DESIRE lines
an evening of music, words, and moving image
by barbara white

directed by mark dechiazza

ralph samuelson, shakuhachi
dominic donato, tantam
barbara white, clarinet

october 5, 2010 at 8 pm

taplin auditorium
princeton university

sponsored by the princeton composers ensemble,
with support from the university committee on
research in the humanities and social sciences
and the center for the study of religion
Desire Lines:
An Evening of Music, Words and Moving Image by Barbara White

Directed by Mark DeChiazza

Ralph Samuelson, shakuhachi
Dominic Donato, tamtam
Barbara White, clarinet

Andrés Villalta, Audio Specialist
Christopher Gorzelnik, Lighting Designer
Buck Linton, Production Consultant

Supported by the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences, the Center for the Study of Religion, the Composers Ensemble at Princeton and the Princeton University Music Department.
PROGRAM

Release for video


Ryōkan's Bowl: *a few everyday moments for suspended tamtam*

My sleeve is wet with tears (after Ryōkan) *for clarinet*

After the Final No (after Wallace Stevens) *for tamtam*

Aura (after Walter Benjamin) *for tamtam with recorded sound*

Having Reunited the Chocolate Lab With Her People, Buddha Pines in the Dappled Glade *for shakuhachi*

Something & Nothing *for video*

text: Zhuangzi
reading: Thomas Hare

Seven Words You Can't Say on Television *for tamtam with recorded sound*

text and performance: George Carlin

INTERMISSION

[During intermission, audience members are invited onstage to look at the score to Ryōkan's Bowl. Please do not touch or remove anything unless specifically instructed to do so.]

It Is What It Is *for tamtam with video and recorded sound*

1. Mountains and Rivers
text: traditional, as transmitted by John Daido Loori
reading: Riley Lee

2. The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water (after Yeats)

Add Water & Stir *for tamtam with recorded sound*

1. Beware (Words of Advice)
text: Ryōkan
reading: Junko Hayatoh, Dominic Donato

2. In Search of the Celestial Teapot
text: Bertrand Russell
reading: Eddie Glaude, Jr.

3. Tiger Noodles Motivates Princeton Junior Faculty
text: Tiger Noodles
reading: Scott Burnham

Buddha Breathes in Bamboo *for shakuhachi*

Desire, Not Thirst *for shakuhachi, clarinet, and tamtam*

Into the Pale Mist (after Mary Oliver) *for tamtam*

*After the concert, please join us for a reception in the first-floor atrium.*
About "Desire Lines"

I’ve long been intrigued by the notion of “desire lines,” the pathways that pedestrians forge at will and spontaneously, in between the carefully designed routes landscape architects offer, as on a college campus when you notice a dirt trail wending its way here or there, avoiding the asphalt. For me this is a lot like music-making, in which things tend to go the way they need to, regardless of prior expectations or careful planning. Along with this openness to the unexpected, I suppose desire lines also suggest a simplicity and everydayness in just doing what needs to be done, without undue extravagance or fuss (though with the extravagance and fuss that are indeed necessary).

In 2003, Dominic Donato premiered a minute-long solo tamtam piece of mine here in Taplin and then invited me to write him another tamtam solo. I was intrigued at the idea, but it was not until 2008 that I got serious about it and, thanks to a loan from Dominic, spent a few glorious months cohabiting with his tamtam—the same one you see on stage. At the time, I was preoccupied with silence and with minimizing my “sonic footprint,” so for a while I just observed my new companion and marveled at the sounds she made when I accidentally bumped into her. But no music got composed until a snowy morning when I was reminded of the writings of the Zen poet Ryōkan, and Dominic’s piece began to write itself. As I learned to touch the tamtam more mindfully, I became increasingly drawn to the richness and unpredictability of the instrument, and I eventually found myself writing a piece, based on Ryōkan’s poems, that takes the shape of a choreographed ritual. The score is comprised of humble drawings I made, alternating between empty circles I call “bowls,” suggesting the ritualism and regularity of the poet’s relationship to his begging bowl, and simple images based on Ryōkan’s poems. The tamtam is bedecked with numerous ornaments, as well as a number of everyday—or not so everyday—objects gathered to excite it, and there are indications in the score where the performer is asked to wait or observe, thereby receiving the extended resonance of the instrument that he himself has initiated.

