NEW WORKS BY:
ELLIOTT COLE
LAINE PERHAM
SEAN PRIAR
KONRAD KAY
ANDREW LOYET
MICHELLE NAGAI

STEVEN MACKEY:
INDIGENOUS INSTRUMENTS
MICRO-CONCERTO
HEAVY LIGHT

WEDNESDAY
2/16/11
8:00PM
TAPLIN AUDITORIUM IN PINN HALL
The Composers Ensemble at Princeton  
Barbara White and Michael Pratt, directors  
presents  
Psappha Ensemble  
Nicholas Kok, conductor  
Tim Williams, percussion  
Steven Mackey, electric guitar  

THE PROGRAM

indigenous instruments

I. swinging, crisp, rhythmic
II. floating, as if improvised
III. mesmerizing, strange, dark, funky

Micro-Concerto for Percussion and Five Instruments

I. Chords and Fanged Drum Set
II. Interlude #1 Vibes Solo
III. Clik, Clak, Clank
IV. Interlude #2 marimba and Cello (attacca)
V. Tune in Seven

INTERMISSION

Heavy Light

1. Ritual
2. First Crossing
3. Psychedelic Fragment
4. Second Crossing
5. Voices
6. Heavy Light

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 8:00PM

Please join us for a reception downstairs following the concert.
FEBRUARY 16 PROGRAM NOTES

Indigenous Instruments:

Indigenous Instruments is vernacular music from a culture that doesn’t actually exist. I fantasized about a culture and their uses for music, did thought experiments to invent the kind of instruments they might play and wrote “folk melodies” idiomatic to those instruments. The exercise was silly but did in fact succeed in leading me to sounds and textures that I would never have thought of in my mode as serious concert-music composer.

My starting point was to retune or detune the ensemble; the cello has a radical microtonal scordatura, the violin G string is tuned down an octave and a quarter tone, the flute is pulled out a quarter tone flat, and one note of the piano is prepared. I went to all this trouble, again as in Micro-Concerto, to unbutton the sound of the ubiquitous Pierrot ensemble. The inspiration for this came from looking at transcriptions of the mbira (African thumb piano) in an ethnomusicology dissertation. I couldn’t really get a sense of what the sound was because these transcriptions seemed so exotic with microtones and odd chord voicings but the look intrigued me and it fascinated me all the more that this indecipherable notation was somebody’s vernacular music.

I’ve had a long fascination with exotic vernacular. I like the sense of a music that seems to obey some natural or, at least, culture-specific laws that are consistent and immutable but completely mysterious to me.

Associated with my need to shake up the Pierrot ensemble is a slightly rebellious attitude toward the piano as tyrant of equal temperament. This led me to open the piece with a microtonal string figure which makes the piano, upon its entry, sound like a broken toy; this piece was fun to compose!

In order to compose the cello part, I borrowed a cello and put pieces of scotch tape where the frets “should” be (remember, I’m a guitarist) and learned how to play that pizzicato part in the last movement. Because I was flying by the seat of my pants with the microtones and had no codified or familiar harmonic system at my disposal, I could not think of anything to go with the cello part; none of the “normal” notes sounded good. I played it over and over waiting for inspiration until a UPS truck with its low moan and slow pitch bend pulled into my driveway and I had a Eureka moment. It was the counterpoint between that big brown truck and that dark, funky cello part that led me to tune the G string down an octave.

I realize I’m probably sabotaging my credibility as an artist by revealing so much about the lucky accidents that inform my working method but then again I have always felt an affinity for the tradition of American crack-pot inventor/composers like Cowell and Partch.

Indigenous Instruments was commissioned by Chamber Music America for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players and was premiered by them in November of 1989.

Micro-Concerto:

When I was a young composer in the mid-eighties the so-called Pierrot ensemble (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, named after Schoenberg’s Pierrot Lunaire) with or without added percussion, was the ubiquitous “mod-music” group. It has a certain economic appeal in that you get a little of everything but because of that, every concert you went to had pieces by students and teachers wrestling with this Spartan orchestra in a post-Schoenbergian expressionist idiom. I have only written two pieces for this ensemble (both on this disc) and felt the need to transform the ensemble into something else, something more sympathetic to my background and interests, something more lively. In Micro-Concerto, the featured role of the percussionist playing a combination of toys, kitchen utensils and “legit” instruments makes the ensemble a little more playful. Also, a recurring strategy in the composition of the non-percussion parts is to have them occasionally get stuck on one or a couple of oddly articulated notes, bringing them closer to the spirit of percussion.

