



# Drumset Beyond its Roots

By Logan Ball and Sean Hamilton

The New Music/Research Committee is excited to present *The Drumset Beyond its Roots*, a celebration of the modern drumset outside of its traditional role as a staple in popular music. For this concert series, we sought out proposals that showcase various contemporary approaches to drumset aesthetics and performance through four broad categories:

**Compositions:** Covering a wide spectrum of works from solos to ensemble works, including concerti, works for percussion ensemble, chamber ensemble and mixed instrumental ensembles, and works utilizing a “deconstructed” drumset.

**Improvisations:** Artists whose work particularly resonates with the hosts include Milford Graves, Chris Corsano, Gerald Cleaver, Lesley Mok, Leo Suarez, Ed Blackwell, Paal Nilssen-Love, Roy Brooks, Susie Ibarra, and Han Bennink.

**New Techniques:** Works that extend the sounds and aesthetics of the traditional drumset. Examples of this include those by Ted Byrnes (“Tactility”), Sean Baxter (“Solo Drumkit Improvisations”), Claire Rousay (“It Is Just So Much More Difficult”), Lisa Cameron, Shigeto, and William Passionfruit Hicks’ “Blank” project.

**Transcriptions or Influence Works:** Original and published transcriptions of notable and/or iconic playing, either note-for-note or as works that pay homage to a particular style or person. This category also includes work that expands upon the work/style of a specific artist, including those in the jazz avant-garde. Unpublished

and original transcriptions are especially encouraged.

We are thrilled to showcase five themed concerts highlighting drumset performance in solo, ensemble, and electroacoustic settings, featuring 25 soloists and ensembles from the United States and abroad at all stages of their career, from students to seasoned professionals. All concerts will take place on Thursday, Nov. 14.

## COLLABORATIONS: INHERENT AND INVENTED

9:00 A.M.

The day kicks off with Collaborations: Inherent and Invented. This concert features the drumset in various roles in the ensemble, including as a solo voice, a voice among a broader many, and as a

broken-down or reimagined instrument. It aims to present a concise overview of some of the many ways the drumset may integrate into collaborative and group roles.



AARON RAGSDALE



JOSEPH VAN HASSEL AND ALEXANDROS FRAGISKATOS

Opening this concert is “Deluge” for flute, percussion, and fixed media. Written by Joshua Clausen and performed by flutist Tammy Yonce and percussionist Aaron Ragsdale, the percussion part includes kick drum, toms, and cymbals in a sort of deconstructed drumset that integrates beautifully with the flute and fixed media parts. “Deluge” was composed for this duo in 2019 and recorded at the Tank Center for Sonic Arts in Rangely, Col., a silo space known for its lengthy and unique reverb.

Joseph van Hassel and Alexandros Fragiskatos will then present one of David Macbride’s rarely performed works, “Face” for two drumsets, from 1986. The work includes composed and improvised music “that it is as visual as it is aural,” according to Macbride, with the players often mirroring each other. Macbride asks the performers to play in such a manner that listeners should not be able to tell what’s written down and what’s not.

Next, we will hear Morris Palter and

Greg Harrison performing Harrison’s work “Woven” for two drumsets and electronics. Composed with both fixed and indeterminate qualities, Harrison creates a piece that truly feels like the two parts are an interconnected singular being. The piece ultimately is a structured improvisation where each player triggers electronics to create a unique realization that will inherently be different from any other performance.

Though programmed on our Collaborations concert, “A Near-Empty Space” is performed by only one player: active contemporary musician and highly applauded Nick Terry. Nick says that he “serves as

an improvising duo partner to the spoken word of philosophers, scientists, poets, and mystics” through this performance, which “converges at the intersectionality of music improvisation, composition, movement.” “A Near-Empty Space” is performed on an array of acoustic and electronic instruments (including an electronic drumset and effects pedals).

