

Since the fall of 2004, concert audiences for Organized Rhythm have been brought to their feet by a pairing of musical personalities as improbable and winning as the duo's combination of organ and percussion. Clive Driskill-Smith, turning thirty this year, is a product of Eton and Oxford whose solo performances in England and America have earned him recognition as one of his generation's star organists. Wry and reserved—until he lets loose an astonishing battery of effects at the keyboard—he's complemented in Organized Rhythm by the athletic moves of Joseph Gramley, a 6'-5" Oregon native whose own crowd-pleasing solo concerts and work with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble have made him, at 38, one of the leading multi-percussionists performing today.

Several years ago, after playing a concert with Colin Currie in Westminster Abbey, Driskill-Smith decided that he'd like further to explore the combination of organ and percussion with another top-flight performer. "So I wrote an e-mail," he now recalls: "Dear Mr. Gramley, How about it?"

Gramley had first been exposed to the melding of organ and percussion during his student days, when he performed Paul Creston's "Meditation for Marimba and Organ," and in later years he became intrigued by the combination's potential when playing for Episcopal churches around New York City. So he e-mailed back in the affirmative and soon found himself part of a duo that performs together whenever its members' calendars aren't taken up by solo engagements or their daily institutional roles—Driskill-Smith as sub-organist of Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral and Gramley as a professor of music at the University of Michigan. (Each has recorded solo CDs: *American Deconstruction* and *Global Percussion* from Gramley and *Fiat Lux* from Driskill-Smith.)

The creative ease that exists between the two—developed not only during travel and concerts, but while finding and shaping a repertoire—is instantly evident to anyone watching them rehearse, perform, and now record. "Clive is very focused," says Gramley, "and he's so well prepared that when I go a little overboard—get a bit too musically expressive or aggressive—he provides exactly the right amount of restraint." Driskill-Smith says that the last few years have allowed the two of them to "understand each other not just musically but personally. I'd say that each concert we do is better than the one before because we *feel* the music more naturally with each performance."

Audiences, even those who are skeptical at the start, have been enjoying it too. Driskill-Smith notes how "people come up and say, afterwards, 'I've never heard that combination, it's absolutely beautiful.'" Trumpet and organ: yes, they've encountered that. Perhaps violin and organ as well. But the pairing of organ and percussion remains a rarity.

For no good reason, argues Gramley: "Percussion is lyrical, percussion is powerful, percussion is visceral, yet it can also be elegant and delicate. I think it can work with anything." Listeners to *Beaming Music* will hear cymbals and drums breaking through the full organ's sound as satisfyingly as any trumpet, and the duo have found balances in which even the soft bars of the marimba can hold their own against a whole range of the organ's pipes and registers. Still, for all the combination's possibilities, says Driskill-Smith, "We're probably the only full-time or at least fully active percussion-organ duo anywhere. Which is great," he jokes, "because it gives us less competition."

When Organized Rhythm was just getting started, Driskill-Smith knew so little about percussion that he "didn't even realize you could tune timpani or strike a drum in a different place to get a different sound." Only by watching Gramley did he learn that a marimbist sometimes uses two mallets in each hand. "It's extraordinary to me; I don't know how he does it." From his own perspective, Gramley has come to see the organ as "a prehistoric synthesizer. There's an oboe stop—they want it to sound like an oboe. There's a trumpet stop—they want it to sound like a trumpet. If you couple all those possibilities with all the possibilities of multi-percussion, you've got an endless array of instruments to choose from. We're a mini-orchestra."

For *Beaming Music*, the two musicians settled into St. Mary the Virgin, Pierre L. LeBrun's French Gothic church just off New York City's Times Square—close to many places (the Juilliard School, Lincoln Center, the Broadway theatres) where Gramley has played for years. But the surrounding neighborhood seemed far away from the soaring stone studio that the church became on the nights when he and his partner were recording. Before the two of them even set to work, Driskill-Smith spent more than twenty hours alone with the church's magnificent Aeolian Skinner organ, getting to know its unique properties and exceptional setting. He and Gramley would be laying down music inside an acoustical space that would leave no need to add reverb and echo at the engineer's console.

