

PHOTO BY ACVILLA



THOLLEM MCDONAS, SOLO PIANO

Sunday, October 8, 2017, at 3pm

Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

THOLLEM MCDONAS, SOLO PIANO

The program will be announced from the stage.

This performance will be presented with no intermission.

Thollem McDonas is a George A. Miller Visiting Artist for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Center for Advanced Study Improvisers Exchange Annual Initiative 2018-19.

Improvisers Exchange, a CAS initiative, is a two-year investigation of the field of music improvisation. This multifaceted program features performance and engagement residencies by leading artists representative of a wide spectrum of the practice, initiates a new performance course on improvisation for students, and promotes scholarly discourse through lectures and panel discussions. This ambitious project will introduce our campus and community to leading artists practicing non-idiomatic approaches to the music, others rooted in jazz and avant-jazz heritages, and master improvisers representing folkloric traditions of the world.

Jason Finkelman (Krannert Center for the Performing Arts) and Michael Silvers (Musicology) will be appointed CAS Resident Associates for AY2018-19, which includes a graduate seminar (CAS 587) in spring 2019.

Additional Thollem McDonas events include:

*Tuesday, October 10, 2017
Film Screening: Who Are U.S. 2016
7pm, Spurlock Museum*

*Thursday, October 12, 2017
SO Live featuring Silver Ochre & Improvisers Exchange Ensemble
7:30pm, Krannert Art Museum*

For a complete listing of Improvisers Exchange events, visit www.cas.illinois.edu

*All events are co-sponsored by
Center for Advanced Study
Division of Musicology
Krannert Center for the Performing Arts
School of Music*

PROGRAM NOTES

My solo work represents the convergence of a wide variety of approaches to the piano, beginning with my multi-cultural childhood in the south San Francisco Bay Area to the vast array of musical approaches and experiences that have colored and defined my life. My approach articulates both integrations and collisions as these influences percolate up and converse with each other in a multitude of ways. In addition to the variety of techniques stemming from my classical training, 20th-century piano music, and the many varieties of the diverse music we call jazz, you may also hear elements of the sonic cultures of punk rock, marching bands, taiko drumming, gamelan, country, and western, as well as music from Mexico, Persia, India, East and West Africa, Native American cultures, and Ireland.

My two main influences as a pianist have been European concert music—from the Renaissance to the 20th century—and jazz, particularly of the 1960s and '70s. As a child, I recognized commonalities central to these traditions: they are both difficult to define, incredibly varied from one era to the next, propelled by new revolutionary ideas, absorbing the sounds and elements of music with which they come into contact, and responding to their socio-political times and events. I have always been inspired by new experiences and eclecticism, rebelling against convention, synthesizing my life and influences into my work as a composer and improviser.

The overall approach to my newest solo album, *Meeting At The Parting Place*, was inspired by a concert I played in celebration of Terry Riley's 80th birthday. Through the process of preparing conceptually for that concert, I realized how important my experiences growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area were to my development as a person and an artist: the West Coast composers including Terry Riley with his endless thirst of curiosity, and Lou Harrison, who I knew growing up, with whom I studied, and in whose gamelan ensemble I played; Kronos Quartet and the Cabrillo Music Festival, who were pushing the boundaries of chamber and orchestral music; Kuumbwa Jazz Club, where early on I heard pianists such as McCoy Tyner and Toshiko Akiyoshi as well as Pharoah Sanders and Elvin Jones; plus the incredible variety of people who migrated to the area, bringing their sounds with them.

I hope listeners approach this concert with a sense of curiosity and adventure, of wonderment at the mystery of it all, ready for a challenge and to be shaken awake to their own moment and to each other.

—Thollem McDonas

PROFILE

THOLLEM MCDONAS is a pianist, keyboardist, composer, improviser, singer-songwriter, author, and teacher. He's spent his life skirting and erasing the edges of boundaries musically, culturally, and geographically. His work is ever changing, evolving, and responding to the times and his experiences, both as a soloist and in collaboration with hundreds of artists across idioms and disciplines. Though McDonas is widely known as an acoustic piano player, he's also the lead vocalist for the Italian agit-punk band Tsigoti and has branched out significantly into the world of electronics through a multitude of projects.

McDonas was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, studying the standard classical piano repertoire, composing and improvising since he was a young child and absorbing the myriad sounds of his culturally diverse upbringing. After dedicating his 20s and 30s to grassroots political activism, he has refocused his attention over the last 15 years on a breadth of musical styles that incorporate his myriad experiences and curiosities. In this last

decade alone, he has played well over 1,000 concerts throughout North America and Europe as a soloist and in collaboration with hundreds of musicians, dancers, and filmmakers. As leader or co-leader, he has released over 60 albums in that span on 22 different vanguard labels to international critical acclaim. Composer Terry Riley has called him "an astounding pianist who understands the huge scope of the instrument," and he continues to delve into the furthest reaches and sub-genres of post-classical, free jazz, noise, punk, dance, and film. A brief cross section of his many recent collaborators includes William Parker, Pauline Oliveros, Stefano Scodanibbio, Nels Cline, Mike Watt, and Rob Mazurek. He is the founding director of Estamos Ensemble, a Mexican-American cross-border ensemble for musical exchange. A published author about art, politics, and his travels, his writings are in *The Anthology of Essays on Deep Listening*, *Full Moon Magazine* (Prague), and presently, *First American Art Magazine*.