

World Premiere of Shawn Okpebholo's  
"Black Music"



**fulcrumpoint**  
NEW MUSIC PROJECT

**Fulcrum Point New Music Project  
&  
~Nois Saxophone Quartet**

**Epiphany Arts Center Sanctuary  
February 18, 2024 7:30 p.m.**

**- Social Sounds -**



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## Social Sounds

*Raised by Wolves* (2021-23)

Scott Johnson

Encounter

Acceptance

Hunt

*Social sounds from whales at night* (2007)

Emily Doolittle

*Dwalm* (2018)

Gemma Peacocke

*Black Music* (2023)      World Premiere

Shawn Okpebholo

I. Black Counterpoint

II. Midnight Hue

III. Obsidian Glass

Stephen Burns, trumpet/flugelhorn/percussion

~Nois

Hunter Bockes, János Csontos, Jordan Lulloff, and Julian Velasco

## Program Notes

Welcome to “Social Sounds” a 75-minute collaboration between two of Chicago’s leaders in new art music: Fulcrum Point New Music Project and ~Nois Saxophone Quartet. This densely packed program traverses to social interactions between several species: wolves, humans, whales, otters, ancient people, dreams, saxes and trumpets. Through post-modern, intermedia, neo-classical and Blues infused styles the composers endeavor to communicate between seemingly disparate languages and instruments to create a social connection and mutual appreciation.

We are grateful to the elders and ancestors of the First Nations’ Council of the Three Fires—the Odawa, Ojibwe and Potawatomi—for their wisdom, traditions, and care for this land upon which we hold this concert of new art music.

Please join us at SPACE in Evanston on March 12<sup>th</sup> for the [“Kinds of ~Nois”](#) Album release party.

Fulcrum Point returns April 13<sup>th</sup> as we present the talented Cuban quintet [“Espirales”](#) on our Discoveries: Hear & Be Heard series. Learn about the inspiration and insights from these talented composers/performers who fuse classical, jazz, and Afro Cuban styles into a virtuosic amalgam of joy and soul. April 24<sup>th</sup> AuxIn: Connected Co-Curator Caitlin Edwards presents violinist/composer [Josh Henderson](#) and his nonet at Fulton St. Collective. Information can be found at [www.fulcrumpoint.org](http://www.fulcrumpoint.org)

### ***Raised by Wolves (2021-23)***

“I have written often for saxophones, but have never used the many extended techniques that have been developed on the instruments. Those sounds are where “Raised By Wolves” begins. The opening phrases use multi-phonics, with the saxes producing complex sounds containing more than one pitch. I thought of these phrases as a sax’s equivalent of heavy metal riffs.

Saxophones and brass are paired in American popular music from marching bands to jazz to rock and R&B, but the relationship is older. Saxophones were originally invented to answer the need for an agile wind instrument loud enough to be heard within a texture dominated by brass instruments. The result became a vehicle for virtuosity, a top soloist for the ensembles it appears in. Trumpets rarely have a chance to play at full strength in small un-amplified chamber music ensembles, so pairing trumpet with saxophone quartet seems like an underused opportunity.

The rude opening sounds of *Raised By Wolves* sparked a tongue-in-cheek, cartoonish image: the saxes as a pack of wolves, with the trumpet wandering into their territory and eventually being accepted and incorporated into the group; a cheerful outcome for anyone entering into a new and uncertain situation. But imagery and connotations aside, this piece is mainly music about music, one of my most complex and technically demanding works.”  
Scott Johnson

The *Social sounds from whales at night* by Emily Doolittle is an 8-minute deep-dive into a conversation between musician and humpback whales, among other animals. Partially composed, partially improvised, and partially processed electronically, *Social sounds...* evokes the spacious depths of the ocean and the surprisingly ‘human’ sounds of its largest inhabitants.