Another seminal influence on Micro-Concerto was the Percussive Arts Society National Convention I attended in 1992. There I witnessed a ninety-minute clinic on state of the art techniques for playing crash cymbals. I confess that there was something humorously esoteric about the event, but I left inspired to imagine particular ways to coax sound out of pieces of wood, metal and skin instead of simply hitting things.
It woke me to the fact that the first step in writing for percussion is to invent the instrument and a playing technique. I rented and set up all the instruments for Micro-Concerto in my basement and learned to play every single measure. (I can’t however play more than one measure at a time.) This led me to some unconventional techniques but luckily percussionists in general, and Dan Druckman in particular, tend to have an adventurous attitude about this: if they can reach it with an arm or leg, or hold it in the mouth, it is fair game. I’m fascinated by the one-man band mentality of juggling contrasting timbres produced by a gamut ranging from finely crafted instruments to kitchen utensils, and hobby shop paraphernalia. Watching Danny perform this piece is a hoot, especially in the last movement, where his foot is playing the kick bass drum, his hands are firing off timbale riffs while shaking a maraca, and he is blowing on a samba whistle. Remember, there are no special effects; there is only one player in real time.

In an addition to providing a virtuoso vehicle for the percussionist, Micro-Concerto also explores a variety of more complex roles that the individual can play in relation to the ensemble. In “Movement I: Chords and Fangled Drum Set,” the rhythm is front and center. I imagine that the piano chords harmonize the rhythm instead of the rhythm measuring the harmonies.”Movement II: Interlude #1, Vibes solo” is a short, lyrical ballad.

In “Movement III: Clink, Clak, Clank,” the percussionist is neither an accompanying rhythm section nor leading melody. I think of it as a contextualizing and interpreting narration spoken in some imaginary tongue-clicking language.

In “Movement IV: Interlude #2, marimba and cello,” the two instruments are completely co-dependent; the story is told only by their interplay. In some sense they are a single instrument with timbres no more disparate than the clickers and samba whistle that are part of the percussionist’s instrument in Movement III. This movement flows without pause into “Movement V: Tune in Seven.” In the first half of the movement the percussionist is one of six players tossing around a set of variations on the Tune. Toward the end, the percussionist returns to the “fangled drum set” and shifts the focus back to what must be (along with singing) the most fundamental form of musical expression—hitting things in time.

The two interludes are played on big, standard pieces of percussion “furniture,” but the main movements focus on small moves and subtle distinctions. They are full of fussy descriptions of how to play some hand-held “toy” just so. This micromanagement of small muscle groups, and the fact that the concerto soloist is accompanied by the smallest orchestra imaginable, suggested the title.

Micro-Concerto was commissioned by a Meet the Composer grant and premiered by the New York New Music Ensemble in 1999.

Heavy Light:

Heavy Light started life as a collaborative venture with choreographer Donald Byrd. The music and dance grew up together as an exploration of a psychadelic esthetic. To me that meant a music that is more evocative than logical and is in search of transcendent consciousness over a waking reality. To be sure, this sensibility is stylized. That is, it alludes to referential aspects of psychadelic culture from a time when the culture of transcendence was arguably a mainstream in the 1960’s. Musically this inspired chants, drones and raga like melodies. The last movement is more of a collaborative band concept than notated chamber music; ironically the electric guitar part is fully notated and the ensemble is asked to evolve and accompany. The title of the piece itself was inspired by the trend in rock band names of the 1960’s to embrace contradictions such as Iron Butterfly and Led Zeppelin. The work was commissioned by Mosaic.

Steven Mackey

Chair Steven Mackey was born in 1956 to American parents stationed in Frankfurt Germany. His first musical passion was playing the electric guitar in rock bands based in northern California. He later discovered concert music and has composed for orchestras, chamber ensembles, dance and opera. He regularly performs his own work, including two electric guitar concertos as well as numerous solo and chamber works and is also active as an improvising musician. As a composer, Mackey has been honored by numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, two awards from the Kennedy Center for the performing arts, the Stoeger Prize for Chamber Music by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and in 2000 the Miami performing arts center acknowledged his contributions to orchestral music with a special career achievement award. His Indigenous Instruments was selected to represent the U.S. at the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris in 1990. Mackey has been the composer in residence at numerous music festivals including Tanglewood and Aspen and he was featured at the 2000 American Mavericks Festival and the 2003 Holland festival in Amsterdam. Among his commissions are works for the Chicago and San Francisco Symphonies, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Kronos Quartet, the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, the Fromm Foundation, the Brentano String Quartet, the Borromeo String Quartet, Fred Sherry, Dawn Upshaw, and The Dutch Radio Symphony, Prisan Saxophone Quartet, the BBC Scottish Chamber Orchestra and many others.
THE PERFORMERS:

Nicholas Kok, conductor

Nicholas Kok studied at New College, Oxford and the Royal College of Music. In both the concert hall and the opera house he has conducted numerous world and British premieres by composers such as Birtwistle, Holt, Maxwell Davies, Reich, Turnage and Xenakis. He is currently Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor to the leading contemporary music ensemble Psappha. Other orchestras he has worked with include the BBCSO, CBSO, CBC, LPO, Philharmonia, RSNO, RSO Berlin, RTE National Symphony Ireland, Ulster Orchestra, Hallé, SCO, Strasbourg Philharmonique, Viva, BCMG and London Sinfonietta.

