

Standard Stoppages

Third Coast Percussion

Program Notes

Percussionists are in the time-keeping business. Other musicians often look to us to create a rhythmic framework, a steady beat within which the music unfolds. One of the joys of being a band of four percussionists is that we often explore how time can be stretched, manipulated, played with, and reimagined. Our collaborators on this album helped us to do just that.

But this album is also about the passage of time on a larger scale. We are celebrating the 20th anniversary of our ensemble this year, and this album is one major way we are marking this milestone. We began by approaching some of our favorite past collaborators about creating new work with us (Jlin and Musekiwa), as well as reaching out to musicians who we have dreamed of collaborating with for years (Jessie, Tigran, and Zakir).

Each composer dealt with time in their own way for these pieces. Jlin drew inspiration from a 275-year old work from a favorite composer from her youth, J.S. Bach. Tigran bends and stretches time with his fantastically complicated rhythmic language, and harkens back to his own past with movement titles like “Memories from Childhood.” Jessie’s works move in and out of perceivable metered time, stretching not just rhythm, but pitch and timbre as well. Musekiwa’s piece title, *Dzoka Kumba*, translates to “Come Back Home” — a universal sentiment that reminds us not just of the places in which but also the people with whom each of our stories is rooted.

Zakir Hussain was known as one of the greatest performers of our time, and while his instrument was the tabla, time was his canvas, and he was able to find extraordinary beauty in the complexities of rhythm, as he does in this new work, *Murmurs in Time*. His piece also includes rhythmic themes his father taught him when he was a child in Mumbai, 60 years ago.

We never imagined that Zakir's brilliant, joyful, inspiring life would come to a close while this album was being prepared for release. We were actually listening to the final audio of his piece moments before we learned of his passing — his voice was speaking to us through this recorded audio as his time on this Earth was reaching its end.

So time was on our minds in ways we couldn't have imagined when we began putting this album together. We're sad not to have had more time with Zakir, but we will be forever grateful for the year we spent working with this absolutely extraordinary musician. His mind-blowing talent and musicality were matched only by his generosity as a collaborator and the infectious joy he brought to his work and to his life.

We're fortunate that the past 20 years have been full of inspiration and joy for our ensemble. We've seen extraordinary moments and met extraordinary challenges. We are so thankful for the time we have had together, and we are reminded never to take it for granted. We feel very fortunate to be able to spend our time making music with each other.

With nearly two decades of spellbinding performances to its name, Chicago-based quartet **Third Coast Percussion** (Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin and David Skidmore) is the first percussion ensemble to win a Grammy Award in the classical genre. Also nominated for a Grammy as a composer collective, TCP recasts the classical music experience with a brilliantly varied sonic palette, crafting music to “push percussion in new directions, blurring musical boundaries and beguiling new listeners” (NPR). The ensemble celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2025, having blossomed from percussion students who met in 2005 at Northwestern University into an internationally-renowned performing arts organization.

TCP has toured widely across the U.S. and four continents, exuding “rare power” (*Washington Post*) and “an inspirational sense of fun and curiosity” (*Minnesota Star-Tribune*). The ensemble’s recordings include 23 feature albums and appearances on 15 additional releases, including its Grammy-winning Cedille recording of Steve Reich’s works for percussion. It has commissioned and premiered new works from such artists as Philip Glass, Missy Mazzoli, Clarice Assad, Danny Elfman, Augusta Read Thomas, and Jlin – whose TCP commission, *Perspective*, was a 2023 Pulitzer Prize finalist.

TCP has also produced collaborative art alongside engineers, architects, choreographers and musicians of all genres, and connected with audiences through talks, play-alongs, educational programs, and mobile apps. They collaborate with numerous Chicago-based civic and cultural institutions, teach thousands of students through educational partnerships, and maintain multi-year collaborations with Chicago-based composers. The quartet also serves as ensemble-in-residence at Denison University.