### ***Social sounds from whales at night***

“My research interests include zoömusicology/biomusicology (which I explore through composition and in academic and non-academic writing, and through interdisciplinary research with biologists); gender and music; parenthood and creativity; music and the environment; and the cultural contexts in which music-making takes place. Both the trumpet and the tape part of *Social sounds from whales at night* are drawn almost entirely from the song of the humpback whale. The trumpet begins by playing a transcription of the humpback whale song, while the tape part begins as an accompaniment background made out of altered recordings of humpback whale song, sperm whale clicks, musician wren song, and one grey seal “rup” call. As the humpback whale song itself begins to emerge from the tape part, the trumpet and the whale sing in duet, before the trumpet takes over with an improvisation based on the whale’s musical language.” – Emily Doolittle

*Social sounds* was commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts for Helen Pridmore. Thanks to Patrick Miller, Luke Rendell, Thomas Goetz and Henrik Brumm for the whale, seal, and bird recordings.

***Dwalm:*** There is a strangeness to the duality of the word *dwalm*. It is an old Scottish word with two meanings: a stupor or daydream (as in the phrase in a *dwalm*), and to faint or fall ill. It comes from the Old English word *dwolma*, which means confusion.

What is strange is that a daydream is such a light and lovely drifting of the mind, whereas fainting or falling ill is a sudden wrenching. Perhaps though, they are different surfacings of the same darkness.

This piece for ~Nois is half lullaby, half keen; both songs to set someone to rest, whether by drifting off or being bid a final, fearsome farewell. Emma Peacocke

In *Black Music*, scored for a saxophone quartet and trumpet, I set out to create a piece that embraces and captures elements of Black artistry, experience, and joy. Fully acknowledging the immense scope, diversity, and intricacy of the Black cultural landscape, the piece reflects my lived, yet common, experience—my artistic approach ranging from visceral to abstract, introspective to energetic. This work is multidimensional, conveying both the physical manifestation of the color black as well as artistic elements of the associated African American experience and musical culture.

The opening movement, *Black Counterpoint*, is a dynamic and vibrant conversation among five voices. The interwoven motives are characterized by their rhythmic intensity, high energy, and independence—highly contrapuntal, with moments of fierce monophony or homophony embedded throughout. The essence of this movement pays homage to various Black popular musical genres (funk and blues, for example), embodying the complex nuances of our culture and strength.

The second movement, *Midnight Hue*, takes a contemplative shift, capturing the mystery of the night. The melody on which this movement is based was composed during a serene summer night as I sat on my porch around midnight, surrounded by darkness interrupted only by the glow of my computer screen. This recurring melody serves as a thematic thread, with the theme becoming more complex with each iteration. This gradual melodic evolution also serves as a metaphorical layer, mirroring the subtle transformations of that summer night, the pulsating breezes, and its warmth.

The final movement, *Obsidian Glass*, is brittle, hard, and black, reminiscent of the properties of obsidian volcanic stone. Elements of this rock have been used to make mirrors, though the surface is uniquely dark. There are moments in the movement where the melodies and motives are superimposed, slightly distorted reflection of itself. Angular with a touch of lyricism, there are pentatonic moments—informally also known as "black note music"—and

abstract bebop references, reflecting elements of Black music found both in the church and in the secular arena, respectively.

*Black Music* was commissioned by Fulcrum Point New Music Project's Hindsight/Foresight Commissioning Program, funded by The Walder Foundation, for trumpet virtuoso Stephen Burns and the acclaimed saxophone quartet ~Nois.

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## Bios

Created in 1998 by Stephen Burns, **Fulcrum Point New Music Project** pushes the boundaries of the musical experience globally by: supporting new compositions, creating and performing new music experiences, and educating audiences to imagine the possibilities of music. Its programs are influenced by popular culture, literature, film, dance, jazz, Latin and world music. Through multi-disciplinary programs, Fulcrum Point encourages audiences to make cross-cultural connections between new music, art, and technology, gaining greater insight into today's diverse world.

