

Focus Day 2009 The Global Economy

By Greg Beyer

*Globalization is as old as civilization: older than capitalism or consumerism, or the euphemism of “free trade.” History is replete with the migrations (voluntary or forced) of peoples; and archaeology continues to expand our awareness of how mobile and far-reaching were the exchanges of goods and ideas. Our rich musical diversity is another product of globalization; and reflects centuries—if not millennia—of influences and cross-pollination. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the world of percussion. A genealogical tracing of various instruments’ origins—or multiple origins—is proof enough of this. The percussion ensemble, as it evolved in Euro-American art music in the 20th century, is a unique hybrid that owes its very existence to globalization. —Peter Garland, from *Think Globally, Act Locally**

It was happening all century; in works like Varèse’s “Ionization” or Cage’s “Third Construction,” the polyglot nature of our art form was already in plain view. In this very journal, Steven Schick has called “Ionization” “our big, messy, percussive Tower of Babel where bongos, cowbells, and maracas from Latin America converse with Asian gongs, European snare drums, and the wailing of sirens to make phrases that in the end are neither Latin nor Asian nor European.” (Schick, 93)

I posit that our contemporary percussive art is a looking glass through which we see and understand ourselves and the world around us. It is the crucible in which we innovate and take the next step, develop the next sound, pave the new way forward, always with our eyes on the rearview mirror of history and our hearts indebted to the world and people around us. Our Percussive Arts Society is, in fact, just that. Percussion links us to this increasingly global society and global culture.

I insist that my profession be relevant to the world in which I function.
—Allen Otte, Percussion Group Cincinnati

If music and its practice can help us to connect and relate to one another with increased sensitivity and care, then there is still hope for the future. It is now 2009, nearly a decade beyond the turn of the millennium. What comes next for the percussionist in this “global economy”?

It isn’t as if we didn’t know that the current issues we face would be upon us. Looking back through the news of the recent past, articles such as Joseph Stiglitz’s “How to Fix the Global Economy,” were cropping up in the major news engines around the globe. Stiglitz posed questions such as, “For how long can the global economy endure America’s enormous trade deficits—close to \$3 billion a day—or China’s growing trade surplus of almost \$500 million a day?” (Stiglitz)

We now know the answer. Reports from over this past calendar year reveal the reality:

February 17, National Public Radio, Morning Edition: “The UN estimates that worldwide, 50 million people could lose their jobs this year... If we don’t work together we won’t find the global solution we are seeking... This crisis started in the financial markets, these are now international, they are not simply national. Until we recognize that, we will not be able to deliver ourselves from what is a really terrible economic situation.” (Mandelson)

March 8, *The New York Times*: “In one of the bleakest assessments yet, economists at the World Bank predicted that the global economy and the volume of global trade would both shrink this year for the first time since World War II. The World Bank said in a new report that the

crisis that began with junk mortgages in the U.S. was causing havoc for poorer countries that had nothing to do with the original problem.” (Andrews)

April 22, *The New York Times*: “Never before in modern times has so much of the world been simultaneously hit by a confluence of economic and financial turmoil such as we are now living through...even as globalization speeds the flow of economic benefits in good times...now we are learning that in times of contraction, globalization transmits trouble with enormous speed and force, affecting economies around the world.” (Knowlton)

What is absolutely clear in these snapshots of recent news is the degree to which we are all interdependent. The decisions we make and the actions we take ultimately have their ripple effects in the world.

Ethical questions follow. What decisions do we make as percussionists? The choice to play “Psappha” by Iannis Xenakis or “Thirteen Drums” by Maki Ishii, or the choice to study the tabla or the tumbadora, are not simply questions of taste. The cultural identity of a given instrument or the biographical back story of chosen composer become touchstones for further investigation and inspiration. We choose to play and the drum takes us—to where we know not. Works or projects of significant complexity and depth offer us lifetimes of exploration and discovery. And these choices define who we are—our purpose in life and in society. Percussion offers us the possibility to work daily with passion and discipline to craft a musical skill or piece of music and, in so doing, to mold ourselves into things of beauty and transformative power.

Percussionists working and creating in the 21st Century are products of an increasingly sophisticated pedagogy that reflects an art form that itself is growing steadily more subtle and deep. This is in no small part in response to the fact that the world as we perceive it is becoming increasingly interconnected. Percussion as the non-instrument, as the instrument “with a Thousand Faces” (Campbell) is perfectly poised to reflect and critique that interconnectivity.

Focus Day 2009 will present over 25 artists/ensembles whose offerings reflect the wealth of global percussion culture and its use in contemporary musical thought. Each of these artists is attempting to make sense of the multitudinous options that percussion presents through processes of synthesis and transformation. Theirs is the fuel that will burn brightly on November 11, 2009, at the Indiana Convention Center as we come together to focus on music that is dedicated to taking the next step.

The day’s events will be divided into two parts, the first dealing with *connectivity* (concerts 1–4), the second dealing with *innovation* (concerts 5–6).