The workshopping and development of the music on this album was made possible by leadership support from The Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation, with additional support from the Julian Family Foundation and Steph and Daniel Heffner.



Compositions

For Third Coast Percussion's 20th anniversary, the quartet asked frequent collaborator Jlin to create a new work that would be a remix or reimagining of a work by a composer who inspires her. *Please Be Still* reimagines materials from the "Kyrie Eleison" of J.S. Bach's *Mass in B Minor*. A lover of Bach's music since childhood, Jlin focused on Bach's rhythmic vocabulary. The creative process with TCP was an extension of the collaboration that yielded her 2023 Pulitzer-finalist piece, *Perspective*.

Jlin (Jerrilynn Patton) has quickly become one of the most distinctive composers in America and one of the most influential women in electronic music. Jlin's thrilling, emotional, and multidimensional compositions have earned her praise as "one of the most forward-thinking contemporary composers in any genre" (*Pitchfork*). She is the recipient of a United States Artists' 2023 Fellowship award and was a finalist for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in Music. Her mini-album, *Perspective* was released to critical acclaim on Planet Mu (2023). Her much-lauded albums *Dark Energy* (2015) and *Black Origami* (2017) have appeared on "Best of" lists in *The New York Times*, *The Wire*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Guardian*, and *Vogue*. Jlin has been commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, Third Coast Percussion, the Pathos Quartet, choreographers Wayne McGregor and Kyle Abraham, fashion designer Rick Owens, and the visual artists Nick Cave and Kevin Beasley. Her latest release, *Akoma* (Planet Mu, March 2024) features collaborations with Philip Glass, Björk, and the Kronos Quartet.

Please Be Still by Jlin was commissioned by Third Coast Percussion for its 20th Anniversary, with support from Carnegie Hall, the Zell Family Foundation, and the Robert and Isabelle Bass Foundation.



2 - 4 Tigran Hamasyan: *Sonata for Percussion*

Although he has built a career as a performer of his own music, Hamasyan's work has started to become available to other performers in recent years, first in the form of sheet music for his solo piano works, and now as new compositions written for other performers. In particular, he seems a natural choice to write for a contemporary percussion ensemble as his creative voice plays with extremely complex rhythmic cycles. His *Sonata for Percussion* places this rhythmic vocabulary within a traditional classical music form as he weaves asymmetrical rhythms into compelling counterpoint. His great power as a composer is that his individual musical lines are always melodies in their own right, transcending the mathematics of their complex rhythmic skeletons, even in the final movement, "23 for TCP," which overlays different subdivisions of the 23/8 time signature.

Tigran Hamasyan is considered one of the most remarkable and distinctive jazz-meets-rock pianists/composers of his generation. A piano virtuoso with groove power, Hamasyan seamlessly fuses potent jazz improvisation and progressive rock with the rich folkloric music of his native Armenia. His musical journey began in his childhood home, where he was exposed to a diverse array of musical influences, leading to him playing piano at age three, performing in festivals and competitions by the time he was 11, and winning the Montreux Jazz Festival's piano competition in 2003. He released his debut album, *World Passion*, in 2004, at age 17. Hamasyan has since released records on France's Plus Loins, Universal France, Nonesuch, and ECM. Hamasyan's new conceptual album, *The Bird of a Thousand Voices*, was released in August 2024 on Naïve/Believe, marking his debut with the label. In addition to awards and critical acclaim, Hamasyan has built a dedicated following worldwide and earned praise from Herbie Hancock, Brad Mehldau, and the late Chick Corea. "With startling combinations of jazz, minimalist, electronic, folk and songwriterly elements ... Hamasyan and his collaborators travel

musical expanses marked with heavy grooves, ethereal voices, pristine piano playing and ancient melodies. You'll hear nothing else like this." (NPR)

Tigran Hamasyan's *Sonata for Percussion* was commissioned by Third Coast Percussion for its 20th Anniversary, with support from Elizabeth and Justus Schlichting and the Zell Family Foundation.

