

Wilco's Drummer, My Brightest Diamond — Celebrity Series' Stave Sessions Is Back



The ensemble Sō Percussion. (Courtesy Stave Sessions)

Keith Powers March 11, 2016



BOSTON — “We fancy ourselves as curators,” says Amy Lam, artistic programmer for the Celebrity Series. “We present the very best of the international art scene, and without Stave Sessions, we were missing something.”

[Stave Sessions](#), the spring-break-palooza of contemporary performing groups, returns Sunday, March 13, to 160 Mass. Ave., the club venue/student hangout at Berklee College of Music. The weeklong festival of alternative acts — at least alternative to what the Celebrity Series typically presents — includes My Brightest Diamond, Glenn Kotche, Sybarite5 and Sō Percussion. It’s a rare chance for Boston to consider itself somewhat avant-garde.



The duo Sudacas opens the Stave Sessions Sunday evening on Berklee Night at 160 Mass. Ave. (Courtesy Nathalie Botbol)

“I’m hoping this is something that people will trust us for,” Lam says. “This miniseries is a snapshot of what is going on in the contemporary music scene. These artists digest the things in their lives, process it and express it on their own. Last year, when people were blown away by Roomful of Teeth, I thought, ‘OK, I’ve done my job.’”

The week opens [Sunday](#) with a nod to the host, Berklee, and two groups with direct ties to the institution. [Sudacas](#), the vocal duo of Venezuela’s Marianella Rojas and Colombia’s Esther Rojas, and [Mixcla](#), led by composer Zahili Gonzalez Zamora, kick off the festival in the spectacular café setting, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows looking out over the Boston street scene, bringing their individual take on contemporary Latin styles.

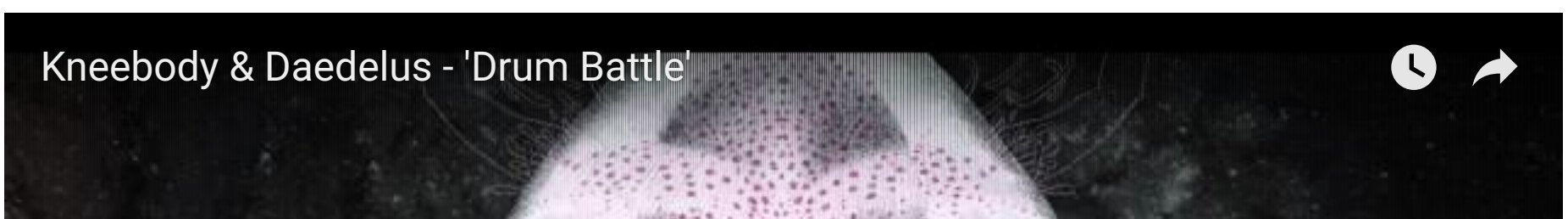




[Tuesday](#) evening's ensemble, [Sybarite5](#), a string quintet whose music veers from Radiohead to Mozart and back to Mohammed Fairouz, brings a program called *Outliers* to 160 Mass. Ave. It's an unusual grouping — bass added to traditional string quartet. But it has rich possibilities, already explored by lots of composers, including Dan Visconti, who wrote "Beatbox": a vernacular, partly improvised concerto for the ensemble premiered by the South Carolina Philharmonic last year.



[Kneebody](#), an electric and eclectic horn-flavored quintet, and [Daedelus](#), the prolific brainchild of Alfred Darlington, often perform together as *Kneedelus*. That combination, onstage [Wednesday](#) evening, is jazzy and groove-atmospheric.






The standout in last year's Stave Sessions was undoubtedly the Grammy- and Pulitzer Prize-winning Roomful of Teeth. This year, it has to be [My Brightest Diamond](#). For a decade, singer Shara Worden has not only released and toured with ensembles under that name, but she has also sung works of composers like Sarah Kirkland Snider, Laurie Anderson and David Lang, and performed with the Decemberists, Fat Boy Slim and David Byrne.

Worden is a mesmerizing contralto, and rock art, song and multimedia presentations all quickly become vehicles for her outsized talents. If "no-genre" is a genre, then that's Worden. Best just to show up and listen to what she does on [Thursday](#) evening.



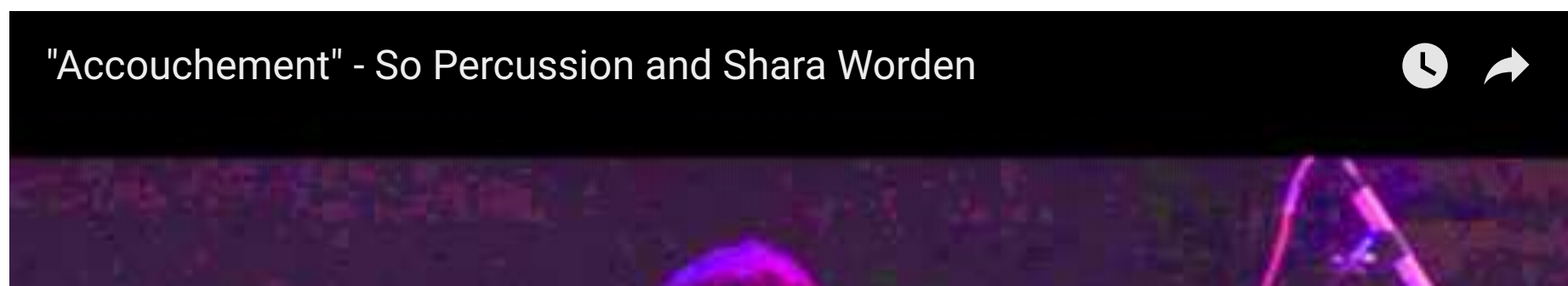


[Glenn Kotche](#), the drummer for the popular band Wilco, branches out himself. He explores musical collaborations that include composers like John Luther Adams (2014's Pulitzer Prize winner for music), and also writes his own works for ambitious groups like Kronos Quartet and eighth blackbird.

Wilco freaks and others will want to see what Kotche cooks up on [Friday](#) evening, when he collaborates with low-key guitarist/folk songwriter [Sam Amidon](#).



Percussion is also the focus for Stave Sessions' closing event. [Sō Percussion](#) has also made the most of high-profile collaborations, bringing to life music written by John Cage, Steve Reich and other avant composers. They take the stage with [Buke and Gase](#), hybrid instrumentalists — “Buke” is Arone Dyer on the baritone ukulele, and “Gase” is Aron Sanchez on the guitar-bass.





“This is an investment in what we do,” Lam says of the Stave Sessions. She travels frequently to scout out these groups, as well as connect with a network of artists and their representatives.

“The first year we had a great start,” she says. “Initially I thought, ‘Presenting at Berklee during vacation week? When the target audience isn’t going to be there?’ But I was humbled and energized by it, really. It’s a unique experience, and I think we’ve already created a brand. We have a great partner in Berklee, we’re trying to do well by the artists, and I like to think that the audience will find this a real destination.”

Stave Sessions opens Sunday, March 13 at 160 Mass. Ave. and runs through Saturday, March 19. Visit www.celebrityseries.org for tickets (\$20 to \$35) and more information.

Keith Powers, former music critic at the Boston Herald, now freelances for a number of newspapers and magazines. Follow him on Twitter at [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith).

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