FOCUS DAY 2009, PART 1: FROM THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH

The first four concerts of the day are organized according to longitudinal divisions of the globe, and effectively divide the Earth into four equal quadrants. To symbolize PAS’s newly found “center of gravity,” our point of departure and return will be 86°W—Indianapolis, Indiana.



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University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance

CONCERT 1
86°W-4°E
9:30-10:45 A.M.



South America, Eastern North America, Caribbean,
Western-most Europe, West Africa

Performer	Piece	Composer
Fernando Rocha	Augmented Instruments	Fernando Rocha
Ryan Nestor	Those That I Fight I Do Not Hate	Jordan Munson
Michael Schutz	Groundloops	Peter Traub
Bev Johnston	Fertility Rites	Christos Hatzis
Dane Richeson	a la Par	Tania Leon

Brazilian percussionist Fernando Rocha considers his work “Augmented Instruments” a link between tradition and technology. It involves performing solo on instruments such as kalimba and pandeiro and manipulating these sound sources with interactive electronics.

“Tradition and innovation are two complementary sides of percussion music,” Rocha says. “On one hand, percussionists explore different cultures to learn new instruments, techniques, and rhythms. The ease of global communication using today’s technology facilitates access to the music of different cultures. It is common today to see someone in Japan learning to play Brazilian pandeiro or someone in Canada learning to play Indian tabla. It is also normal that different traditions are being combined in our new music world. On the other hand, percussionists also search for new sounds everywhere, us-



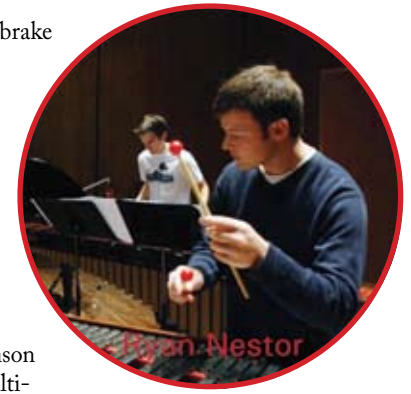
ing any material available—like brake drums, sirens, etc.—and finding new ways of playing existing instruments. Electronics and digital technology create a rich field for the further exploration of sounds.”

Ryan Nestor, likewise, is interested in melding tradition with technology. In Jordan Munson’s “Those That I Fight I Do Not Hate,” Nestor and Munson have collaborated to create a multimedia presentation that casts a different light on the traditional Irish bodhrán. Nestor explains: “Immediately concerned with honoring the historical roots of the instrument, Munson researched Irish poetry, finding inspiration in the William Butler Yeats poem “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death,” from which the piece derives its title.” The work honors “the Irish origins of the instrument, while simultaneously pushing the sonic circumference of the bodhrán in decidedly non-traditional ways.”

Referring to the World Wide Web and its ability to undermine physical distance as a factor in defining our cultural/musical landscape, Michael Schutz presents Peter Traub’s “Groundloops” for small percussion and Internet audio signal looping. While Schutz and Traub embrace the benefits of the Internet in terms of increasingly free transfer of cultural information, they simultaneously fret over loss of subtle detail. According to Schutz, “Groundloops’ meditates in two ways upon the costs and benefits of the musical diversity achieved through modern technology.” Through a process of slowly adding sonic layers through electronic loops and sending these signals out to three servers at points spread throughout the country, the sonic result is an “increasingly distorted” mass of timbres and frequencies. The work “simultaneously celebrates and critiques the possibilities of Internet-based audio transmission.”

Canadian solo percussion artist Bev Johnston will present “Fertility Rites,” for solo marimba and pre-recorded audio, by Christos Hatzis.

The recordings used in this piece are all field recordings Hatzis made of female Inuit throat singing while he was on location (Baffin Island in arctic Canada) for musical/documentary projects in association with CBC Radio. Hatzis explains: “Throat songs were originally a fertility ritual, a shamanistic mating call which the women performed while the men were out hunting. [In ‘Fertility Rites’] their sexual sug-



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gestiveness is enhanced by electronic processing or through juxtaposing the songs against other types of amorous music stylistically more familiar to the listener, such as the ‘French-sounding’ second movement or the tango-like music of the third. In the end, both inner and outer worlds merge into uninhibited abandon and celebration of sexuality and life.” (Hatzis)

Regarding the unusual juxtapositions of musics of different cultures in this piece, Johnston says, “It doesn’t seem at all odd that Christos, a Greek immigrant, traveled to Baffin Island in the Arctic, recorded the sound of the Inuit throat singers, and somehow magically mixed the woody sound of the marimba with the guttural sounds of the throat singers and, of course, added influences of romanticism and his own Greek heritage into the mix. I come from a city where this is almost expected!”

