

*Special Event*

# Steven Schick: Solo

—◆◆◆—  
Thursday, January 30, 8:00 p.m.  
Saturday, February 1, 8:00 p.m.  
—◆◆◆—



*Please note that photography and the use of recording devices are not permitted. Remember to turn off all cellular phones and pagers before tonight's performance begins. Miller Theatre is wheelchair accessible. Large print programs are available upon request. For more information or to arrange accommodations, please call 212-854-7799.*

*Special Event*

# Steven Schick: Solo

## Part One: Origins

Thursday, January 30, 8:00 p.m.

## Part Two: Responses

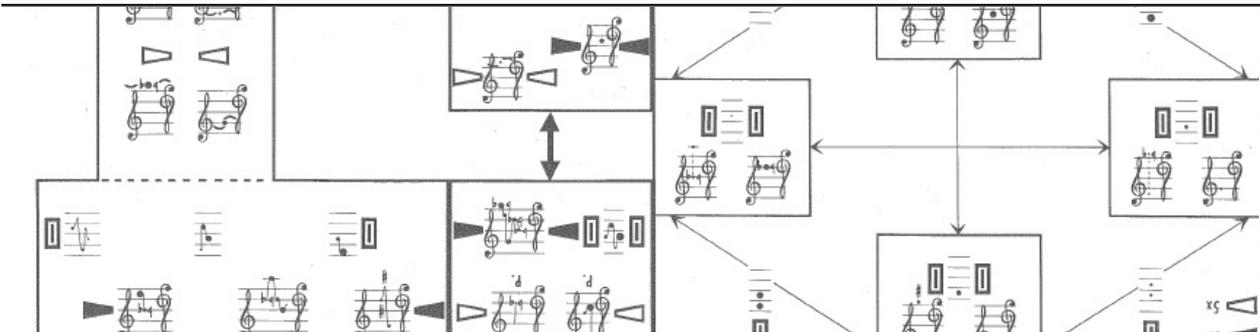
Saturday, February 1, 8:00 p.m.

## *Free Event: Percussion in the 21st Century*

Friday, January 31, 3:00 p.m.

Explore the future of this dynamic art form through a conversation moderated by Schick with music luminaries including composer Kaija Saariaho, jazz vibraphonist Stefon Harris, percussionists Aiyun Huang and Haruka Fujii, and So Percussion founder Adam Sliwinski.

The event will be followed by a reception.



*Special Event*

# Steven Schick: Solo

## Part One: Origins

Thursday, January 30, 8:00 p.m.

*Zyklus* (1959)

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928 -2007)

*The King of Denmark* (1964)

Morton Feldman (1926-1987)

*Intérieur I* (1966)

Helmut Lachenmann (b. 1936)

*Toucher* (1972)

Vinko Globokar (b. 1934)

INTERMISSION

*Psappha* (1975)

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001)

*Silvers Streetcar for the Orchestra* (1982)

Alvin Lucier (b. 1931)

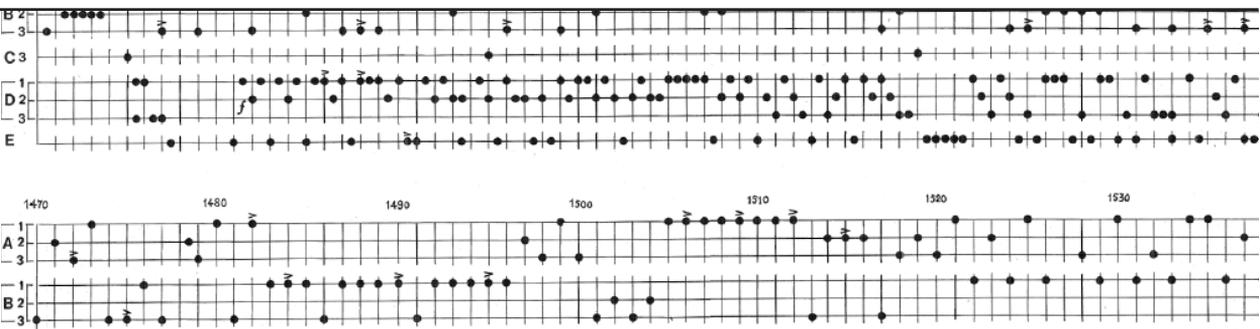
*?Corporel* (1982)

Globokar

*Rebonds* (1989)

Xenakis

This program runs approximately two hours including intermission.



