



SŌ PERCUSSION & CAROLINE SHAW

PHILADELPHIA PREMIERES | PENN LIVE ARTS DEBUTS

CAROLINE SHAW

SŌ PERCUSSION Eric Cha-Beach, Josh Quillen, Adam Sliwinski, Jason Treuting

FRIDAY, **FEBRUARY 3** @ 8 PM

Annenberg Center, Zellerbach Theatre

There will be an intermission.

This performance is part of the ListenHear Series, with support provided by The Presser Foundation.

PROGRAM NOTES

Taxidermy (2012) by Caroline Shaw

Why “Taxidermy”? I just find the word strangely compelling, and it evokes something grand, awkward, epic, silent, funny and just a bit creepy—all characteristics of this piece, in a way. The repeated phrase toward the end (“the detail of the pattern is movement”) is a little concept I love trying (and failing) to imagine. It comes from T.S. Eliot’s beautiful and perplexing “Burnt Norton” (from the *Four Quartets*), and I’ve used it before in other work as a kind of whimsical existentialist mantra. — Caroline Shaw

Narrow Sea (2022) by Caroline Shaw

Narrow Sea places the seeds of old American folk hymns within the unlikely combination of Sō Percussion, Dawn Upshaw and Gil Kalish [Upshaw and Kalish are not performing.] Together, they create unique sound worlds with ceramic bowls, flowerpots, humming and a piano played like a dulcimer. All of the lyrics are from songs found in *The Sacred Harp*, a collection of shape-note hymns first published in the 19th century. These lyrics, set in entirely new melodies, sing about “going home.” Each hymn refers to water in some way, as an image of what lies between this world and the next, and each carries a sense of joy in looking beyond that river. The words reveal our essential human yearning for a home, a safe resting place. — Caroline Shaw

INTERMISSION

Let the Soil Play its Simple Part (2020) by Sō Percussion and Caroline Shaw

Caroline Shaw and Sō Percussion combined forces for this powerful original set of songs composed together. Shaw’s faultless ear for melody and harmony, combined with Sō’s rhythmic invention and compositional experimentation, make for a world of sonic richness that feels fresh and unique. It is a journey across the landscape of the soul, told through the medium of distinctly contemporary songs which represent Shaw’s debut as a solo vocal artist.

Shared lifetimes of voluminous musical and literary experiences traverse the spiritual realms of *The Sacred Harp* and the *Book of Ruth*, the oceanic ruminations of James Joyce, the American roots song “I’ll Fly Away” filtered through medieval plainchant and even the pop group ABBA. Sonically, there is no other collaboration to compare it to. Shaw’s voice cycles through the gently intimate, to penetrating rapture, through layers of constructed counterpoint, while Sō Percussion’s nearly endless menagerie of instruments and techniques provides varying accompaniment of drums, piano, marimba, steel drums, electronics, tuned flowerpots, toys, synthesizers and more.

The thrill in this collaboration lies partly in the sense that each entity adds dimensions to the other’s music which revitalizes them both. Shaw gives voice and melody to the years of experimentation in rhythm, color and complexity, which defines Sō’s work over two decades and more than 20 albums. Sō opens a world of sonic possibilities and rhythmic virtuosity, which dramatically expands Shaw’s palette beyond the vocal and string writing for which she is best known.

In this collection of 10 songs, forces alternate between tightly crafted orchestrations and spontaneous duets between Shaw and each of the four members of Sō Percussion. The title song of the set features Shaw’s unadorned voice setting her own words, accompanied by Josh Quillen’s lyrical strumming on the steel drums. In “Lay All Your Love On Me,” Shaw and Adam Sliwinski concoct a stately motet for voice and marimba out of the chorus from ABBA’s famous hit song. In “Long Ago We Counted,” Jason Treuting unleashes cascades of his signature drumming underneath otherworldly loops of Shaw’s voice. With “Some Bright Morning,” Eric Cha-Beach simmers various layers of ambient drones under Shaw’s gradually unfolding synthesis of “I’ll Fly Away” and the 13th-century plainchant “Salve Regina.”

