

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

ANDREW BLISS, DIRECTOR

KEVIN ZETINA, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



The Midwest Clinic 2025
December 19, 2025, 11:15 AM
Ballroom W184

ABOUT THE NATALIE L. HASLAM COLLEGE OF MUSIC

The Natalie L. Haslam College of Music at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville is a nationally recognized leader in music education, performance, and scholarly activity. With a distinguished faculty and a vibrant student body, the College offers a comprehensive range of undergraduate and graduate programs spanning music business, music communications, performance, composition, music education, and more.

Committed to artistic excellence and innovation, the College provides students with transformative learning experiences, preparing them to succeed in today's evolving music economy. Through dynamic performances, community engagement, and collaborations with world-class artists, the College enriches the cultural landscape of East Tennessee and beyond.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDING DEAN



Dear Midwest Clinic Attendees,

On behalf of the University of Tennessee's Natalie L. Haslam College of Music, I am pleased to welcome you to this performance by the UT Percussion Ensemble, led by Director Dr. Andrew Bliss and Assistant Director Professor Kevin Zetina. We are deeply honored to be part of the Midwest Clinic International Band and Orchestra Conference, one of the most prestigious gatherings of music educators, performers, and innovators in the world. Our participation reflects the exceptional artistry, scholarship, and forward

momentum defining our College and our Percussion Studies Area.

Since joining the University of Tennessee in 2011, Dr. Bliss has cultivated a percussion program that is now recognized nationally for its artistic vision, collaborative spirit, and commitment to new music. Under his leadership, our students regularly perform at regional and national festivals, participate in performance tours, and engage with distinguished guest artists and faculty, shaping experiences that prepare them for meaningful careers in music.

At the Natalie L. Haslam College of Music, our students stand at the heart of everything we do. Through performances, outreach, and service, they represent the best of our institution with communities across Tennessee and throughout the country. Their work continues to elevate our College and reflects our ongoing commitment to excellence.

Thank you for joining us today. We hope you enjoy the performance and the opportunity to connect with colleagues and friends who share a deep commitment to the transformative power of music.

Go Vols!

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Pappas

Founding Dean, Natalie L. Haslam College of Music

PROGRAM

Honeybee, 1820 (2018) Evan Chapman

Embryo (2022) Jlin
arr. Third Coast Percussion

Pillar III (2020) Andy Akiho

Cloud Folk (2017) John Psathas

Aestus (2024) Ethan Booyer

soldier/sailor (2021) Natalie Dietterich

Electric Sunrise (2025) Plini
arr. Kevin Zetina

*World premiere

PERCUSSION FACULTY



Andrew Bliss

Andrew M. Bliss serves as Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Tennessee College of Music, where he leads the UT Percussion Ensemble, the African-Diasporic Percussion Ensemble, and coordinates applied percussion and seminar/laboratory instruction across undergraduate and graduate levels. His work combines performance, curation, and mentorship, providing students with opportunities to engage deeply in both traditional and forward-looking percussion practices.

Since arriving at UT in 2011, Bliss has built a nationally recognized percussion program distinguished by artistic excellence and community engagement. He directs the award-winning University of

Tennessee Percussion Ensemble, which was featured at the 2015 PASIC New Literature Session and earned international acclaim by winning the 2018 PAS International Percussion Ensemble Competition, resulting in a showcase concert at PASIC. The ensemble has also appeared twice at the McCormick Marimba Festival (FL) and performed on the 2017 and 2025 PASIC Focus Day concerts, collaborating with leading composers on innovative repertoire. Bliss is the founder of the annual UT Percussion Festival sponsored by PAS, and he has established a strong outreach profile for the program through performances at Knox County schools, the Dogwood Arts Festival, the UT Alumni Awards Gala, the Knoxville Symphony Children's Concert Series, and the UT Cancer Institute. In recognition of his creative and pedagogical contributions, Bliss received the Faculty Innovator Award from the UT Teaching & Learning Center in 2024.

Bliss is active internationally as a performer, conductor, and educator. His appearances range from Knoxville's Big Ears Festival to the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music (Germany) and the Patagonia Percussion Festival (Argentina). He has collaborated with a wide range of artists including John Luther Adams, Pamela Z, Mark Applebaum, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Carolyn Chen, Evan Chapman, Kendall Williams, Sarah Kirkland Snider, Marc Mellits, Roomful of Teeth, So Percussion, and the Kronos Quartet. His performances span the solo and chamber repertoire, large ensemble collaborations, and cross-genre projects that bridge contemporary classical, experimental, and global traditions — with a growing focus on drumset performance, live electronics, original composition, and large-scale sound installations.