As I completed Ryōkan’s Bowl, I started to become interested in more traditional uses of the conventional, even clichéd, gong stroke that is familiar to many of us. (Strictly speaking, a gong is different from a tamtam, but the terms are nevertheless used interchangeably.) I loved the way the long decay resounded, the way that different mallets teased out different timbres, and as before, the way the player, like his audience, became a listener to the gong’s protracted crescendo. I also became more and more intrigued by the alchemy of combining a simple gong stroke with recorded text, and thus Nothing Doing was born. Nothing Doing is a collection of about thirty (at this writing) pieces for solo gong, from which the other gong solos on this program are taken. Some include recorded sound and a couple are performed along with video imagery. A few are deliberately unplayable! As a set, Nothing Doing plays with opposing or complementing the emblematic solo tamtam attack with one or more events—or, even, non-events. Sometimes the focus is more “semiotic” and tongue-in-cheek, and at other times, it is more about the play of more intricate musical syntax, as when the live performer enhances or comments on the expressive aspect of the recorded texts. In composing the pieces, I aim to embrace and simultaneously question the traditional associations of the clichéd stroke, and I continue to be entranced by the many ways a single, familiar sound may signify.

A few weeks after completing Ryōkan’s Bowl, while working on Nothing Doing, I began to learn to play the Japanese bamboo flute known as the shakuhachi. Coincidentally or not, this is an instrument closely associated not only with Zen practice but also with metal percussion, for the shakuhachi tradition emulates the sound and envelope of a bell, again with its long, protracted decay—the difference being, of course, that the shakuhachi player learns to slalom through a single note with breath, inflection and ornament—and, after a minute or so, may perhaps contemplate beginning a second note. The two solo shakuhachi pieces included here are part of an ongoing series called Buddha Gets Around, which I offer as part of the traditional shakuhachi Zen repertoire called honkyoku. As such they use gestures, modes, patterns, and ornaments that emerge from that tradition. (In fact, what they most have in common with the honkyoku repertoire is probably that they have things in common in the honkyoku repertoire.) The titles are light-hearted and whimsical but not at all unserious: each piece arises from my recollection of a particular moment of grace I cherish in my memory, and I have tried to evoke (if not capture) the sensations of each of those moments in music. My friend Nancy Zeltsman unwittingly inspired me to begin the series by presenting me with a particularly compelling (in fact, one might say, cuddly)”incarnation” of the historical Buddha, who I started to imagine popping up unexpectedly and benevolently at these moments.

The clarinet pieces offered here show a kinship to the shakuhachi in their use of modality, simplicity, bent notes, and their embrace of the physical reality of the tube. When I began to learn the shakuhachi, I realized I had been playing it already, if on a different instrument. Release and Something and Nothing both began as gong pieces but turned into videos! Release combines texts contributed by the speakers, while Something and Nothing is based on a Taoist text by Zhuangzi. In making these I emulated the Taoist principle of wu wei, familiar from tai ji, in which one avoids unnecessary meddling, “doing by not doing.” In Something and Nothing in particular there is minimal editing, and thus the compositional process involves relatively equal parts discovery and intervention.