5 - 6 Zakir Hussain: *Murmurs in Time*

Murmurs in Time is the legendary tabla master's only composition for a classical percussion group, although his career was filled with collaborations with percussionists of all kinds and explorations of the special bond among "fellow rhythmists." This two-movement work echoes with memories of his own personal history. His musical journey started as a very small child, with his father and Guru, the famous tabla player Ustad Alla Rakha, singing rhythms for the young Zakir to sing back. These vocalizations of drum sounds ("bols") are an important element of the Hindustani classical music tradition and feature prominently in the first movement of *Murmurs in Time*. They can be a way to internalize rhythmic patterns independent of physical technique, and also become virtuosic displays in their own right. A rhythmic cycle used in the second movement was a pattern Zakir learned from his father when he was about 11 years old. This collaboration encompassed a balance of strictly composed material and opportunities for improvisation. Hussain treated the commission as an opportunity for mutual learning, rather than a channel for

imposing his will on the other performers. “It is important that respect is given to the artists that I’m working with, by allowing them to be able to find their own way in the piece that I’m presenting . . . I love to see how it comes back to me in a different costume.”

The preeminent classical tabla virtuoso of our time, **Zakir Hussain** was appreciated as one of the world’s most esteemed and influential musicians, one whose mastery of his percussion instrument took it to a new level, transcending cultures and national borders. A child prodigy who began his international touring career by the age of 18, Zakir was at the helm of many genre-defying collaborations, including Shakti, Remember Shakti, Masters of Percussion, Planet Drum, Tabla Beat Science, and Sangam. In February 2024, Zakir made history by receiving three Grammy Awards in a single Grammy Awards Ceremony, the first musician from India to be thus honored. As a composer, he scored music for numerous feature films and composed four concertos, which have enjoyed premieres and acclaimed performances in India, Europe, and the U.S. – by the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center. He was the recipient of countless awards, including five Grammys, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan, Padma Shri, *Officier* in France’s Order of Arts and Letters, and several honorary doctorates. Zakir was voted “Best Percussionist” in both the *Downbeat* Critics’ and Readers’ Polls and *Modern Drummer’s* Reader’s Poll over several years, including 2023. He was honored with SFJazz’s Lifetime Achievement Award at its 2017 Gala for his “unparalleled contribution to the world of music.” In 2022, he was named the Kyoto Prize Laureate in Arts and Philosophy. As an educator, he conducted many workshops and lectures each year, both at prestigious universities and at annual workshops that he led in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Murmurs in Time by Zakir Hussain was commissioned by Third Coast Percussion for its 20th Anniversary, with support from Modlin Center for the Arts at University of Richmond, Carnegie Hall, Washington Performing Arts, and the Zell Family Foundation.



7 Jessie Montgomery: *Study No. 1*

This was the first in what has become an ongoing series of collaborations between Jessie Montgomery and Third Coast Percussion. Montgomery wrote *Study No. 1* for the Percussive Arts Society's International Convention, and TCP served as a sort of musical laboratory for her as she worked on the piece: reading sketches; offering thoughts on notation and logistics; and sharing tricks of the trade, such as changing the pitch of a tom-tom by blowing air through a tube inserted into the side of the drum, dipping crotales in a bowl of water to bend their pitch, and sliding a crotale across a drumhead to create a phaser effect. All of the sounds in this work are created acoustically.


8 - 10 Jessie Montgomery: *In Color Suite*

arr. Sean Connors and Third Coast Percussion

In workshops with Third Coast Percussion for her *Study No. 1*, Montgomery brought excerpts from a number of pre-existing works, including *In Color*, as material to experiment with on percussion instruments as a way to explore timbral possibilities and the blending of sonic colors. TCP member Sean Connors was drawn to *In Color* in particular and asked for the composer's blessing to arrange three movements for percussion quartet. His version includes unique timbral combinations of its own, including bowed marimba with melodica, whistling and humming in unison with vibraphone, and a wooden rasp drawn on the ends of low marimba bars, all of which

add a touch of the unexpected to the expressive harmonic language of Montgomery's writing.

