

Third Coast Percussion

Third Coast percussion at Notre Dame made possible through the generosity of Shari and Tom Crotty.

DeBartolo Performing Arts Center
Presenting Series

SAT, JAN 30 AT 7:30 P.M.
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THIRD COAST PERCUSSION

Sean Connors
Robert Dillon
Peter Martin
David Skidmore

with

David Friend and Oliver Hagen, pianos and keyboards

Surface Tension (2015)*

Donnacha Dennehy (b. 1970)

-Intermission-

Sextet (1984)

Steve Reich (b. 1936)

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- 5.

*World Premiere

Donnacha Dennehy's *Surface Tension* was written for Third Coast Percussion, and commissioned by the University of Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Additional funding provided by the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation.

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Born in Dublin, **Donnacha Dennehy** returned to Ireland after studies abroad at the University of Illinois, IRCAM (France) and the Netherlands. In 1997, he founded the Crash Ensemble, Dublin's now renowned new music group, who performed many of Dennehy's landmark works, including *Grá Agus Bás* (with the singer Iarla O' Lionaird) and *That the Night Come* (with Dawn Upshaw). Dennehy joined the music faculty at Princeton University in 2014. His musical vocabulary draws on the scientific sonic analysis of French Spectralism, the intense repetitive energy of Dutch and American minimalism and his own Irish heritage.

About his new percussion quartet ***Surface Tension***, Dennehy writes:

"Inspired by the way various indigenous drums (such as the Irish bodhrán or Middle Eastern frame drums like the Turkish Tar) play with the tension of the skin in order to bend the pitch and produce something almost approaching melody, I sought a way of making so-called un-pitched drums 'sing' in their own way in this piece.

"I was particularly interested in creating a kind of mobile pitch-space that shifted in and out of various overtone-based tonalities. This is a tall order for drums, instruments that are normally considered un-pitched! But I liked the tension implicit in this possible scenario—it triggered my imagination.

"Actually realizing this strange idea took some work and I am deeply indebted to Third Coast for their assistance and their spirit of complicit adventure and experimentation. I knew that I wanted the drums to move continuously through the pitch space, as in a pulsing glissando (something that crops up quite a bit in my music) and I was very happy when we discovered that you could change the tension of the drumheads of tom-tom drums by attaching plastic tubing into a hole on the side and blowing into the drum to tighten the skin of the head, thus raising the pitch.

"This alternate tightening and slackening of the drumheads of the toms became the *modus operandi* of the piece - by using this method I was able to gradually build pitch centers and travel between them. Some of these pitch centers are even overtone based—the players must gliss to very specific partials such as the 7th, 11th or 13th of a fundamental so as to create a strong resonant, fusing harmony. Essential in this quest is the addition of very precisely tuned bongos and travel congas. Of course, the spectra produced by all these drum instruments are rather strange, not really following the pattern of more standard pitched instruments, so even when all the drums are pulsing around a particular pattern of harmonics, one still hears many inharmonic things that create frictions in the way we perceive the pitch material. I find these frictions very interesting and I sometimes play with them.

“As the drums start to go a little out of tune from the continuous tightening and slackening of their heads, I have also written “tuning zones” into the composition, where the players gently tune their drums in a rhythmic way using their normal technique of turning the tension rods.”

Considered by many to be America's most influential living composer, **Steve Reich** is a pioneer of “minimalist” music—a term which, like many other musical style designations, is borrowed from the visual arts and applies better to some of Reich's compositions than others. Reich borrows harmonies from jazz great John Coltrane and interlocking rhythms from the drums of Ghana. The result is music of long, sustained harmonies, clear driving pulse and ecstatic energy.

“Schoenberg gives a very honest musical portrayal of his times. I salute him—but I don't want to write like him. Stockhausen, Berio and Boulez were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces of a bombed-out continent after World War II. But for some American in 1948 or 1958 or 1968—in the real context of tail fins, Chuck Berry and millions of burgers sold—to pretend that instead we're really going to have the dark-brown Angst of Vienna is a lie, a musical lie.”

Sextet was commissioned by Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians and by the French Government for the percussion ensemble Nexus. The five movements, which go directly from one into the next, are arranged in an “arch form:” A, B, C, B, A. The first and last movements consist of fast, rhythmic music; calm, groovy, sinewy interlocking lines on the keyboards characterize the second and fourth movements; and the third movement is both the slowest and the most visceral.

Many trademarks of Reich's style figure prominently in this piece. Rhythmic and melodic patterns are gradually built up one player at a time. These repetitive patterns are often played in a musical canon, where two or more players repeat the same pattern, but with each player beginning their pattern on a different beat, creating a multi-layered musical echo-effect. Reich also manipulates the listener's perception of the pulse through emphasis of different rhythmic groupings. At many points in the piece, for instance, a listener can tap his or her foot every two notes, every three notes, or every four notes and though each speed of toe-tapping feels quite different, each speed also fits perfectly with the music.

The result of these rhythmic games is a whirlwind of sound and ecstatic energy—a true masterpiece of the 20th century. Third Coast Percussion recorded *Sextet* with David Friend and Oliver Hagen as part of an album of Steve Reich's music on Cedille Records, released in February 2016.

