

Shawn Mativetsky presents

T A B L E A U X

New Music for the Tabla of North India

"[Shawn Mativetsky's] solo contemporary tabla recital attracted quite a crowd. It was a beautiful mix of eastern music with western rhythms and western music with eastern beats." - Bharat Times, Montreal

"On a été transporté par les sonorités du tabla de Shawn Mativetsky." - CIBL FM, Montréal

"Our senses were instantly tingled..." - The Gazette, Montreal

The **tabla** is the most popular percussion instrument of Northern India. It can be heard in Indian dance, devotional, folk, and film music. The tabla is an integral part of North Indian classical music, where it can be performed solo, in dance accompaniment, or to accompany melodic instruments. The instrument made its debut approximately 300 years ago, having evolved from drums with a history dating back over 2000 years.

Over the past decade, **Shawn Mativetsky** – percussionist, composer and educator – has been working to combine his dual backgrounds in both Western and Indian classical music by commissioning new music for the tabla. The resulting works draw their inspiration from Western and Indian music in varying degrees, and reflect the personalities and approaches of the individual composers. The tabla, with its quasi-melodic sonorities, is a unique percussion instrument that produces a colourful palette of sounds, rhythms of extreme intricacy, and music of great depth and vibrancy. Audiences are fascinated and inspired by the instrument's rich musical heritage, technical complexity, and soothing percussive timbres.



Indian classical music places a great importance on improvisation and spontaneous creativity on the part of the performer. There is also a very special and personal rapport between performer and audience which serves to shape the development of the performance. Whether in a performance of new or traditional music, Shawn's performances move audiences with his fresh approach, creativity in improvisation, and his deep respect for tradition; simultaneously breaking new ground, while taking his inspiration from the past.

The proposed repertoire takes on many shapes and forms, from solo tabla pieces, to duos, trios, and concertos with ensemble. The programme can therefore be flexible, depending on artistic vision and budget. Please feel free to discuss your needs with us.

In addition to performances, Shawn Mativetsky is pleased to offer opportunities for audience-building and educational enrichment through tabla workshops, demonstrations, and master classes for performers, composers, or the general public. He is also available for Indian classical music performances, such as performing Indian classical tabla solo, or accompanying soloists on sitar, bansuri, etc.

C O N T A C T

For bookings, contact Shawn Mativetsky at
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Versatile percussionist Shawn Mativetsky performs in a variety of musical genres with dynamism and skill. Equally at home in Western classical and contemporary/new music, Indian classical music, and world music, Shawn also composes and performs music for dance and theatre. He is active in the promotion of the tabla and North Indian classical music through lectures, workshops, and performances across Canada and the United States. Based in Montreal, Shawn teaches tabla and percussion, both privately and at McGill University, where he directs the McGill Tabla Ensemble.

As an ensemble musician, Shawn Mativetsky's wide range is evident in his work with three very different groups: the contemporary music ensemble Quintette Mont-Royal, violinist Parmela Attariwala's cross-cultural Attar Project, and the Indian-folk group Galitcha. Shawn has given acclaimed solo performances at the Banaras Hindu University (India), the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, and the Société des Arts Technologiques. He has been featured in contemporary music series such as Groundswell, Jusqu'aux Oreilles, and Evolutions. As a soloist, he has appeared with the Thirteen Strings Chamber Orchestra, Musica Nova, Ensemble Fusions, GEMS, and the percussion ensembles at the University of Toronto, McGill University, and William Paterson University.

Shawn's work as composer and percussionist in Geordie Theatre's productions of *Brahm and the Angel* (2005) and *Hansel and Gretel* (2003) was met with critical acclaim. In 2003, he performed in Théâtre du Rideau Vert's highly successful production of Paulo Coelho's *L'Alchimiste* and was musical director and performer in Ensemble Mahapooram's *Le Lion du Panjshir* and Danse Kalashas / Usine C's dance production, *En Himalaya*. In 2006, he collaborated with the dancer Manijeh Ali, composing music for her solo dance choreography, *Spirit of the Mountain*.

Shawn has also performed with Ramasutra, Matter of Time, Ensemble Mahapooram, Ragleela, Lithium Ensemble, the Montreal Organ Consort, and Duo Sheppard-Lanza, as well as with a number of symphony orchestras in Canada. His performances have been recorded for radio and television, including CBC, Radio Canada, Bravo, CH Montreal, and Zee Music (UK/India). In 2000, his recording with Ramasutra won an ADISQ Felix award, and was nominated for a Juno.