Special Event

# Steven Schick: Solo

## Part Two: Responses

Saturday, February 1, 8:00 p.m.

*Wendell's History for Steve* (2008) Gustavo Aguilar (b. 1962)

*The Anvil Chorus* (1991) David Lang (b. 1957)

*Bone Alphabet* (1992) Brian Ferneyhough (b. 1943)

*Six Japanese Gardens* (1997) Kaija Saariaho (b. 1952)

*XY* (1998) Michael Gordon (b. 1956)

INTERMISSION

*Roar* (2002) John Luther Adams (b. 1953)

*Aphasia* (2010) Mark Applebaum (b. 1967)

*Crystal Radio* (2014) **world premiere** Nathan Davis (b. 1973)

*Trans* (2014) **world premiere** Lei Liang (b. 1972)

*Wendell's History for Steve, Part 2* (2008) Aguilar

This program runs approximately two hours including intermission.

The image displays a complex musical score for the piece 'Bone Alphabet' by Brian Ferneyhough. It features two staves: a piano part on the left and a violin part on the right. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *mpz*, *pp*, *mpz*, *pp*, *mf*, *ppp*, and *mp*. Performance instructions include *poco rallentando*, *ben marc.*, and *mf*. The violin part includes dynamic markings like *f*, *dimin.*, *pp*, *mf*, *p*, *f*, and *f mp*. Performance instructions include *sub.*, *♩ = 60*, *grazioso, ben artic.*, *cresc.*, and *f*. The score is marked with measure numbers 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200. The score is written in a highly detailed and complex style, characteristic of Ferneyhough's work.

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# About the Program

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## *Introduction*

For a time, while I was an undergraduate student at the University of Iowa, I played a game to pass the hours on long winter evenings. My roommates and I, classmates in a music history course, imagined famous first performances we wished we had seen. It soon became a kind of competition among us to see who could propose the most fabulous moments in music history. Paris in May of 1913 for *The Rite of Spring* became so common an entry that we eventually disqualified it. But there were other favorites among my cohort. The first performance of *Ionisation* (“imagine sirens in a concert hall...amazing!”) and Beethoven’s Opus 130 (the “Cavatina” of that string quartet, we heartily agreed, was probably the most beautiful music ever written) were up there with Mahler’s Fifth Symphony and provocative outliers like Monteverdi’s “Vespers of 1610.”

Yes, I know. It was a sad, geeky game. But here’s the thing: while I was using my evenings reliving the glory days of classical music, my days were spent learning the first classical percussion solo ever played, Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Zyklus*. At the tender age of fifteen, the piece still had the electrical zap of a new work and it soon became clear that my nightly nostalgic fantasies could never compete with actually creating new work. Suddenly and irreversibly (imagine brakes screeching and tires squealing in a reckless U-turn) I stopped staring at the heat lightning of history - to borrow Robert Penn Warren’s evocation of distant memories as faint flashes on a far-away horizon - and willfully, naively, walked out into the roiling storm that was new percussion music.

At that time there were only a handful of percussion solos. When I played my first solo recital in 1976, the three works I presented constituted about a third of the entire serious repertoire. But these few pieces upended me. They were to me – as Borges wrote of Kafka – so important that they influenced even those things that came before them. Suddenly my understanding of the musical present ceased to be based on the past; it was the past that was rooted in the present. As a result, my view of Beethoven was, and largely still is, indebted to Stockhausen and not the other way around. The Berlioz *Requiem* had the power of Xenakis, not the reverse. For a young performer, in my case a recently transplanted farm boy with more experience raising turkeys than

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performing classical music, the history-less-ness of this music was ideal. There were no elders to appease, no cache of inherited wisdom to master. With next to no percussive skills and no idea where this music would lead me, I simply bought the score to *Zyklus*, located some instruments, and began to practice.

