

SR9 Trio: A Fresh Voice

By Travis Newman

Alexandre Esperet, Nicolas Cousin, and Paul Changarnier comprise the fabulous French percussion group SR9 Trio. Central to the group's unique voice is that, broadly speaking, they specialize in two seemingly distant corners of percussive arts. On one end of their stylistic spectrum sits the sophistication of Bach, and on the other is the world of contemporary theater percussion and mixed media. In both, they exude the defining characteristics of great chamber music. What captured my imagination when I first saw them perform was how naturally they connected these vastly different styles.

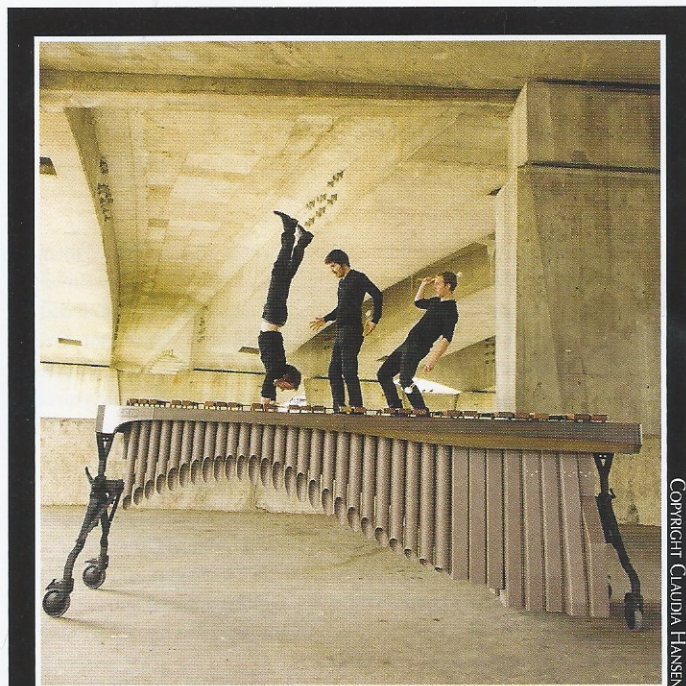
SR9 Trio's Showcase Concert at PASIC17 will open with J.S. Bach's "Gigue" from *English Suite No. 6, BWV 811*. Their marimba trio adaptation of this lively and dense movement will surely demonstrate their fluent, sensitively balanced chamber playing. In this promotional video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1hguYGJXvI>) for their album *Bach au Marimba*, Nicolas states, "The 'Bach on the Marimba' program is somehow for us the best way to illustrate our artistic approach."

Their PASIC program will also include François Tashdjian's "Narnchygäer," one of the first pieces commissioned by SR9 to fill their need for new and original marimba trio repertoire. The piece will also appear on the trio's forthcoming CD, *Alors On Dance?* (expected March 2018), alongside Baroque dance suites such as the Bach "Gigue," romantic dances by Bartók and Borodine, and mystical dances by Satie and De Falla. The composer describes "Narnchygäer" as a "demon dance." The work highlights the group's energy as well as a darker, more intense side of their musical voice.

A theater and mixed-media portion of their concert will open with Compagnie Kahlua's piece, "Ceci n'est pas une balle"—a fun work requiring the imagination of the audience. It may be the best example of the group's commitment to fully involved acting. Let them convince you of the object that seems to be more than just an ordinary ball! Finally, the PASIC audience will be treated to "Konvulsion" by Camille Rocailleux for contemporary theater percussion performers and soundtrack. It expands the performance space and explores the entire stage in a new way.

The members of SR9 Trio met while studying at the National Conservatory of Music and Dance in Lyon, France under Jean Geoffroy—himself a masterful specialist in marimba adaptations of the solo violin and cello works of Bach, and avant-garde contemporary theatrical and mixed-media repertoire. Alexander, Nicolas, and Paul began playing together in 2010, focusing on the organ trios and other works of Bach. The universally accessible nature of Bach's music led them to find the core of their approach to making chamber music. Since recording *Bach au Marimba*, they moved to adaptations of such Western classical composers as Mendelssohn, Stravinsky, and Ravel. Later, they moved into commissioning new works, and finally started some theatrical percussion projects. Notably, their show C O R P O R E L S exemplifies the theatrical side of the group. As for their catchy name, it simply comes from the mathematical square root of nine, which equals three.

SR9 Trio won 1st prize at the 2012 Percussion Trio Competition sponsored by the International Percussion Competition Luxembourg. Later the same year, Esperet won 1st prize at the prestigious Tromp Percussion Competition (for solo percussionists), sponsored by Tromp Percussion Eindhoven (in The Netherlands). In fact, all three are accomplished as individual performers. They have won competitions, played (and still play) with orchestras, performed concerts, and presented master classes across Europe, the United States, and other parts of the world. Knowing them, they will not be the first to brag about such things. They are passionate, hard-working, humble musicians who share an artistic vision.



COURTESY CLAUDIA HANSEN

SR9 Trio

Friday, Nov. 10, 4:00 P.M.
Daytime Showcase Concert

As Alexandre says, "[We] like to collaborate with various artists to explore other artistic fields, including dance and theater, and create new projects where all disciplines merge into one creative expression." He described the next show they are writing—intended to be accessible to all audiences—as an extension of the C O R P O R E L S show. "[It] will be without instruments, based on music theater and body percussion, and will be premiered in Fall 2018."

If you should be lucky enough to attend their PASIC performance, or any future performance by them, notice the way this group makes the likes of Bach and Rocailleux fit appropriately on the same concert. In spite of the stark contrasts, they succeed in making a connection—with control and grace—between a beautiful chamber performance of Bach, and falling onto the floor along with a soundtrack!

Many percussionists relish that our field encompasses so much diversity, but they also struggle with how to combine various different passions within their careers. SR9 Trio's courage and vision demonstrates that it comes down to compelling personalities. Art is art! In their case, the skill set of a group of great performers reaches into the intangible and immeasurable to create artistic relevance. Come to take away your own inspiration.

Travis Newman is a DMA student at the University of Iowa. He received his MM in Percussion Performance from Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and Bachelors in Music Education degree from Missouri State University. **PN**