

Syndicate for the New Arts: a conversation with Tyler Damon

by Mike Telin



From the first time electric guitarist [Tashi Dorji](#) and drummer/percussionist [Tyler Damon](#) worked together, everything clicked. “Tashi and I grew up about 8,000 miles from each other, but when I met him, he felt like an old friend. We never needed to talk about anything,” Damon said during a telephone conversation. “And our music has developed over time from playing together as often as we do, which has been several times a year since early 2015.”

On Friday, March 16 at 8:00 pm at Historic St. John’s Episcopal Church in Ohio City, the [Syndicate for the New Arts](#) will present Tashi Dorji and Tyler Damon in a concert of improvised music. Presented in cooperation with [New Ghosts](#), the evening will also feature Danish saxophonist Liberty, New York City bassist Frank Meadows, and Oberlin-based electronic musician Judy Jackson. The concert is free with a \$10-\$15 suggested donation.

Although Dorji’s and Damon’s performances are strictly improvised — nothing is written down — the Duo has developed a musical language that is part of a larger family tree of similar forms such as free jazz, European free improvisation, and Buddhist monastic music. “Our influences are wide-ranging, and I think that can be heard in what we do when we perform live,” Damon said.

While Damon is not overly concerned with the idea of newness, nor does he set out to reinvent the wheel, he said that the Duo's music is now feeling like their own, even if there are reference points to preexisting music and artists.

“This is one of the first times in my creative life that I feel like Tashi and I have figured out how to dial into something that is uniquely ours. That gets said a lot about music and especially about improvised music, but it feels like we're channeling something that is beyond us. Whatever has brought us together and informed this 'one mind' kind of thing that we have going, I want to chase that as long as I can.”

Originally from Cincinnati, Tyler Damon is now based in Chicago, although he is still in the early stages of cultivating a relationship with the city and the music scene. Prior to his move to the “Windy City,” Damon spent many years in Bloomington, Indiana. “I worked in a record shop, Landlocked Music, for nine years. I also worked for social services, like serving free meals to people in the community. It was great to have jobs that not only accommodated but also encouraged me to go on tour and to pursue this creative life that I have.”

Damon said that it was his time as a student at Indiana University that shaped his musical aesthetics. “I studied English Literature and that played an interesting part in my musical development because it put me in touch with people who turned me on to a variety of literature, art, and music. I also had access to an incredible art museum and a world-class cinema. Bloomington afforded me the opportunity to find my niche.”

While a student, Damon took classes on horror in literature as well as decadence in English literature. “I'm not a big fan of H.P. Lovecraft, but realizing the influences that writers like him and Oscar Wilde had on later cultural movements like hippies or punks — along with notions of mystery and cultivated boredom — you see that they're all from the same thread. I feel like this is all a big part of Tashi's and my music.”

Dorji's and Damon's music is also informed by politics. Although they don't subscribe to any broad “ism's,” the duo is left-leaning and interested in radical politics, intersectional feminism, issues of race, and the rise of fascism. “There is an anarchist bent in a lot of our music,” Damon said. “I hope it doesn't come across as aggressive, macho, or anything like toxic masculinity, because there was a lot of that in heavy metal and punk. In the past I liked that, but I ditched it in favor of abstraction.”

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