Closing out this concert is the largest work of the day, Jamie Wind Whitmarsh’s “Concerto for Drumset and Percussion Ensemble.” Divided into three parts that showcase the drumset in various roles and styles, each of which treat the drumset differently, the work was the first-place winner in the 2012 PAS Composition Contest. This performance for the 2024 New Music/Research Presents will be presented by soloist Justin Alexander alongside the Virginia Commonwealth University Percussion Ensemble, and is a welcomed addition to the day, showing off the drumset in a soloistic and ensemble setting.



MORRIS PALTER AND GREG HARRISON



NICK TERRY



JUSTIN ALEXANDER

## FLYING SOLO: WORKS FOR A SINGLE PLAYER

11:00 A.M.

The drumset as a solo instrument is not a new idea. However, considering the instrument’s popularity, an alarmingly low amount of repertoire exists. This concert is charged with highlighting a wide array of solo works for the drumset.

The Flying Solo concert opens with Igor C. Silva’s “Your Trash,” performed by Reed Puleo. The composer’s goal was to blur the lines between acoustic sounds, electronics, and video. The performer is instructed to insert videos of themselves into the piece, creating a new version for every performance.

Evan Chapman will then perform “Bird Fish” by Anna Meadors. This piece features processed loops created by the composer through improvisation on tenor saxophone, her primary instrument. “Bird Fish” was inspired by Maurits Cornelis Escher’s “Bird, fish” (1938), a graphic piece of visual art. In Escher’s work, birds and fish drawn with the same ink and in similar shapes, can be seen interlocking



and stacked one on top of the other – the essence of which is captured in this work from Meadors.

The third piece will be Carlos dos Santos's "Cenas instantâneas dispersas," performed by Nath Calan from Brazil. This piece is described by Calan as a work for drums and scenic music. The title translates to "Scattered snapshot scenes." Facial expressions, drawings/pictures, and spoken word are all part of this intriguing piece.

"Time and Money" by Pierre Jodlowski will then be performed by Victor Pons. "Time and Money" was composed as an

"interrogation about our society, our behaviors with time and money," says Jodlowski. He begins the piece with a wooden cube sequence, which symbolizes a basic object that contrasts modern technologies. As the piece continues, music begins to loop; cycles of rhythmic patterns appear along with interjections of radio and movie sounds. The piece culminates in faster activity, representing our hectic lives.

Kate Neal's "Self-Accusation," performed by Melissa Wang, will be the final piece for this concert. It features the drumset used as part of a large multi-percussion instrument, complete with woodblock, an-

vil, pipes, and several metal trinkets, with spoken text of Peter Handke. As with several of Neal's pieces, choreography plays a role in "Self-Accusation" (head scratches, shoulder shrugs, turning the head, etc.). The performer is also required to make various vocal sounds, such as tongue pops.

### INFLUENCES: AN HOMAGE TO... 1:00 P.M.

Each work on this concert pays tribute to an artist, style, or genre. We are especially excited about the contrasting styles and aesthetics this concert features, which tips the cap to various players and styles ranging from electronic music to jazz, pop, and metal.

Von Hansen's "The Breaks" is a perfect fit for the "deconstructed" drumset category and serves as the Influences concert opener. Through its scoring for acoustic instruments and fixed media, "The Breaks" serves as a nod to electronic music artists and such drummers as Squarepusher, Venetian Snares, Jojo Mayer, Glenn Kotche, Billy Martin, and more. To kick off this concert, Emily Salgado, Hannah Weaver, Von Hansen, Tommy Dobbs, and Daniel Albertson will present this energetic and seamlessly arranged composition, characteristic of the drum'n'bass style of sampled and programmed drums.