Conductor, composer and trumpeter **Stephen Burns** is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Fulcrum Point New Music Project in Chicago. He has been acclaimed on four continents for his virtuosity and interpretative depth in recitals, orchestral appearances, chamber music, and multi-media performances. He has worked closely with composers John Corigliano, Osvaldo Golijov, Gunther Schuller, Jacob TV, and La Monte Young. Native to Wellesley, Massachusetts, Mr. Burns studied under Carmine Caruso, Armando Ghitalla, Arnold Jacobs, Vincent Penzarella, Gerard Schwarz, Pierre Thibaud, William Vacchiano, and Roger Voisin at the Tanglewood Music Center, the Juilliard School, and postgraduate work in Paris. He won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, Avery Fisher Career Grant, the NEA Recital Grant, the Naumburg Award, the Charles Colin Award, the Meier Arts Achievement Award, and the Maurice André Concours International de Paris. A certified teacher in *The Art of Practicing and Performing Beyond Fear*, Mr. Burns is on faculty at DePaul University's School of Music and The Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, as well as a Visiting Lecturer with Amici della Musica in Florence, Italy. CDs at Naxos, MHS, Dorian, Delos, Essay, Kleos, & Innova. Stephen Burns is a Yamaha Performing Artist.

Take your preconceived notions of 'noise' and toss them out the window. Equal parts "fiendishly good and fiendishly goofy" (Chicago Tribune), ~**Nois** is a Chicago-based saxophone quartet dedicated to connecting with diverse audiences through the creation of new work. Since its founding in 2016, "~Nois continues to legitimize the saxophone quartet as a premiere ensemble formation for classical music" (*thank you* Brutal New Music) through commissioning repertoire that is thought-provoking, engaging, and honestly just really good, by some of today's most inspiring compositional voices.

Hailed as "technically superb and musically brilliant" (Cleveland Classical), and renowned for their "supremely sensitive balance and control" (Chicago Classical

Review), ~Nois has presented over 130 performances spanning 24 states over the past seven years. These engagements have included invitations to perform at some of the top festivals and concert series in the nation, including Big Ears, LONG PLAY, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, Princeton Sound Kitchen, and the University of Chicago Presents Series. As educators, ~Nois has held residencies at some of the nation's top academic institutions including the University of Chicago (Don Michael Randel Ensemble in Residence 2020/21), Princeton University (Princeton Sound Kitchen Residency 2023), Michigan State University (MSUFCU Entrepreneurial Ensemble in Residence), CU Boulder (Composition Department Ensemble in Residence 2020 - 2023), and more. The ensemble has also been awarded top prizes at numerous prestigious chamber music competitions including the M-Prize International Arts Competition, the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and was once deemed "Too loud for the Farmers Market" (Local Evanston, Illinois 1st Ward Constituent).

At the core of ~Nois' ethos is a fierce dedication to the commissioning of living composers, with a particular emphasis on developing a personal friendship with all collaborators they work with. In doing so, the ensemble aims to create new works of art that reflect and exemplify the values of human connection which are central to the quartet's mission. With more than 100 world premieres to date, the members of ~Nois have had the privilege of working closely with some of the world's leading voices in composition to create new works for saxophone quartet, including Nico Muhly, Augusta Read Thomas, Shelley Washington, Alex Mincek, Hans Thomalla, and Tonia Ko, among others.

As proud residents of Chicago, the ensemble members seek to serve the diverse neighborhoods of the city through an annual season of self-presented concerts and programs. Each year, ~Nois' Curiosity Series brings together Chicago residents and artists for an evening of music exclusively featuring the work of composers and performers with strong ties to the city, with a particular focus on advocating for younger creators in Chicago. The ensemble also enjoys bringing works written by their non-Chicago collaborators to the city through other local performances, such as the world premiere of Annika Socolofsky's song cycle "I Tell You Me" at Chicago's Ear Taxi Festival in 2021. The piece was described as "among the most captivating compositions I heard the whole festival" by Hannah Edgar of the Chicago Tribune, and was subsequently listed as one of "Chicago's Top 10 moments in classical music, opera, and jazz that defined 2021" (Chicago Tribune). Additionally, ~Nois serves Chicago youth through their Young Creators Fellowship, which selects two local high school-aged students each year to collaborate with the ensemble on new works for saxophone.



