

## Program Notes

I began working on *Timber* in 2009 at the invitation of the Dutch-based dance group Club Guy & Roni and the percussion ensembles Slagwerk Den Haag and Mantra Percussion. I had written many orchestral works over the decade, from *Decasia* in 2001 to *Dystopia* in 2007, and I wanted to clear my mind of pitches and orchestration. For that reason, I decided early on that *Timber* would be for non-tuned percussion, and that each percussionist would play one instrument only. I thought of composing this music as being similar to taking a trip into the desert. I was counting on the stark palette and the challenge of survival to clear my brain and bring on visions.

I imagined that the six instruments would go from high to low, and that through a shifting of dynamics from one instrument to the next, the group could make seamless and unified descending or ascending patterns. After working on rhythmic sketches with Mantra Percussion in early 2009, I went to Amsterdam in June to workshop my ideas with Slagwerk Den Haag. I had “the plan” but was searching for the right instruments.

After some experimentation, Slagwerk’s Fedor Teunisse brought out a set of wooden simantras. These slabs of wood, which looked like building materials from a lumberyard, had a gorgeous sound, distinct enough that the clarity of the percussive hits could be heard; their deep resonance produced a complex field of overtones. With inspiration from this discovery, I returned to New York to finish the music for Club Guy & Roni’s extravaganza *Pinball and Grace*, which premiered in October of 2009.

*Program notes by Michael Gordon*

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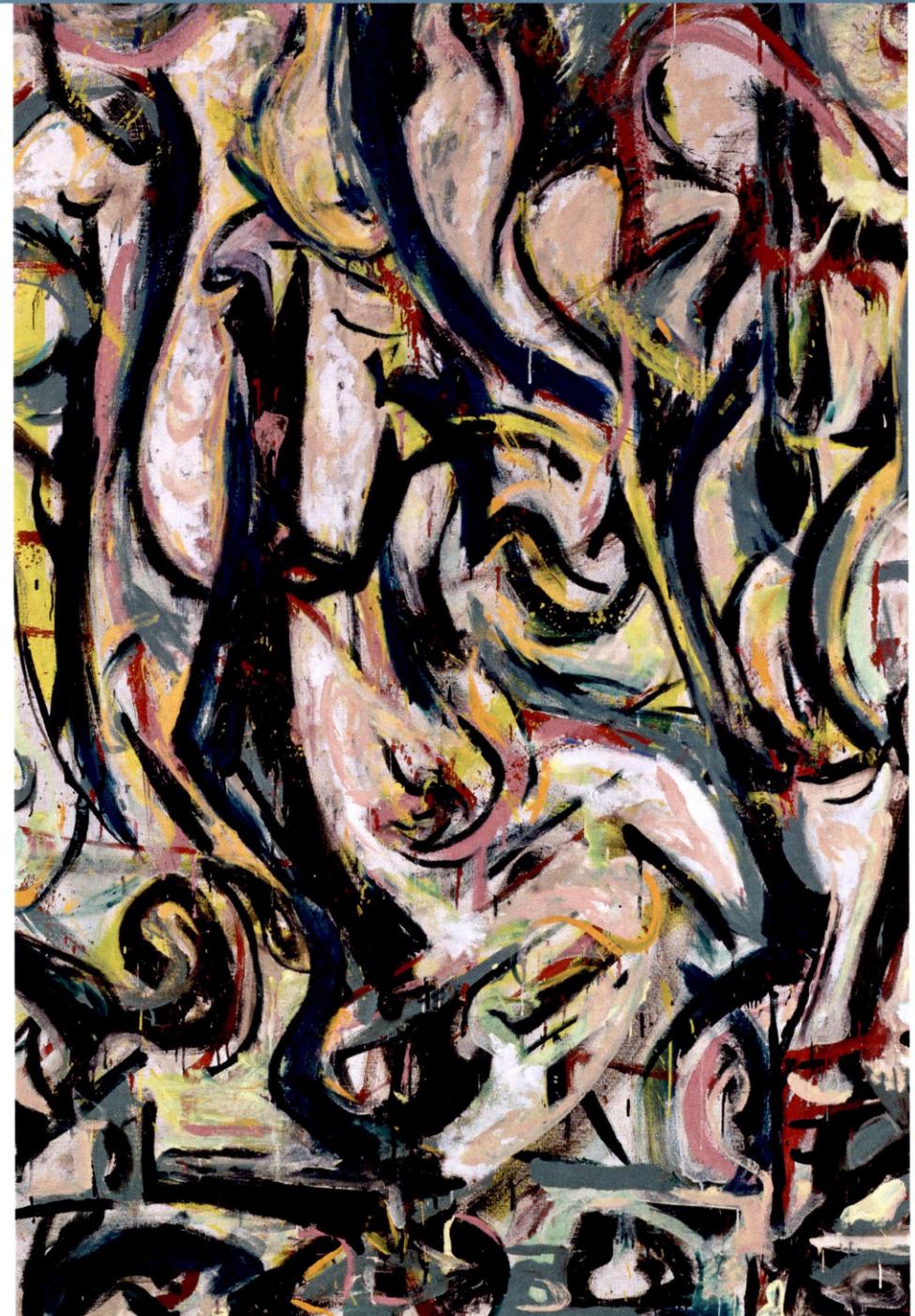
**Cover** Jackson Pollock, *Mural* (detail), 1943, Gift of Peggy Guggenheim, reproduced with permission from the University of Iowa

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# 76TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

NOVEMBER 19, 2017 / NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



# Program

## Mantra Percussion

Celebrating Jackson Pollock's *Mural*

**NOVEMBER 19, 2017 / 3:30**

**WEST BUILDING, WEST GARDEN COURT**

Michael Gordon (b. 1956)

*Timber* (2009), for six percussionists playing wooden simantras (two-by-fours)

## The Musicians

Committed to honoring the past and expanding the future of percussion music, Mantra Percussion brings to life new works for percussion by living composers, collaborates with artists from diverse genres and styles, and questions what it means to communicate music with percussion instruments. Mantra Percussion engages new audiences by challenging the standard concert format through performances that look toward a grander artistic vision.

Since forming as an ensemble in 2009, Mantra Percussion has been featured throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, including at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, the Bang on a Can Marathon, Duke Performances, Los Angeles's Redcat Theater, and on National Public Radio. After co-commissioning Michael Gordon's percussion sextet *Timber*, the group premiered it in the United States in October 2011 and then toured it internationally.

Mantra Percussion has been hailed by the *New York Times* as "finely polished... a fresh source of energy" and by *TimeOut New York* as "forward thinking"; the group was praised by the *New Yorker* and *TimeOut New York* for presenting one of the ten best classical performances of 2012. The ensemble recorded Aaron Siegel's *Science Is Only a Sometimes Friend* on Lockstep Records, Michael Fiday's *Hands On!* on Innova Records, and more recently a double-CD album, *Timber Remixed/Timber Live*, on Cantaloupe Music with twelve remixes of Michael Gordon's *Timber* by some of the leading electronica artists today—Squarepusher, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Tim Hecker, Fennesz, Oneohtrix Point Never, and Hauschka.