Dane Richeson and Juilliard pianist Brent Funderburk will close the first concert with Tania Leon’s “a la Par.” Leon is a well-known contemporary classical composer of Cuban heritage who has integrated the sounds and rhythms of her native island in a deep and subtle manner. Of “a la Par,” she writes, “It is my first attempt to express the dichotomy between the folk-music traditions of my native Cuba and the classical European training I received at the Havana Conservatory. Think of it like the rails of a train. In the distance they look like one. And as they come toward you, they are in sync; if they take a curve, they take it together.”

Richeson concurs: “Anyone who is familiar with Afro-Cuban music and/or has spent time in Cuba will most definitely hear Tania’s Cuban roots in this exciting and very angular contemporary composition.”

CONCERT 2
4°E–94°E
11:00 A.M.–12:00 P.M.



Central and Eastern Africa, Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, India

Performer	Piece	Composer
Don Nichols	Another Border Crossing	Don Nichols
Proper Glue	New Work	Martin Scherzinger
Andrew Spencer	Jose/BeFORe JOHN ⁵	Aurél Holló
UW-Madison Perc. Ens.	Concerto for Darrabukka	Anthony Di Sanza

Composer/performer Don Nichols presents his own “Another Border Crossing,” for Persian tombak and pre-recorded audio. Given the current political unrest in Iran, this work is timely and offers a different perspective on Iranian media; the audio in the work is culled from a contemporary Iranian television news broadcast. “Television news is an important lens through which people around the world view and interpret each other and themselves. In ‘Another Border Crossing’ the percussion investigates musical material informed by both the instrument’s cultural history and the speaking style cultivated by newscasters. In particular, the soloist directly ‘translates’ the speech of the newscaster to the drum, with special attention given to the accurate rhythmic reproduction of his delivery.”

The Proper Glue Duo, Steve and Melanie Sehman, will present the world premiere of a new work by Martin Scherzinger. Born and raised in South Africa, Scherzinger is a gifted musicologist and mbira expert. His understanding of a variety of traditional instruments from around southern Africa informs his theoretical writings, his teaching, and his compositions. Proper Glue studies mbira with Scherzinger at the Eastman School of Music, and their collaboration is bound to yield excellent and exciting results.

Scherzinger offers the following about his compositional intentions: “I see no point in westernizing African music. I want to achieve the reverse by introducing some strictly non-Western aspects of African music into the context of a European instrumentarium: an anti-hierarchic distribution of parts, interlocking techniques, shifting downbeats, largely non-functional harmony, open forms, extremely fast tempi and slow ones; non-developmental use of repetition, contrasting and irregular patterning, tone color, energy and exuberance.”

Andrew Spencer and Trio Central from Central Michigan University will perform “Jose/beFORe JOHN⁵” by Amadinda Percussion Group member and composer Aurél Holló. Holló reports that it was his goal “to connect traditional percussion cultures to prominent 20th-Century movements.”

Spencer adds, “This work struck me as a relevant, meaningful and joyous contribution to this year’s Focus Day—a work that combines [musical languages from varied cultures]



artistically. The result is a deep, refreshing work whose worth is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Composer/percussionist Anthony Di Sanza will be featured as soloist in his own “Concerto for Darrabukka and Percussion Quartet,” accompanied by the University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate percussion ensemble. Di Sanza says that he owes “an eternal debt of gratitude to the darrabukka, as it sent me in a direction that seems natural and right. Indeed it was the drum, rather than an intellectual curiosity or something else more ‘self’ driven, that served to open the global door for me. I am sure that many percussionists around the world have in personal ways found themselves being led by the drum.”

The darrabukka has taken Di Sanza on a journey that has opened for him the study of its cultural context. “My goals lie in creating something unique and new while respectfully drawing from global percussion cultures. At a time in history when tolerance and understanding of those not like ourselves seems at a minimum, one can hope that the communication, respect and patience we sow as global musicians might one day contribute to the broader global good.”

CONCERT 3
94°E-176°W
1:00-2:15 P.M.



China, Korea, Southeast Asia, Australia

Performer	Piece	Composer
Ohio U. Perc. Ens.	Contrast	Dong Wook Park
Stuart Gerber	Ladrang Kampung	Steven Everett
Li Lin	Gong Fu (Kung Fu)	Wen DeQing
Percussion Group Cincinnati	Drama	Guo WenJing

Roger Braun and the Ohio University Percussion Ensemble will perform Korean composer Dong Wook Park’s “Contrast.” The title alludes to the juxtaposition and intermingling of multiple elements within.

Braun elaborates, “Park’s piece directly brings together two musical traditions that originally operated separately in his musical life: traditional Korean percussion of his youth and homeland and the western percussion of his American conservatory training in the late 1960s. This work creates a medium wherein these two separate musical traditions coexist and enhance each other, creating a new musical expression that did not exist previously. Since this piece is from 1976 it also makes it clear that while globalization is currently a real driving force, it is not new. The history of our instrument really has always been about this theme, and this is how percussion has evolved.”

