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Mind Out of Matter by Scott Johnson

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

World Premiere!

Scott Johnson | Alarm Will Sound

Mind Out of Matter

Composer **Scott Johnson**

Based on the voice and ideas of **Daniel C. Dennett**

Performed by **Alarm Will Sound**
Artistic Director and Conductor **Alan Pierson**

Erin Lesser, flute, piccolo
Christa Robinson, oboe
Alex Hamlin, clarinet, saxophone
Elisabeth Stimpert, clarinets
Gina Cuffari, bassoon
Matt Marks, French horn
Mike Gurfield, trumpet
Michael Clayville, trombone
John Orfe, piano, keyboard
Chris Thompson, percussion
Matt Smallcomb, percussion
Ben Russell, violin
Caleb Burhans, violin, electric guitar
Nadia Sirota, viola
Stefan Freund, cello
Logan Coale, double bass, electric bass
Gavin Chuck, Managing Director
Jason Varvaro, Production Manager

Program

Mind Out of Matter
Cow Design
Invisible Agents
Winners
Good for Itself
Stewards
Surrender
Awe

The creation of *Mind Out of Matter* was supported by New Music USA and the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature, with additional production support from Peak Performances @ Montclair State (NJ).

Duration: 1 hour 15 minutes, no intermission.

In consideration of both audience and performers, please turn off all electronic devices. The taking of photographs or videos and the use of recording equipment are not permitted. No food or drink is permitted in the theater.

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Montclair State's **Office of Arts & Cultural Programming (ACP)** presents and produces leading artists of the world in dance, music, theater, and opera. Under its signature series Peak Performances, ACP has produced works such as *Zinnias: The Life of Clementine Hunter* by Robert Wilson, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshie Reagon, and Jacqueline Woodson; *Dog Days* by David T. Little and Royce Vavrek; Harry Partch's *Oedipus*; and Ridge Theater's *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* by David Lang. In addition, ACP has commissioned works by Bill T. Jones, Kronos Quartet, Jan Fabre, Liz Lerman, Wayne McGregor, Laurie Anderson, Romeo Castellucci, Richard Alston, Susan Marshall, Fred Hersch, and David Gordon.

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Alexander Kasser Theater

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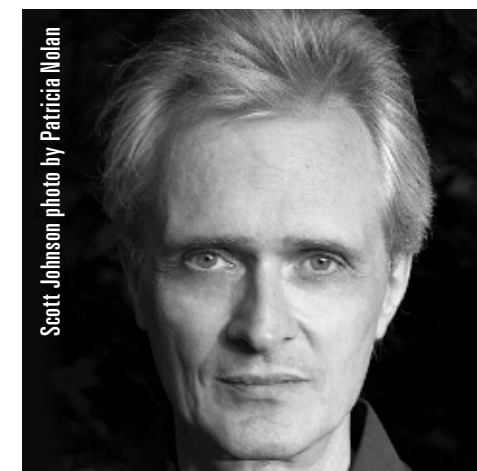
THE 2014-15 SEASON



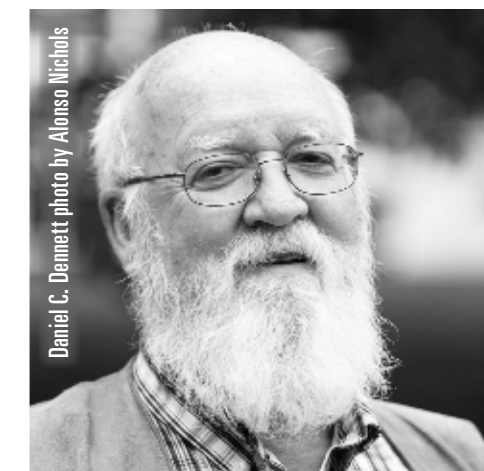
World Premiere!

