

## Contemporary Collaborations with Third Coast Percussion

By Stephanie Manning



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“Strum,” “Strike,” and “Bend” are all evocative references to the physicality of string and percussion instruments. And one is especially significant.

Put all three together, and you get the title of Third Coast Percussion’s (TCP) upcoming

program with violinist/composer Jessie Montgomery. “I think the ‘Bend’ part is maybe the most interesting,” says ensemble member Robert Dillon. “Something we really have enjoyed about Jessie’s percussion writing is this twisting, warping, or bending of sounds.”

Whether that’s blowing through a tube into a tom-tom or hitting a crotales before dipping it into water, these manipulations are ubiquitous in Montgomery’s music. And her recent piece for TCP is no exception.

Lady Justice / Black Justice, The Song, commissioned in celebration of the group’s 20th anniversary, is a major part of their latest tour. On Wednesday, April 30 at 7:30 pm, Third Coast Percussion will bring that piece and a whole lot more to Finney Chapel as part of the Oberlin Artist Recital Series. Montgomery will also join the four-piece ensemble onstage to perform Lou Harrison’s Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra.

Chicago has always been home base for the group (Dillon, David Skidmore, Peter Martin, and Sean Connors) since its inception in 2005. And Montgomery relocated to the area in 2021 to spend three years as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Mead Composer-in-Residence. "Now she's set up shop here and this is her home, which is great," Dillon says. "We love that she has connected with Chicago in that way."



After Montgomery became a local, TCP workshopped her first piece for percussion ensemble and played around with some of her pre-existing works. Member Sean Connors eventually arranged the Suite from In Color, which appears on the April 30 program. "It's very different than the original version," written for tuba and string quartet, "but it's really beautiful," Dillon says.

The Suite also appears on TCP's latest album, Standard Stoppages, released on April 11. The record marks the group's 20th anniversary with commissions from collaborators new and old — and three of those new works will be heard in Finney Chapel.

Montgomery turned to visual art to inspire her piece, specifically Ori Carino's Black Justice. This multi-layered, holographic [painting](#) of Lady Justice as a Black woman reflects on the injustices Black Americans have faced and continue to face in the present day. "It's a very striking image," Dillon says. The group's program notes will provide audience members with a QR code to take a look for themselves.

TCP relishes in these kinds of projects that reach across disciplines and genres. Electronic music producer Jlin (Jerrilynn Patton) created Please Be Still, which interpolates J.S. Bach's "Kyrie eleison" from his Mass in B Minor. Jlin, who has become a frequent collaborator, is "such a delightful and interesting person," Dillon says.

To create music together, Jlin will first send the percussionists an audio file of what she wants it to sound like, and it's up to them to transcribe what's happening and how it fits on their instruments. "We have to essentially arrange the piece into its final form for live performance," Dillon says. "That meeting of the voices is the thing that makes it so exciting. You end up with something that none of us would have created on our own."

TCP also reached out to pianist and composer Tigran Hamasyan, whose music lies at the intersection of jazz, rock, and folk. "We thought he'd be a really great person to ask to write a percussion quartet, because the rhythmic vocabulary of his music is just totally bananas," Dillon says. "It's really intense, very complicated, but grooves really hard."

Hamasyan's Sonata for Percussion certainly lives up to that description. Since premiering it last summer, "it feels like it's an audience favorite," Dillon says. And the music's devilish difficulty "presents a really nice growth opportunity for us as performers."

The only piece from the Oberlin performance that isn't also on their new album is Lou Harrison's Concerto. "The way that he combines the violin with percussion ensemble is so effective," Dillon says. "It's a very, very expressive piece."

Featuring Jessie Montgomery as the violin soloist highlights her dual career as a composer and performer. "I think we feel a kinship with Jessie in that way, because all of us in Third Coast Percussion also write music," Dillon says. "We really relish the opportunity to do both things and to see the way that they make each other stronger."

*Tickets are available [online](#) and by phone at 800-371-0178.*

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