The influence of Zen tradition comes about naturally through the shakuhachi, as well as through the texts of Ryōkan. I’ve long been aware of a spiritual focus in my work but have for equally long been hesitant to discuss it publicly, for such a revelation can easily overwhelm the sound and foster misunderstanding rather than illumination. Moreover, having written articles and led seminars that address the complexities of cross-cultural appropriation, I am well aware of the danger of such work becoming—or, at least, appearing—sanctimonious or precious. However, having presented you with a gong, a shakuhachi, and Zen poetry—not to mention the Zen master George Carlin—it seems time to come out of the closet. For me the spiritual aspect lies not only in the concentration on simplicity, nuance, and stillness, but also in the cultivation of an openness to things as they are, which includes an acceptance of and curiosity about all aspects of experience, including loss, struggle, imperfection and impermanence—and, on occasion, delight, whimsy, and absurdity. This is in keeping with Zen, of course, but it also introduces a shamanic perspective that comes out of my years-long initiation into Celtic spiritual practices. In this
tradition, one is advised to hear “the music of what is happening,” whether or not it is the music one planned. The shamanic perspective also cultivates a holistic and embodied approach to music-making—and, indeed, to being, which is part of what you see here tonight. Many of the objects and items on stage have off-stage significance as well. In fact, one of our team’s more arduous tasks was to share a bottle of wine so we could provide Dominic with the cork he uses to excite Lady Gong. And so, as the tamtam resonates, so does that festive evening. For me, it is as important to honor the gong through cleansing, caressing, listening and observing as it is to coax lovely sounds from her skin. More generally, it is as important to acknowledge, voice and release everyday experience—pleasant or painful—as it is to fashion beautiful objects of contemplation.

The type of adventure we’re presenting tonight demands concentrated attention, an adventurous spirit, and a willingness to trust in the unknown and in one another, and I am honored to be collaborating with such skilled, flexible and imaginative individuals. I have known Dominic the longest: I think it was in the mid-1990s that I first heard him play, and over the years, he has encouraged me to do things like play with coffee cans and frying pans and to toss ball bearings into a gong—once he even constructed a new mallet expressly to execute my vibraphone/bongo memorial to Duke Ellington. While I have always appreciated his subtle, inquiring spirit, and dry wit, the “behaviors” he is practicing tonight show more generosity, engagement and imagination on his part than I could possibly have anticipated. I met Ralph a little over a year ago, and I have been studying shakuhachi with him since that time. Whenever I hear him play, whether the music is complex or simple, extroverted or subdued, I am reminded of Miles Davis’s appreciation of João Gilberto: “he would sound good reading a newspaper.” I am not sure how you would read a newspaper on the shakuhachi, but anyway, for Ralph I composed *Buddha Breathes in Bamboo*, which steps away from the more virtuosic and exerting aspects of the instrument and simply drinks in the reality of the bamboo tube and the air circulating through it. I met Mark even more recently and have been privileged to observe his ability to absorb my ideas so sensitively and to respond to them so eloquently—and, often, uncannily. And, if that were not enough, more than once he encouraged me to hop off the sidewalk to explore a path that I would not otherwise have noticed. Finally and equally important, Christopher Gorzelnik and Andrés Villalta have contributed much beyond what I could possibly have expected and have responded with generosity and good humor to every request. Thanks are also due to Ernest Clark, Michael Early, Steven Mackey, and Kyle Subramaniam for their assistance in putting together what turned out to be a rather intricate and elaborate presentation of simple and humble things.

**About the Artists**

**Barbara White**

Composer Barbara White has a long-standing interest in collaborative and interdisciplinary work, specifically in working with dance and video. She has received commissions from the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York New Music Ensemble, Boston Musica Viva, the Fromm Foundation, and the Koussevitzky Foundation. Recent performances include the Aspen Music Festival, the Orchestra of St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble, Earplay, Lontano, Eighth Blackbird and the Chameleon Arts Ensemble. Honors and awards include a Fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, three awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a 2003 Guggenheim Fellowship. White has performed her clarinet works with the Fromm Foundation Contemporary Music Series at Harvard, Frente de Danza Independiente (Quito, Ecuador), and the Florida International Festival of New Music, as well as on her first solo CD, *When the Smoke Clears*. A second CD, *Apocryphal Stories*, was released in 2004. A third, *My barn having burned to the ground, I can now see the moon*, has been recorded and is now in production. White’s scholarly writings address such matters as the coordination between sound and movement and the relationship between creative activity and everyday life, as well as the impact on music of gender, listening, and spirituality. In 1998, she joined the faculty of the Princeton University Music Department, where she is now Professor.

**Dominic Donato**

Dominic Donato is active as a percussion soloist, chamber musician, composer and teacher. He is a member of the Talujon Percussion Quartet and DoublePlay Percussion Duo and has been staff percussionist for the Composers Conference at Wellesley College for the past 20 years.