Scott Johnson | Alarm Will Sound

Mind Out of Matter



Scott Johnson photo by Patricia Nolan



Daniel C. Dennett photo by Alonso Nichols



Alarm Will Sound photo by Michael Reamus

October 4 & 5, 2014

Alexander Kasser Theater



MONTCLAIR STATE
UNIVERSITY



Program Notes

Using melodies and rhythms derived directly from philosopher Daniel C. Dennett's recorded voice, *Mind Out of Matter* traces his view of the Darwinian life of ideas. Just as living creatures evolve in the physical environment, so do ideas and traditions mutate and compete within ecosystems made up of human minds and cultures. They populate our brains, multiply within our societies, and spread like viruses—sometimes to our benefit, sometimes not.

The main source for this work is *Breaking the Spell (Religion as a Natural Phenomenon)*. Here Dennett extended Darwinian principles into the realm of belief itself, connecting the biological origins of human consciousness and civilization with the religious traditions that claim to explain them. The human brain is nature's greatest causality detector, and the enormous advantage provided by its ability to understand and predict events has flooded the planet with us, our works, and our plant and animal symbiotes. But that brain is still prone to false positives. We are capable of discovering our origins in the physical universe, and also of inventing supernatural stories when reality seems too complex, mysterious, or unfair. But even when in error, something rather amazing is going on.

This piece employs “speech music” techniques devised for my 1980–82 work *John Somebody*, where I first used the melodies of spoken words as the basis for an accompanying instrumental score. I write down the approximate pitch of each syllable, set each phrase within a rhythmically compatible tempo, and then organize the harmonies of the work around those speech melodies. Instruments might clearly imitate a phrase or depart toward a more abstract relationship—but always in directions suggested by the speech melody.

While working on *How It Happens*, written for the Kronos Quartet with the recorded voice of crusading journalist I. F. Stone, I found myself thinking about a shared liberal assumption: that human history shows a gradual moral evolution, from purely familial and tribal loyalties toward a gradual widening of the circle of inclusion. How true is this? I began to investigate Darwinian thought, and one of the first places I turned was Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*.

I was immediately struck by the explanatory power of applying Darwinian principles to the realm of ideas, traditions, and technologies—all evolving and competing for space in their natural ecosystems of human minds. This “meme's-eye

view” lent clarity to the jumble of competing genres and colliding traditions that musicians must navigate, as well as the powerful loyalties and aversions people feel toward musical styles—expressions of both their individuality and their group affiliation. These observations led to an extended essay, “The Counterpoint of Species,” which I eventually sent to Professor Dennett. By then, I had heard his voice in interviews. Lively and engaging speakers share common features: wide intervals, emphatic rhythmic accents, expressive tempo variations, and resolution to a stable low note to convey certainty. Dennett's voice does all that and more—he occasionally unconsciously outlines a major triad, or uses a startling tritone interval when saying something startling. Making this piece seemed obvious.

Much of natural and cultural evolution occurs by repurposing existing structures. Feathers evolved for insulation but were re-engineered for flight, and Turkish military percussionists marching toward Vienna did not imagine that Beethoven would someday appropriate their sounds to celebrate universality. Origins do not determine outcomes. Dennett's ideas suggested a rock-inflected score that reflects the adaptive strategies of the evolutionary process, which doesn't care where its raw material comes from. Such openness to popular influence was once an animating principle of the classical tradition, but it was in serious disrepair and disrepute during the heyday of late-20th-century High Modernism, when I was starting out. I found this situation unwelcoming and have spent much of my artistic life entwining the musical DNA of seemingly opposing genres, to better reflect what I actually enjoy about music.

If Darwinian thought makes sense in my own subculture, its usefulness in more momentous issues is no surprise. Metallurgy works, whether one is making a sword, a plowshare, or a trumpet. Religion may no longer be at the center of philosophical debate in the 21st century, but it's still at the center of the news—particularly news about violent conflict. By bringing his expertise as a philosopher of consciousness to bear on a topic sorely in need of calm and scientifically informed thought, Dennett asserts a place for specialists in the broader cultural conversation. But the damage done by supernatural beliefs is not the only reason to pay attention. Once again I find a resonance with my feelings about popular musics—there is something fascinating going on here, whether or not you are part of it. Anything that appears in all human cultures, in forms adapted to local

surroundings, has much to say not only about those particular cultures but also about what it is to be human.

