

STEVEN SCHICK RESIDENCY #1: THOUGHT

TUESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER 7PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

Brian FERNYHOUGH (b. 1943) *Bone Alphabet* (1991) 13'

Iannis XENAKIS (1922-2001) *Psappha* (1975) 12'

Sarah HENNIES (b. 1979) *Thought Sectors* (2020) 52'

Steven Schick percussion

Approximate duration: 2 hours with no interval

ABOUT STEVEN SCHICK

Percussionist, conductor, and author Steven Schick was born in Iowa and raised in a farming family. Hailed by Alex Ross in the *New Yorker* as, "one of our supreme living virtuosos, not just of percussion but of any instrument," he has championed contemporary percussion music by commissioning or premiering more than one hundred-fifty new works. The most important of these have become core repertory for solo percussion. Schick was inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 2014.

MORE WITH STEVEN SCHICK THIS WEEK

In his essay, *The Externally Facing Artist*, Steven proposes three important relationships at the core of a healthy artistic practice: between an artist and the materials of their craft, between an artist and the natural world, and between an artist and their community. To unpack these ideas and crucial relationships, ANAM and Steven will combine forces in a residency of three performances.

Tonight's concert *Thought* is the first of Steven's residency series. Further information for the second and third performances can be found at www.anam.com.au/whats-on/steven-schick or speak to one of our Box Office staff after tonight's concert.

TOUCH

Thursday 18 September 7PM

Pauline OLIVEROS *Tuning Meditation*
Zosha DI CASTRI *TOUCH:TRACE*
Sarah HENNIES *Settle*
Iannis XENAKIS *Persephassa*

LIFE

Saturday 20 September 7PM

Michael PISARO *Ricefall*
Olivier MESSIAEN *Couleurs de la Cité Celeste*
Anna THORVALDSDÓTTIR *Aequilibria*
Igor STRAVINSKY arr. COLNOT
The Rite of Spring

Steven Schick's Artistic Residency at ANAM is supported by Peter Jopling AM KC & Richard Parker and the Estate of the late Vivienne Ritchie AM.

ANAM respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands spread across Australia on which we work and live. We uphold and honour their continued relationship to these sites, we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

THE WONDER OF IMPERFECT RESONANCE

The breath before the first note brings with it endless possibility. An object held aloft may be still, but physicists see it as having gravitational potential energy: potential to become kinetic energy the moment I let go. The moment the conducting hand drives down towards the icus; the instant the mallet accelerates towards the taut drumskin; before potential becomes movement, and before the imagined becomes sound. All music is kinetic, an intentional conversion of human-driven energy into vibrations that we experience as sound. But the physicality so often called for in percussion works gives the repertoire a special kind of kinetic quality unlike any other instrument. One arrives with a certain set of expectations for any other instrument. The possibilities of percussion overwhelm most rigid ideas and require an audience to open their minds, and hearts, further.

The first work intentionally limits the breadth of percussion to just seven sound sources, yet the set-up is the only simple thing about **Brian Ferneyhough's** *Bone Alphabet*. Commissioned by Steven Schick with the request that the instrumentation be small enough so that he could tour it by air, the work includes some indeterminate aspects quite unusual for Ferneyhough. In his fascinating and detailed essay on preparing this work ('Developing an Interpretive Context' in *Perspectives of New Music*, 1994), Schick comments on the precision Ferneyhough demands in his works – suited to the rhythmic nature of percussion, but not the varied and often unpredictable timbres of struck objects. Rather than battle the 'imperfect resonances' of subtly different cymbals and drums flexing in new humidities, Ferneyhough came to embrace percussion's inherent "wildcard" nature: the percussionist chooses the seven instruments that make up the *Alphabet's* metaphorical letters. The combinations then create an aural vocabulary through Ferneyhough's characteristic nesting of irrational rhythms, creating a sense of layered pulses and intersecting lines.

Both the Ancient Greek poet Sappho and the contemporary Greek composer **Iannis Xenakis** share a streak of bold creation and innovation, using complexity and new forms to heighten experience rather than for its own sake. Separated by two and a half millennia, the shape their complexities take is strikingly different, and yet it is Sappho's poetry that inspires the intricate cell structure of *Psapppha*. Like the clarity and sharp imagery of Sappho's poetry, Xenakis's *Psapppha* uses this detailed structure to capture rhythm in its "purest" form. Listening to the stark shapes of Xenakis's works, it's unsurprising to learn he also worked as an architect, and in both was an innovator in using burgeoning computer systems to realise the mathematical structures of his imagination. Percussion as a solo instrument had only recently been emerging, spurred by John Cage, Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and the systematic visions of Xenakis fit the possibilities of percussion – but this also meant that Xenakis's innovations needed to cover not just musical material but the conventions for writing and performing, which were (and arguably are) still in flux. Composers have experimented with graphic notation, variations on staves, and, in Xenakis's case, dense grids to better represent the sequence of notes against time, capturing the relationships of what we perceive as multiple meters and cross-rhythms.

By 2006, Schick had performed *Psapppha* over five hundred times, and evident today it is still a core part of his repertoire. Like *Bone Alphabet*, the instrumentation is also left up to the performer, specified instead as six groups of instruments divided by material (wood, metal, skins) and pitch. Both being such formidable works in the percussion repertoire, Schick relishes in the material exploration – both in the musical material and the *physical* material, the way in which the choices of resonators within such specific rhythmic constraints creates a conversation of resonance, a community of sound.

The final, and most significant, exploration of sound comes from American composer, and frequent Schick collaborator, **Sarah Hennies**. Rather than examining the sounds itself, Hennies examines psychoacoustics, or the ways sound is perceived by the listener. ANAM percussion addicts may remember the metaphysical exploration of sound in time and perception through Gerard Grisey's *Le noir de l'étoile* last year, which broadly played with predictability to manipulate the listener's psychological experience of time against the cosmic clocks of pulsars. Hennies takes psychoacoustics to a deeply human intimacy, basing itself on psychologist Ernest Hilhard's concept of 'divided consciousness' between active and receptive processes in the brain. Much of Hennies's output reflects on queer and trans identity, and the unfurling of the consciousness and its own perception is a profound reflection of the queer experience through sounds, the spaces between, and the mere question of what an object is, isn't, and could be.

Words by Alex Owens, Music Librarian, Robert Salzer Foundation Library