As a conductor and producer, Bliss specializes in creating immersive concert experiences. He has directed projects such as Michael Gordon's **Big Space** with the Bang on a Can All-Stars at the Tennessee Theatre, a 100-percussionist realization of Michael Pisaro's **A wave and waves**, and a live score performance of **Brimstone & Glory**. He also served as Director of the 2016 PASIC Focus Day, and for two decades as co-founder and Artistic Director of Nief-Norf, establishing its Summer Festival as an international hub for contemporary thought that united performers, composers, and scholars in collaborative, interdisciplinary work.

Bliss is in demand as a clinician and adjudicator, sharing his expertise through residencies and master classes at universities across the country. He has adjudicated major events including the Music for All National Percussion Festival, the PAS Concert Chamber and International Percussion Ensemble Competitions, and recently served as performer and adjudicator at the Center Grove High School Percussion Festival and the Ohio State University Percussion Festival. He has also been a featured presenter at leading conferences such as the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), the Midwest Clinic, the College Music Society, and the National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy. His method book **Multitudes** (Musicon Publications) is widely used nationally among high school and collegiate percussion programs.

Bliss is proud to be a Yamaha Performing Artist, and his performance and education activities are generously supported through collaborations with Zildjian Cymbals, Innovative Percussion, Evans & Sensory Percussion (D'Addario), Black Swamp, and Meinl Percussion.

PERCUSSION FACULTY



Kevin Zetina

Kevin Zetina is a passionate performer, composer, and arranger devoted to contemporary music—whether interpreting seminal works of the last century, premiering or composing brand new works, or arranging popular music for modern classical ensembles. He currently serves as Lecturer of Percussion at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he is the Assistant Director of the UT Percussion Ensemble, teaches applied lessons, and contributes broadly to the College of Music. Under his mentorship, students have placed into top graduate programs and summer festivals, and have performed

with international performing ensembles such as the World Percussion Group. His students have also performed at the Midwest Clinic, the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC), and throughout the Knoxville community. He is also a faculty member in percussion and composition at the Nief-Norf Summer Festival, and a regular performing member of the Nief-Norf ensemble.

Zetina's artistic practice is centered on developing ground-breaking new music; performing these works as a soloist and with chamber ensemble; and highlighting these works through carefully curated performances, ensemble directorship, and teaching. He has collaborated with members of Sō Percussion, Eighth Blackbird, Ensemble Signal, the JACK Quartet, and the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Recent highlights include touring China with a percussion sextet of fellow Yale alumni, performing sold-out TEDx concerts featuring his composition *Coalescence*; publishing a new percussion quartet, *sink*; and premiering ten new solo and chamber recordings which garnered over 100,000 views. This past November, Kevin presented his new snare drum book *Polyrhythms Through Pop Music* at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC).

As a composer, some of Zetina's notable projects include *Coalescence* (2021), which was commissioned and premiered by the Yale Percussion Group and recently featured as the centerpiece of a TEDx event in Shenzhen, China; *Fleeting Lines* (2023), commissioned and premiered by the UT Percussion Ensemble; and *shepard tone* (2020) which he recently performed with internationally acclaimed pianist Vicky Chow. Most recently, Zetina published a book, *Polyrhythms Through Pop Music* (2024), which is an interdisciplinary collection of advanced snare drum solos and methodology that bridges the worlds of popular music, nested rhythm, and modern French-American rudimental drumming. In addition to composing, Zetina is a successful arranger whose work, which ranges from Animal Collective to Meshuggah, has reached hundreds of thousands of listeners worldwide. Today's performance concludes with the world premiere of his newest arrangement, *Electric Sunrise* by prog-rock guitarist Plini. Kevin's compositions are published through Liquidrum publishing.

Zetina earned his MM and MMA degrees from Yale University as a Havemeyer Scholarship recipient under Robert van Sice, and he holds a BM from the Eastman School of Music with the Howard Hanson Scholarship where he studied with Michael Burritt. He is a proud Pearl/Adams Concert Performing Artist and Vic Firth Educational Artist.