This work hopes to hint at the sense of the sublime available from the unornamented natural world, to contrast modern empirical thought with our ancestors' earliest searches for causality and coherence in a mysterious world, and finally to insist that our capacity for wonder is not dampened by knowledge or facts. Rather, the insights of a scientific worldview enrich our experience by providing keys to the vastness and

About the Artists

Scott Johnson

Scott Johnson has been a pioneering voice in the new relationship being forged between the classical tradition and the popular culture that surrounds it. Since the early 1980s, he has played an influential role in the trend toward incorporating rock-derived instrumentation into traditionally scored compositions and the use of taped, sampled, and MIDI-controlled electronic elements within instrumental ensembles. His music has been heard in performances by the Kronos Quartet, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Bang on a Can All-Stars, and his own ensembles; in dance works performed by the Boston Ballet, London Contemporary Dance Theatre, and Ballets de Monte Carlo; and in Paul Schrader's film *Patty Hearst*. His music has been recorded on the Nonesuch, CRI, Point, and Tzadik labels.

Johnson's scores generally employ both acoustic and electric/electronic instruments, and he has premiered most of his electric guitar writing himself. Compositions that feature sampled voice include the groundbreaking 1982 *John Somebody* as well as *Americans*, *Convertible Debts*, *The Value of People and Things*, and *How It Happens* (commissioned by the Kronos Quartet and based on voice recordings of the late journalist I. F. Stone). Awards include a 2006 Guggenheim Fellowship, a Koussevitzky commission, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and five grants from the New York State Council on the Arts, as well as grants and commission support from Lincoln Center, the Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Fund, the Jerome Foundation, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and the Concert Artists Guild/Mary Flagler Cary Trust. Concert venues for Johnson's own ensembles have included New York City's Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, the Knitting Factory, and The Kitchen as well as concert halls, art museums, and

intricacy of the universe, opening up aesthetic and intellectual vistas that traditional belief systems cannot provide.

Human beings are now a decisive factor in the planetary ecosystem, and understanding the machinery of belief that drives our choices is no longer a matter of pure intellectual curiosity. It is a major evolutionary player—our most carefully considered philosophies and our least-questioned beliefs have equally crucial consequences.

—Scott Johnson, *Composer*

festivals throughout Europe and North America. Johnson's recent concert appearances include Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Japan Society, Lincoln Center Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, Yale University, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's *Great Day in New York* series. Other recent premieres include the Bang on a Can All-Stars at Lincoln Center, the New Millennium Ensemble and Cygnus at Merkin Hall, and Sentieri Selvaggi in Milan. Johnson has also published articles and essays on contemporary music and has lectured at leading conservatories and universities, including San Francisco and Peabody Conservatories, Senzaku Ongaku Daigaku, New York University, Manhattan School of Music, and Yale.

Daniel C. Dennett

Daniel C. Dennett, the author of *Breaking the Spell* (Viking, 2006), *Freedom Evolves* (Viking Penguin, 2003), and *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), is University Professor and Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy and co-director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Tufts University. He lives with his wife in North Andover, MA, and has a daughter, a son, and four grandchildren. He was born in Boston in 1942, the son of a historian by the same name, and received his BA in philosophy from Harvard in 1963. He then went to Oxford to work with Gilbert Ryle, under whose supervision he completed the DPhil in philosophy in 1965. He taught at University of California–Irvine from 1965 to 1971; he then moved to Tufts, where he has taught ever since, aside from periods visiting at Harvard, Pittsburgh, Oxford, the École Normale Supérieure in Paris, the London School of Economics, and the American University of Beirut.