Jessie Montgomery is a Grammy Award-winning composer, violinist, and educator whose work interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, poetry, and social consciousness, making her an acute interpreter of 21st-century American sound and experience. Her profound works have been described as "turbulent, wildly colorful, and exploding with life," (*The Washington Post*) and are performed regularly by leading orchestras and ensembles around the world. In June 2024, she concluded a three-year appointment as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's Mead Composer-in-Residence. A founding member of PUBLIQuartet and former member of the Catalyst Quartet, Montgomery is a frequent and highly engaged collaborator with performing musicians, composers, choreographers, playwrights, poets, and visual artists alike. At the heart of Montgomery's work is a deep sense of community enrichment and a desire to create opportunities for young artists and underrepresented composers to broaden audience experiences in classical music spaces. Montgomery has been recognized with many prestigious awards and fellowships, including the Civitella Ranieri Fellowship, the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and Sphinx Virtuosi Composer-in-Residence, the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation, and *Musical America's* 2023 Composer of the Year. She serves on the Composition and Music Technology faculty at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music.



11 Musekiwa Chingodza: *Dzoka Kumba (Come Back Home)*

TCP has worked with Zimbabwean artist Musekiwa Chingodza multiple times over the past decade, bringing him to the Midwest to teach the quartet about Shona music and the Mbira, an instrument that plays a central role in that musical tradition. To celebrate Third Coast

Percussion's 20th anniversary, the ensemble asked Musekiwa to return to Chicago and teach them a new piece to record together. *Dzoka Kumba* ("Come back home") was a message to Musekiwa's daughter, inviting her to come back to the family's home for care and comfort during a trying time. This recording features Chingodza singing and playing Mbira, with TCP supporting on marimba, vibraphone, drumset, sun drum, and hosho — Shona shakers made from dried gourds.

Musekiwa Chingodza was born into a family of great mbira players in Mwangara village, Murewa, Zimbabwe, in 1970. He began playing mbira at age five and is self-taught. Through listening to other gwenyambira (great mbira players), he developed a strong attachment to and love for mbira music. He is a singer, dancer, and drummer, and plays both mbira dzavadzimu and nyunga nyunga. He regularly tours the US, Canada, Japan, and France. In 1991, Musekiwa was a key member of the band Panjea, founded by Chris Berry. He composed the hit song "Ganda" on Panjea's Zimbabwean album. His compositions and performances are featured on a number of recordings. He says, "Our music is both medicine and food, as mbira has the power to heal and to provide for people. Mbira pleases both the living and the dead."

Dzoka Kumba by Musekiwa Chingodza was commissioned by Third Coast Percussion for its 20th Anniversary, with support from the Zell Family Foundation and Third Coast Percussion's New Works Fund.



Credits

Performers: Third Coast Percussion (Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin, David Skidmore); Zakir Hussain, tabla and tanpura (tracks 5 and 6); Musekiwa Chingodza, mbira and vocals (track 11)

Producers Judith Sherman and Colin Campbell

Engineer Bill Maylone

Assistant Engineers Aidan Connelly, Nick Iacono, and Daniel Quinlan

Studio Assistants Emma Brooks and Samantha Aviles

Mixing Third Coast Percussion, Judith Sherman, and Bill Maylone

Mastering Engineer Joe Lambert

Program Notes Robert Dillon and David Skidmore

Recorded

Tracks 1-4 and 7-10: November 4-8, 2024 and Tracks 5-6: September 30-October 2, 2024 at Narwhal Studios, Chicago, IL; Track 11: November 15, 2024 at Rax Trax, Chicago, IL.

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www.thirdcoastpercussion.com

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Third Coast Percussion and Cedille Records mourn the loss of Bonnie McGrath, whose enthusiasm and passion we will dearly miss.

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