How lucky I was!

These two concerts are the result of that practice. I have chosen seventeen percussion solos and arranged them chronologically, starting in 1959 with *Zyklus* and concluding with two premieres by the talented young composers Nathan Davis and Lei Liang. The pieces fall into two categories: “Origins,” the foundational works of the solo percussion repertoire, and “Responses,” a set of pieces that I commissioned or premiered. Two intertwined purposes are reflected by this music: it is both what I do on stage and also a system of knowledge acquisition, the way I have come to understand the world.

### ***Origins***

The earliest percussion solos arose from the cultural clear-cut following World War II. This is reflected in the first three stage set-ups of Origins. Each is an imposing circular arrangement – literally a world of its own – in which wooden, metal, and skin instruments represent a grand universe of sonic possibilities from noise to tone. Each piece utilizes a unique notational scheme and allows the performer previously unheard of amounts of freedom. In response to the chaos and strife of the war years, the goal was nothing less than to create a new language of shared responsibility and peaceful co-habitation. There was, as you might expect, inevitable friction between the ideal and the real. Accordingly, for me at least, the new percussion solos function as *koans*—that is to say, as the paradoxical objects of a practice of meditation, in which the concrete pulls against the mysterious and the determined against the uncontrollable.

In *Zyklus*, for example, Stockhausen constructs a robust form based on highly logical serial techniques and then immediately subverts it, with a spiral-bound score that allows a performer to start on any page and proceed around the circle of instruments in either a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction. (The direction depends on whether the score is read upside-down or right-side-up!)

In another paradox, my performance of *The King of Denmark* utilizes noisy instruments weighing nearly a thousand pounds. Yet Feldman asks for a delicate performance with fingers and hands at the very threshold of inaudibility. Physically the

piece is massive; sonically it's weightless. Tonight's interpretation is based on one I did at the invitation of Claire Chase for a concert celebrating the moment that Feldman met John Cage. All of the pitches of my realization – including those of the flowerpots, cowbells, and woodblocks – are derived from their names.

Helmut Lachenmann's *Intérieur I* is the most conventionally scored and notated piece among the first solos. In a recent conversation with the composer, it was clear that he considers the set-up to *Intérieur I* to be a single meta-instrument, in the same way that the piano is *an* instrument and not eighty-eight small, separate instruments. However, the percussionist is asked to explore the interiors of sounds, often by scraping the surface of instruments as though the goal were to get inside them. As a result, sonic organicity – that which Lachenmann craves above all – crumbles and we hear the unique voices of the individual instruments more clearly than ever. It seems with percussion the more diligently you try to manage it the less predictable it becomes.

If solo percussion music is indeed untamable and paradoxical, why would any composer be interested in it? Perhaps the ability to move beyond even the most determined compositional language leaves this music unsuitable for certain kinds of expression but perfect for other kinds. I have a gut feeling that a composer turns to percussion at very personal moments when the goal is to explore the self via sound. *Zyklus* was one of two great Stockhausen pieces from the mid-1950's that led the composer out of the darkness of the Nazi period and reconnected him to a kind of religious mysticism. (The other was his stunning electronic masterpiece *Gesang der Jünglinge*, a searing setting of texts from the Book of Daniel about youths thrown into the fiery furnace.) In a similar embrace of his religion, Feldman's title alludes to a prediction in occupied Denmark that the King would never allow the deportation of Jews, even if he too had to wear a yellow star so that one Dane could not be distinguished from another. Lachenmann's belief system is more political than religious, but his decades-long assault on "the musical instrument" via extreme and unconventional playing techniques is also a critique on the centrality of other social, economic, and political instruments.