"Basically, we're reproducing a concert," says Driskill-Smith. To which his partner adds: "Clive and I have performed every piece on this CD numerous times, and we've tried to give the recording the same energy as our live performances."

A listener to the six supremely varied pieces on *Beaming Music* will have no trouble agreeing.

Gramley and Driskill-Smith often use “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” to open *Organized Rhythm*’s live concerts, and they’ve deliberately put it first on this CD. “It squelches the expectation of a slam-bang start,” says Gramley. Listeners are instead drawn in by the soft strains of a familiar masterpiece. Its simple, beautiful melody—transcribed from **Bach**’s cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* (*Heart and Mouth and Deed and Life*)—has been played by many instrumental combinations, but never before in the way Driskill-Smith and Gramley put it together. “Reading off the full score,” says the organist, “I play the bass notes with the pedal and the inner accompaniment parts on the manuals.” Over that, on top of it, Gramley is able to play the instantly recognizable melody on a Vibraphone, making use of that instrument’s “sustain pedal” to “open up all kinds of sonic and phrasing opportunities.” Driskill-Smith employs a reed stop for the chorale melody that Bach originally intended a choir to sing. The amalgamated results are gentle, deft and satisfying—but only a hint of the complex combinations and moods that still await the listener.

To move directly from Bach to a bolero—specifically, **Pierre Cochereau**’s “*Boléro sur un thème de Charles Racquet*”—is to make a leap not only from the sacred to the profane, but also from a musical design that feels stately and inevitable to one that seems almost to be composing itself in the moment. “The Cochereau is a wonderful piece,” says Driskill-Smith. “It’s full of interesting and unusual colors and sounds.” Famous for improvisation, Cochereau was better known in his lifetime (1924-1984) as an organist than a writer of music; this bolero is a transcription of what he did in concert, and when Driskill-Smith plays it, he is bringing to life not so much the remote vision of a composer, but the live work of a fellow performer.

Among the piece’s many demands, the organist is called upon to use the *vox humana* stop with a tremulant that gives it a vibrato sound, and to create, with the mutation stops, thick and reedy solo sounds that are so striking a listener may believe a gremlin has just jumped into the pipes. For the entire composition Gramley plays an *ostinato*, in triplet rhythm, on the snare drum, but far from feeling held down musically by this task, he says that his supporting role “has opened up [his] ears to the amazing possibilities of the organ.” Those listening to the nearly 13-minute piece will ride an arc familiar to theatrical drama: a muted, then robust, rising action moves toward a full-out climax and then a softer denouement that allows the emotions to sort themselves and settle.

If Gramley's task in "Boléro" is to serve, as he puts it, as a "rhythmic platform, or foundation" for the organ music, the supporting role seems to switch in the duo's performance of the CD's title selection, "Beaming Music," composed by **Nico Muhly**, then barely into his twenties, in 2002.

The work's joyous eight minutes open with Driskill-Smith providing a long churchly chord and then a series of simple repetitions that act as a sturdy, self-effacing, springboard for the excited bell-like sounds of Gramley's marimba. Once they're aloft, the organ breaks free from its supportive pattern and begins beaming up its own sparkling treble sounds toward the painted blue stars on St. Mary's ceiling. The two instruments are finally joined in a kind of high-spirited celestial dance that reveals the full rhythmic vitality and mixed metrics—everything from 4/4 to 7/16 to 2/4 and 5/16—of Muhly's piece.

