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Bringing Down the Stars and Moving Them Around

Office of Arts + Cultural Programming

PEAK Performances at Montclair State University

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PROGRAM NOTES

CENK ERGÜN (b. 1978)
Proximity (2009)

Proximity was premiered by Sō Percussion at the MATA Festival, 2009.

proximity of attack to attack
proximity of attack to decay
proximity of decay to decay
proximity of frequency to frequency
proximity of reiteration to reiteration
proximity of microphone to monitor
proximity of microphone to instrument
proximity of instrument to monitor
proximity of instrument to instrument
proximity of instrument to player
proximity of player to microphone
proximity of player to monitor
proximity of player to player
proximity of player to listener
proximity of listener to instrument
proximity of listener to microphone
proximity of listener to monitor
proximity of listener to listener
proximity of proximity to proximity

—Cenk Ergün

A native of Turkey, Cenk Ergün is a San Francisco–based composer and improviser. Ergün has received performances of his chamber music by artists including Sō Percussion, Alarm Will Sound, Janus, and cellist Joan Jeanrenaud at events including the MATA Festival, the Bang on a Can Marathon, and John Schaefer’s *New Sounds Live*. Using the software instrument of his own design to process instruments such as a modified autoharp, a 1930s Victrola, a circuit-bent 1980s Touch & Tell, and audio samples ranging from the cries of a dying goat to a malfunctioning faucet, Ergün performs solo and alongside video artists, dancers, and musicians including Fred Frith, Alvin Curran, and Molissa Fenley. In 2009 he released two solo electronic records, *08081208* and *Çal*.

IANNIS XENAKIS (1922–2001)
Pléiades (1978)

Pléiades was premiered in May 1979 at the Opera du Rhin by Les Percussions de Strasbourg. The American premiere was in 1981 at The Oberlin Conservatory of Music by the Oberlin Percussion Group.

Iannis Xenakis is famous for his complex theories and mathematically derived compositional techniques—his monumental percussion sextet *Pléiades* is a virtuosic display of those skills. But he was also a student revolutionary during World War II, the survivor of a traumatic and disfiguring mortar blast.

Xenakis wrote about the impersonal and beautiful violence of nature. In a remarkable demonstration of artistic will, he also converted his own experiences with human violence into a resource for musical expression. Although the following excerpt from his treatise “Formalized Music” doesn’t fully encapsulate *Pléiades*, it is an inspiring glimpse into Xenakis’s aesthetic world, at once both abstract and deeply personal:

“Everyone has observed the sonic phenomena of a political crowd of dozens or hundreds of thousands of people. The human river shouts a slogan in a uniform rhythm. Then another slogan springs from the head of the demonstration; it spreads towards the tail, replacing the first. A wave of transition thus passes from the head to the tail. The clamor fills the city, and the inhibiting force of voice and rhythm reaches a climax. It is an event of great power and beauty in its ferocity. Then the impact between the demonstrators and the enemy occurs. The perfect rhythm of the last slogan breaks up in a huge cluster of chaotic shouts, which also spreads to the tail. Imagine, in addition, the reports of dozens of machine guns and the whistle of bullets adding their punctuations to this total disorder. The crowd is then rapidly dispersed, and after sonic and visual hell follows a detonating calm, full of despair, dust, and death. The statistical laws of these events, separated from their political or moral context, are the same as those of the cicadas or the rain. They are the laws of the passage from complete order to total disorder in a continuous or explosive manner. They are stochastic laws.”

—Adam Sliwinski

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sō Percussion

Since 1999, Sō Percussion has been creating music that explores all the extremes of emotion and musical possibility. It has not been an easy music to define. Called an “experimental powerhouse” by the *Village Voice*, “astonishing and entrancing” by *Billboard Magazine*, and “brilliant” by *The New York Times*, the Brooklyn-based quartet’s innovative work with today’s most exciting composers and their own original music has quickly helped them forge a unique and diverse career.

Although the drum is one of humanity’s most ancient instruments, Europe and America have only recently begun to explore its full potential, aided by explosions of influence and experimentation from around the world. In the 20th century, musical innovators like Edgard Varèse, John Cage, Steve Reich, and Iannis Xenakis brought these instruments out from behind the traditional orchestra and gave them new voice.

It was excitement about these composers and the sheer fun of playing together that inspired the members of Sō to begin performing together while students at the Yale School of Music: Cage’s *Third Construction* wove elaborate rhythmic counterpoint using ordinary objects, while Reich’s *Drumming* harnessed African inspiration to ecstatic effect.

A blind call to David Lang, Pulitzer Prize–winning composer and cofounder of New York’s Bang on a Can Festival, yielded Sō’s first big commissioned piece, *the so-called laws of nature*, which appeared with Evan Ziporyn’s gamelan romp *Melody Competition* on the group’s first album, *Sō Percussion*. In the following years, the thrill of working with amazing composers would yield new pieces by Paul Lansky, Dan Trueman, Steve Reich, Steve Mackey, Fred Frith, and many others.