Keith Brown

Keith Brown is a Distinguished Lecturer at the University of Tennessee, where he teaches applied drum set and serves as Director of Jazz Bands and coordinator of small jazz ensembles. An active performer, he appears regularly with groups such as Mark Boling's Trio Life and the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra, performing with artists including Monty Alexander, Mulgrew Miller, Hank Jones, John Clayton, Maceo Parker, Wycliffe Gordon, James Moody, Jimmy Heath, Terell Stafford, Stefon Harris, Karrin Allyson, Gregory Porter, Ingrid Jensen, John Pizzarelli, Ken Peplowski, Eric Reed, James Morrison, Warren Wolf, Cecile McLorin Salvant, and Christian McBride.

Brown has also performed with Zim Ngqawana, Marvin Stamm, Doc Severinsen, Tommy Flanagan, Jerry Coker, Rick Simerly, Will Campbell, Greg Tardy, Donald Brown, Jeff Coffin, and others. He appears on numerous recordings, including albums with the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra and Boling, Brown & Holloway. His work with South African saxophonist Zim Ngqawana on *Zimology in Concert (USA 2008)* earned a SAMA for Best Traditional Jazz Recording.

An active clinician, Brown frequently presents drum set workshops and works with regional honor jazz bands. He endorses Meinl cymbals and Innovative Percussion sticks and contributes to Percussive Arts Society publications.



Mike Mixtacki.

Michael Mixtacki is a versatile percussionist, educator, and recording artist, and serves as an adjunct lecturer at UT Knoxville. With over 15 years of experience across world percussion, orchestral percussion, contemporary chamber music, jazz, and commercial music genres, Mixtacki has built his career on a well-rounded, holistic approach to percussion.

As an educator, Mixtacki served on faculty at Texas Tech University, the University of Texas at San Antonio, and Northern Illinois University prior to his appointment at UTK. He has directed percussion ensembles, taught private

lessons, and designed lecture courses in global music, music technology, and percussion pedagogy. Additionally, he founded and directed Afro-Cuban and Samba ensembles at each institution. Mixtacki has been involved with music camps and summer programs as a director and faculty member and has been a featured guest artist at universities across the country.

Mixtacki's performance experience spans many musical genres, including appearances alongside notable artists like Kristin Chenoweth, Boyz II Men, Raul Pineda, Liam Teague, Jesus Diaz, Elio Villafranca, and Nestor Torres. As an orchestral percussionist and timpanist, he has performed with several orchestras across Texas and Wisconsin. His versatility as both a singer and percussionist within Afro-Cuban and Brazilian genres inspires his creative activity, where he blends these traditions with contemporary percussion sounds. Mixtacki's recording credits include two GRAMMY-nominated albums with Wayne Wallace, and two albums with Ritmos Unidos led by his mentor, Michael Spiro. He has performed and presented at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, Texas Music Educators Association Convention, and Jazz Education Network Convention.

Mixtacki holds degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Indiana University, and Texas Tech University. He is a Yamaha Performing Artist, and a clinician for the Latin Percussion Department of Education. He also endorses Innovative Percussion, Remo, and Sabian.

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Curating Motion: Reimagining the Percussion Ensemble

The percussion ensemble has always been the great shapeshifter of contemporary music.

It exists without fixed instrumentation, without a singular repertoire, and without the structural weight of tradition prescribing what it must be. That freedom can feel disorienting, but to me it is one of the most profound artistic opportunities in higher education. The percussion ensemble is a place where the line between composer, performer, and inventor dissolves—where the rehearsal room becomes a laboratory for imagination.

Unlike other established ensemble models, ours has never required permission to evolve. We expand, contract, and reconfigure constantly. Some works resemble a “percussion orchestra,” conducted and symphonic in scope; others operate as kinetic sculptures, spatial installations, or multimedia environments. One semester we may be performing in a recital hall, the next inside a gallery, a parking garage, or a digital environment. Each iteration demands new skills: the ability to stage, record, move, and listen. The ensemble’s fluid identity isn’t a limitation—it’s a reflection of the world our students will enter.

What makes percussion distinctive is that it *requires* its players to be creators. Our field doesn’t sustain itself through a fixed canon; it lives through commissions, collaborations, and the willingness of performers to make something new. As educators, this means we are training not just instrumentalists but **composer-performer-improvisers**—or hybrid musicians—musicians who can originate ideas, shape them collaboratively, and bring them to life in performance. I want our students to leave school understanding the full cycle of creation: how to imagine sound, communicate it, build the vehicle that produces it, and execute it with artistry. Those are the same habits that sustain creative life in the 21st century.

