Welcome...

On behalf of the Department of Music, I am delighted to welcome you to our concert.

This performance represents only a small portion of the richness and diversity of activities that take place in the Department of Music every year. Composition, scholarship and performance are the central activities of our students and faculty and many of the performances we present represent more than one of those areas. Scholarly seminars often reconstruct and present performances of ancient, lost, or unfinished work. The Princeton Sound Kitchen presents music newly composed by our faculty and students performed by some of the world’s most skilled and adventurous musicians.

Our two certificate programs – the Program in Jazz Studies and the Program in Musical Performance – also integrate the stage, the studio and the classroom. Participants in both of those programs take private lessons, master classes, and academic courses en route to solo and ensemble concerts.

Our new Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence, Sō Percussion, are an exciting new addition to our musical community. An internationally acclaimed quartet of musicians, Sō will give free public concerts with instruments that range from the familiar to the exotic.

We hope you will attend many more events presented by the Department of Music at Princeton University. The diverse and eclectic interests of our students and faculty mean that you can enjoy events not only in our high traffic areas, like Euro-American concert music, opera and jazz, but also a great variety of other music – vernacular, learned, sacred and profane – from around the world.

The public is also invited to the many pre-concert lectures, colloquia and conferences that feature local scholars as well as distinguished visitors. For a list of upcoming events please visit princeton.edu/music.

We look forward to seeing you at our next Music Department event!

Steven Mackey
Professor and Chair, Department of Music

Friday, September 12, 2014 at 7:30pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence

SŌ PERCUSSION
Eric Beach
Josh Quillen
Adam Sliwinski
Jason Treuting

STEVE REICH
Mallet Quartet (2009)

JASON TREUTING/ SŌ PERCUSSION
Selections from amid the noise (2006)
Life is (blank)
June
Extremes

JOHN CAGE
Third Construction (1941)

— INTERMISSION —

BRYCE DESSNER
Music for Wood and Strings (2013)
PROGRAM NOTES

Who We Are and What We Do

The Sō Percussion formula is simple: we pursue everything we are interested in. Our group started 15 years ago at the Yale School of Music in the vein of other classical chamber music groups, gathering and commissioning repertoire from important composers to perform at the highest level. This mission remains intact, but has expanded to encompass writing music for ourselves, as well as creative collaborations that span across musical categories.

Tonight’s program brings several of those strands together. John Cage’s Third Construction — by far the oldest piece in our active repertoire — stands as a pillar of musical revolution and achievement. Cage represents the percussion quartet something similar to what Joseph Haydn does for the string quartet: a musical grandfather, without whom the further advances in the art form seem unimaginable. He believed that beautiful and exciting music could be coaxed from tin cans, pod rattles, tom-toms, and conch shells.

Steve Reich is another seminal composer for percussionists, perhaps a father to our medium if Cage is the grandfather. His works like Drumming and Music for 18 Musicians completely redefined the role percussion instruments could have in western classical music. Luckily for us, he is still alive and composing. In 2009, he wrote Mallet Quartet for us, one of our most popular pieces.

In 2006, our founding member Jason Treuting (currently in his second year as a Fellow at Princeton’s Lewis Center for the Arts) embarked on a series of compositional experiments using patterns of syntax in words to create musical structures. The resulting work is called amid the noise, a series of pieces that alternate between ambient meditations and vibrant rhythmic studies.

The second half of tonight’s program features Bryce Dessner’s Music for Wood and Strings. Bryce is best known as a guitarist and songwriter for the rock band The National, but his career as a classical composer has taken off in recent years. When Carnegie Hall commissioned him to write this piece for us, instead of stepping into our world, he invited us into his. The piece is written for a new instrument called the Chordstick, a sort of hybrid stringed instrument that resembles the guitar, but is played flat with sticks like a hammered dulcimer. Bryce himself spent enough time with the instruments to learn their capabilities inside and out.