No other performance on the disc better reflects Gramley and Driskill-Smith's success at synchronization. "We need to be totally locked in a rhythmic zone," says Gramley, even though there is always a very slight delay between the moment an organist hits a key and—after the air has passed through the instrument's pipes—the moment a listener hears the sound. As Driskill-Smith explains, the only way for him and Gramley to remain together—to the listener's ear—is to remain, in fact, slightly apart, with the marimbist a split second behind the organist. What's required is a kind of consistent *tour de force*, whose intricate success is everywhere apparent in the pair's performance of "Beaming Music."

Challenging as the Muhly selection may be, it's "Black Host" (1967), by the Pulitzer Prize and Grammy-winning **William Bolcom** (b. 1938), that Driskill-Smith calls the single most difficult piece he's ever had to master. Composed specifically for organ and percussion, the work has such a formidable reputation that, ever since the duo was formed, colleagues, presenters and audiences have been telling Gramley that Organized Rhythm "absolutely *has* to do the Bolcom."

"Black Host" begins with seven shuddering, well-spaced organ chords, each arriving like the fall of an axe, the sound left hanging in the church's air. The effect, says Driskill-Smith, is "awesome"—a word he cheerfully admits he doesn't use often. Several minutes in, Gramley startles listeners with a series of blows, loud as gunshots, to the

concert bass drum. From that point the audience is ushered into a darkly serene stretch of the composition before, further on, bells and chimes lift the mood toward what seems to be a peaceful Sunday-morning exaltation. But the listener is quickly jerked back toward a wild Saturday night of ragtime music—a development completely unexpected unless one knows of Bolcom's other composing accomplishments in this distinctly American field.

Just when the piece seems bent on dissolving into a kind of pressure-cooked cacophony—with Gramley's crash and ride cymbals and concert bass drum pushing it to its limits—a shift to chimes and what Driskill-Smith calls a “hymn-like tune” from the organ restore a priestly order and authority to the mood and music. The musicians lead the listener back up from Bolcom's pyrotechnic crypt to the hopeful worship of a sun-filled church.



Having experienced Bach's music of resurrection and been guided through Bolcom's devilish underworld, the listener may well feel ready for the apocalyptic combination of joy and destruction in “Landscapes of Patmos,” a meditation upon the Book of Revelation written in 1984 by Czech composer **Petr Eben** (1929-2007). Intent on exploring images that St. John is said to have envisioned on the isle of Patmos, Eben also found in writing this piece what he described as a long-sought opportunity “to associate organ and percussion” in “one of those rare combinations, where the organ can call into play all its resources.”

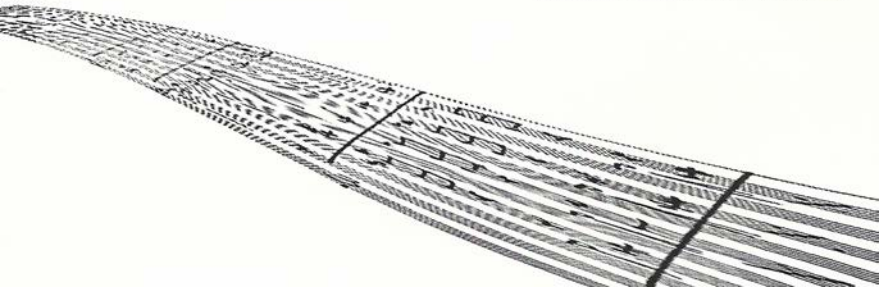
It's the composition's “variety of colors,” says Driskill-Smith, that made him spend an unusually long time choosing the registrations he would use. In its third movement (“Landscape with Temple”), for example, instead of using the pedals to play the bass of the harmony, he selects a high solo stop. Gramley, in this same movement, employs gongs, bells, a glockenspiel and tam-tam. “One aspect of this piece that I really love,” he says, “is getting to play some hand drums.” Those will include four bongos of different pitch in the fourth (“Rainbow”) movement.