Stuart Gerber and flutist Sarah Kruser-Ambrose present Steve Everett’s “Ladrang Kampung.” Taken from Everett’s larger shadow play, *KAM*, the work is a traditional setting of the Javanese gamelan cyclical form *ladrang* set within a framework of cutting-edge, real-time computer processing of both audio and video. Everett will be on hand to control all things digital using the KYMA interactive media system. Gerber says that this work is “an attempt at encouraging the growth of the [traditional] art form through the utilization of contemporary technology.”

Li Lin, who is Associate Professor of Percussion at Fuzhou Normal University, will perform Chinese composer Wen DeQing’s “Kung Fu” for solo multi-percussionist. The virtuosic work combines strong elements of European avant-garde musical language with traditional Chinese percussion instruments and their associated rhythms and oral traditions. For many years, Wen lived and worked in Geneva, Switzerland, before taking his current post at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music.

Wen writes, “Kung Fu translates as skill, virtuosity, and technique. There are two types of kung fu, one soft (yin) and one hard (yang). The most significant element of kung fu is the ts’i (chi). This composition is inspired by typical sonorities of my native land and the powerful physical impressions, both internal and external, of Kung Fu.”

Over the past few years, many have had the opportunity to travel to China. The growing prominence of China on the international stage, in large part because of its sheer size and its economic might, has made this so. Its pull is magnetic. Whether intentionally or not, it seems inevitable that we “follow the money.” How much more interesting, then, is the fact that Percussion Group Cincinnati has been involved with composers from China since the mid-1970s. Allen Otte explained how this came to pass: “Nixon in China. The year is 1973, and the tom-toms and tam tams followed soon thereafter. The collection of drums we’ve used for all of our Cage and Harrison performances ever since came directly to us from China in the mid-’70s. It took a bit longer for the new percussion music to arrive.



“The first group of post-Cultural Revolution Chinese composers is known in China as ‘The 5th Generation,’ and they are quite a famous collection of musicians. Most of them were friends, studying together in the Central Conservatory in Beijing after returning from being ‘sent down to countryside,’ as Qu Xiao-song would always say, during the Cultural Revolution. In addition to Guo, whom we brought to this country to work with us on the piece we’d commissioned, Xiao-song wrote a number of pieces for us during the ten years he lived in New York, and we’ve done all of Tan Dun’s various water pieces. Other successful classmates and peers of these composers include Chen Yi, Chen Qi-gong (head of music for the Beijing Olympics), and Bright Sheng.”

PNG will perform Guo WenJing’s “Drama,” which was written in collaboration with the trio.

CONCERT 4
176°–86° W
2:30–3:30 P.M.



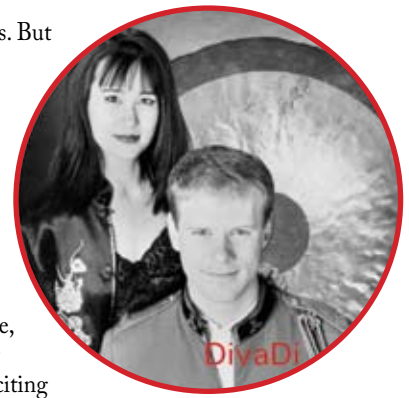
Western North America, Central America

Performer	Piece	Composer
David Carlisle (DivaDi)	Mad Cow	David Carlisle
Alex Harmon	Prime Ordinals	Jim Casella
Mike Truesdell	Hard-Boiled Capitalism	Ben Wahlund
Heather Sloan	The Ice Box Tarantella	Roland Kniese
John Lane	Nana and Victorio	Peter Garland
NIU Percussion Ensemble	Repercussio	Alexandre Lunsqui

On the homestretch, as it were, the final concert of the first part of this year’s Focus Day encompasses works that are being created and/or

championed in the United States. But even these works reveal multiple streams of influences and ideas, and it is encouraging to find that many of the performers on this program, involved in either composition or collaboration, are among the youngest players of the day’s events.

DivaDi (Adrienne Park, piano/percussion and David Carlisle, percussion/composition) present Carlisle’s “Mad Cow.” In this exciting percussion duo, David has fused influences of North Indian tabla drumming, 1960s bebop drumming, and the instrumental music of the Batak people from Northern Sumatra. Carlisle speaks of tension and release, drawing parallels between the North Indian tabla compositions known as *tihai* and the rhythmic interplay between drummer Tony Williams and pianist Herbie Hancock—setting up expectations through highly syncopated rhythmic patterns and then fulfilling or defying expectations with phrase resolutions that push beyond barlines. In “Mad Cow,” the instrumentation is also a fusion and assimilation, using the “stuff” of multiple percussion (metal pipes, ceramic bowls, Chinese cymbals, African djembe and shells, octobans, etc.) in the “style” and setup arrangement of Batak drumming (player one) and bebop drumming (player two). What is the result of this incredible collection of influences? *Eclectic electric.*



Alex Harmon presents a new work for djembe and electronics that he developed in collaboration with well-known composer/arranger Jim Casella. Delay lines as well as pre-recorded elements make this work an engaging and attractive new addition to the repertoire for djembe in a solo context. Harmon reports his enthusiasm and excitement for being involved in the creation of new repertoire for percussion solo, utilizing the djembe in new and creative ways.



