

Sō Percussion to join Akron Symphony in David Lang's *man made* on October 15

by Mike Telin



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.

Lang and Wilkins will present the concert's "Preview from the Podium" at 7:00 pm. The

concert is presented in collaboration with Tuesday Musical Association.

Written for Sō Percussion, *man made* was commissioned by London's Barbican Center and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The ensemble premiered the work at the Barbican with the BBC Symphony in May of 2013. The American premiere was given in October of 2014 by Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic. During the 22-minute piece, Eric Cha-Beach, Josh Quillen, Adam Sliwinski, and Jason Treuting will snap twigs and strike everything from wine bottles to a steel drum, a trap set, xylophones, and "found" instruments. View a trailer [here](#).

"As a percussionist, you're the one in the group who's asked to play the taxi horns in *American in Paris*," Josh Quillen said during a telephone conversation. "So we've been conditioned from day one to accept oddities in our musical lives." Quillen noted that the term "found" instruments might lead people to believe that he and his colleagues are going into the woods looking for branches and old bottles. "I prefer the term 'curated' instruments," he said. "Cellists spend their lives getting to know that one instrument, but percussionists build what we need ourselves — we buy all the stuff at Home Depot and put it together."

The Dover, Ohio, native pointed out that the build-it-yourself approach to percussion music didn't start with John Cage. "Indigenous populations all over the world were creating hand-made instruments like steel drums. Cage brought that approach into the concert hall. He said, 'I'm going to write pieces for tin cans that are as thoughtful and innovative as anything that Schoenberg and Boulez wrote.' David Lang has taken that aspect of Cage's 'man made' approach to instrument making and used it during a set of concerto movements that progress from the rawest to the most traditional materials."

During the first movement, the quartet will literally be snapping twigs in front of the orchestra. "We didn't go out and scavenge for the twigs. We have to snap them in rhythm, and twigs that are in the woods are often inconsistent. But we discovered that Asian Willow is really reliable, and we found this place online called DriedDecor.com who will ship it anywhere in the world."



The second movement will find the quartet playing tuned wine bottles, and during the third they will play tuned metal pipes. "They're like fence posts that we've cut to different lengths," Quillen said. "We play those with the right hand while playing a trash can with the left. During the fourth we'll transition to more traditional instruments. You'll hear me playing steel drums, then Eric joins in on vibraphone, Adam plays marimba, and Jason improvises on drum set. David also uses the Orchestra's percussion section. There are a lot of woodblocks, high metal sounds, and bowed crotales. David sews it all together in an organic way that you can easily follow as a listener and a watcher."

The University of Akron grad said that he and his colleagues have always enjoyed working with David Lang. “He’s always been fascinated by watching us play his music and he loves the blood, sweat, and tears of live performance. In this concerto we’re often sitting in a row and can’t see each other, so it’s kind of like anti-chamber music. He doesn’t hound us if a rhythm is wrong because he’s more interested in the battle that a musician has to deal with when they’re onstage in a live setting. Once you let go of the fact that you might tip over a wine bottle or your twig might not break, it is a real blast.”

In addition to performing and teaching, Sō Percussion has also begun to pursue projects that provide direct service to those in need. Their End Hunger NE food packing events are particularly close to Quillen. “My wife is a pastor who works at a church camp in New Jersey, and when I saw them do a food packing event, it struck me that all you need is a little bit of money and bodies to pack the food — and we have that at our summer camp at Princeton. The last two years we’ve packed a little over 50,000 meals for a local food bank in Mercer county.” Click [here](#) to learn about all of Sō Percussion’s service and community projects.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 11, 2016.

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