



CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

TACTUS

With Special Guest

Leese Walker, Soundpainter

Erin Rogers and **Matt Ward** (BM '98),
Co-Artistic and Administrative Advisors

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2026 | 7:30 PM
ALAN M. AND JOAN TAUB ADES PERFORMANCE SPACE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2026 | 7:30 PM
ALAN M. AND JOAN TAUB ADES PERFORMANCE SPACE

CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

TACTUS

With Special Guest

Leese Walker, Soundpainter

Erin Rogers and Matt Ward (BM '98), Co-Artistic and Administrative Advisors

Program

JULIUS EASTMAN
(b. 1940)

Stay On It (1973)

Garrick Neuner, voice

Claire Cathey, flute

Sarah Pedlar, flute

Ethan Burke, clarinet

David Holloway, French horn

Sathvi Seshan, violin

Miles Wierer-Huling, viola

Leo Martinez, bass

Isaac Dorio, piano

Zheng Liu, toy piano

Mihail Babus, percussion

Emma Stewart, percussion

BETSY JOLAS
(b. 1926)

De Nuit (By Night) (2004)

Garrick Neuner, voice

CHRISTIAN WOLFF
(b. 1934)

Burdocks (1970-1971)

Claire Cathey, flute

Sarah Pedlar, flute

David Holloway, French horn

Sathvi Seshan, violin

Miles Wierer-Huling, viola

Leo Martinez, bass

Isaac Dorio, piano

DAVID LANG
(b. 1957)

cheating, lying, stealing (1993, rev. 1995)

Ethan Burke, bass clarinet

Clara Cho (BM '21, MM '23, PS '24), cello*

Zheng Liu, piano

Mihail Babus, **David Cossin** (BM '94)*+, and

Emma Stewart, percussion

Intermission

WALTER THOMPSON

Soundpainting (2026)

Leese Walker, Soundpainter*

Leo Martinez, Soundpainter and bass

Garrick Neuner, voice

Claire Cathey, flute

Sarah Pedlar, flute

Ethan Burke, clarinet

Henry Berberi, saxophone*

Holden Meier, trumpet*

David Holloway, French horn

Sathvi Seshan, violin

Miles Wierer-Huling, electric violin

Ealaph Tabbaa, viola*

Elias Jort, cello*

Isaac Dorio, piano

Zheng Liu, piano

Mihail Babus, percussion

Emma Stewart, percussion

Evan Furrow, drums*

Luke Bacani, vibraphone*

* Guest Performer

+ CPP Faculty

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

De Nuit (By Night) (2004)

Betsy Jolas

Text by Victor Hugo

1. I know not... (The Tables)

I know not where this begins, nor where it comes to end, nor what can be found
in the foreground, in the rear, in the middle, and right and left and east and west
and south and north; I do not know it inside nor outside; I see planets and planets
and stars and stars and stars; I see constellations, I also see rays all tangled up
with wonders and fastened to gleams of light; and dazzled minds engulfed in
contemplation, and contemplation immersed in those dazzled minds; I am caught
in the fabulous whirling of the wheel with the golden nave. Where does this all
lead? I do not know. And night makes a rutted way for stars.

2. There was darkness... (Ocean)

There was darkness all over; it was silent, quite unearthly;
I was left alone, yet it was no longer me;
Or rather, in my head open to winds of fear,
I felt it, even though gloom and mystery
Had not yet broken the thread which holds me to the earth,
I felt it rising, swelling, flooding every single nook,
As a strange and fearsome stream of oblivion;
[...]

And hardly did I then still have a sense of my life
When, just as a mere worm guided by a gleaming light,
What I had named my soul had turned into something
Which I no longer trusted and which floated in me.
All that was left of me was a craving to know,
And a desire for something that could be,
And lips longing for water, for flowing water,
Even within the fatal hand of night.

PROGRAM NOTES

***Stay On It* (1973)**

Julius Eastman

One of the first musicians to add pop elements to the Minimalist mix, Julius Eastman was an African-American artist who studied piano at the Curtis Institute with Mieczyslaw Horszowski before switching his major to composition. He was also a noted singer, well known for his 1973 Nonesuch recording of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King*. He also performed on two of Meredith Monk's albums. Many of his pieces have an activist political aspect, and he spoke out about what it meant to be black and gay in the United States.

