

The logo for Bates music is set against a background of faint, overlapping musical staves and notes. The word "Bates" is written in a bold, red, serif font, while "music" is in a smaller, black, italicized serif font.

Bates *music*

presents

**David Pontbriand and
Brian Shankar Adler**

Saturday, March 20, 2021

Live-Streamed from the Olin Concert Hall

7:30 pm

About the Concert

Sitarist **David Pontbriand** and percussionist/composer **Brian Shankar Adler** perform an evening of pieces and songs connected (in one way or another) to India. Unusual settings of sitar with vibraphone, drum set, and bomba legüero, engage in textural dialogue with the more customary duo of sitar and tabla. The program includes improvisations, original compositions, and folk songs, as well as works by Ellington/Strayhorn and Lennon/McCartney.

Program

Introduction Drone (Adler)

is inspired by the subtle, hypnotic hum of the tamboura, a plucked string instrument from India. In this piece, I am seeking to create a similarly meditative effect through the use of weaving rhythms that stretch and contract; a palindrome, with no fixed beginning or ending. –BSA

Alaap

is the name for the exploratory opening section of a raga performance, where the raga theme is gradually unfolded and developed, in free time. In the Indian classical tradition, ragas are melodic frameworks based on one or more modal scales, each with specific conventions of phrasing that suggest a distinct melodic shape, or flavor. Within this framework, the artist creates a unique spontaneous composition with each performance. My alaap is an original conception, for sitar solo, combining melodic elements from two different raga forms with elements of free improvisation, in a “stream of consciousness” series of episodic variations. The vibes provide an atmospheric envelope, gently framing and supporting the melodic variations. –DP

Gat

is a composition for sitar and tabla, where the themes developed in the alaap are further explored in a rhythmic framework called tala. A simply stated opening theme is presented, followed by a series of variations, most often in gradually increasing tempo and density.

Our gat begins in a slow cycle of sixteen beats, called vilambit teental. In our semi-classical format, the sitar and tabla engage in an equal exchange of both melodic and

rhythmic ideas. Our informal course of improvisation does not preclude the inclusion of spontaneous episodes in free rhythm. –DP

Mountain Pass (Adler)

is a drum solo for hybrid percussion: mridang and western drum set. It is inspired by the Khyber Pass, a geographic region northwest of India, which historically, has been a trade route bridging India with the west. The theme is composed in madhya rupak tal (medium 7 beat cycle) over a twelve bar blues form. –BSA

Mantra (Adler)

is an original composition based on the Indian Raga, Chandrakauns. Typically performed in the evening, it is known to gently evoke longing. The melody is reminiscent of the all-night mantras that I remember hearing as a child. In this noir tinged line however, there is no text, giving the listener and/or performers an opportunity to superimpose their own meaning to it. A bridge of chromatically ascending notes offers a release from the repetitive cycle, launching into a freely improvised section. –BSA

Blindfolded (Adler)

was composed as the second movement of a suite, set to poems by Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, the 13th century poet from Persia. Though not directly connected to India, Rumi's works were standard repertoire in the ashram community that I grew up in. –BSA

Champa Bothri Desha (Folk Song)

is a folk-love song from West Bengal, in which a lover is compared to the sweetness of a champa flower. –BSA

The Fool on the Hill (Lennon/McCartney)

was released several months prior to the Beatles' visit to India in 1968. The lyrics and harmony carry a psychedelic and mysterious quality leaving the listener to wonder who the man (or God?) on the hill really is. It was noted that McCartney wrote the song after a strange encounter with a man on Primrose Hill who appeared to have vanished before his eyes. In his autobiography, he mentions that the entity may have had a connection to his meditation teacher, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi whom he was about to visit. Though not a song that the Beatles recorded with sitar or tabla, we enjoy playing the song over a drone, and the programmatic theme of the hill, that it underscores. –BSA

Endless is My Wealth (Adler)

is set to a poem by the first century Indian poet, Shankarcarya, (my eponym). The poem tells the heartbreaking story of a man standing atop a hill, watching his village burning to the ground. As his home and earthly belongings have crumbled and are now nothing but embers, the poem concludes with him stating: "I have nothing at all," yet "Endless is my wealth." –BSA

Agra (Strayhorn)

was written as a part of Far East Suite after Duke Ellington's state department sponsored tour of Asia. It offers another American perspective on music from India. Agra is a chromatic piece that Adler adapted for our duo of sitar, vibes, and bombo legüero (a folkloric drum from the North of Argentina). –BSA

Bios

Brian Shankar Adler is a multidisciplinary drummer, percussionist and composer. His work transcends the terrain between genre and geographic region, asking: how can we find connection through rhythm? He has been described as “A polyrhythmic force... New York City gritty yet still somehow capable of evoking the delicacy of a summer breeze...” by Brad Cohan, *JazzTimes*.