He has conducted a varied repertoire in the opera house, ranging from Monteverdi to Turnage. Companies he has worked for include English National Opera, Opera North, Oper Koeln, Staatsbühne Stuttgart, Teatro Sao Carlos Lisbon, Coliseu Porto, Klagenfurt, Opera Factory, Almeida Opera and English Touring Opera. Festival appearances include Aldeburgh, BBC Proms, Buxton, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Orkney, Montepulciano and Valencia. Future plans include concerts with Psappha, Northern Sinfonia and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Alcina for OTC and Orphée et Eurydice for Staatsbühne Stuttgart.

Psappha

Psappha, Manchester’s new music ensemble and one of the UK’s top contemporary music groups, was formed in 1991 by its Artistic Director Tim Williams and specialises in the performance of music by living composers and that of the 20th and 21st centuries. The ensemble has an extensive and varied repertoire of hundreds of works and a reputation for technical assurance and interpretative flair. Attracting attention from audiences and music press internationally, it won the Manchester Evening News Award for Opera in 2000 and has twice been shortlisted for a prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society award. Psappha has commissioned and premiered many works by a wide range of composers including the award-winning music-theatre work, Mr. Emmet Takes a Walk, by its Patron, Peter Maxwell Davies, also recorded by the original performers.

Psappha has appeared throughout the UK, featuring regularly at most of the country’s major music festivals, including the BBC Proms, in special Henze and Maxwell Davies portrait series and in the recent Bernstein Project at London’s Southbank Centre, and in a residency at the St. Magnus Festival, Orkney in 2009. To celebrate its landmark 20th anniversary in 2011, Psappha has lined up an exciting and diverse array of commissions from John Casken, Sally Beamish, Gordon McPherson and Ian Wilson.

It has made highly successful tours to North and South America, Australia, Belgium, France, Holland, Ireland, Jersey, Portugal and Spain and this season appears in the United States as part of a residency at Princeton University. Having made a number of recordings on various labels, Psappha launched its own CD label in 2004 with Maxwell Davies’s Eight Songs for a Mad King and Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot. The most recent release, Busted Micro Shorts, features music by Steven Mackey.

Newly appointed Contemporary Ensemble in Residence at the University of Manchester, Psappha encourages the breaking down of barriers between artistic and educational experiences, inspiring creativity and the exchange of ideas with students through interactive and collaborative projects. Autumn 2010 sees the launch of ‘Composition Lab’, an online resource designed to accompany the composition element of GCSE and A-level music. Tireless champions of the music of today, Psappha is continually seeking to develop new audiences, breaking fresh ground in its innovative development of the digital dissemination of its work through free-to-view films of live performances on its website. Psappha welcomes people of all ages to try something new, and become involved with the ensemble and its composers through its online resources, in performances and projects and at its pre- and post-concert events.

Keep informed about Psappha’s activities by signing up to its regular e-newsletter on www.psappha.com.
THE COMPOSERS:

**Elliott Cole**

Elliott Cole is a first-year composition student at Princeton University. Enthusiastic about joining music and literature, he has written four chamber operas and a verse lecture, set to music, about the beginning of the world. Earlier this year, he was a featured panelist and performer at Columbia University’s Remaking Opera conference. Later this spring, his music will be performed at the G. Prokofiev showcase at SXSW, and at the MATA festival by the Metropolis Ensemble. In August he will travel to Switzerland as a ‘spotlight artist’ of the Lucerne Festival Academy.

**Lainie Fefferman**

Lainie Fefferman is in her fourth year of the composition program at Princeton. For more info, go to www.lainiefefferman.com

**Sean Friar**

Born in Los Angeles in 1985, Sean Friar’s first musical love was rock and blues piano improvisation, and piano bad-boy Jerry Lee Lewis his first musical idol. While his focus shifted toward classical composition in high school, his music still maintains the raucous energy, accessibility and directness of those early musical influences, now along with a diverse classical sensibility. He graduated from UCLA with B.A.’s in Music and Psychology, and is currently the Harold W. Dodds Honorary Fellow in the Ph.D. program in composition at Princeton.