The percussion ensemble is, by nature, a workshop ensemble. We spend as much time building as we do rehearsing: refining instrument design, testing staging ideas, discussing notation, and working directly with composers. Our students aren’t just learning repertoire—they’re learning process. When a composer joins us for a residency, we treat it as a shared experiment. We ask questions, we make suggestions, we fail publicly, we revise. It’s a conversation rather than a transaction, and it teaches a more complete musicianship than any single lesson on technique or interpretation.

Those collaborations rely on trust—the same trust that defines great chamber music. Many of our projects are performed entirely without a director. That transition is not symbolic; it’s developmental. When the ensemble takes responsibility for cueing, pacing, and flow, they begin to listen differently—to each other and to the room. They start to internalize ensemble awareness, pulse, and phrasing in ways no external gesture could teach.

In fact, for this performance, I won’t be on stage at all. It is a strange place to be for a director. But, it reflects our belief that the ultimate goal of ensemble pedagogy is autonomy—the ability for students to lead, communicate, and perform with complete collective agency. That invisibility is the truest measure of success. It means the ensemble has reached a point where musical leadership is distributed and fortified, where artistry and accountability are shared equally among the performers.

This sense of agency extends to how we engage with new music itself. Too often, “contemporary music” has been treated as a stylistic descriptor—a genre to be decoded or defended. But contemporary music isn’t a sound; it’s an attitude.

It's defined by openness: openness to collaboration, to experimentation, to uncertainty. It's about asking better questions rather than defending old answers.

In percussion, that curiosity is not an aesthetic choice—it's our lineage. Ours is a tradition built by people who had to invent their own notation, construct their own language, and imagine their own repertoire. To be curious is to honor that ancestry.

Across my career, I've often felt that openness mistaken for instability, as though creativity required apology. We are sometimes asked to defend our experiments in timbre, movement, or form simply because they lack precedent. But innovation has always been the lifeblood of percussion. Ours is a discipline built on invention—on instruments that didn't exist a century ago or even a week ago, on repertoire still being written, on musicians who are constantly engineering their own tools. After all, our founding fathers were John Cage and Edgard Varèse—artists who turned curiosity itself into a compositional method. Curiosity isn't an ornament to tradition; it *is* our tradition. To suppress it is to deny the very conditions that made this art form possible.

Within the larger ecosystem of music-making, I see percussion standing beside band, orchestra, choir, and opera as an equal pillar of creative practice. This is not a call for hierarchy but for recognition. Our ensemble contributes something distinct to that shared landscape: a model of collective authorship. The percussion ensemble adds a complementary dimension—collaboration as composition, sound as architecture, performance as experimentation. It's the connective tissue between disciplines, a space that integrates the structural discipline of large ensembles with the freedom and immediacy of chamber music.

Pedagogically, that balance produces extraordinary outcomes. Our students learn to manage complexity not through obedience, but through awareness. They master precision while embracing risk. They cultivate craftsmanship alongside adaptability. They learn to prepare complex scores and electronics setups, but also to breathe, cue, and lead each other through silence. This merging of roles—performer, conductor, composer, producer—is the foundation of artistic resilience.

Ultimately, I believe the percussion ensemble models the most important lesson in higher music education today: that **curiosity is a discipline**. To improvise, to collaborate, to build something new from sound and imagination—these are not extracurricular impulses. They are fundamental to the survival of music as an art form. Our students will graduate into a world that rewards creativity and adaptability more than replication. Every rehearsal we spend building trust, taking risks, and pursuing sound for its own sake is training for that future.

The program that follows reflects these ideals. Each work invites performers to act not as interpreters, but as co-creators—artists responsible for the life of the music itself. The pieces explore many intersections: acoustic and electronic, structured and spontaneous, intimate and architectural. Together, they form a portrait of a field that refuses to stand still.

The program that follows reflects these ideals. Each work invites musicians to act not as performers, but as interpreters — artists responsible for the life of the music itself.

