

PROGRAM NOTES

the so-called laws of nature (2002)

David Lang

I went to college to study science. I was expected to become a doctor, or at the very least a medical researcher, and I spent very much of my undergraduate years studying math and chemistry and physics, hanging out with future scientists, going to their parties, sharing their apartments, eavesdropping on their conversations. I remember a particularly heated discussion about a quote from Wittgenstein: "At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanation of natural phenomena." This quote rankled all us future scientists, as it implied that science can't explain the universe but can only offer mere descriptions of things observed. Over the years it occurred to me that this could be rephrased as a musical problem. Because music is made of proportions and numbers and formulas and patterns I always wonder what these numbers actually mean. Do the numbers themselves generate a certain structure, creating the context and the meaning and the form, or are they just the incidental byproducts of other, deeper, more mysterious processes? My piece *the so-called laws of nature* tries to explore the "meaning" of various processes and formulas. The individual parts are virtually identical-the percussionists play identical patterns throughout, playing unison rhythms on subtly different instruments. Most of these instruments the performers are required to build themselves. Some of the patterns between the players are displaced in time. Some are on instruments which have a kind of incoherence built into their sound. Does the music come out of the patterns or in spite of them? I am not sure which, but I know that this piece is as close to becoming a scientist as I will ever get.

-David Lang

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SCHOOL OF MUSIC COMING EVENTS

For more information on any of these events, or to be on the UO Music mailing list, call the music school's Community Relations Office, weekdays, at 346-5678.

Tuesday, Jan. 30 • 8 p.m., Beall Hall

PACIFIC RIM GAMELAN

UO Ensemble; \$7, \$5

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107th Season, 46th program



SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Beall Concert Hall
8:00 p.m.

Monday evening
January 29, 2007

THE VANGUARD SERIES

presents

Celebrating Steve Reich at 70!

featuring

SO PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Josh Quillen

Adam Sliwinski

Jason Treuting

Lawson White



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

PROGRAM

Music for Pieces of Wood

Steve Reich

Four Organs

Drumming: Part One

INTERMISSION

the so-called laws of nature

David Lang

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ABOUT TONIGHT'S ARTISTS

Steve Reich's music is one of the first things that brought So Percussion together when we were grad students. As a percussionist, it was exciting to realize that a very serious composer had written so much music for percussion group. A few other people had done it before – John Cage, Iannis Xenakis – but never in quite the same way. The cyclical grooves and muscular sound were very familiar to people brought up on rock music, but it didn't take long to realize that the structures and ideas were also extremely important. Playing Reich turns the hierarchy of western instruments directly on its head. The percussionist moves to the front of the stage, and is encouraged much of the time to play as loudly and exuberantly as can be managed. The pieces we are performing on this concert are some of our favorites. They capture the breathlessness and buoyancy of Reich's eclectic style.

There was a line, and **So Percussion** (So is a form of the Japanese verb meaning 'to play') crossed it. They'd never been just another modern performance ensemble anyway. Following two acclaimed albums of rigorous music by modern master Steve Reich and even-more-modern masters David Lang and Evan Ziporyn, as well as ongoing collaborations with hepcat Björk producers Matmos, the 20-something quartet has discovered a bold new voice: their own.

Called "astonishing and entrancing" by *Billboard*, "brilliant" by the *New York Times*, the discovery is perfectly appropriate. Coming together in the green pastures of New Haven, at Yale's graduate program, So Percussion was created to give fresh voice to what co-founder Jason Treuting calls "funky contemporary music." Devoted to the conceptual dreamscapes of Reich, Iannis Xenakis, John Cage, and others, So established a disci-

plined work ethic, learning pieces whole — memorized and absorbed -- instead of merely read. In performance, music stands were jettisoned for a stunning live dynamic. A blind call to Bang on a Can founder David Lang yielded a commission. Called "a must-hear" by *Billboard*, their self-titled debut featured Lang's "the so-called laws of nature."

In 2004, realizing Steve Reich's nine-part "Drumming" as a quartet, they made one small step for music, one radical step for a percussion group: they overdubbed -- and to great success. Having explored the past, in the form of Reich's classics, and the present, in the form of Lang and Ziporyn's freshest, it was time for So to start exploring the future.

In that vein, their newest CD/DVD *Amid the Noise* began as an after-hours project. Eager to expand their palette, So members Treuting, Adam Sliwinski, and Lawson White experimented with glockenspiel, toy piano, vibraphones, bowed marimba, melodica, tuned and prepared pipes, metals, 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 Manhattan and Tokyo. In 2006-2007, So is performing *amid the noise* across the country with electronic gurus Matmos.

"If you're sick of the sounds you've got, you go and find more," declares Sliwinski of the group's sonic philosophy. "There's always something to hit or rub or whatever." It is a philosophy they have taken with them to countless educational programs, which have ranged from teaching adolescents to masterclasses with student percussionists and composers at Harvard, Duke, Princeton, the University of Texas, the University of Oklahoma, and many other schools. It also has inspired them to commission dozens of composers to write for this most eclectic of instrumental groups. With the list spanning from such notables as David Lang and Paul Lansky to emerging talents Dennis DeSantis and Suzanne Farrin, this unique repertoire has been heard at the Miller Theatre and Carnegie Hall in New York, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Walker Center in Minneapolis, to name a few. In fact, So is one of the only outfits that can play at a major concert hall and with indie's hippest producers within 24 hours.

With an audience comprised of "both kinds of blue hair... elderly matron here, arty punk there" (as the *Boston Globe* described it), So 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 with sticks for many eons), the members of So Percussion are nothing if not themselves, imaginary lines or not.

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