~Nois' recorded output boasts a wide variety of genres and styles, spanning all the way back to 2020, when the ensemble released their debut album, "Is This ~Nois". Heralded as "fresh and intense" (The Whole Note), the album (which was absolutely *not* named in honor of a record by The Strokes) exclusively featured works by composers with ties to the quartet's hometown of Chicago and was included in the "Best of Bandcamp" list for the contemporary classical category in June of 2020. The group's highly anticipated sophomore album, "Kinds of ~Nois", will be releasing in March of 2024 on the label Bright Shiny Things, in collaboration with the composer collective Kinds of Kings. The ensemble will also make various appearances on other albums in the 2023/2024 season, including "I Tell You Me" by Annika Socolofsky (Carrier Records), "birthday party" by the indie-pop artist Vines (self released), and a composer portrait record featuring the music of Osnat Netzer (New Focus Recordings). Additionally, ~Nois' recorded output has been featured on some of the country's leading classical music radio stations, including WFMT in Chicago and WQXR's "New Sounds" Series on New York Public Radio.

In order of the group's Settlers of Catan leaderboard, ~Nois is János Csontos (he/him), Julian Velasco (he/him), Jordan Lulloff (he/him), and Hunter Bockes (he/him). For more information, please visit [www.noissaxophone.com](http://www.noissaxophone.com)

Canada-born, Glasgow-based composer **Emily Doolittle**'s music has been described as "eloquent and effective" (The WholeNote), "masterful" (Musical Toronto), and "the piece...that grabbed me by the heart" (The WholeNote). Originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, Emily was educated at Dalhousie University, the Koninklijk Conservatorium in the Hague, Indiana University and Princeton University. From 2008-2015 she was Assistant/Associate Professor of Composition and Theory at Cornish College of the Arts. She has been at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where she is an Athenaeum Research Fellow and Lecturer in Composition.

Emily's work is regularly performed across the UK, Canada, the US, and Europe, and she has been commissioned by such ensembles as the Vancouver Symphony, Orchestre Métropolitain (Montreal), Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra (Toronto), Symphony Nova Scotia, the Vancouver Island Symphony, Ensemble Contemporain de Montréal, Paragon, the Kapten Trio, and such soloists as sopranos Suzie LeBlanc, Janice Jackson, Patricia Green and Helen Pridmore, pianist Rachel Iwaasa, violinist Annette-Barbara Vogel, viola d'amorist Thomas Georgi and viola da gambist Karin Preslmayr.

Emily has an ongoing research and musical interest in zoomusicology, the study of music-like aspects of animal songs. She has explored this in a compositions such as *Woodwings*, *Bowheads*, and *Reedbird*, as well as in her doctoral dissertation at Princeton and in collaborative research with biologists and ornithologists. Recent zoomusicological publications include “Hearken to the Hermit Thrush: A Case Study in Interdisciplinary Listening,” “Zoomusicology: a Quick Guide” (co-authored with Bruno Gingras), and “O Canto do Uirapuru: Consonant intervals and patterns in the song of the musician wren” (co-authored with Henrik Brumm). She is also interested in art and environmental activism, and was recently awarded Royal Society of Edinburgh Research Workshop funding to co-organize the talk and concert series Art-Making in the Anthropocene with colleagues Sarah Hopfinger and Stuart MacRae. Other recurrent research and compositional interests include folklore, musical story-telling, music and gender, parenthood and creativity, and making music for and with children.