Another young performer, Mike Truesdell, will present a solo work for vibraphone by composer Ben Wahlund. The lengthy title, “Hard Boiled Capitalism and the Day Mr. Friedman Noticed Google is a Verb,” is a nod to two authors named Friedman: Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), which discusses the role of economic capitalism in liberal society from what is now termed a “neo-con” perspective, and Thomas Friedman’s *The World is Flat* (2005), which expounds upon the development of Google and the leveling of the playing field by instant access to information around the globe.

Reflecting on both the current availability of knowledge via the Internet as well as the current economic climate, Wahlund decided to write for vibraphone alone in an effort to “compose within one’s means.” Truesdell comments upon both the celebratory and anxious sides of the coin of the current information age: “The increasing ease with which we can disseminate our ideas (blogs), ourselves (video conferencing), and our art (real-time webcasts) has allowed the world to be more



open, driven and peaceful; however, the ease of this Internet-based society can be easily misused. This is one of the primary foci of Thomas Friedman in his book. Wahlund captures the essence of both the peaceful, open, and free society, as well as the reckless misuse of these technological developments through long, sustained, pedal tone sections [that become] bursting flourishes of crunching dissonance.”



A specialist of an instrument from the Caribbean, the marimbula, Heather Sloan will offer the world premiere of a new work by composer Roland Kniese, “The Ice Box Taranatella.” “In my work to promote the creation of new music for marimbula,” Sloan explained, “I presume that first, we are shaped by our cultures and inextricably bound to them. Such a framework provides us our original tastes and assumptions—in short, who we are. Second, as we are increasingly exposed to other cultures, we desire to experience the unknown: who we are *not*. In my career I have focused much of my attention on music of the Dominican Republic. I will never be Dominican, but intensive work with Dominican musicians has shaped my musical worldview, and I hope my Dominican counterparts have gained something as well.

“Our inquiries into globalization and technology as they pertain to artistic production naturally raise questions of economics and access to resources,” Sloan continued. “Ideally, the universe of musical exchange would be morally self-correcting; all interactions would occur with respect and fairness. Historically, of course, this has not always been the case, although I believe there is a growing awareness of a need for such an environment.”



John Lane is an expert on the music of American composer Peter Garland, whose quote began this article. Lane will present Garland’s “Nana and Victorio,” a work richly influenced by the music and history of the Native American Apache. Setting texts by Edward Dorn against a sonic backdrop that evokes Native American music, Garland seeks to bring to life the struggle of the Apache for their “way of life against the U.S. government around the turn of the 20th century.”

Lane explains why the work carries significance: “Many American percussionists can discuss at length the percussive traditions and histories of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Indonesia, even explaining how they have impacted or developed our current instruments and art. However, when it comes to Native American music and the variety of percussive wealth in Native American cultures, most of us draw a total blank.”

According to Garland, “Nana and Victorio” starts from the premise that multiculturalism starts at home. In a country whose cultural and political origins are founded on migrations, slavery, and genocide, this fact has often been ignored or suppressed. This has



been especially the case in terms of the original Americans, the ones who came here millennia ago. For many more recently transplanted Americans—a matter of mere centuries—this culture remains truly ‘exotic.’ So ‘Nana and Victorio’ may be described as a case of ‘think locally, act globally.’”

The Northern Illinois University percussion ensemble will end the first part of Focus Day with a performance of “Repercussio,” a sextet for the Afro-Brazilian berimbau by Brazilian composer Alexandre Lunsqui. The berimbau is an instrument connected to the Afro-Brazilian martial art known as *Capoeira Angola*, and in this most traditional context it is performed in a consort of three instruments (along with a host of other percussion instruments) to accompany the *capoeiristas* in the ring of the game. Interestingly, in Africa the instrument is played primarily as a solo instrument whereas the Brazilian tradition of performing with three berimbaus represents a merging of multiple African cultures. The instrument is of Bantu origin, while the familial concept of three instruments together is Yoruban or, more broadly, West African (e.g. Afro-Cuban *batá* and *rumba* styles).

The idea to double the number of instruments to six developed in connection with two models in mind: the strings of a guitar and the European percussion sextet tradition begun by groups like Les Percussions de Strassbourg and Kroumata. What makes Lunsqui’s music unique is the manner in which the berimbaus are tuned harmoniously as a single unit, as well as the spirit of exploration for new sounds and timbres that Lunsqui embraces as a composer steeped in the European avant-garde tradition.

Through his music, Lunsqui embraces multiple streams of influence: the traditional folkloric and popular musics of his native Brazil, the improvisatory freedom of American jazz (Lunsqui is an excellent jazz pianist), and the spirit of research for new sonic material espoused by the French avant-garde movement known as the Spectral School. Lunsqui studied at Columbia University with Tristan Murail, among others, earning his doctoral degree “with honors” bestowed upon him for his compositional output to date.