Hailed by *The New Yorker* as “vibrant” and “superb,” Third Coast Percussion explores and expands the extraordinary sonic possibilities of the percussion repertoire, delivering exciting performances for audiences of all kinds. Formed in 2005, Third Coast Percussion has developed an international reputation with concerts and recordings of inspiring energy and subtle nuance.

These “hard-grooving” musicians (*New York Times*) have become known for groundbreaking collaborations across a wide range of disciplines, including concerts and residency projects with engineers at the University of Notre Dame, architects at the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, astronomers at the Adler Planetarium and more. The ensemble enhances the performances it offers with cutting-edge new media, including free iPhone and iPad apps that allow audience members to create their own musical performances and take a deeper look at the music performed by Third Coast Percussion.

Third Coast Percussion is the Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Notre Dame’s DeBartolo Performing Arts Center, a position they assumed in 2013. They have the honor of being the first ensemble at the University of Notre Dame to create a permanent and progressive ensemble residency program at the center. Third Coast Percussion performs multiple recitals annually as part of the DeBartolo Performing Arts Center’s Presenting Series, engages with the local community and leads interdisciplinary projects in collaboration with a wide range of disciplines across campus.

Third Coast’s recent and upcoming concerts and residencies include the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art (Chicago), Town Hall Seattle, Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival (Colorado), Eastman Kilbourn Recital Series (New York), St. Paul Chamber Orchestra Liquid Music Series (Minneapolis), Atlas Performing Arts Center (D.C.), Ensemble Music Society of Indianapolis, National Gallery of Art (D.C.), University of Chicago Presents, the Austin Chamber Music Festival and more. Third Coast has introduced percussion to chamber music audiences in Texas, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Illinois, securing invitations to return to many of these series.

Third Coast’s passion for community outreach includes a wide range of residency offerings while on tour, in addition to a long-term residency with the Holy Cross/Immaculate Heart of Mary Marimba Ensemble on Chicago’s South Side. In addition to its national performances, Third Coast Percussion’s hometown presence includes an annual Chicago series, with four to five concerts in locations around the city. The ensemble has collaborated in concert with a wide range of artists and performing ensembles including Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, Eighth Blackbird, Ensemble Signal and video artists Luftwerk.

The members of Third Coast Percussion—Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin and David Skidmore—hold degrees in music performance from Northwestern

University, the Yale School of Music, the Eastman School of Music, the New England Conservatory and Rutgers University. Third Coast Percussion performs exclusively with Pearl/Adams Musical Instruments, Zildjian Cymbals, Remo Drumheads and Vic Firth sticks and mallets.

GUEST ARTISTS

David Friend's playing has been called "astonishingly compelling" (*Washington Post*), "sizzling" (*NewMusicBox*), "inventive" (*New York Magazine*) and he has been heralded by the *New York Times* as "[one] of the finest, busiest pianists active in New York's contemporary-classical scene." He focuses primarily on new and experimental music and has worked with a wide array of composers, including some of the most prominent composers of our time such as Steve Reich, Julia Wolfe, David Lang and Charles Wuorinen. He has performed around the world, including at major venues such as Carnegie Hall (New York City), Royal Festival Hall (London), the Chan Centre (Vancouver) and the National Centre for the Performing Arts (Beijing). He regularly performs with a wide array of contemporary music groups including Ensemble Signal, Hotel Elefant, TRANSIT New Music, and Grand Band and has been a guest artist with many others including the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Alarm Will Sound, Ensemble Pamplemousse, Mantra Percussion and the American Composers Orchestra. He has recorded for the New Amsterdam, Innova, Albany and Harmonia Mundi labels and has been heard throughout the country on radio programs including National Public Radio's *Performance Today*, WQXR's *Hammered* and WNYC's *New Sounds*.

Conductor/Pianist **Oliver Hagen** has appeared with American and French ensembles and orchestras such as the Orchestre National de Lyon, American Composers' Orchestra, East Coast Contemporary Ensemble and the Orchestra of the League of Composers. In 2010 Hagen was named Assistant Conductor of the Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris. During his time in Paris, Hagen assisted music director Susanna Mälkki and he worked with conductors such as Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös, Matthias Pintscher and Ludovic Morlot. As a pianist, Hagen has a strong association with the Lucerne Festival Academy, which he attended between 2005-2009, and notably performed one of the solo piano parts in Pierre Boulez's "Répons" with the composer himself at the podium. As a pianist in the New York City-based new music ensemble Signal, Hagen has appeared at venues ranging from the Ojai Music Festival, Columbia University's Miller Theatre, Walt Disney Concert Hall and the Festival of Contemporary Music at Tanglewood to the Bang on a Can Marathon and Le Poisson Rouge in New York City. He has worked closely with composers such as Steve Reich, Helmut Lachenmann, Charles Wuorinen and Oliver Knussen. Hagen is in the last year of his DMA in conducting at Eastman. At Eastman, Hagen is one of the Assistant Conductors of the Eastman Musica Nova Ensemble, he runs his own weekly sight-reading orchestra and he has recruited his own conducting studio of non-majors.

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