His music has been performed internationally by such ensembles and performers as the American Composers Orchestra, Matmos, So Percussion, Orkest de Ereprijs, NOW Ensemble, Ensemble Klang, Janus, Newspeak, TRANSIT, the Formalist Quartet, the New Pacific Trio, the New Millennium Ensemble, New Music Collective, members of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, and 4-time Grammy-winning percussionist, Glen Velez. This season will see his Carnegie Hall debut, first with his *Clunker Concerto for Line C3 Percussion* and the American Composers Orchestra; and again the following month, with a new work for the NY Youth Symphony. Among his honors are the Aaron Copland Award and Residency at Copland House; a First Music Commission; the Lee Etelson Composers Award; three ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Awards; residencies at Apeldoorn, Aspen, Bang on a Can, Bowdoin and Norfolk; an NMC New Works Commission; 1st place in the SCI/ASCAP Composer Commission Competition (Region VIII); 1st place in the Hawaii Institute of Contemporary Music Competition; and 1st prize in composition in the National PTA Reflections Contest.

For more information, please visit him at www.seanfriar.com

**Konrad Kaczmarek**

Konrad Kaczmarek received a B.A. in music from Yale University, a MMus in electronic music composition from University of London, Goldsmiths, and is currently in the composition program at Princeton. He has held teaching positions at Yale University, The New School University, and Harvestworks Studio in New York.

As a freelance programmer and sound designer he has worked with many people including Laurie Anderson, Coco Fusco, Matthew Suttor, and the Builder’s Association. His work in this capacity has taken him to the Kunstnernes Hus in Oslo, Norway (2009), The New Zealand International Arts Festival (2008), The 2008 Whitney Biennial Performance Series, the Next Wave festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (2006), "Works and Process" at the Guggenheim (2006), and The Strings of Autumn Festival at the Estate Theater in Prague (2006).

His own work has been performed at the Stanley Glasser Electronic Music Studio in London, the Sonorities Festival at Queens University in Belfast, The SoundBytes Festival in Halifax NS, The Tank and The Chelsea Art Museum in New York, Brooklyn College, The Extensible Toy Piano Project at Clark University and University of Albany, and the Princeton Composer’s Ensemble. He has been awarded residencies at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, The Banff Centre in Canada, and STEIM in The Netherlands.
ANDREW LOVETT

Andrew Lovett, composer, recently moved from Cambridge, UK, to Princeton with his partner, Melissa Lane. He completed a PhD at City University, London in electroacoustic composition and went on to establish a career composing electroacoustic music, chamber music, theatre and dance scores and occasional TV/film work. Recently, he has focused strongly on music-theatre and opera, especially in collaboration with the Electric Voice Theatre, a troop of singers based in London. Don’t Breathe A Word is his second full-length opera, following Abraham On Trial, which was premiered in the UK in 2005.

MICHELLE NAGAI

Michelle Nagai studies music composition in the graduate program at Princeton University. She creates site-specific musical performances, compositions, installations, radio broadcasts, dances and other interactions that address the human state in relationship to its setting. She is a founding member of the American Society for Acoustic Ecology and holds a teaching certificate from the Deep Listening Institute.

Upcoming Music at Princeton Events:

Saturday, February 19
CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE RECITAL
Meghan Todt ’11, violin
Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall, 8:00PM
Works by Beethoven, Bach, and Dvořák

Sunday, February 20
RICHARDSON CHAMBER PLAYERS
“Sunday Afternoon Schubertiade”
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall, 3:00PM
Tickets: $20, $15, $10, students $5.

Wednesday, February 23
THIRD ANNUAL HIGH SCHOOL JAZZ COMBO FESTIVAL
Dr. Anthony D.J. Branker, adjudicator
Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall, 5:00-9:00PM
Featuring a performance by the University Jazz Composers Collective

Friday, February 25
CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE RECITAL
Taplin Auditorium in Fine Hall, 8:00PM
Megan McPhee ’11, violin

Sunday, February 27
JAZZ VESPERS
featuring the University Jazz Vespers Ensemble, Anthony D.J. Branker, director
University Chapel, 11:00AM

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY GLEE CLUB AND CHAMBER CHOIR
Gabriel Crouch, conductor
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall, 3:00PM
“The Singing Revolution” – Choral music from Estonia, Spirituals from the U.S.”
Tickets: $20, $15, $10, students $5.

Next Composers Ensemble at Princeton Concert:
Monday, March 21, with the Brentano String Quartet

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