Other songs build layers of instrumentation as blocks of rhythm and sound underneath Shaw’s voice. “Find the Line” announces itself with a progression of flowerpot harmony, which builds surprisingly into an uplifting, anthemic celebration of life and devotion. Two songs take their titles from lines in James Joyce’s *Ulysses: The Flood is Following Me* and *A Veil Upon the Waves*. Both are thick with layers of ambivalence and reflection. “Soon our Transient Comforts Fly” builds interlocking rhythms reminiscent of Steve Reich, which Shaw elevates with a yawp of spiritual ecstasy from *The Sacred Harp* tradition.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sō Percussion

For 20 years and counting, Sō Percussion has redefined chamber music for the 21st century through an "exhilarating blend of precision and anarchy, rigor and bedlam." (*The New Yorker*) They are celebrated by audiences and presenters for a dazzling range of work: for live performances in which "telepathic powers of communication" (*The New York Times*) bring to life the vibrant percussion repertoire; for an extravagant array of collaborations in classical music, pop, indie rock, contemporary dance and theatre; and for their efforts in education and community, creating opportunities and platforms for music and artists that explore the immense possibility of art in our time.

Recent highlights include performances at the Elbphilharmonie, Big Ears 2022, where they performed *Amid the Noise*, premiered a new work by Angélica Negrón with the Kronos Quartet, and performed their Nonesuch album with Caroline Shaw, *Let the Soil Play Its Simple Part*, and a return to Carnegie Hall, where they performed new collaborations with Nathalie Joachim and Dominic Shodekeh Talifero. Their Nonesuch recording, *Narrow Sea*, with Caroline Shaw, Dawn Upshaw and Gilbert Kalish, won the 2022 Grammy® for Best Composition. Other albums include *A Record Of* on Brassland Music with Buke & Gase and an acclaimed version of Julius Eastman's *Stay On It* on new imprint Sō Percussion Editions. These add to a catalogue of more than 25 albums featuring landmark recordings of works by David Lang, Steve Reich, Steve Mackey and many more.

In the summer of 2022, Sō performed at the Music Academy of the West Festival, Newport Classical and Time Spans in New York, and offered four concerts at Our Festival in Helsinki, including a performance of *Let the Soil* with Caroline Shaw. Other 22/23 dates include concerts for Cal Performances, the Palau de la Musica Catalana in Barcelona, the Barbican in London, the Kennedy Center and University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In fall 2022, Sō Percussion began its ninth year as the Edward T. Cone performers-in-residence at Princeton University.

Rooted in the belief that music is an elemental form of human communication and galvanized by forces for social change in recent years, Sō enthusiastically pursues a range of social and community outreach through their nonprofit organization, including partnerships with local ensembles Pan in Motion and Castle of Our Skins, their Brooklyn Bound concert series, a studio residency program in Brooklyn and the Sō Percussion Summer Institute, an intensive two-week chamber music seminar for percussionists and composers. sopercussion.com

Sō Percussion's 2022-2023 season is supported in part by awards from: The National Endowment for the Arts; The New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature; The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; The Aaron Copland Fund for Music; The Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University; The Amphion Foundation; The Brookby Foundation; The Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation; The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation; The Howard Gilman Foundation; and The Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

Sō Percussion uses Vic Firth sticks, Zildjian cymbals, Remo drumheads, Estey Organs, and Pearl/Adams instruments. Sō Percussion would like to thank these companies for their generous support and donations.

Caroline Shaw

Caroline Shaw is a New York-based musician—vocalist, violinist, composer and producer—who performs in solo and collaborative projects. She was the youngest recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2013 for *Partita for 8 Voices*, written for the Grammy® Award-winning Roomful of Teeth, of which she is a member.

Recent commissions include new works for Renée Fleming with Inon Barnatan, Dawn Upshaw with Sō Percussion and Gil Kalish, Seattle Symphony, Anne Sofie von Otter with Philharmonia Baroque, the LA Philharmonic, Juilliard 415, the Orchestra of St. Luke's with John Lithgow, the Dover Quartet, TENET, The Crossing, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, the Calidore Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, the Baltimore Symphony and Roomful of Teeth with A Far Cry. Shaw's film scores include Erica Fae's *To Keep the Light* and Josephine Decker's *Madeline's Madeline*, as well as the upcoming short *8th Year of the Emergency* by Maureen Towey. She has produced for Kanye West (*The Life of Pablo, Ye*) and Nas (*NASIR*) and has contributed to records by The National and Arcade Fire's Richard Reed Parry. Once she got to sing in three-part harmony with Sara Bareilles and Ben Folds at the Kennedy Center, and that was pretty much the bees' knees and elbows.

Shaw has studied at Rice, Yale and Princeton, and currently teaches at NYU and is a Creative Associate at The Juilliard School. She has held residencies at Dumbarton Oaks, the Banff Centre, Music on Main and the Vail Dance Festival. Shaw loves the color yellow, otters, Beethoven's *opus 74*, Mozart's opera, Kinhaven, the smell of rosemary and the sound of a janky mandolin.