While the early pieces were grand musical statements, later composers like Vinko Globokar and Alvin Lucier worked on a smaller scale. In *Toucher*, Globokar accompanies French translations from Berthold Brecht's play *The Life of Galileo* and asks a percussionist to choose seven instruments that sound like the vowels of French. By striking those instruments with the fingers (thus *Toucher*) exactly as the vowels are spoken, the instruments can be coaxed to "speak." Texts and subtexts telescope back and forth in time. We imagine Galileo as he balances free scientific inquiry with the



conservative dictates of the Church. Then there is Brecht on the eve of Nazi power in Europe wondering, as do his characters, why the powerless are silenced. And, finally, we imagine Globokar, the Yugoslav expatriate in Paris, as he melded these thoughts into an artistic statement worthy of the revolutionary zeal of the *soixante-huitistes*.

With *?Corporel* political inquiry is literally stripped bare. A soloist sits shirtless on stage and explores the sonic possibilities of his body. By both striking and receiving the strokes, the performer is simultaneously the creator of the musical object and the object itself. This recursive relationship with my own changing body leads to meditations on the fear of aging with the commensurate and inevitable decline of virtuoso technique, and on the sonic paucity of identical mass-produced instruments. *?Corporel* also reminds us that the body is our principal organ of memory: the shape that I now have is a means of storing all I have done, thought, and learned. Playing *?Corporel* is a way of releasing those memories.

If there is an equation whereby the simplest and most probing explorations produce the richest results, Alvin Lucier's *Silver Streetcar for the Orchestra* is its clear proof. The title comes from the name Luis Buñuel gives to the triangle in his surrealist treatise on orchestration. The sonic richness of this bent piece of metal, often overlooked as a side of fries in the grand smorgasbord of percussive possibilities, is systemically explored by slight changes of tempo, dynamic, and striking area.

By his own account Iannis Xenakis felt like an ancient Greek exiled to the 20th century. When I think of him in my mind's eye, I can imagine him both outside his Paris studio in the Quartier Pigalle and in Athens at the time of Pericles. This historical friction fuels the terrible passions of his percussion music, as he sought to express ancient archetypes of emotion and intellect in the progressive musical language of the late 20th century. Forgive my pedagogical impulse here, but young percussionists who wish to play Xenakis would be well advised to remember both the present and the past: *Psappha* is a lamentation in the poetic voice of Sappho, not a foray into noise art; and *Rebonds*, for all of its rhythmic vitality, is a chant not a groove. Separated by fourteen years, the two works operate on very different planes. In *Psappha*, Xenakis offers some guidelines but ultimately leaves the choice of instruments to the performer. A score that looks more like a computer printout than traditional musical notation guides the player through a labyrinth of sonic clashes among groupings of skin, wood, and metal instruments. In *Rebonds*, the complexity is subtler and more inwardly directed: a standard musical score activates a sonically homogenous set of drums and woodblocks in an intense whirlwind of rhyming cross-rhythms.

## ***Responses***

A celebrated poet once defined poetry to me as “a rifle loaded with the future.” We had been talking about Wilfred Owen, the British poet and soldier, whose verse depicting the horrors of gas attacks and trench warfare in World War I was set in searing fashion in Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem*. I remember the poet saying that any piece of art that served only to memorialize the past didn’t deserve to be called art. This was true, he averred, looking directly at me, even of art of the very recent past. I took his point. And truly, as much as I love the early percussion solos, our primary responsibility to them is not to enshrine them, but to extend their impact through the creation of new work. Keenly aware that *Zyklus* is nearly sixty years old, I can say with certainty that sixty is not the “new” anything. So, however modern its musical language might still sound, we can no longer think of it as contemporary music.

My personal strategy for creating new percussion music was to work with my friends. David Lang, my college classmate in Iowa and close friend, had just asked me to be the founding percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars when we began talking about *The Anvil Chorus*. David wondered, whimsically, how many separate rhythmic lines I might be able to play if I used all four limbs. To probe this question he created a rhythmic template based on the stroke cycles of traditional blacksmithing where the smiths needed to count their hammer blows carefully to avoid whacking each other on the head. *The Anvil Chorus* renders those multiple rhythmic lines via the clangs of brake drums and steel tubing along with a raucous array of foot-operated gongs.