Shawn Mativetsky is a ganda-band disciple of Pandit Sharda Sahai of the Benares tabla gharana and has also studied tabla with Bob Becker. In addition, he has studied Western classical percussion with Pierre Béluse, D'Arcy Gray, Andrei Malashenko, and Robert Slapcoff, and the percussion of Kathakali dance-theatre with Bruno Paquet. Shawn holds a Master's degree in music from McGill University and has received grants from the Canada Council for the Arts, the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec.

Repertoire List

SOLO

Ke-Te by Paul Frehner (2006)

Solo tabla, 12'

In the Indian tradition, a tabla solo is usually accompanied by a melodic instrument that plays a pattern and keeps time; here, the composer wanted to take on the challenge of writing a purely solo piece for the tabla. On these two drums, the *baya* – played by the left hand – and the *dahina* – played by the right, it is possible to produce a variety of sounds. These sounds are given syllabic names, similar to the Western practice of calling notes by solfege syllables. The sounds produced by the *baya* are *ge* and *ke*; those produced on the *dahina* are *te*, *tin*, *tun*, *na* and *ra*.

Ke-te is formally divided into three sections. The sounds *ke* and *te* are used extensively in the first and third sections. The middle section could be called *tun-na*. *Ke-te* is composed for and is dedicated to Shawn Mativetsky.

Alap, Jor, Jhala by Payton MacDonald (2003-2005)

Solo tabla, 19' (7', 5', 7')

Alap, *Jor*, and *Jhala* are for solo tabla. The titles come from the first, second, and third parts of the melodic introduction to a North Indian *Hindustani* classical music performance. These pieces are fully written out, with no improvisation.

An *Alap* is a slow, stately exposition of a *raga* with no regular rhythmic pulse. Just as a melodic player will unfold a *raga* one note at a time, so does the tabla drummer gradually reveal the different tones of the drums. The tension and density of the phrases also gradually increases.

During the *jor* section, a steady pulse is gradually established and the melodic phrases associated with the given *raga* are gradually revealed. This idea has been translated to solo percussion by focusing on the left hand drum (*baya*) and exploring the beautiful pitch changes that are possible by sliding the hand across the drum and pressing into the head. The rhythms are precisely written out, but the feeling is one of rubato and freedom.

A *jhala* is a section in which the notes of a fast melodic passage alternate with a drone note. In this work, an analogue is drawn to a melodic *jhala* by using alternating, or hand to hand, strokes on the drums. *Jhala* should be played with abandon, the end barely controlled. Refinement becomes less important as the

work progresses. The tension between what is comfortable and what is possible should be maximized.

Frictions, by Patrick Saint-Denis (2007)

Solo tabla, 6'

In this piece, the composer wanted to emphasise the friction provoked by applying Western musical ideas to an instrument whose resonant sounds transport us elsewhere. Processes generated by computer provide us with the opportunity to bring these sounds closer to home and to hear the tabla in a new light. Commissioned by Shawn Mativetsky with the aid of a grant from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Trade Winds by Christien Ledroit (2003)

Concerto for tabla with electronics or string orchestra, 14'

"The most fascinating piece on the program was Christien Ledroit's Trade Winds for tabla and orchestra... Percussionist Shawn Mativetsky handled the virtuoso solo part with an aplomb that was nicely matched by the orchestra." – The Ottawa Citizen

This piece exists in two formats, one for solo tabla and electroacoustic accompaniment (played back via standard CD), and one for solo tabla and string orchestra. *Trade Winds* is a concerto for tabla and electronics, built almost entirely from a few short musical fragments based on Indian musical scales and rhythms. The structure of the work is a loose interpretation of one of many Indian solo structures, and while it does not adhere strictly to Indian models, it captures the same basic slow-fast structure. The fast sections undergo a process of metamorphosis, from a *jhaptaal* (10 beat cycle) rhythm to a *rupak* (7 beat cycle) rhythm (and vice-versa), with the coda set in a *teentaal* rhythm, while the unmetered sections dissect the basic materials of the metered sections and explore their various musical aspects.