- Andy Bliss

Director of Percussion Studies, UT Natalie L. Haslam College of Music

*If you'd like to explore more reflections like this, join me at **Sonic Sketchbook**, my journal on Substack devoted to drumming, technology, and creative workflows.*

PROGRAM NOTES

Evan Chapman - *Honeybee, 1820*

Composed in 2018 for seven percussionists, *Honeybee, 1820* was commissioned by the University of Tennessee Percussion Ensemble and premiered at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, where the ensemble received first prize in the International Percussion Ensemble Competition. The work serves as Chapman's musical ode to the coast of Maine—a landscape that carries deep personal meaning for the composer as both a site of memory and creative renewal. Its title references the honeybee, Maine's state insect, and its subtitle, *1820*, the year Maine achieved statehood. Chapman describes the piece as what happens “when a single musical idea is distributed via ‘pollination’ throughout an entire ensemble, morphing in form throughout its travels, like a honeybee delivering pollen and nectar.”

Honeybee, 1820 unfolds with quiet intimacy, opening with three performers on toy handbells whose fragile tones set a shimmering, reflective atmosphere. From that point, rhythmic and timbral fragments migrate through the ensemble, transforming as they pass between players and instruments. The result is a work of subtle counterpoint and evolving color—music that balances mechanical precision with organic flow.

Chapman's long-standing collaboration with director Andy Bliss and the UT Percussion Ensemble has yielded multiple commissions and media projects, and *Honeybee, 1820* remains emblematic of that partnership: meticulous in craft, imaginative in sound, and grounded in human connection.

Where *Honeybee, 1820* lingers in the organic world—its sound shaped by breath, resonance, and natural motion—*Embryo* turns sharply toward the mechanical and digital. Together, they chart a path from the tactile intimacy of acoustic sound to the hyper-precise terrain of contemporary electronic rhythm, tracing the expanding vocabulary of percussion in the twenty-first century.

Jlin - *Embryo*

Originally composed in 2021 for the Grammy Award-winning Chicago-based ensemble Third Coast Percussion, *Embryo* represents a striking intersection between electronic production and acoustic percussion performance. The work exists both as a standalone electronic track—released on Jlin's *Embryo* EP (Planet Mu, 2021)—and as an expanded concert version for mallet instruments and electronics.

Jlin (Jerrilynn Patton), based in Gary, Indiana, first emerged from the footwork scene but has since become one of the most original compositional voices in contemporary music. Her work draws on the rhythmic density of electronic dance music while embracing the timbral and formal freedom of the concert world. Recent commissions from Kronos Quartet, choreographer Kyle Abraham's company A.I.M, and collaborations with artists as varied as Steve Lehman, Depeche Mode's Martin Gore, and violinist Galya Bisengalieva reflect her expanding artistic scope.

In *Embryo*, Jlin's signature polyrhythmic language unfolds through a constantly mutating electronic environment. The piece opens with an “insect-like” pulse that propels and destabilizes the texture; layers expand and contract with a kinetic precision that challenges even the most agile of human hands. The accompanying track drives the ensemble through an intricate lattice of syncopations, where each sonic fragment seems to reconfigure the rhythmic DNA of the piece in real time.

For Jlin, *Embryo* marked a moment of renewal and experimentation—music written, as she has noted, “to get out of [her] own head.” Heard in this version for acoustic percussion and electronics, the work becomes both a dialogue and a contest between digital and physical rhythm, a vivid expression of her ongoing evolution from producer to composer.

As *Embryo* blurs the boundary between acoustic and electronic rhythm, *Pillar III* reasserts the physical power of live percussion—the sound of rhythm embodied, sculpted, and shared in real time.

Andy Akiho - *Pillar III* from *Seven Pillars*

Pillar III is drawn from Andy Akiho’s *Seven Pillars* (2021), an evening-length work for percussion quartet written for and premiered by Sandbox Percussion. Structured as seven ensemble movements interwoven with four solos, the complete work unfolds as both an architectural and emotional journey—its rigorous symmetry serving as a framework for explosive rhythmic invention and coloristic freedom.

Within that larger design, *Pillar III* functions as one of the most rhythmically grounded and visceral chapters. Its interlocking patterns pulse with a physical energy that borders on dance, anchored by Akiho’s signature use of asymmetric meters and cyclical grooves. The movement’s 13-beat “backbeat,” layered with densely woven counter-rhythms, drives toward a cathartic collapse before dissolving into a subdued coda—momentary stillness after kinetic release.