Brian Ferneyhough and I knew each other in Freiburg while I was a student at the Hochschule there. (In an interesting twist, Kaija Saariaho was there at the same time.) Later he became a colleague at the University of California, San Diego, and on my first day as a new faculty member I ran into Brian and blurted out my desire for a new percussion solo. The idea piqued his interest and within a few weeks he provided a page of sample measures of what would become *Bone Alphabet*. He wanted to know if his ideas were playable. One of the first measures I tried featured cross-rhythms in ratios of 5:4, 3:2, 5:6, 7:5 and 7:6 ... to be played simultaneously! I had never seen such difficult music in my life and doubted whether I or anyone else could ever learn it. So I responded that it wouldn’t be a problem and got my calculator out. In our version of breaking the four-minute mile, it’s now not unusual for me to get audition recordings from college-aged percussionists with very fine versions of *Bone Alphabet*.



I didn't commission Kaija Saariaho's *Six Japanese Gardens*, but I did give its first U.S. performance at the 1997 Ojai Festival. Until *Six Japanese Gardens*, solo percussion music had been largely culturally agnostic. Kaija's visit to Japan in the early 1990's provided the inspiration for a percussion solo with an accompanying electronic track of processed indigenous chants and rhythms. In her typically graceful treatment of musical materials, Saariaho enlists the computer to metabolize culturally charged elements and creates a unique new work while embracing an earlier tradition.

In another in-depth look at rhythm, Michael Gordon's *XY* explores an evolving set of cross-rhythms, starting with 1:1 (even notes) through ratios of 3:2, 5:4, and 6:5. All that chattering of one hand against another can sound chaotic, but Michael applies the clarifying "XY" formula – that is, one hand gets louder as the other gets softer. This enforces a constant shift from one fore-grounded rhythm to another with a brief moment of what feels like harmonic tension as the hands pass each other. As phase shifts between hands get faster and the rhythms themselves more complex, rhythmic/harmonic intricacy accumulates, and the sonic space becomes saturated. Playing *XY* feels a little like conducting Mahler: grand forces grounded in harmonic tension are set on an inevitable course for collision. Sit back and enjoy.

With the exception of Lei Liang's new work, *Trans*, the remainder of the works on these concerts feature electronics in some capacity. (Lei's piece goes to the other end of the technology spectrum and employs the supplementary sounds of sixty pairs of stones that will be played by the audience.) Many solo instrumentalists turn to technology to create a palette of new sounds. But percussion instruments operate along a different paradigm, since we already make more sounds than any composer can use. Instead we turn to technology to reshape the way we perceive the sounds we have.

Source materials for electronic manipulation vary widely. John Luther Adams created the electronic "aura" for *Roar* by processing the sounds of a large tam-tam to create a virtual accompaniment for a real tam-tam. The overlay of a copy on top of an original might seem rooted in "cut and paste" technology, but the true emotional inspiration for his method came during our conversations that led to *The Mathematics of Resonant Bodies*, the 85-minute work for solo percussion of which *Roar* is the central movement. For three days in November, 2001, John and I sat in his studio near Fairbanks and spoke about the possibility of a new percussion solo. Every day we watched the weak mid-afternoon sun set behind the Alaska Range as a stunning, red-rimmed silhouette of mountain peaks emerged. As the peaks disappeared into the distance, each set larger and less distinct, the closer ranges appeared to be surrounded by resonant halos of self-similar shapes. In a very real way, John transcribed those mountains as gong sounds.