Eastman was a member of the Creative Associates ensemble at SUNY Buffalo in the late 1960s and early '70s. He wrote *Stay On It* for that group in 1973, and toured and recorded it (in a live performance) with them. Eastman's notation was often casual, and details of his scores have been created posthumously from recordings. *Stay On It* was a structured improvisation that could be performed with varying instrumentation, including a voice repeating the title words. Eastman's brother Gerry notes a Caribbean influence in it.

For this performance, the members of Tactus have created their own unique arrangement of the piece. Decisions were made in rehearsals, and Leo Martinez put in significant work to condense notes and ideas into a beautifully organized score.

—Ethan Burke

***De Nuit* (By Night) (2004)**

Betsy Jolas

French-American composer Betsy Jolas' piece *De Nuit (By Night)* presents two songs for unaccompanied low voice, setting late text by the French romantic poet Victor Hugo. Jolas' fascination with this ethereal text has spanned over forty years, with previous settings including a radio cantata and an accompanied song cycle. Her passion and understanding for the text are shown not just through her English translation which you will hear tonight, but through her richly sensitive palette of vocal textures including microtonal runs, spoken text, and hummed passages. Constantly shifting atonal lines and her characteristic "wave rhythm" aptly mark Hugo's text on expanse, light, and cosmic doubt with a setting which cannot discover its center.

—Garrick Neuner

***Burdocks* (1970-1971)**

Christian Wolff

Burdocks (1970-71) is a composition by French-American composer Christian Wolff (b. 1934). Wolff studied with John Cage in the 1950s and became a part of the New York School art movement. His compositions frequently feature improvisation and innovative uses of notation. These elements are at the forefront of *Burdocks*, which “...include[s] specific notations on staves; notations indicating only durations, often depending on other sounds a player hears; and various verbal directions both explicit and suggestive.” Wolff notes that he had the Scratch Orchestra* in mind while creating the work and was very interested in the indeterminacy of amateur performance. The loose nature of the piece’s notation requires the performers to engage in collaborative decision-making; Wolff intends for “...a social music, in which participation is a rich and rewarding experience.” The preparation of this performance has absolutely been rewarding and full of joyful collaboration for Tactus. We have selected five of the ten sections of *Burdocks* to present tonight, experimenting with communication, movement, and listening. The selections include I (C and E), V, VIII, IX, and X.

**The Scratch Orchestra was a musical community comprised of musicians (or non-musicians) of all levels, “joined in a populist-anarchist spirit.”*

—Sarah Pedlar

***cheating, lying, stealing* (1993, rev. 1995)**

David Lang

A couple of years ago, I started thinking about how so often when classical composers write a piece of music, they are trying to tell you something that they are proud of and like about themselves. Here’s this big gushing melody, see how emotional I am. Or, here’s this abstract hard-to-figure-out piece, see how complicated I am, see my really big brain. I am more noble, more sensitive, I am so happy. The composer really believes he or she is exemplary in this or that area. It’s interesting, but it’s not very humble. So I thought, What would it be like if composers based pieces on what they thought was wrong with them? Like, here’s a piece that shows you how miserable I am. Or, here’s a piece that shows you what a liar I am, what a cheater I am. I wanted to make a piece that was about something disreputable. It’s a hard line to cross. You have to work against all your training. You are not taught to find the dirty seams in music. You are not taught to be low-down, clumsy, sly and underhanded. In *cheating, lying, stealing*, although phrased in a comic way, I am trying to look at something dark. There is a swagger, but it is not trustworthy. In fact, the instruction in the score for how to play it says: *Ominous funk*.

—David Lang

Soundpainting with Tactus

Walter Thompson

The Art of Live Composition

Tonight's 35-minute performance features the Tactus Ensemble in a live composition constructed through Soundpainting, the universal multidisciplinary live-composing sign language created by composer Walter Thompson. Using a vocabulary of more than 1,800 signed gestures, Soundpainting allows a composer to create and shape music in real time, transforming the responses of improvising performers into a nuanced composition.

The MSM Soundpainting residency on the first concert of every year is led by Contemporary Performance Faculty Todd Reynolds, whose longstanding practice and teaching have introduced generations of musicians to Soundpainting. For this year's concert, Reynolds welcomes guest Soundpainter Leese Walker, who will lead the performance. Walker will be joined for a portion of the concert by guest Soundpainter Leo Martinez, a CPP student who has been performing with Walker's Strike Anywhere Performance Ensemble since last year.

