, Frances McKay and Paul Lansky, who represent, respectively, the beginning and the end of his formal compositional training: McKay taught the composer during his high school years; Lansky is his principal graduate advisor. The work thus

alludes to McKay's chamber music evoking water, and to Lansky's use of percussive sounds and randomization.

What is not immediately apparent is that the use of text is another autobiographical aspect. Since he was eleven, the composer has reached out to the world of the arts by corresponding with various well-known authors, composers, and poets, including Paul Bowles, James Lord, David Diamond, George Crumb, Morton Gould, Lou Harrison, Milan Kundera, Henri Dutilleul, and Philippe Denis. His correspondence with the noted Dutch travel writer, novelist, and poet Cees Nootboom (b. 1933), with whom he shares a fascination with the relationship of actual travel to imagination, led the composer to ask Nootboom to record his poem *Cartography*, from the collection *The Captain of the Butterflies* (1955–96) for inclusion in *Littoral*. Tellingly, Nootboom reads an English translation — a translation is much like an old map — strangely familiar and dangerously misleading.

Into Nootboom's philosophical poem the composer interpolates an excerpt from Richard Hakluyt (1532–1616), the English literary figure credited with inventing travel literature. This interpolation of Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* — a sextant and stars in words — is spiritually remote from Nootboom as it is about finding one's way physically, and expanding an empire.

In exploring the depths of *Littoral* the listener is carried into a meditation on the deceptive correlations of thought and experience and of depiction and perception.

THE ARTISTS

And if these program notes have stood in relation to *Littoral* like an old map to an actual coastline, then experiencing the work may confirm that the shore is not where we had expected to find it. So let the epigram printed on the score guide our listening: "*Aile falquée du songe, vous nous retrouverez ce soir sur d'autres rives.*" (Saint-John Perse, *Oiseaux*, Sickle wing of the dream, tonight you shall find us on other shores.)

— Jeffrey Edelstein
Director for New Music
Crane Arts — Ice Box Project Space
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

John Supko (b. 1980, NY) has studied music at the Levine School of Music in Washington, DC; at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music; at the École Normale de Musique and the Schola Cantorum in Paris, France; and at Princeton University, where he is a Ph.D. candidate. He is the recipient of numerous prizes and grants, including the BMI Student Composer Award, the ASCAP/Morton Gould Young Composers Award, the Grand Prize of the National Young Composers Competition, a Fulbright Grant, a Meet the Composer Grant and, most recently, a 2007-2008 Georges Lury Fellowship. His work has been published in collaborative editions with the poet Philippe Denis by Collection Mémoires and, most recently, by Harpo &. Future projects include the chamber opera *HI MY NAME IS* (with a libretto by Robert Fitterman) and a commissioned solo percussion and tape work for Andy Bliss.

where he studied with Robert Van Sice. He performs with ProMark Drumsticks and Mallets and uses Pearl/ Adams Musical Instruments. www.mpduo.com

Nadia Sirota, *viola*, has commissioned and premiered dozens of new works by composers and songwriters including Nico Muhly, Valgeir Sigurðsson, Ryan Streber, Judd Greenstein, Marcos Balter, and Ben Frost. As a soloist and chamber musician, she has collaborated with artists such as Joseph Kalichstein, Itzhak Perlman, and the Silk Road Ensemble, and has performed extensively in New York and abroad.

After winning top prize in Juilliard's concerto competition in 2005, Nadia performed Hindemith's *Der Schwanendreher* in Alice Tully Hall with the Juilliard Orchestra under the direction of Marin Alsop. While attending Juilliard, Nadia started many programs dedicated to New Music, including Juilliard Plays Juilliard, an initiative that pairs interested performers with composers with the goal of creating compelling and informed performances of new works, and The New Music Project in the Castleman/Amory/Huang studio, as well as being a founding member of the AXIOM ensemble.

In the fall of 2007, Nadia will join the faculty of the Manhattan School of Music for its new Masters Program in Contemporary Music Performance.

Nadia is a member of the Tetras String Quartet, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME), and the collaborative, multimedia group Vision Into Art (VIA), as well as being a founding fellow of The Academy — A Program of Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, and The Weill Music

Institute. In the spring of 2008, Nadia will release an album on the newly-minted New Amsterdam label.

Nadia has recorded for MTV2, Neuma, Bedroom Community, Royal Academy of Music, and 11:11 records and has performed on NPR's *Morning Edition*, BBC Radio 3, CBS *Morning Edition*, A&E *Breakfast with the Arts*, and *Late Night with Conan O'Brian*.

Nadia received both her undergraduate and Master's degrees from the Juilliard School, where she studied with Heidi Castleman, Misha Amory, and Hsin-Yun Huang. More information on nadiasirota.com and myspace.com/nadiasirota.

Brian McOmbert, *percussion*, is a researcher in evolutionary biology and ecology at the University of Pennsylvania. Originally from Old Saybrook, CT, Brian began playing drum set at age ten and developed as a largely self-taught player in and around the New England hardcore/metal scene during the mid 1990's. He currently plays in the band Dirty Projectors and resides in Philadelphia.

Due East brings together Erin Lesser and Greg Beyer to form an exciting and dynamic combination of flutes and percussion. The duo has performed in Europe, Canada and the USA at venues such as the Warsaw Crossdrumming Festival, Banff Centre for the Arts and the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions in Texas, Tennessee and Ohio.

The duo has given recitals at universities across the United States, including Lawrence University, Northern Illinois University, Manhattan School of Music, Columbia University and Concordia College in

Bronxville, NY. Due East has also performed for the New Music Festival at Western Illinois University, NYC PAS Day of Percussion, Music at Our Saviour's Atonement (NYC), the American Music Center's Annual Award Ceremony (NYC), New Rochelle Public Library (NY), and Fort Massey Music Series in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

In the summer of 2005, Due East was invited to be an ensemble-in-residence at the Yellow Barn Chamber Music Festival. They performed throughout Amherst, MA and Putney, VT, and were heard on WGBH radio. They also presented outreach concerts at Camp Allegro, (Putney) Agape Church (Brattleboro) and the Eric Carle Museum where they premiered a new work based on *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Due East actively promotes new music, and has commissioned several works. They have premiered works for Wet Ink Musics (NYC), Columbia University Composers, and the 21st Century Schizoid Music Series at Cornelia Street Café (NYC). In conjunction with performance, Erin and Greg are frequently asked to present workshops for composers and instrumentalists on contemporary music and its various extended techniques for their respective instruments.

In March 2007, Due East went on a weeklong tour of Oregon including a residency at Western Oregon University. Upcoming events include concerts for Wet Ink Musics and the NYU Composers' Collective First Performance and Composer's Concordance (NYC). In August 2007, Due East will be artists-in-residence at the Universidade de Campinas, in Brazil.

Dr. Beyer is currently an Assistant

Professor of Percussion at Northern Illinois University, and is endorsed by Latin Percussion, Bosphorus Cymbals and Innovative Percussion.

Ms. Lesser has just been named a member of The Academy, a joint collaboration of the Juilliard School, Carnegie Hall and the Weill Institute of Music.