FOCUS DAY 2009, PART 2: LOOKING FOR IT

*The way I see it
Isn't necessarily
The way you see it
Or the way it is
Or ought to be
What's more important
Is that we're all
Looking for it
And a way to see it (Di Nardo)*

If we are each looking for a way in the world, percussion is our chosen tool to light the path forward. What makes percussion beautiful is the never-ending series of possibilities that it offers to us as artists to make new sounds, develop fresh perspectives, and pave new roads forward. Each of the artists featured in the second part of Focus Day 2009 has been steadily developing a new voice in percussion artistry for some time. The level of artistic maturity and creativity that these artists have reached and the underlying principles of self-discipline and dedication to their art can serve as positive inspiration for our society. The music they will present is representative of the divergent possibilities that percussion embodies.

CONCERT 5
4:00–5:30 P.M.

Performer	Piece/ Project	Composer
Payton MacDonald	Super Marimba	Payton MacDonald
Danny Weiss	tintal drumset solo	Weiss/traditional
Clocked Out	Prepared Piano Concerto	Erik Griswold

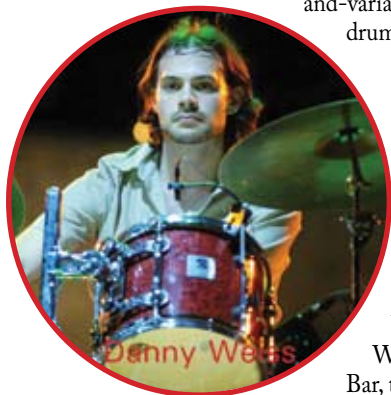
Composer/percussionist Payton MacDonald has developed a unique approach to the solo marimba that is informed by his study of Indian classical rhythm and melody, American minimalism, and very simple electronics. His knowledge merges seamlessly with his unbridled optimism and his infectiously positive spirit and energy in the presentation of *Super Marimba*, a collection of “tunes” that developed out of an improvisational approach.



Payton
MacDonald

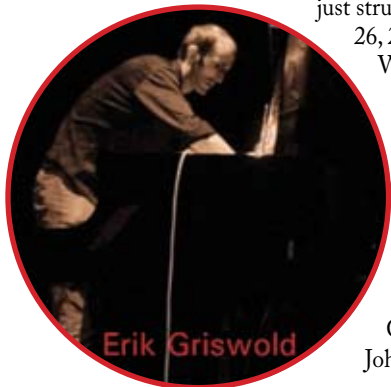
Super Marimba is the nexus point of all of my artistic activities,” says MacDonald. “Here I combine my study of tabla drumming, Western classical composition, and jazz improvisation. All of my *Super Marimba* compositions are notated, but the pieces include improvisation. Sometimes the improvisation is free and spontaneous, but more often it is of a unique sort that I have developed over the past couple of years, based on the kaida/palta theme-and-variation processes used in tabla drumming.” (MacDonald)

Jazz drummer Danny Weiss finds similar inspiration in the rhythmic practice of classical Hindustani music. Weiss has systematically adapted the classical approach of tabla performance to the jazz drumkit. On a personal note, I will never forget the first time I witnessed Weiss performing this project. Walking into New York City’s 55 Bar, the place was packed with people waiting in anticipation. I found myself sitting on a barstool next to Nora Jones (granddaughter of Ravi Shankar). When Weiss took the stage, he began by dedicating his performance to the victims of the devastating tsunami that had just struck Southeast Asia (December 26, 2004). It was clear even then that Weiss thinks very little about himself and rather considers himself a vehicle through which music can connect distant worlds. Weiss played continuously for over an hour, offering some of the most sensitive yet blistering and awe-inspiring drumming I have ever witnessed. Glancing into the audience, I saw John Riley sitting at a table a few



Danny Weiss

Erik Griswold is inspired by the music of Electric Kulintang featuring New York City-based percussionists Susie Ibarra and Roberto Rodriguez. Ibarra, a native of the Philippines, and Rodriguez, a native Cuban, bring their rich cultural backgrounds to their drumset playing and beyond. They have each won prestigious awards and accolades in their own right for a diverse series of individual projects, and together they form Electric Kulintang.



Erik Griswold

feet back. He was, as is his wont, transcribing some of Danny’s ideas on a bar napkin. Something special was clearly happening that night.

Weiss is humbly understated about his endeavors. “Since I have been studying tabla for the past twelve years I have made an effort to incorporate the rhythms of Hindustani music into my drumset playing,” he says. “As time goes on and my relationship to drums and tabla gets deeper, I find myself trying to bridge a musical as well as cultural gap. I strongly believe that I have a duty to be the best musician I can be in order to be the best person I can be. I practice very intensely to transform my being and, in turn, transform others. That is the best I can hope to do in this lifetime.

“I will be performing tabla repertoire that has been handed down from my guru, Pandit Samir Chatterjee, on the drumset. The solo will be presented in the traditional classical manner. I have adapted the compositions to the drumset to the best of my ability in order to bring out the essence of the tabla. In turn, a new language—one that works for my needs—has been born.”