Correspondence of shape to sound also lies at the root of Mark Applebaum's *Aphasia*. Here a performer is asked to execute nearly a hundred physical gestures in exact unison with an electronically modified vocal track. The gestures – characterized vividly in the score with indications like “Centurion Greeting,” “Disco Point,” “Rubik’s Cube,” among others – if executed exactly, will seem like they cause the sounds. I did not commission *Aphasia*, but I present it here as representative of the half dozen new pieces that Mark and I have worked on together. Each one has been as inventive as *Aphasia*.

At the time of this writing, I have not yet learned the new pieces by Lei Liang and Nathan Davis. Therefore I can't comment on their works except to thank them both for responding so generously to my invitation to create new percussion music.

Gustavo Aguilar offers a valediction in a combination of live and electronic sources in his *Wendell's History for Steve*. After opening the concert by recording a brief improvisation for crotales and electronics on a small handheld tape recorder, I'll conclude by replaying the tape and reciting Wendell Berry's touching poem “History.”

The rehearsal process for a retrospective performance such as this feels like sitting on a rainy afternoon and re-reading years worth of one's journals. How wonderful to be reminded that music shapes itself according to the contours of life. One's memories are molded into the sounds, caught like small insects in amber. Gustavo Aguilar's piece was the first music I learned after I married Brenda. As a result, the Berry text always incites a moment of private celebration (well, not so private now). Every performance I give of *Bone Alphabet* has a chilling moment right at bar 25, which is the measure I was learning when my brother phoned to say our father had died. And re-learning *Zyklus* in the winter of 2013-14, with all of its chatter about sequestration and Superbowls, recalls an Iowa winter forty years ago when I suddenly broke it off with the past and fell headlong in love with the present.

How lucky I was!

My thanks at this moment are to Melissa Smey for inviting these concerts, to Brenda and my family for their love and patience, and to this amazing music, which has never failed me.

Program notes by Steven Schick



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# About the Artist

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Percussionist, conductor, and author **Steven Schick** was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. He was the founding percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars (1992-2002) and served as Artistic Director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève (2000-2005). Schick is founder and Artistic Director of the percussion group, “red fish blue fish.” He is Music Director of the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus and Artistic Director of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. In 2012 he became the first Artist-in-Residence with the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). Schick will be Music Director of the 2015 Ojai Festival. He maintains a lively schedule of guest conducting including appearances with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Asko/Schönberg Ensemble, and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Schick founded and is currently Artistic Director of “Roots and Rhizomes,” a summer course on contemporary percussion music held at the Banff Centre for the Arts. Among his acclaimed publications are a book, *The Percussionist’s Art: Same Bed, Different Dreams*, and numerous recordings of contemporary percussion music, including a 3-CD set of the complete percussion music of Iannis Xenakis (Mode). Steven Schick is Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego.



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**Miller Theatre at Columbia University** is the leading presenter of new music in New York City and one of the most vital forces nationwide for innovative programming. In partnership with Columbia University School of the Arts, Miller is dedicated to producing and presenting unique events, with a focus on contemporary and early music, jazz, opera, and multimedia performances. Founded in 1988, Miller has helped launch the careers of myriad composers and ensembles over the past 25 years, serving as an incubator for emerging artists and a champion of those not yet well known in the United States. A three-time recipient of the ASCAP/Chamber Music America Award for Adventurous Programming, Miller Theatre continues to meet the high expectations set forth by its founders—to present innovative programs, support the development of new work, and connect creative artists with adventurous audiences.

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*as of Jan. 17*



# Upcoming Events

**Thursday, February 6, 8:00 p.m.**

BACH, REVISITED

**Saariaho + Bach**

Jennifer Koh, *violin*

Jean-Baptiste Barrière, *electronics*

**Tuesday, February 11, 6:00 p.m.**

POP-UP CONCERT

**Ensemble Signal**

**Saturday, February 22, 8:00 p.m.**

COMPOSER PORTRAIT

**Roger Reynolds**

Irvine Arditti, *violin*

Ensemble Signal

Brad Lubman, *conductor*

**Saturday, March 1, 8:00 p.m.**

JAZZ

**Miguel Zenón Quartet**

**Tuesday, March 4, 6:00 p.m.**

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