The University of Tennessee Percussion Ensemble’s connection to *Seven Pillars* extends beyond performance. Many of the ensemble’s members worked directly with Akiho and Sandbox Percussion while attending the Sandbox Summer Percussion Seminar, gaining firsthand insight into the compositional and interpretive processes behind the work. That collaboration brings a unique immediacy to this performance—one shaped by direct mentorship, shared discovery, and a deeper understanding of the piece’s intricate rhythmic and emotional landscape.

Akiho’s compositional language fuses his background as a steel pan performer with influences drawn from contemporary classical, jazz, and world-music traditions. Described by the *Los Angeles Times* as “trailblazing,” his music has been recognized with Pulitzer and GRAMMY nominations and celebrated for its theatricality and precision. In *Pillar III*, the fusion of structure and spontaneity—architecture and impulse—stands as a microcosm of his larger artistic vision.

Where *Pillar III* compresses rhythm into muscular, asymmetric drive, *Cloud Folk* opens the lens: the same kinetic energy breathes outward into layered cycles and luminous harmony, a panoramic view in motion.

John Psathas - *Cloud Folk*

Commissioned by Michael Burrirt for the Eastman Percussion Ensemble and awarded the 2017 John Beck Composition Prize, *Cloud Folk* extends John Psathas’s genre-crossing language into a large acoustic percussion setting (with added piano). The composer imagines “Cloud Folk”—invisible visitors hovering in the upper atmosphere—arriving with optimism, observing human behavior, and departing in swift disbelief. The music traces that arc without narration: layers gather, crest, and recede in lucid waves.

Psathas builds much of the work from shifting inversions of a single major-seventh sonority, treating each bass placement as a distinct emotional hue. Over this harmonic constant, he sets interlocking ostinati that feel oceanic yet precisely engineered: long-span cycles (often in five and seven) overlap within an overarching 6/4-12/8 pulse, while entries and exits land at disarming, off-grid moments that keep the surface in organic motion. The opening’s

tubular bell and delicate shaker articulate a solemn, expectant frame; timbres such as bowed song bells, shekere, and vibraphone thread a warm, luminous sheen through the texture—an “aesthetic calm” energized by velocity rather than tension. Independent “rogue” lines (notably vibraphone and floor tom) act like free-thinking observers inside the ensemble, heightening the sense of communal motion seen from above.

Born in Wellington, New Zealand, Psathas has collaborated widely across classical, jazz, and electronic worlds (from Evelyn Glennie to the Athens 2004 Olympic ceremonies). *Cloud Folk* distills that borderless sensibility into a vivid, large-ensemble canvas—expansive in color, grounded in groove, and unmistakably human.

After the vast, panoramic textures of *Cloud Folk*, *Aestus* draws the focus inward: six performers at a single instrument, channeling the same elemental motion through shared touch and human connection.

Ethan Booher - *Aestus*

Composed in 2024 for six players sharing a single marimba, *Aestus* (Latin for “surge of the sea”) transforms the instrument into a living metaphor for motion, balance, and collective energy. Through interwoven gestures, players continuously exchange space, cross paths, and reach over one another—physicalizing the ocean’s relentless swell and undertow. The score’s undulating swells, accent patterns, and rhythmic tides evoke both the calm and volatility of the sea, while its choreography blurs the line between music and movement.

A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, composer-performer **Ethan Booher** writes music that feels physically alive—energizing performers and audiences through rhythm, gesture, and immediacy. A graduate of the University of Tennessee’s Natalie L. Haslam College of Music, Booher is currently completing a master’s degree in composition at NYU Steinhardt, where he studies with Michael Gordon, Robert Honstein, and Julia Wolfe. His writing reflects that lineage: visceral and clear, yet deeply rooted in the tactile experience of sound.

For the University of Tennessee Percussion Ensemble, *Aestus* represents both a homecoming and a surge forward—a chance to champion the work of an alumnus whose creative voice continues to expand the boundaries of percussion performance.

Natalie Dietterich - *soldier/sailor*

soldier/sailor (2021) occupies the liminal space between composition and improvisation—a terrain where pulse and freedom coexist. Scored for piano, drum set, and two marimbas, the work establishes a lattice of repeating patterns: the pianos move in groupings of five while the marimbas sustain a sixteenth-note ostinato, their interlocking layers creating a subtle rhythmic drift that constantly redefines the listener’s sense of center. Within this shifting grid, the drum set operates as a free agent—at times stabilizing, at times disrupting—shaping the ensemble’s momentum in real time.