Closing this program is the performance ensemble, Clocked Out Duo (Vanessa Tomlinson and Erik Griswold) joined by Queensland Conservatorium students Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, Cameron Kennedy and Stephanie Mudford presenting Erik Griswold’s “Concerto for Prepared Piano and Percussion.” “The ‘Concerto’ mingles sounds and objects from everyday life with techniques and ideas spanning from John Cage’s early prepared piano experiments to Ross Bolleter’s ‘Ruined Pianos’ of outback Australia,” he says. “A fairly compact percussion quartet—comprised of glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, drums, and cymbals—is augmented by natural and found objects such as stones, ceramic bowls, and suspension springs, as well as toy instruments. This combines with the prepared and ‘retuned’ piano to create an unreal hybrid, folk-like sound.

“Rhythms from my everyday life found their way into the composition—for example, the heavy breathing and pounding footsteps of a run through the mangroves, or the quirky syncopation of a car door falling shut. Other sounds that surface from my past include hypnotic, trance-like ocean waves, the mechanical tinkling of miniature music boxes, and a somewhat skewed Batucada band.”

EVENING CONCERT
8:00–10:00 P.M.

Performer
Electric Kulintang featuring Susie Ibarra and Roberto Rodriguez
Julie Spencer and Gernot Blume
Vanessa Tomlinson

The evening program begins with a set of compositions by Electric Kulintang featuring New York City-based percussionists Susie Ibarra and Roberto Rodriguez. Ibarra, a native of the Philippines, and Rodriguez, a native Cuban, bring their rich cultural backgrounds to their drumset playing and beyond. They have each won prestigious awards and accolades in their own right for a diverse series of individual projects, and together they form Electric Kulintang.

“The music of Electric Kulintang is inspired to create modern folklore,” says Rodriguez. “We are contemporary artists who also at times work with indigenous artists and art forms. I find there is a deep connection, if we look for it, in the preservation of tradition and creation of new music. From our epics and legacies that pass on in



Susie Ibarra
& Roberto
Rodriguez



music, the transformation of culture is essential to our existence.”

Ibarra relates a personal story that lends insight into her musical convictions: “Four years ago I was walking with my husband outside a temple on the streets of Bangkok. I heard and saw a Thai woman singing on the street. She did not have any eyes. She sang beautifully, drawing us into her intimate world, yet to most people she was invisible. I told this story to my dear friend, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa, and he remarked, ‘It’s amazing what we do to make ourselves feel whole.’



“As an artist, I often find myself walking in a fragmented world with musical sounds that are fragile and endangered. To make myself whole, I have been walking both back into my roots—the indigenous and folkloric music of the Philippines—and into a world of imagination and dreams.

This route has brought me to focus on creating and performing contemporary folkloric music that shares human experiences as well as abstract beauty. Electric Kulintang expresses this through sonic landscapes of percussion, kulintang (Philippine gongs), vocals, and electronics.”

Marimbist/composer/improviser Julie Spencer and her husband, pianist/composer Gernot Blume, will play a series of six works, many of which will be premiere performances. Spencer’s background is highly varied and deep, including intensive training in marimba, world music studies (Ghanaian drumming and dance, Balinese and Javanese gamelan, North Indian tabla and sargam singing), jazz improvisation, and composition. “These broad influences persist in revealing themselves in ever changing ways through the music that continues to emerge and develop,” she says. “I am grateful for these experiences of other cultures shaping my life, world view, social conscience, and music. To quote Italian filmmaker Roberto Benigni, ‘with a green horse, a sense of humor, a gentle heart, and a little imagination, *la vita e bella*—life is beautiful’.”

“Ecstatic Sunlight on the Mountain Snow” is a one-movement concerto for solo marimba and percussion quartet. The title is meant to evoke brilliance and high energy. Spencer suggests, “Think of the brilliant energy of high-altitude sunlight reflected vividly in prismatic colors by ice crystals on a mountain peak turning into visible sound.”

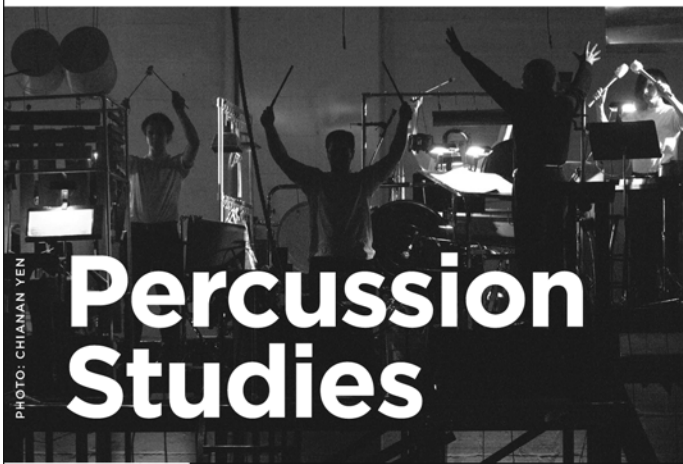
“Soulhouse Speak” is one movement in Spencer’s *Soulhouse* series. The work is for solo marimba and percussion quintet. “The music is dedicated to the inner voice that urges us to articulate our existence with creative gestures of individuality. ‘Souhouse’ is who we are, all living things. We contain within our soul’s house the truth that Antoine de St. Exupery expressed in his story about the Little Prince: ‘What is essential is invisible to the eye’.” On both of these works, Spencer will be accompanied by Dane Richeson and LUPE (the Lawrence University Percussion Ensemble).