Well-seasoned in contemporary music,



REED PULEO



NATH CALAN



EVAN CHAPMAN



VICTOR PONS



MELISSA WANG

and especially familiar with the music of Stuart Saunders Smith, Jude Traxler has performed and premiered many of Smith's works. In keeping with that, Traxler will give the world premiere of "Violets," a three-movement solo for four-piece kit, hi-hats, and ride based on Max Roach's recorded drum solos. Traxler says the piece "is both simpler AND more complex than Smith's previous drumset compositions (exceptional single-movement works that truly legitimize the kit on a concert stage)" that "beautifully blends Smith's experimental/improvisational spirit with a conservative look back at one of our

instrumentarium's very first performer-composers."

Andy P. Smith will then present Alexis C. Lamb's "Trigon" for drumset and fixed electronics. Smith commissioned this work recently, which, he says: "exemplifies a compositional-improvisational hybrid, demanding the performer to realize complex combinations of written material with conceptual improvisations." Smith also notes allusions to the playing of David Garibaldi and "almost-marches" that nod to early drumset use.

Next, we will hear "TLC," composed by Juri Seo and performed by Mark Eichen-

berger. Composed in 2022, the work was commissioned as part of the Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History members, led by Emily Salgado. A virtuosic solo work written for a groove drumset and Roland SPD-SX, the work is inspired by jazz drummer Terri Lyne Carrington. Seo states, "My goal was to create a piece that pays homage to jazz while pushing the boundaries of solo drumset performance." This is an exciting and effective work that integrates the now often-seen SPD and acoustic drums.

Closing out this concert is Brant Blackard's "Until Flesh is Torn From Bone," a trio directly influenced by death-metal drumming. Blackard says: "I've attempted to explore several aspects of this music, which I adore: the speed and endurance required of the musicians, the surprising and unpredictable metric modulations, and the often-relentless pacing." This high-energy piece does just that, alluding to the quick, aggressive, and technical nature of metal drumming in a trio format that includes djembe, cajon, and drumset.

### NEW APPROACHES: BEYOND THE ACOUSTIC

3:00 P.M.

This concert will feature performances by five artists incorporating digital voices and/or electronics in a variety of ways,



VON HANSEN



ANDY P. SMITH



JUDE TRAXLER



MARK EICHENBERGER



BRANT BLACKARD



showcasing the possibilities of drumset augmented with technology.

Olivia Cirisan opens this concert with a performance of “37 Across 39 Down” for drumset and electronics, a piece she commissioned in 2023. Composed by Ancel Neeley, the piece is written as a translation of a crossword puzzle into music for drumset, and it includes snippets of videos/media that showcase the particular words within the puzzle.

Following that, Andrew Toy will present a performance of his work that intersects improvisation with technology through automation. In this work, Toy controls things such as looping parameters and effects in order to influence his improvisation in differing ways. Toy says, “As musicians, the notion of automation may seem to run contrary to improvisation and creative expression. But when used in new and interactive ways, automation offers a bridge between acoustics and digital sound worlds and can become an invisible collaborator for the creative drummer to improvise with in meaningful new ways.” This is a novel technique that approaches electronic interaction from a different path than typically seen.

Without Borders Percussion Quartet features four musicians from the United States and Taiwan that perform works composed and arranged by members of the group for percussion, technology, and mixed instrumentation. As part of New Approaches, they will perform “Bird,” a tune by Alex Smith in collaboration with Will Alderman, Kathryn Irwin, and Yun Ju Pan. “Bird” is a guided improvisation for percussion, drum triggers, original samples, vocoder, and glockenspiel processed live, where the drum triggers recognize different zones and velocities of the acoustic instruments that results in various manipulations of transposition, panning, and processing of the samples.

Martin Daigle will then perform “Freeze!” by Jason Noble. The 2022 winner of Music NB’s “Innovator of the Year” award, Daigle is an interdisciplinary performer, composer, researcher, and producer from New Brunswick, Canada. In

“Freeze!” listeners can experience Daigle’s “augmented drumkit,” which combines acoustic drum sounds, digital samples, and visual manipulations exemplifying Daigle’s cutting-edge research and approach to percussion music.