The title alludes to the weather patterns that allowed ancient cultures to meet and trade with each other. It refers to a blending of cultures and exchange of ideas, brought about by a mutually-occurring phenomenon, wind (or in this case, music).

Les arbres célestes by Bruno Paquet (1997)

Tabla with tape (CD), 7'

For the recorded tape in this piece, Bruno Paquet used a process of composition through aleatoric sequences, with elements of chance affecting the musical outcome. A setup of multiple tabla and vibraphone are played with falling projectiles. A cloth was laid out over the vibraphone with holes cut out to expose the correct notes, which were then struck by the falling projectiles, liberated in waves. The

musical sequences on tape were then treated and combined with live tabla, which provides the counterpoint.

The contrast between the warmth of individual life, the coldness of cosmic space, fantastic and celestial is created by the combination of live tabla and prerecorded tape, a feeling that the composer experienced during Montreal's ice storm in 1997.

Tabla Solo in Teentaal, traditional

Solo tabla with harmonium accompaniment, 10' to 60' (variable)

In the Benares *baj* (style), the art of solo tabla performance is greatly respected and very highly developed. There are more than twenty forms of composition in use, many of them unique to this tradition. Some are theme and variation forms which require spontaneous composition by the performer, while many others involve sophisticated compositional techniques with finished pieces handed down from generation to generation. In addition, there is a well defined procedure for joining the various types of compositions to form a logical and pleasing performance. The solo also includes vocal recitation of tabla compositions, using the traditional 'solfege' syllables called *bol*.

A tabla solo is traditionally played in a sixteen beat *taal*, a rhythmic cycle, known as *teentaal*. Throughout a performance an aural outline of this *taal* is maintained by means of a cyclic melody known as a *lahara*, normally performed by either harmonium (free reed keyboard instrument played with one hand, while the other pumps the bellow) or sarangi (a bowed string instrument similar to a violin, but with 36 strings, most of them being for sympathetic resonance).

DUO

Metal Jacket by Nicole Lizée (2005)

Tabla and harmonium, 12'

Inspired by K.K. Downing and Glenn Tipton circa 1983, *Metal Jacket* explores the raw, gritty qualities of the tabla and harmonium. At points in the work, the roles of the two instruments are reversed as the harmonium produces percussive sonorities and the tabla provides the melodic content through use of the tuning hammer. The work showcases the lower register of the harmonium, exploiting its rich, resounding tone, and emphasizing its compulsory need to "breathe." Like Downing and Tipton, the two sound sources at times intertwine to create detailed harmonic material and synchronized grooves. At other times, they trade off in a duel-like fashion.

***Ikky Gober* by Payton MacDonald (2002)**

Flute and tabla, 8'

"It was in the horrible land of Ud that I drank Ikky Gober. At first I felt nothing, but within an hour hallucinations of the most grotesque sort overcame me. The walls pulsed with a strange rhythm, awkward and unnatural. In front of me appeared a huge set of tabla, those beautiful drums I remember from my journeys in India. A terrifying giant creature, much like the fabled Gdretre, played them, lost in mystic bliss. The flies became a drone, insistent, relentless. And from some corner of my consciousness a flute-like tone sang above in a mode of no familiar praxis..."

***Farmaishi* by Payton MacDonald (2003)**

Flute and tabla, 9'

A *farmaishi tukra* is a special composition for tabla that has unique structural characteristics. MacDonald uses two *farmaishi tukras* from the Benares tabla tradition as the starting point for this piece. The first is in subdivisions of four (or eight), whereas the second is subdivided into groupings of seven. When these compositions are recontextualized within the context of Western music, we hear their personalities, their peculiarities anew, like an old friend who suddenly changes his appearance or personality.

***LA* by Robert Rosen (1996)**

Violin and tabla, with drones, 15'

La was commissioned by Parmela Attariwala in 1996 three years after first meeting Robert Rosen during a Banff Centre residency. Their shared interest in Ravi Shankar's *Concerto No.1* for sitar and orchestra inspired the commission, and the resulting work has become one of the most popular and oft performed contemporary Canadian works of the past decade.