We are honored and terribly excited to begin our appointment at Princeton as Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence. Through our past teaching at Princeton, as well as our Sō Percussion Summer Institute, we already feel like part of this community. Starting this year, we’ll be searching for even more ways to plug into the vibrant arts scene of this amazing University.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

For over a decade, Sō Percussion has redefined the modern percussion ensemble as a flexible, omnivorous entity, pushing its voice to the forefront of American musical culture. Praised by The New Yorker for their “exhilarating blend of precision and anarchy, rigor and bedlam,” Sō’s adventurous spirit is written into the DNA passed down from composers like John Cage and Steve Reich, as well as from pioneering ensembles like the Kronos Quartet and Nexus Percussion. Sō Percussion’s career now encompasses 13 albums, touring throughout the USA and around the world, a dizzying array of collaborative projects, several ambitious educational programs, and a steady output of their own music.

When the founding members of Sō Percussion convened as graduate students at the Yale School of Music, their initial goal was to present an exciting repertoire of pieces by 20th-century luminaries such as Cage, Reich, and Iannis Xenakis. An encounter with David Lang, Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and co-founder of New York’s Bang on a Can organization, yielded their first commissioned piece: the 36 minute, three movement, the so-called laws of nature. Since that first major new work, Sō has commissioned some of the greatest American composers of our time to build a new repertoire, including Steve Reich, Steve Mackey, Paul Lansky, Martin Bresnick, and many others.

Over time, an appetite for boundless creativity lead the group to branch out beyond the composer/interpreter paradigm. Since 2006, with group member Jason Treuting’s amid the noise, the members of Sō Percussion have been composing in their own right within the group and for others. In 2012, their third evening-length work, Where (we) Live, premiered at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and traveled to the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s 30th Next Wave Festival and the Myra Loy Center in Helena, MT. Where (we) Live follows on the heels of 2009’s Imaginary City, a fully staged sonic meditation on urban soundscapes. In 2011, Sō was commissioned by Shen Wei Dance Arts to compose Undivided Divided, a 36-minute work conceived for Manhattan’s massive Park Avenue Armory.

Sō Percussion’s artistic circle extends beyond their contemporary classical roots. They first expanded this boundary with the prolific duo Marmos, whom The New York Times called "ideal collaborators" on their 2010 combined album Treasure State. In 2011, the rock band The National invited Sō to open one of their sold-out shows at New York’s Beacon Theater. Sō’s recording of the so-called laws of nature became the cornerstone of their self-titled debut album on Cantaloupe Music (the record label from the founders of Bang on a Can) in 2004. In subsequent years, this relationship blossomed into a growing catalogue of exciting records. In 2011, Sō released six new albums, ranging from their definitive recording of Steve Reich’s Mallet Quartet on Nonesuch Records, to Steve Mackey’s epic quartet, It Is Time, on Cantaloupe, to their collaborative album Bad Mango with jazz trumpeter Dave Douglas on Greenleaf Music. The BBC raved of Sō’s
performance of Maeli Quartet that they "have it nailed, finding both the inner glow and the outer edge, and never letting the tapestry lapse into the flat or routine."

Sō Percussion is heavily involved in mentoring young musicians. Its members are Co-Directors of a new Percussion Department at the Bard College-Conservatory of Music. This top-flight undergraduate program enrolls each student in a double-degree (Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Arts) course in the Conservatory and Bard College, equipping them with elite conservatory training and a broad liberal arts education. In 2009, they created the annual Sō Percussion Summer Institute on the campus of Princeton University. The Institute is an intensive two-week chamber music seminar for college-age percussionists featuring the four members of Sō as faculty in rehearsal, performance, and discussion of contemporary music for students from around the world. During the 2011-2012 academic year, Sō was an ensemble-in-residence at Princeton University, teaching seminars and collaborating extensively with talented student composers. The members of Sō were named the Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence at Princeton University in 2014.

Sō has been featured at many of the major venues in the United States, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Stanford Lively Arts, Texas Performing Arts, and many others. In addition, a recent residency at London’s Barbican Centre, as well as tours to Western Europe, South America, Russia, and Australia have brought them international acclaim.

Upcoming Music at Princeton Events

Tuesday, September 16, 8:00pm
Princeton Sound Kitchen: Black Box Project
Whitman College Class of 1970 Theatre

Thursday, September 18, 7:30pm
Princeton University Glee Club presents
The Schola Cantorum of Oxford University
Trinity Church, 33 Mercer Street, Princeton

Friday, September 19, 7:30pm
Takács String Quartet with Meryl Streep
presented by Princeton University Concerts
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

For more information, visit princeton.edu/music.