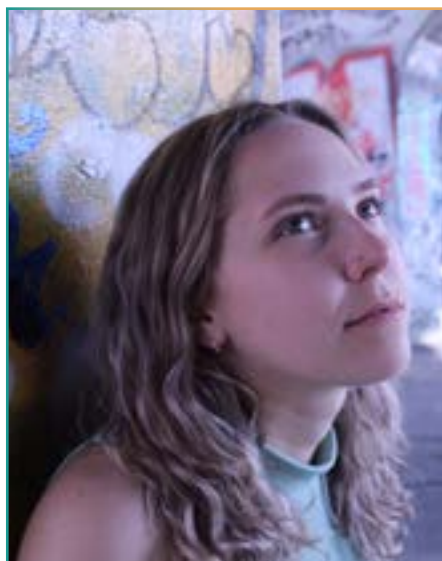
To close this concert, dedicated contemporary musician Dustin Donahue will perform Paul Hambree’s “Grapple” for drumset, glockenspiel, and live electronics (developed in collaboration with the performer). As discussed by Donahue, Hambree seeks to merge the disparate worlds of pitched and unpitched by splitting the

percussionist in half, playing glockenspiel and drumset in unison. Further, Hambree explores what he calls “unnatural synthesis” throughout the piece in the interaction of glockenspiel, drums, and electronics.

## CHRONOLOGY: COMPOSITIONS THROUGH TIME

5:00 P.M.

Our final concert of the day is a survey of the drumset through time. Here, the instrument is showcased in ensemble and solo settings through five unique pieces,



OLIVIA CIRISAN



ANDREW TOY

PHOTO BY JASMINE WILLIAMS



WITHOUT BORDERS PERCUSSION QUARTET

spanning from the 1960s until as recent as 2015.

Live performances of William Zickos's drumset duets, quartets, and quintets were taking place as early as 1962. In this concert, you will hear some of the earliest

precisely notated drumset compositions. Attendees at this concert will receive a two-page program that offers a brief biography of William Zickos, examples of his notation style, and an outline of some of his innovative compositional concepts.

Janis Mercer's "Air," performed by Kevin Nichols, will follow. Mercer uses the drumset to voice a dramatic struggle. Nichols states, "She identifies the drumset's musical, aesthetic, and philosophical potential, and then leverages the instrument to convey aspects of her own personal and professional life." This piece is motivated by several ideas, such as suffocation (in a musical and intellectual sense), the inability to breathe during asthma attacks, the challenge of writing a "melodic" percussion piece with just one pitched instrument, and a general response to the question of writing "pretty" or "tonal" music.

"Straitjacket" (2009) by Mark Applebaum is the next piece on the program. This piece, made up of four movements, has been privately subtitled by Applebaum as "four restraint systems for solo percussion and percussion quartet." Movement I, "Palindrome," will be showcased here. A palindrome reads the same way backwards and forwards; for example, "a man,



MARTIN DAIGLE



DUSTIN DONAHUE



THE WILLIAM ZICKOS DRUM SET QUARTET: DOUG AUWARTER, JOHN BRAZELTON, RON VAUGHN, NORMAN WEINBERG



a plan, a canal - Panama." In "Palindrome," the scheme is a bit irregular. The composer notes, "Perhaps it is clearer to imagine that my task is to first compose a number series and its retrograde: 12345-54321. But in this piece, the palindrome is distilled as 125-541." Here, thematic/recognizable bits (such as 1 and 5) are noticeable and heard in both directions. However, the "2" and "4" themes are only heard forwards and backwards, respectively. Certain parts ("3") exist conceptually but are never sounded.

Next, Ben Wahlund will present his composition "Tassa" (2011). This drumset solo is loosely based on a "Wedding Hand" in the Tassa tradition of drumming from Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time, a nod to jazz fusion drumming is made. This piece was composed in collaboration with NIU Distinguished Teaching Professor and Professor Emeritus Robert Chappell, who spent two months in 2004 studying Tassa drumming in the West Indies.

