

February 25, 2019 | By Anthony King

Cross-Wired Brings International Percussionists to UC San Diego for One Dynamic Week

Concerts, master classes will workshop and premiere new piece by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Roger Reynolds

The UC San Diego Department of Music's Cross-Wired series is incredibly unique, Distinguished Professor Steven Schick said. It's a week-long set of mini-concerts, master classes and large-scale performances for seven up-and-coming percussionists, each who will be studying new work by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer and University Professor Roger Reynolds.

Hailing from across North America and Europe, the select seven percussionists will be on campus Feb. 25 – March 1. In session each day, afternoon masterclasses will be open to the public, as will a 5 p.m. informal concert on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.



From left, Roger Reynolds and Steven Schick present "Cross-Wired" Feb. 25 - March 1. (Courtesy UC San Diego Department of Music)

"Here and There" for Cross-Wired, in composer Roger Reynolds' words

A powerful dimension of some musical traditions is the creation of a document that describes the purposes of the work as a field of opportunity. It's called a "score." It represents the composer's vision, but each performer can realize it anew, often in unexpected ways.

In conceiving a new work, I imagine things that intrigue me. But when there is an opportunity to work with skilled musicians as composition proceeds, details change through interaction and adjustment. Even the meanings can change.

Cross-Wired was conceived so as to give me an opportunity to work with eight percussionists who have studied “Here and There.” This week, they will explore what they have discovered with each other, with me, and with an acknowledged master: maestro Schick. This process entails doubts and revelations, and it’s my favorite part of being a composer.

“Here and There” — built as a response to an intriguing short text of Samuel Beckett’s — presents formidable, perhaps even unprecedented challenges to the performer: not only choreographing intricate percussion actions intended to mimic Beckett’s words, but also the actual speaking of his text, using the voice in extended ways that move beyond what an actor would be likely to do.

Steven’s concept is brilliant and I am certain it will reward both the participants, and the audiences that experience the resulting performances.

“The thing that we can do at UC San Diego is create a laboratory situation, where we are not barring the doors to new work but we are making them more accessible to artists, to students and to audiences,” Schick said, who holds the Reed Family Presidential Chair in Music. “I’ve never heard of anything like this, the idea that we would bring in a large number of people all working on different stages of one piece.”

Reynolds’ new work “Here and There” includes text by Samuel Beckett and will be coached by Schick, Reynolds, Department of Theatre and Dance faculty member Eva Barnes and two Department of Music alumni, returning to campus for the special occasion: Aiyun Huang, a professor at the University of Toronto, and Ivan Manzanilla, now at the University of Guanajuato.

“Working collaboratively with masterful performers such as Steven Schick is one of my greatest satisfactions as an artist,” Reynolds said. “I await this week — all its interactions and discoveries — with high anticipation.”

Schick said this was the fourth major piece he and Reynolds have worked on together — “Each time he shows me something I’ve never thought of” — and being able to offer this work, unrestricted, is important.

“We’re supporting the education of these young musicians, and bringing them here to our campus so we can work together,” Schick said. “Part of the selection process is that they will leave here and play these pieces in other places, specifically in underserved communities where audiences wouldn’t necessarily have contact with Roger’s work.”

In the evening on Feb. 27, as part of the department’s WEDS@7 series, Schick will present a solo percussion concert that will start with “ __ . . . __ __ . . __ __ . . __ . . ” (2018), written specifically for Schick by current Ph.D. student Celeste Oram; “Trans” (2014) by professor and Qualcomm Institute Research Artist in Residence Lei Liang, and “Zyklus für einen Schlagzeuger (Cycle for a Percussionist)” (1959) by Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Following the intermission, Schick will present the very first performance of Reynolds' "Here and There" (2018), the piece being workshopped during the week with the guest artists.



Percussionist Steven Schick holds the Reed Family Presidential Chair in Music. (Photo by Alexis Negron/ UC San Diego Department of Music)

To round out the week, Friday, March 1 will begin with a 4 p.m. public presentation in the Conrad Prebys Music Center's Experimental Theater, featuring a "Master Class Round Up" with the guest percussionists performing excerpts from the week's work, and a second performance of "Here and There" by Schick.

"Many commissions have an exclusivity agreement, where the commissioner has exclusive rights to perform the piece for a set period of time before others can play it. Cross-Wired is the opposite: it's an 'anti-exclusivity' commission, bringing up-and-coming artists into the earliest possible stage so that everyone benefits," Schick said. "This is very special."

Following the 4 p.m. concert, the UC San Diego percussion ensemble red fish blue fish will take the stage at 7 p.m. with Schick and alumni Huang and Manzanilla in the Conrad Prebys Concert Hall, first performing four vignettes followed by the massive undertaking of Iannis Xenakis' "Persephassa" (1969).

The first of Xenakis' innovative and ambitious works for percussion ensemble, "Persephassa" was commissioned for the first-ever Shiraz Festival — organized by the Empress of Iran — and held at the historic desert site of Persepolis. Schick says he knows the piece intimately, but presenting it at UC San Diego this year has special meaning.

One thing that makes the performance unique is that the six percussionists, including Schick performing with graduate students, are distributed around the audience: both on stage, but also in specific locations in the concert hall seating. When the Conrad Prebys Concert Hall was built 10 years ago, the seating was specifically designed for this piece in particular.

"Persephassa" has not, however, ever been performed in the hall.

"One of the main parts of the construction of the Concert Hall was that this piece was chosen as a token, as a 'here's a difficult piece to present, let's make sure we can do it at UC San Diego,'" Schick said. "We thought that, given it's an anniversary of sorts for the hall, that we should be doing it."

In all, Schick said the week-long undertaking is an “exciting and inviting way” for students, artists and the greater public to engage with and experience new percussion music.

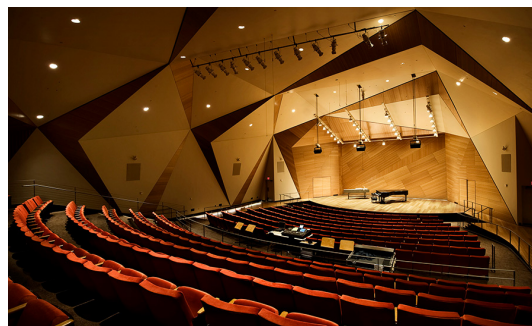
“We are knitting together what seems to be disparate parts of experiencing a new piece,” Schick said. “How do you work with a composer? How do you frame it so the audience responds? How do you disperse it into the public conversation? Cross-Wired is an attempt to integrate all of those into a single event, to assure that it will have a life outside of our first performance.”

Learn more about the complete [Cross-Wired](#) week of events.

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Built 10 years prior, the Conrad Prebys Music Center Concert Hall will stage the performance of “Persephassa” on March 1 at 7 p.m. (Photo by Erik Jepsen/ UC San Diego Publications)