Other works will include “Waterfalls,” originally for marimba concerto and presented at Focus Day as a marimba/piano duet; “Almost 5 A.M.,” a “module for varying improvisatory realizations”; and “New Music for Duets,” which features Spencer and Blume on a whole host of musical instruments and explores “an expression of the soul mediated through a language of the intellect, made possible by an openness of heart. Music is a perpetual process of redefinition.”

One final work of note on the Spencer/Blume set is “Choir of An-

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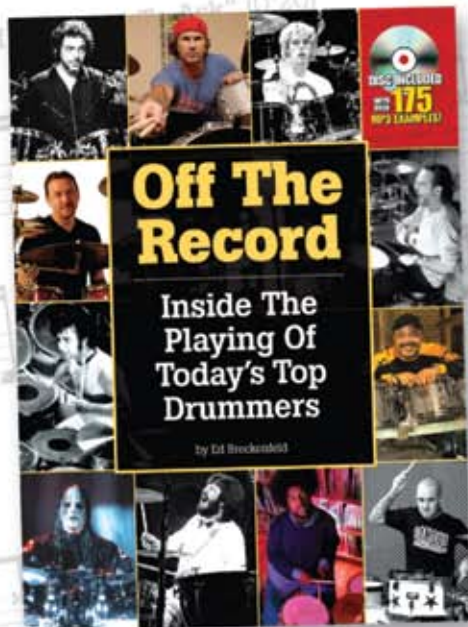
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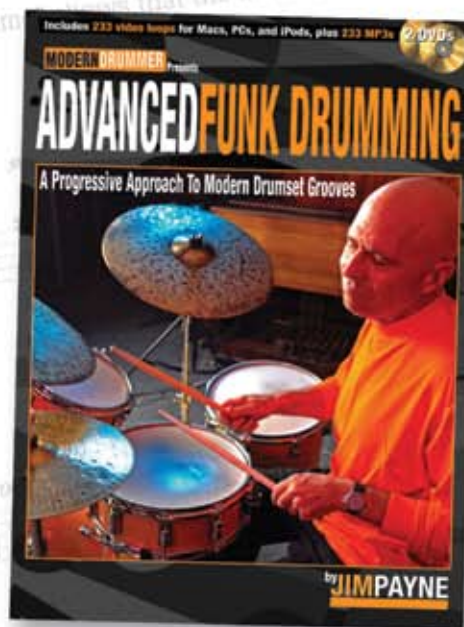


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gels” for a very special instrument, the bowed glass marimba. This work was created and recorded as part of a commission from the city of Bingen, Germany, to foster new music based on the writings of the medieval visionary Hildegard von Bingen. The title of the piece is taken from a text in which Hildegard described masses of angels singing together serenely in rows of perfect concentric circles around a center filled with

deep blues, radiant yellow, and warm red colors—the wings of angels, which she called “Chöre der Engel.”

Focus Day 2009 will end with a coda-like closing performance by Australian percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson. “Spill,” by Erik Griswold, merges “music and kinetic sculpture,” Tomlinson explains. “A large cone-shaped pendulum swings through the performance space, slowly spilling out 20 kilos of rice grains. The solo performer humbly offers bowls, temple bells, rice paper, and other sounding materials in a play of textures and unexpected rhythms. In a simple and elegant gesture the percussionist does not strike the instruments, but puts forward objects to be sounded, synthesizing diverse historical and cultural influences including Dada (Marcel Duchamp’s kinetic sculptures and *Anemic Cinema*), Sichuan culture, the Cage school, and minimalism (Reich’s ‘Pendulum Music’). This exploration of sound, and culmination of diverse influences is elemental to my work. The reflection of culture in communities, in compositions, and through improvisation drives my art forward—beyond percussion, beyond musical genre, toward collective awakening of the ears and spirit.”

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Greg Beyer, second-prize winner of the 2002 Geneva International Solo Percussion Competition, has given solo performances and master classes throughout the United States, Europe, South America, and in China. Of primary importance to him is his project *Arcomusical*, dedicated to the advancement of the berimbau in contemporary music. Beyer is a founding member of the flute/percussion duo Due East, which recently won the 2008 National Flute Association Chamber Music Competition and whose first CD release, *Simultaneous Worlds*, will be available in the fall of 2009. He is an Assistant Professor of Percussion in the School of Music at Northern Illinois University and is the host of PASIC Focus Day 2009. PN

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