

Sō Percussion to join UA Percussion Ensemble and Akron Symphony in concerts this week

by Mike Telin



It's all about Sō Percussion in Akron this week. On Wednesday, October 12 at 7:00 pm in Guzzetta Recital Hall, Eric Cha-Beach, Josh Quillen, Adam Sliwinski, and Jason Treuting will team up with the University of Akron's Percussion Ensemble for a performance

of Steve Reich's groundbreaking composition *Drumming* as part of Tuesday Musical's [FUZE](#) series.

Then on Saturday, October 15 at 8:00 pm in E.J. Thomas Hall, [Sō Percussion](#) will join Christopher Wilkins and the [Akron Symphony](#) in Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Lang's *man made* for percussion quartet and orchestra. The evening will also include Ralph Vaughan Williams's Overture to *The Wasps*, Tan Dun's *Secret of Wind and Birds*, and Gustav Holst's *The Planets*. Lang and Wilkins will present the concert's "Preview from the Podium" at 7:00 pm.

"It's going to be an amazing homecoming," Josh Quillen said during a recent telephone conversation from Brooklyn, NY, where the group is based. "Three of us have family here. I was born and raised in Dover, Eric was born and raised in Canton, Adam bounced around as a kid but ended up in Hudson, and Jason was born and raised in Los Angeles."

Although the four percussionists pursued their undergraduate studies at different schools — Josh attended the University of Akron, Eric the Peabody Conservatory, Adam the Oberlin Conservatory, and Jason the Eastman School of Music — they all did their graduate work at the Yale School of Music. "We were not all at Yale at the exact same time, but we all overlapped at one point or another," Quillen noted. "After that we just

kept doing what we were doing while at school, playing in art galleries and basically performing wherever people would let us play.”

The group’s name comes from the second character in the compound Japanese word 演奏 (*ensou*), meaning “to perform music.” Alone, *sō* means “to play an instrument,” but it can also mean “to be successful,” and since their Yale days, the quartet has had plenty of success. In addition to concertizing around the world, Sō Percussion are the Performers-in-Residence at Princeton University as well as co-directors of the percussion department at the Bard College-Conservatory of Music.

Each year they run the Sō Percussion Summer Institute (SoSI), which provides college-age composers and percussionists with an immersive exposure to collaboration and project development. “We’ve been really fortunate,” Quillen said. “You don’t realize it when it’s happening, but when you look back, it’s really satisfying to see how all of the hard work has paid off.”

Steve Reich was inspired to compose *Drumming* after observing musical ensembles during a visit to West Africa. The four-movement work requires nine percussionists, vocalists — one male and two or three female — and a whistler and a piccolo player. The work’s duration is at the discretion of the performers, but recordings range from 55 to 84 minutes.

“When *Drumming* came on the scene back in 1971, it was like, Wow!, an evening-length piece for percussion,” Quillen said. “We often refer to Edgard Varèse’s *Ionization* as being a seminal work for percussion ensemble, but it’s only five minutes long. *Drumming* broke the mold and caused composers and percussion groups to look at more classical approaches to concerts — two shorter works on the first half and a big musical statement on the second. That’s something we’ve tried to drive home in our own programming.”

Quillen said that he and his colleagues look forward to working with the University of Akron’s percussion ensemble. “We teach the piece by rote, but with a good percussion studio, which this one is, we can put it together in two days. I’m so excited to be able to work with my teacher, Dr. Larry Snider, and the students. It’s going to be a lot of fun.”

On Tuesday, in the second part of this article, Josh Quillan will discuss David Lang’s *man made*.

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