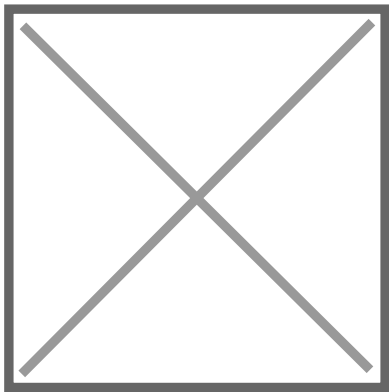




Review: SÅ• Percussion Brings A World Premiere with Steel Pan Lineage to Libby Gardner Hall

Description

SALT LAKE CITY, UTâ?? SÅ• Percussion, comprised of the [Edward T. Cone Performers-in-Residence](#) at Princeton University and recent winners of the 2025 [Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance](#) for [Rectangles and Circumstance](#), has long been described as an ensemble that â??redefinesâ?• chamber music. But even that verb feels inadequate for what unfolded at Libby Gardner Hall on Tuesday night, January 13, 2026. The quartet didnâ??t simply redefine; they expandedâ??opening outward what counts as sound, instrument, structure, or shared musical memory.

Presented by UtahPresents in partnership with the University of Utah School of Music, the concert previewed two major premieres: *Panorama for Mallet Quartet* by [Kendall K. Williams](#) and [Caroline Shaw](#)â??s *Strange and Artificial Echoes*â??before the works head to Carnegie Hall later this month. The evening also served as a communal debut, bringing more than twenty student percussionists onstage for the programâ??s final selections.

Four men standing in a line, dressed in various styles of casual and semi-formal clothing, against a r
SÅ• Percussion ([Eric Cha-Beach](#), [Adam Sliwinski](#), [Jason Treuting](#), and [Josh Quillen](#)) by Anja SchÃ¼tz

Kendall K. Williamsâ??s *Panorama* (World Premiere)

I invited Professor Sam Brysonâ??Director of Percussion at Weber State University and leader of Utahâ??s steel band *Pantastica*â??to join me for the performance, knowing his relationship with *Panorama* tradition. Listening beside him sharpened every contour of the piece. Having played in *Pantastica* with Bryson, I felt the authenticity of the textures alongside him: the melodic clarity, the harmonic interior, the guitar-like comping patterns, the grounded bass logic, and the engine-room layer built from foot-operated percussion.

Hearing the premiere with someone who understands and appreciates Pan tradition clarified just how deeply the piece honors *Panorama*. SÅ• Percussion didnâ??t reach for stylistic reference; they committed to structural fidelity, translated with care, intelligence, and respect. Before the piece began,

Jason Treuting described their learning process: learning the music entirely by rote, just as pan players in Trinidad and Tobago have done for generations.

According to Treuting, *Panorama* took shape over 3.5 years and roughly 300 hours, passed from Williams to the quartet slowly and intentionally—body to body, rather than page to page. For S&P Percussion, learning the piece meant stepping directly into a lineage.

The work's very first gesture—the clicking of mallets, like a bandleader tapping the skirt of a pan to start the ensemble—sent Bryson straight to Woodford Square in Port of Spain. As the driving tempo and interlocking lines unfolded, he noted how the quartet maintained melody, countermelody, harmony, and bass even while taking turns on the irons. The effect felt astonishingly true to the musical world he loves.

The stacked sixteenth notes on two sets of hi-hats suggested both a drum set and a gait; the mounted bass drum and kick drum anchored the groove; the cowbell and brake drum added the unmistakable timbre of the engine room. The composing and execution were remarkable on all levels.

Composer Insight: How the Steelband Became a Mallet Quartet

After the performance, I messaged Williams to ask how the parts were split, and he shared how he mapped a full steel band onto four players. Jason Treuting carries the melody, sometimes adding chords; Eric Cha-Beach shapes the harmony, moving between harmonic lines and countermelodies; Adam Sliwinski becomes the guitar section, comping steelband strumming patterns nearly 80% of the time; and Josh Quillen grounds the bass, mirroring the depth and drive of the big pans.

This mapping—melody, harmony, comping, bass—carries the structural DNA of *Panorama* into a contemporary chamber context, making the piece both culturally grounded and sonically new.

Five individuals sitting in a row on chairs, each with their hands placed over their hearts. They are performing *Panorama* With Caroline Shaw. Photo: Anja Schatz.

Caroline Shaw's *Strange and Artificial Echoes*

Receiving its U.S. premiere, Caroline Shaw's new 25-minute work behaves less like a linear composition and more like a constellation—an assemblage of memories, citations, and sonic artifacts suspended in orbit around one another. Inspired partly by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and its fantastical "Sound Houses," Shaw taps into a lineage of imagining what sound can become when placed in the hands of unfettered experimentation. Bacon's speculative laboratories were not only utopian but cautionary—spaces where scientific curiosity blurred into control. *Strange and Artificial Echoes* seems, at moments, to brush against that same ambivalence. Its oscillation between natural textures and engineered artifice hints at the possibility of a quiet warning: that innovation—especially in our age of accelerating AI—can reshape how we listen, what we preserve, and what slips out of view. Shaw never states this outright, of course, but the tension she constructs between the elemental and the manufactured leaves the door open to such a reading.

The piece drifts between acoustic and electronic textures—voices, hums, cassettes, taped rehearsals—creating a space where recognition and estrangement sit side by side. Shaw encourages listeners to “feel free to daydream,” and the work seems written for exactly that mode of attention. It performs as an archive—not of documents, but of resonances, timbres, and time-folds.