The piece’s title evokes duality: structure and instinct, discipline and motion, soldier and sailor. Dietterich’s notated material invites interpretation rather than strict execution, resulting in performances that breathe and diverge with each iteration.

Composer, violinist, and vocalist **Natalie Dietterich** has been recognized by *Performance Today* for her “pulsatingly beautiful and moving” music. Her work spans film, installation, and concert settings, with collaborations that include Ensemble Modern, Wild Up, the Luxembourg and Brussels Philharmonics, and soloists such as guitarist JJJ. A recipient of the ASCAP Leo Kaplan Prize and a MacDowell Fellowship, Dietterich currently teaches at Yale University, blending acoustic performance and technology in her practice.

soldier/sailor reveals that intersection—part precision, part spontaneity—offering performers a

framework through which to explore rhythm as both architecture and instinct.

Following the exploratory freedom of *soldier/sailor*, *Electric Sunrise* channels that openness into radiant drive—progressive rock rendered through percussion, closing the program with exuberance and light.

Plini (arr. Kevin Zetina) - *Electric Sunrise*

Originally composed by Australian guitarist and composer **Plini Roessler-Holgate**, *Electric Sunrise* has become an emblem of contemporary instrumental progressive rock—celebrated for its intricate meter, luminous harmony, and sense of optimism. The piece opens Plini's 2016 debut album *Handmade Cities*, a recording that earned wide critical praise and was named among *Guitar World's* "20 Best Guitar Albums of the Decade." Known for blending the sophistication of jazz harmony with the precision of progressive metal, Plini's music radiates warmth rather than aggression, emphasizing melody, texture, and emotional clarity.

In this new arrangement by **Kevin Zetina**, Assistant Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Tennessee, *Electric Sunrise* is reimagined for large percussion ensemble. The work retains its 13/8 pulse and evolving polyrhythmic framework while translating Plini's layered guitar writing into an expansive timbral spectrum of mallet percussion, drum set, and auxiliary instruments. The result is both faithful and transformative—progressive rock refracted through the acoustic resonance and rhythmic precision of the percussion medium.

As a program finale, *Electric Sunrise* offers a joyful synthesis of craft and energy: a bridge between contemporary percussion practice and the rhythmic innovation of modern rock. It embodies the same forward-looking spirit that animates the entire program—one grounded in collaboration, curiosity, and the shared thrill of sound in motion.



PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Annika Blackburn

Senior Performance | Rogersville, TN

Freddy Morales

Masters Performance | Socorro, TX

Jackson Boeskool

Sophomore Music Education | Nashville, TN

Weston Reddick

Freshman Performance | Sevierville, TN

Anna Chance

Freshman Music Education | Chantilly, VA

Burke Rivet

Senior Performance | Seymour, TN

Anna Davis

Junior Performance | Frederickburg, VA

Peyton Stramel

Masters Performance | Toledo, OH

Lydia Dodd

Junior Performance | Hendersonville, TN

Myles Thomas

Masters Performance | Roanoke, VA

Brooke Duez

Junior Music Education | Rockvale, TN

Rodolfo Valero, Jr.

Masters Performance | New Braunfels, TX

William Dunlap

Freshman Pre-Med | Memphis, TN

Ezekiel Wondwosen

Sophomore Performance | Murfreesboro, TN

Luke Herrington

Freshman Music Education | Farragut, TN

GUEST ARTIST

Jayden Joyce

Freshman Music Education | Bartlett, TN

Stephanie Hensley

Piano | M.M., University of Tennessee (2024)

Sadiq Mohammed

Sophomore Computer Science | Johnson City, TN



UT PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

FACULTY



Dr. Andrew M. Bliss
*Associate Professor of Percussion,
Director of Percussion Studies*



Professor Kevin Zetina
Lecturer of Percussion

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS



Freddy Morales
Graduate Teaching Assistant



Myles Thomas
Graduate Assistant



Peyton Stramel
Graduate Teaching Assistant



Rodolfo Valero, Jr.
Graduate Assistant

ABOUT THE **UT** PERCUSSION STUDIO

Percussion at UT prepares drummers and percussionists to thrive as performers, composers, and improvisers in today's diverse musical world. Through a balance of individual instruction, ensemble participation, and seminar experiences, students develop a strong foundation in traditional repertoire while also engaging with contemporary approaches and creative practices. The program emphasizes artistry, versatility, and innovation, encouraging each student to discover and refine their unique musical voice.



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