For its next disc, Sō tackled *Drumming*, one of the first and few percussion pieces of symphonic scope (well over an hour long). A landmark American work, *Drumming* fuses African aesthetics, Western philosophical concepts, and technologically inspired processes in a minimalist masterpiece. In

2010, Sō presented the US premiere of Reich’s new *Mallet Quartet*, written for the group and several other renowned percussion ensembles.

Sō’s third album, *Amid the Noise*, heralded a new direction: original music, written by member Jason Treuting. Eager to expand their palette, the members experimented with glockenspiel, toy piano, vibraphones, bowed marimba, melodica, tuned and prepared pipes, metals, duct tape, a wayward ethernet port, and all kinds of sound programming. The resulting idiosyncratic tone explorations were synchronized to Jenise Treuting’s haunting films of street scenes in Brooklyn and Kyoto. This ongoing work has resulted in exciting new projects such as the site-specific *Music for Trains* in southern Vermont and *Imaginary City*, a sonic meditation on urban soundscapes commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s 2009 Next Wave Festival in consortium with five other venues.

For the past several years, Sō has been joining the electronic duo Matmos for shows around the country and in Europe, exploring the sonic and theatrical possibilities of beer cans, hair clippers, ceramic bowls, and dry ice. This collaboration culminated in *Treasure State*, released on Cantaloupe Music in 2010.

Sō Percussion is becoming increasingly involved in mentoring young artists. Starting in the fall of 2011, its members will be codirectors of a new percussion department at the Bard College Conservatory of Music. This top-flight undergraduate program will enroll each student in a double degree (bachelor of music and bachelor of arts) course in the Conservatory and Bard College and will expose them to both traditional Western conservatory training and a variety of world traditions. The summer of 2009 saw the creation of 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. For their latest festival, the four members of Sō served as faculty in rehearsal, performance, and discussion of contemporary music to 26 students from around the world.

Sō Percussion has performed this unusual and exciting music all over the United States, with concerts at the Lincoln Center Festival, Carnegie Hall, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Stanford Lively Arts, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and many other venues. In addition, recent tours to Russia, Australia, Italy, Germany, Spain, and the Ukraine have brought the group international acclaim. Sō won second prize overall and the Concerto Prize at the 2005 Luxembourg International Percussion Quartet Competition.

With an audience comprised of “both kinds of blue hair... elderly matron here, arty punk there” (as the *Boston Globe* described it), Sō Percussion makes a rare and wonderful breed of music that both compels instantly and offers vast rewards for engaged listening. Edgy (at least in the sense that little other music sounds like this) and ancient (in that people have been hitting objects for eons), perhaps it doesn’t need to be defined after all.

Sō would like to thank Pearl/Adams Instruments, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth drumsticks, Remo drumheads, and Estey organs for their sponsorship.

Sō Percussion is represented by Alliance Artist Management, (p) 212-304-3538, www.allianceartistmanagement.com.

Meehan/Perkins Duo

Founded in 2006, the Meehan/Perkins Duo (Todd Meehan and Douglas Perkins) has emerged as a driving force in new music through its compelling performances of new works for percussion. Hailed as “superb young players” by *The New Yorker* and “gifted percussionists” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the Duo believes in cultivating relationships with living composers through commissions and collaborations that expand the percussion genre. Its repertoire encompasses the vast sound possibilities of percussion, including both acoustic and electro-acoustic works.

Meehan and Perkins first began collaborating in 1999 as founding members of Sō Percussion. They have since performed at countless venues across the country, including Weill Recital Hall, the Ojai Music Festival, the Bang on a Can Marathon, the BAM Next Wave Festival, Miller Theatre, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, The Stone, and the International Festival-Institute at Round Top. In addition to its performances, the Duo regularly teaches master classes at universities throughout the country.

The Duo performs on Pearl/Adams musical instruments, Vic Firth drumsticks and mallets, and Black Swamp Percussion accessories.

Learn more at Insite, our **interactive** online forum. Visit www.peakperfs.org/insite to voice your opinion and deepen your Peak Performances experience.

Music

Music

Music

Dr. Susan A. Cole, President
 Dr. Geoffrey W. Newman, Dean, College of the Arts
 Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director, Arts & Cultural Programming

Peak Performances @ Montclair presents:

Sō Percussion

Bringing Down the Stars and Moving Them Around

featuring

Eric Beach
Josh Quillen
Adam Sliwinski
Jason Treuting

and guest artists
Meehan/Perkins Duo

Sound Engineer **Lawson White**

PROGRAM

Proximity Cenk Ergün (b. 1978)

~~ Pause ~~

Pléiades Iannis Xenakis (1922–2001)

Métaux
 Claviers
 Peaux
 Mélanges

Duration: 1 hour and 20 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 inside the theater.

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TOWN AND COUNTRY: Music of European Royalty and Aristocracy

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Alexander Kasser Theater
Montclair State University

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To view our complete season and for more information, visit www.peakperfs.org.

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10
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Peak performances
 @montclair



Credit: Janette Beckman



Credit: Ben Johansen

Sō Percussion

and Guest Artists Meehan/Perkins Duo

Bringing Down the Stars and Moving Them Around

November 6, 2010 • 8:00pm

Alexander Kasser Theater
Montclair State University