Over the past ten years or so Dominic has kept himself entertained by writing, commissioning and performing compositions featuring tamtams and other ringing metals. Composers who have written pieces for him include Peter Jarvis, Stuart Jones, Elizabeth Hoffman, Helen Lee, Eric Moe, Steven Ricks, Usio Torikai and Barbara White. Upcoming premieres include works by Arthur Kreiger, Seung-Ah Oh, and Xi Wang. Dominic recently released "METALMORPHOSIS" - the first CD of his Music for Tamtams Project. For more information please visit: [www.musicfortamtams.com](http://www.musicfortamtams.com).

In 2007 Dominic was selected by Meet the Composer as one of eight "Soloist Champions" in honor of his continuing commitment to new music and the solo percussion repertoire. Dominic heads the Percussion Department and directs the Contemporary Ensemble at the Conservatory of Music at Purchase College.
Ralph Samuelson

Ralph Samuelson is a performer and teacher of the Japanese bamboo flute, shakuhachi. He was trained in the classical tradition of the Kinko School under the tutelage of the late Living National Treasure Goro Yamaguchi, as well as by Shudo Yamato and Kodo Araki. He began shakuhachi studies in 1969 as a graduate student in the World Music Program at Wesleyan University and studied traditional music in Tokyo in the 1970s under the guidance of the distinguished musicologist Fumio Koizumi. Mr. Samuelson has performed in leading concert venues in New York, around the United States, and in Europe and Asia. He has been presented in live radio and television broadcasts in the US and Japan and has recorded for Music of the World, Lyrichord Records, CBS Masterworks, Axiom, Tzadik, and other labels. In 1991 and in 2008 he was the featured shakuhachi soloist in the New York City Ballet’s production of Jerome Robbins’ “Watermill”, with music by Teiji Ito. Since 1976 Mr. Samuelson has also worked as a foundation professional facilitating and supporting international cultural exchange, and from 1991 to 2008 he served as director of the Asian Cultural Council, a foundation supporting exchanges in the arts and humanities between the United States and Asia.

Mark DeChiazza

Mark DeChiazza is a director and artist working across multiple disciplines. He created staging and video for composer Steve Mackey’s It Is Time, a Carnegie Hall commission for SO Percussion, and directed Slide, a music theater event, also composed by Steven Mackey, and written and performed by Pulitzer nominee Rinde Eckert with the Grammy-winning ensemble, eighth blackbird; His Pierrot Lunaire, a dance/theater production of Arnold Schoenberg’s song cycle conceived for eighth blackbird and soprano Lucy Shelton, premiered at the 2009 Ojai Music Festival and has since performed at Chicago’s Harris Theater, and at LACMA; his Pierrot will be a staple of eighth blackbird’s touring repertory in 2012—the centennial of its composition. In collaboration with MacArthur Fellow Susan Marshall, Mark DeChiazza staged site-specific work for Asphalt Orchestra, an iconoclastic marching band produced by Bang on a Can, and presented by Lincoln Center Out of Doors 2010. Previously, he was Assistant Director to Ms. Marshall in the creation of the Philip Glass/Leonard Cohen production The Book of Longing and also for eighth blackbird’s Bang On A Can commission, singing in the dead of night. For thirteen years he was a core member of Susan Marshall & Company, creating and performing dance and dance-theater works in the US and abroad.

Next Composers Ensemble at Princeton "Freelance" Concert: Tuesday, November 9

Princeton University Department of Music
Steven Mackey, Chair
Marilyn Ham, Department Manager
Gregory Smith, Academic Programs Manager
Kyle Subrenaniam, Business Manager
Cynthia Masterson, Office Assistant

Concert Office
Marna Seltzer, Manager
Ernie Clark, Concert Coordinator
Deborah Rhoades, Accounts Manager
John Burkhalter, Office Assistant

Technical Staff
Andrés Villalta, Audio Specialist
Joseph Vizzini & Chris Hill, Piano Technicians
Bryan Fitzwater, Technical Support Specialist
Jeffrey Snyder, Technical Director

Special Facilities Staff
Christopher Gorzenik, Production Supervisor
John Burton, Production Technician
Liz Lamer, Production Technician
Bill Pierce, Production Technician