What results is a piece that rewards openness and curiosity. *Strange and Artificial Echoes* opened with the quartet rubbing rocks together, a gesture they returned to throughout the piece. The choice felt almost like a response to Bacon’s *Sound Houses*: before entering a world of tapes, electronics, and technological manipulation, Shaw begins with the most ancient instrument imaginable—stone—inviting listeners to consider what happens when innovation outpaces the natural world it emerges from.

Shaw’s play with breath and language—especially the repeated “shhhh” and soft *sh-* words like *shade*—layered into the texture like ghost syllables. The piece is full of such strata: snippets of recorded laughter; moments that call attention to media itself, such as two tapes being turned over in perfect parallel. By the time the final repeating vocal motif emerged, it had softened into something like a lullaby. It is strange, yes, and artificial by design—but also intimate, tender, and unexpectedly human.

Four musicians performing on stage, each playing string instruments: a violin, a viola, and two cellos. Percussion, with Eric Cha-Beach, Josh Quillen, Adam Sliwinski, Jason Treuting, performing with guests Kasey Blezinger, Shelby Blezinger-McCay, David Degge, Petra Elek, Amy Garapic, Todd Meehan, Doug Perkins, Yumi Tamashiro, and Clara Warnaar. In Zankel Hall on December 7, 2019. Photo: Stefan Cohen.

Jason Treuting — *Go Placidly with Haste*

Emerging from Treuting’s modular project *Amid the Noise*, *Go Placidly with Haste* turns simple musical ideas into a flexible, collective environment. Like Terry Riley’s *In C*, the work holds its identity even as its sonorities shift. Designed to expand or contract depending on who joins, each performance becomes entirely its own world.

Jason Treuting reminded me once again why he has earned a reputation as a creative genius—one unafraid to try new things or reimagine the familiar. I was delighted by the way he painted newspapers and lined them across the stage, transforming a mundane material into a visual and sonic texture. One painted newspaper became a projection surface, carrying shifting images that echoed the program’s themes of memory, resonance, and distortion. It felt quintessentially Treuting: inventive but never inscrutable, playful yet deeply intentional.

Later in the piece, some of the University of Utah musicians even ripped newspapers onstage—a gesture that felt almost sacrilegious after watching Treuting so lovingly prepare and animate them, yet undeniably enriched the texture of the sound: a reminder to the audience that even the most ordinary materials can become instruments when handled with intention.

Another visual and aural highlight came when all four musicians gathered around the grand piano, playing on both its exterior and interior surfaces. They plucked the strings, struck the frame and lid for rhythmic punctuation, and used mallets inside the instrument to draw out muted, bell-like tones. The effect was both intimate and startling—another reminder of how the piece reimagines familiar

instruments as sites of discovery.

Student performers included:

Davis Fowers, Nathan Montoya, Ella Prawitt, Peter Hill, Jake Harker, Rebekah Hall, Zach Anderson, Conner Johnson, Kaitlynn Steff, Alex Kent, Jordan McMillan, Tim Petersen, Ellie Foote, Jaxon Howes, Elliot Mohlman, Evelyn Williams, Sawyner Nutall, Ian Miller, and Drew Fallon.

Four musicians performing onstage, each seated at a table with various percussion instruments and SÅ• Percussion, Diaspora Songs, December 2019. Photo: Stefan Cohen.

Eric Cha-Beach 4+9

[Eric Cha-Beach](#) 4+9 studies rhythmic possibility with a kind of mathematical elegance that still manages to groove. Built on a single 9/4 bar, the piece explores every way its 36 sixteenth notes can divide: by 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, and 18. The result is a shifting grid where the underlying pulse stays steady even as the surface reorganizes itself in real time.

Originally written for the SÅ• Percussion Summer Institute in 2017, 4+9 extends Cha-Beach's earlier rhythmic experiments in *A Gun Show*, stripping the idea to the pure process of hearing each permutation unfold. The piece feels propulsive, architectural, and quietly astonishing proof that rhythm is a landscape of its own.

Conclusion

SÅ• Percussion's evening at Libby Gardner Hall was a reminder of what chamber music can become when curiosity leads the way. At one point during the performance, I remarked to Bryson that SÅ• Percussion feels like *the avant-garde of percussionists* artists who expand the field's vocabulary without abandoning its roots. Bryson nodded, adding that their innovations remain completely accessible, not experimentation for its own sake but grounded, generous music-making. I agreed. That combination rigor without pretension is precisely what makes their work so rare. From steelband lineage to experimental sound houses, from mathematical precision to communal joy, the quartet expanded the possibilities of what we can hear, remember, and make together. It was not only a preview of Carnegie Hall programs to come, but an offering uniquely alive in Utah and a rare moment where global traditions, local artists, and deep listening met in the same room.

Further Listening & Links: <https://sopercussion.com/> [Bandcamp](#) [MORE ABOUT 25X25](#)

Next concert: Friday, January 23, 2026, 9 PM Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall

[Tickets](#)

Category

1. Music
2. Reviews

Tags

1. Caroline Shaw Strange and Artificial Echoes
2. contemporary percussion music review
3. Eric Cha-Beach 4+9
4. Jason Treuting Go Placidly with Haste
5. Jason Treuting SÅ• Percussion
6. Kendall K. Williams Panorama
7. Libby Gardner Hall performance
8. mallet quartet world premiere
9. Panorama steelband tradition
10. percussion ensemble review
11. steel pan music Utah
12. SÅ• Percussion review
13. Trinidad steelband lineage
14. University of Utah Percussion Studio
15. UtahPresents concert review
16. Weber State University Pantastica

Date

2026/10/14

Date Created

2026/01/16

Author

keola06

default watermark