Walker is the Founder and Producing Artistic Director of Strike Anywhere, New York City's pioneering multidisciplinary performance ensemble. She was the first actress to be Soundpainted and played a pivotal role in helping Thompson adapt the language for theater. A core member of the Walter Thompson Orchestra since 1997, Walker is a leading Soundpainting practitioner and educator and, alongside Thompson, offers the only Soundpainting Certification Course in the United States. In 2026, she co-produced the 28th International Soundpainting Thinktank at Vassar, hosted by Strike Anywhere in collaboration with Powerhouse Theater. The annual conference was attended by 48 Soundpainters from over a dozen countries.

Tonight's performance brings together performers from diverse musical backgrounds in an exploration of composition, collaboration, and spontaneity. Every gesture generates a response, and every response creates a new possibility. What emerges is a composition that exists only in this moment—unrepeatable, unpredictable, and alive.

ABOUT THE GUEST ARTIST

Leese Walker, Soundpainter

Leese Walker is the Founder and Producing Artistic Director of New York City's Strike Anywhere Performance Ensemble, a multidisciplinary company of musicians, dancers, actors, and designers. Founded in 1997, Strike Anywhere creates provocative performances and innovative education programs that promote empathy, creativity, and civic engagement, working at the intersection of activism, the arts, and social justice.

Walker is a leading practitioner and educator in the field of Soundpainting, the universal multidisciplinary sign language developed by composer Walter Thompson for live composition with improvisers. She was the first actress to be Soundpainted and was instrumental in helping Thompson adapt the language for theater. Soundpainting has evolved to encompass all performance disciplines and is now practiced in more than 35 countries. Walker has been a core member of the Walter Thompson Orchestra since 1997 and, in collaboration with Thompson, offers the only Soundpainting Certification Course in the United States.

In 2026, Walker produced the International Soundpainting Thinktank in collaboration with the Powerhouse Theater at Vassar, bringing together Soundpainters, artists, and educators from around the world. She has also led Soundpainting residencies at Oberlin College and Conservatory, Dartmouth College, and Lehigh University, and has taught and led workshops at Het Nationale Theater in The Hague.

Walker has performed and taught at venues including Brooklyn Academy of Music, PS122, the Irondale Center, and internationally throughout Europe and Asia. She has led workshops for Lincoln Center's LEAD program and is a recipient of the BAX Arts Educator Award, the Arts Presenters Emerging Leaders Scholarship, and the APPEX Fellowship in Ubud, Bali. She is a master teaching artist with Roundabout Theatre Company.

ABOUT THE CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

The Contemporary Performance Program (CPP) is a two-year graduate degree program at the Manhattan School of Music. The students of CPP form the core of Tactus, MSM's premier contemporary ensemble. As members of Tactus, CPP students perform works of the 20th and 21st centuries, work closely with living composers, and present works by MSM faculty and students.

Administration

Erin Rogers, Co-Artistic & Administrative Advisor

Matt Ward, Co-Artistic & Administrative Advisor

Faculty

Ashkan Behzadi,
contemporary history survey

Gregg August, bass

David Cossin, percussion

Anthony de Mare, piano

Monica Ellis, bassoon

Oren Fader, guitar

John Ferrari, percussion

Susan Jolles, harp

Margaret Kampmeier, piano

David Krakauer, clarinet

William Lang, trombone

Curtis Macomber, violin

Kevin Newton, horn

Tara Helen O'Connor, flute

John Pickford-Richards, viola

Todd Reynolds, electronics

Brandon Ridenour, trumpet

Erin Rogers, saxophone

Lucy Shelton, voice

Fred Sherry, cello

Keve Wilson, oboe

Tactus Ensemble

Garrick Neuner

Malverne, New York

Claire Cathey

Mount Pleasant, South Carolina

Sarah Pedlar

Decorah, Iowa

Ethan Burke

Flagler Beach, Florida

David Holloway

Natick, Massachusetts

Sathvi Seshan

Jersey City, New Jersey

Miles Wierer-Huling

Portland, Oregon

Leo Martinez

West Park, Florida

Isaac Dorio

Naples, Florida

Zheng Liu

Nanchang, China

Mihail Babus

Munster, Indiana

Emma Stewart

Orange, Virginia

ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 1,000 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege Division is a professionally oriented Saturday music program dedicated to the musical and personal growth of talented young musicians ages 8 to 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

Your gift helps a young artist reach for the stars!

To enable Manhattan School of Music to continue educating and inspiring generations of talented students and audiences alike, please consider making a charitable contribution today.

Contact the Philanthropy Office at 917-493-4434
or to make an online gift, **scan this code**
or visit msmnyc.edu/givenow.



Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Manhattan School of Music on the traditional land of the Lenape and Wappinger past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.



MSMNYC.EDU