More hand-drumming, and the striking of bentwood temple blocks, is required for the final (“Horses”) movement, in which percussive hoofbeats are heard against organ sounds that seem to reflect every task and pace in the animals' lives, from the slow pulling of drays to full-on gallop. Swiss alpen glocken can be heard quoting the *Dies Irae* (Days of Wrath), which Eben once explained “is heard throughout the piece, as though bringing doom in its wake. However, towards the end another hymn, the *Victimae paschali laudes* of Easter, proclaims the victory of life over death.” This later, hopeful melody is conveyed by the alternation of the organ's reed stops with joyful phrasings from Gramley's chimes.

“Carnival of the Animals” (1886) may bring the CD to a close with material that’s more familiar, and warmly approachable, than some of the challenging “new music” that’s preceded it, but the beloved composition by **Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835-1921) also allows a percussionist, as Gramley puts it, to “turn the tables and grab on to some meaty melodies of the type that we *never* get to play.” Years ago, he participated in a two-piano chamber orchestra version of the work and got the idea that it might transfer well to organ and percussion. The results (three parts arranged by Nico Muhly and three by Gramley and Driskill-Smith themselves) show the wonderful extent to which this children’s favorite allows for a surprising depth and variety of adult engagement as well. It also shows the full panoply of relationships between Driskill-Smith’s instrument and Gramley’s multi-percussion setup.

During the “Introduction and Royal March of the Lion,” the marimba’s full register unrolls a kind of regal red carpet, while the organ provides, first, a low, reedy sound and then some cartoon thrills and chills. “Hens and Roosters” offers a comical competition between the two musicians, at the end of which the xylophone’s treble clamorings can only be silenced by a great chord-crash from the organ. For “The Swan” that follows it, the two are back in full cooperation, with Driskill-Smith searching his keyboard and pedals for what he calls “a beautiful cello sound” that will carry the section’s familiar, plangent melody; Gramley’s marimba softly bubbles in its wake. “Fossils” proves to be the fastest and merriest section of all, the organ acting as a kind of carnival calliope that brings the earth’s geological boneyard to life—and nearly wakes the stone statues of St. Mary’s.

Program Notes by Thomas Mallon





Joseph Gramley
multi-percussionist
www.josephgramley.com



Clive Driskill-Smith
concert organist
www.organist.org.uk

Organized Rhythm
www.organizedrhythm.com

Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists

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The Granite State News, Wolfeboro NH

"Just awesome, and a great attendance."

US Concert Presenter

"A large and very enthusiastic audience. Both artists performed with impeccable technique, and the highest level of artistry and musicianship. Their programming was brilliant. This was really a HIT!"

US Concert Presenter

1. *Death, Boy of Man, Desiring* (03:37)
J. S. Bach (1685-1750); arranged by Clive Driskill-Smith and Joseph Gramley GEMA
2. *Boléro sur un thème de Charles Racquet* (12:50)
Pierre Cochereau (1924-1984); Published by Editions Chantraine SACEM
3. *Beaming Music* (07:52)
Nico Muhly (b. 1981); Published by St. Rose Music Publishing Co., Inc. ASCAP
4. *Black Host* (16:21)
William Bolcom (b. 1938); Published by Jobert-Paris BMI
5. *Landscapes of Patmos* (22:10)
Petr Eben (1929-2007); Published by United Music Publishers, Ltd. ASCAP
6. *Landscape with Eagle* (03:26)
7. *Landscape with the Elders* (03:19)
8. *Landscape with Temple* (05:35)
9. *Landscape with Rainbow* (02:52)
10. *Landscape with Horses* (06:58)
11. *The Carnival of the Animals* (12:04)
Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921); arranged by Nico Muhly, Joseph Gramley and Clive Driskill-Smith SACEM
12. *Introduction and Royal March of the Lion* (02:08)
13. *The Tortoise* (02:14)
14. *Aquarium* (02:17)
15. *Hens and Roosters* (00:57)
16. *The Swan* (02:56)
17. *Fossils* (01:32)

Total Time: (75:14)



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