The final performance of the day will belong to Doug Perkins, as he showcases John Luther Adams's "Ilimaq." Adapted from an earlier work for percussionist Scott Deal, "Ilimaq" is a five-movement work for percussion and electronics written for Wilco drummer Glenn Kotche. This performance will display the final three movements, "The Sunken Gamelan," "Untune the Sky," and "Ascension." Adams,

a rock drummer in his early days, calls on the ferocious energy and virtuosity of a rock 'n' roll drummer. Cantaloupe Music, in a recent review, called the piece "an immersive, mesmerizing, and deeply musical journey for the listener, as well as a spectacular vehicle for a pivotal talent from the world of rock."

### CLOSING

The drumset is a cornerstone of percussion, with its iconic and immense reputation as a prominent rhythmic figure in all kinds of music. In presenting The Drumset Beyond Its Roots, our aim is to highlight the seemingly endless aesthetics of the drumset through its utility, versatility, and sonic possibility. Please join us on Thursday, Nov. 14 to celebrate and explore the drumset! [PN](#)

## 2025 New Music/ Research Day Call for Proposals

### "Percussion & Movement"



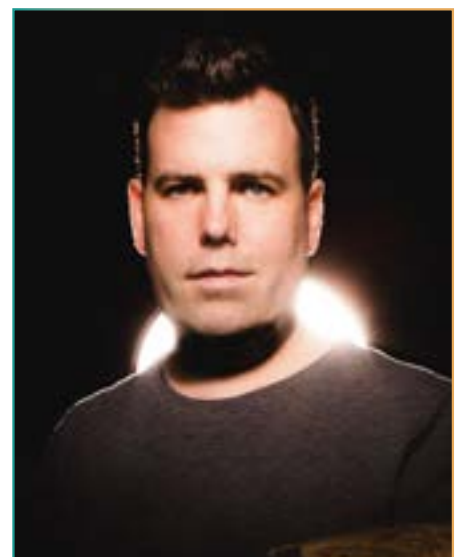
**GARZA VON KAMPEN AND THE WOU-USF PERCUSSION GROUP**



**KEVIN NICHOLS**



**BEN WAHLUND**



**DOUG PERKINS**

Algorithm  
**TAKEDOWN**  
ANIMATION BY ALEX BUDOVSEY

- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2024)
- BEST SONG (2023)
- BEST ANIMATION (2023)
- BEST MUSIC SCORE SHORT FILM (2023)
- BEST EXPERIMENTAL ANIMATION (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- WINNER (2023)
- BEST MUSIC IN SHORT (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- BEST ANIMATION (2023)
- BEST COMPOSER (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- BEST ANIMATION (2023)
- BEST INTERNATIONAL ANIMATION (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- BEST MUSIC SCORE (2023)
- BEST ANIMATION SHORT (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- DIRECTOR'S CHOICE AWARD (2023)
- BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION BOGOSHORTS (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION (2024)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION CLEVELAND (2024)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION FILMETS BADALENA (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION VEGAS SHORTS (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION TOKYO (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION MARTIN'S VINEYARD (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION LOS ANGELES (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION COURAIN 3D (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION OXFORD (2024)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION PRAGUE (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION ROME (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION DUBLIN (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION BEST SHORT AWARD (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION BUDAPEST MOVIE AWARDS (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION MONTREAL (2023)
- OFFICIAL SELECTION TOKYO (2024)
- NOMINATION BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- NOMINATION BEST ANIMATION (2023)
- NOMINATION BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- NOMINATION GENTLE INDEPENDENT MOVIE AWARDS (2023)
- NOMINATION AMSTERDAM MOVIE FEST (2023)
- NOMINATION BEST MUSIC VIDEO (2023)
- NOMINATION BEST HIP HOP (2023)

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