Robert Rosen writes of this composition: "Once every ten years, in the middle of winter, just before dawn's first light, the full moon shines exactly between the two angular mountain peaks outside the front of my house. It is in full glory, amplified by the refracted angle through the earth's atmosphere. In 1996, I had the experience of seeing this phenomenon. Sometimes I feel it is an artist's responsibility not to miss these types of events and to have the necessary patience to wait for them. Our works of art are our commentaries upon what we observe, reiterated and interpreted through the aesthetics that have shaped our creative language in the cultural climate of our upbringing. The 'newness' that can result in a work is a byproduct of confluence and conjecture based on observation. That is what makes a work 'of' and 'for' contemporary time.

If that process happens to touch upon one of the many invisible threads of human cultural history, then a work stands a chance to be understood and respected outside its own contemporaneous environment.

So what does that have to do with *La*? This work is a product of the confluence of ideas and conjectures about possibilities that I have had from working with some wonderful musicians: people who don't look at me in strange ways when I tell them about the moon."

WITH ENSEMBLE

***Threedance* by Robert Aldridge (1987)**

Violin (or flute), marimba and tabla, 12'

Throughout the piece, the tabla is set primarily in rhythmic unison with the marimba, creating a 'super' percussion instrument whose pitches are reinforced with resonant rhythmic attacks. This motor drives the violin, whose melodic and improvisational gestures dance around the constant forward motion of the piece. The technique of phasing is used throughout *threedance*, whereby things fade in and out constantly, reflecting the idea that everything is always in motion and in a different space than it was five seconds ago. Through the use of this 'doppler' effect, the composer wanted to make a piece which evokes movement towards and away from different states of being: primal and serene, joyous and ecstatic, and sometimes reflective.

***Palta* by Bob Becker (1981)**

Solo tabla with percussion sextet, bass, piano, 10'

Palta was composed in 1981 and premiered the following year in Toronto by NEXUS ensemble. Originally conceived as a concerto for the North Indian tabla with keyboard percussion accompaniment, the piece was later revised to include additional electronic instruments and steel pans, thus making it suitable as a solo vehicle for drum set as well. North Indian musicians use the Hindi word *palta* to refer to variations made on a theme. In this piece the solo drums play improvised variations on a number of rhythmic themes, while the accompanying instruments – which include crotales, glockenspiel, songbells, vibraphone, marimba, steel pans, piano and electric bass – play variations on a cyclic pentatonic melody. This melody, which is often heard as an accompaniment to classical tabla solos in India, appears in a variety of harmonisations and orchestrations throughout the piece.

***Elementalities* by Christien Ledroit (2000)**

Flute, vibraphone, and tabla, 12'

Elementalities is a set of short pieces, all based on different presentations and mutations of

elements. The piece started with the idea of creating elements (short melodic and/or rhythmic fragments) and transforming them, and grew into a suite of five "mind games," all related to each other, but independent, such that any combination of movements may be played in concert. The outer movements, *Elemental I* and *II*, are concerned almost exclusively with basic presentation and permutation of elements. *Elemental I* offers four different unmetered settings of a set of elements, presenting them in different instruments, different orders and different registers. *Elemental II* treats a different set of elements to similar procedures, but places them in a metered setting. The second movement, *Cereal*, strings certain melodic and rhythmic elements of the other movements into a single melodic line. This melodic line is placed in one of several rhythmic/metric layers, and is then put through several serial permutations to create the structure. The middle movement, *Floating*, sets a rhapsodic flute line, drawn from the various elements of the other movements, floating above a mechanical, slowly changing background in the percussion.

***1st, 2nd, 3rd Concertos for Tabla and Percussion Quartet* by Payton MacDonald (2002-2004)**

Solo tabla with percussion quartet, 12' each

In a traditional tabla solo performance, a person playing a melodic instrument accompanies the tabla soloist. The melodic performer plays a melody that repeats round and round, outlining the rhythmic cycle against which the tabla player creates complicated and elegant rhythmic structures. MacDonald has always been interested in hearing the melodic part supported and developed in a way that is only possible with Western notation. Bob Becker wrote a piece called *Palta* in the 1980s that also explores this idea and set the precedent for his work. The drumming repertoire in the concertos is traditional music learned from the virtuoso tabla player, Pandit Sharda Sahai.

Technical Requirements

- Tabla, flute, and harmonium must be amplified. Short mic stands are preferable for tabla and harmonium.
- Tabla is played seated on the ground, so a 6'x8'x16" riser is recommended, covered with a carpet.
- CD playback and monitors are needed for any piece with electronics.

The technical requirements vary, depending on the program. A detailed stage plot and input list is available.