His first book, *Content and Consciousness*, appeared in 1969, followed by *Brainstorms* (1978), *Elbow Room* (1984), *The Intentional*

Stance (1987), *Consciousness Explained* (1991), *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995), *Kinds of Minds* (1996), and *Brainchildren: A Collection of Essays 1984–1996* (MIT Press and Penguin, 1998). *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* was published in 2005 by MIT Press. He co-edited *The Mind's I* with Douglas Hofstadter in 1981. He is the author of over 400 scholarly articles on various aspects of the mind, published in journals ranging from *Artificial Intelligence* and *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* to *Poetics Today* and the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. His most recent books are *Intuition Pumps and Other Tools for Thinking* (Norton, 2013) and, with Linda LaScola, *Caught in the Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind* (Amazon.com, 2013).

Dennett gave the John Locke Lectures at Oxford in 1983, the Gavin David Young Lectures at the University of Adelaide, Australia, in 1985, and the Tanner Lecture at the University of Michigan in 1986, among many others. He has received two Guggenheim Fellowships, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Science. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1987. He was co-founder (in 1985) and co-director of the Curricular Software Studio at Tufts and has helped to design museum exhibits on computers for the Smithsonian Institution, the Museum of Science in Boston, and the Computer Museum in Boston.

After more than 40 summers hobby farming in Maine, he is selling his farm and moving to a house on an island in Maine, where he can continue his sailing and maybe resume his sculpting.

Alarm Will Sound

Alarm Will Sound is a 20-member band committed to innovative performances and recordings of today's music. They have established a reputation for performing demanding music with energetic skill. Their performances have been described as “equal parts exuberance, nonchalance, and virtuosity” by the *Financial Times* of London and as “a triumph of ensemble playing” by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The *New York Times* says that Alarm Will Sound is “one of the most vital and original ensembles on the American music scene.”

The versatility of Alarm Will Sound allows it to take on music from a wide variety of styles. Its repertoire ranges from European to American works, from the arch-modernist to the pop-influenced. Alarm Will Sound has been associated since its inception with composers at the forefront of contemporary music, premiering pieces by John Adams, Steve Reich, David Lang, Michael Gordon, Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Aaron Jay Kernis, Augusta Read Thomas, Derek Bermel, Benedict

Mason, and Wolfgang Rihm, among others. The group itself includes many composer-performers, which allows for an unusual degree of insight into the creation and performance of new work.

Alarm Will Sound is the resident ensemble at the Mizzou International Composers Festival. Held each July at the University of Missouri in Columbia, the festival features eight world premieres by emerging composers. During the weeklong festival, these composers work closely with Alarm Will Sound and two established guest composers to perform and record their new work.

Alarm Will Sound may be heard on eight recordings. *Radio Rewrite*, their release on Nonesuch, is the world-premiere recording of Steve Reich's newest work for large ensemble, based on the music of Radiohead. *Canzonas Americanas*, their release on Cantaloupe, features music by Derek Bermel, whose eclectic approach draws on the musical traditions of Europe, North and South America, and Africa. Their genre-bending, critically acclaimed *Acoustica* features live-performance arrangements of music by electronica guru Aphex Twin. This unique project taps the diverse talents within the group, from the many composers who made arrangements of the original tracks to the experimental approaches developed by the performers.

In 2010, the group developed and performed the Dirty Projectors' *The Getty Address* in its new identity as a live performance piece at Lincoln Center, Disney Hall, and the Barbican. Music that Dirty Projectors front-man David Longstreth created on a computer by meticulous and complicated sampling, looping, and layering is translated and arranged by Matt Marks, Alan Pierson, and Chris Thompson for 23 musicians of both bands.

In 2011, after three years of development, Alarm Will Sound presented *1969*, a multimedia work using music, action, image, and text to tell a story about great musicians—John Lennon, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, and Leonard Bernstein—and their responses to the social, political, and creative tumult of the late 1960s. Alarm Will Sound were artists-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2013–14.

Members of the ensemble began playing together while studying at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. With diverse experience in composition, improvisation, jazz and popular styles, early music, and world musics, they bring intelligence and a sense of adventure to all their performances. alarmwillsound.com

Alarm Will Sound thanks The Aaron Copland Fund for Music and the BMI Foundation, Inc.