Adler grew up in an ashram, in the mountains of upstate New York and began his rhythmic studies on the Indian mridang at the age of five. He received a jazz percussion scholarship to attend New England Conservatory where he was encouraged to discover his own artistic voice, connecting his complex heritage and upbringing through jazz, Indian, South American, Jewish and western classical music traditions. In Boston, Adler collaborated with Korean vocalist Sunny Kim, releasing three albums and touring the northeast and Europe.

In 2005, with a globally influenced sonic palette and forward-thinking rhythmic concepts in tow, Adler moved to New York City. He spent sixteen years there, performing everywhere from street corners and dive bars, to Carnegie Hall, The Jazz Standard, Juilliard, Lincoln Center, The Rubin Museum, Smalls and The Stone. In 2013, Adler was a guest soloist with Bomba de Tiempo in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He performed and recorded for Chelsea Clinton’s film “*Of Many*,” Kamala Sankaram’s

operas, “*Thumbprint*” (LA Opera) and “*A Rose*” (Houston Grand Opera), and Elizabeth Swados’ last two theatrical productions, “*The Nomad*” and “*The Golem.*” In 2019, Adler traveled to Kuwait to perform with oudist, Ahmed Alshaiba. Adler is a member of the eclectic rock band, Bombay Rickey and trash orchestra, Bash the Trash. He has also worked with: Cochemea, Sheila Jordan, Guillermo Klein, The Michael Leonhart Orchestra, Frank London, Kate McGarry and Raga Massive, among others.

Brian Shankar Adler has been recorded on over thirty-five albums including his most recent works, “*For a Gallery on the Moon*” (Chant Records, 2020) and “*Fourth Dimension*” (Chant Records, 2019). His music video, “*Mantra*” won best music video at Transcinema International Film Festival in Peru and official selection at Quiet City Film Festival in New York City. Adler’s work has been featured in Jason Bivin’s book “*Spirits Rejoice,*” Newsweek, JazzTimes, NPR, Downbeat and Modern Drummer Magazine. He has composed and/or performed music for Appleton Rum, Dairy Queen, ESPN, and Nike.

Through a three-year residency at Barbès, plus performances at Roulette and the Queens World Fair, Adler developed Human Time Machine: an improvising percussion ensemble that uses over 100 hand signals to generate and develop rhythmic ideas in real time. The experience has been described as “an earth-shaking party of organically shifting patterns.”

Brian Shankar Adler currently resides in Portland, ME.

He is on faculty at: Bates College, Brooklyn Conservatory, University of Maine (Augusta), and The Vermont Jazz Center.

Brian Shankar Adler
www.brianadler.com

American Sitarist **David Pontbriand** began his journey with the Sitar in 1973. His story is a rare exception to the rule, in that he is completely self-taught. Pontbriand's Music of Sitar is driven by an intuitive and emotive approach that is deeply personal, and yet displays elements of classical form and style. His original, and primarily spontaneous, compositions for sitar are freely interpretive, and yet rooted in the Hindustani ragas of North India. The Artist explains, "While I have great respect for the Indian classical traditions, I do not necessarily adhere to any of them. I allow free rein to my own musical instinct" posing the question; "Can there be an American music for sitar?"

Prior to his interest in sitar, David began his music career as a drummer at the age of 12, performing with jazz, country western, and rock bands at local clubs and events around Massachusetts. Inspired by the music of the Beatles, he soon switched to guitar. But it was the influence of George Harrison who pointed the way to Ravi Shankar, and to serious study of the sitar.

In addition to his mainly solo-sitar appearances, Pontbriand has performed in duos, trios, and ensembles

including Om Rasa, the Raga Trio, and Sitar Rhythmia. Performance credits include the TSAI Performance Center at Boston University, Grant Hall at Brown University, Fenwick Theater at Holy Cross, The Fleming Museum, at University of Vermont, University of New Hampshire, University of Southern Maine, and Bates College Olin Arts Center. Pontbriand has toured New England in performances with Boston Musica Viva, under the direction of Richard Pittman, and the Longfellow Chorus with director Charles Kaufmann. He has performed and toured with tabla master Samir Chatterjee, in contemporary composer Shirish Korde's multimedia theatrical production "Chitra".

The association with Bates College began after an appearance as accompanist with Anoushka Shankar at the Bates Chapel, in 2003. David has become a familiar performer at music and holistic festivals around New England. His sitar stylings have crossed over into Jazz, appearing with Kit Demos in the Dark Matter jazz series in Cambridge Mass. He has participated in musical reviews and dance collaborations, and been active as a session musician; including a cameo appearance on the recently released album by The Pretty Reckless that made its debut at #1 on the Billboard best-selling albums chart.

A resident of Portland since 1977, David Pontbriand has been dedicated to raising the awareness of the sitar in Maine, by maintaining a schedule of performances, private lessons, and lecture-demonstrations. He has been a member of the Bates College adjunct music faculty since 2003. His recordings of original music for sitar include: Raga Fission, Sitar Dreams, Inner Spaces, and Rosean.

Bates

bates.edu/music