Emily has received a number of awards for her music, including an Opera America Discovery Grant, the Roberta Stephenson Award, a Sorel Organization Recording Grant, the Theodore Front Prize, two ASCAP Morton Gould Awards, and the Bearn’s Prize. Her work has been supported by grants and commissions from Creative Scotland, the Hope Scott Foundation, the Hinrichsen Foundation, the Canada Council, the Nova Scotia Arts Council, Socan, FIRST Music, the Montreal Arts Council, the Conseil des arts et Lettres du Quebec, the Artist Trust, the Eric Stokes Fund, The Culture and Animals Foundation, and ASCAP, and with funded artist residencies at MacDowell, Ucross, Blue Mountain Center, Banff, and the Center for Contemporary Art in Glasgow. Her chamber music CD *all spring* was released on the Composers Concordance label in 2015.

Composer **Scott Johnson** (1952-2023) was a pioneering voice in the new relationship being forged between the classical tradition and the popular culture that surrounds it. A forerunner of today’s “postclassical” trends, he played an influential role since the early 1980’s in the incorporation of rock-derived instruments, electronics, and musical materials into traditionally scored compositions. His music has been heard in performances by the Kronos Quartet, Alarm Will Sound, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Bang On A Can All-Stars, and his own ensembles; in dance works performed by the Boston Ballet, the London Contemporary Dance Theater, and the Ballets de Monte Carlo. His music is recorded on the Nonesuch, CRI, Point, and Tzadik labels.

Trained in both music and visual arts at the University of Wisconsin, Johnson's early experiments in combining prerecorded tape and electric instruments culminated in the groundbreaking *John Somebody* (1980-82), in which the pitches and rhythms of recorded speech became the source material for an accompanying instrumental score; a technique which spread as digital sampling became common in the mid-1980's. Other compositions featuring sampled speech include *Mind Out Of Matter*, based on the voice of philosopher Daniel Dennett, *How It Happens*, based on the voice of the journalist I. F. Stone, as well as *Convertible Debts*, *The Value of People and Things*, *Pact*, and *Americans*, all of which combine voice sampling with electro-acoustic ensembles.

Johnson's scores make extensive use of musical materials and sounds drawn from the American vernacular, and he has often premiered his electric guitar writing himself. He appeared at festivals, concert halls, and art museums throughout Europe and North America: first with self-performed compositions for solo electric guitar, tape, and electronics; later with an octet made up of a guitar-based rock band with a saxophone trio; followed by an electric quartet of violin, cello, electric guitar, and piano/synthesizer. New York City concert venues for Mr. Johnson's ensembles have included concert halls such as Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and Merkin Hall, as well as alternative spaces such as The Kitchen and Roulette.

Johnson was the recipient of fellowships from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Guggenheim Foundation, a Koussevitsky award, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and five grants from the New York State Council on the Arts; as well as grants and commission support from Lincoln Center, New Music USA, the Jerome Foundation, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Concert Artists Guild, and the Mary Flagler Cary Trust. His commissioned works include *Mind Out Of Matter* for Alarm Will Sound, *Stalking Horse* for the American Composer's Orchestra, *Bowery Haunt* and *Last Time Told* for the Cygnus Ensemble, *The Illusion of Guidance* for the Bang On A Can All-Stars, *How It Happens* and *Bird in the Domes* for the Kronos Quartet; *I Am New York City* for soprano Dora Ohrenstein (premiered by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra), the score for Paul Schrader's film *Patty Hearst*, and *Before Winter*, recorded for the Boston Ballet by Mr. Johnson's own ensemble.

Johnson's own concert appearances included Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, the Japan Society, the Lincoln Center Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, Yale University, the Schleswig-Holstien Festival, a chamber concert with members of the Minnesota Orchestra, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's "Great Day In New York" series. Johnson has also published articles and essays on contemporary

music, one of which is excerpted in Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin's "Music In The Western World." He lectured on his music and ideas at leading conservatories and universities, including San Francisco and Peabody Conservatories, Senzaku Ongaku Daigaku, New York University, The Manhattan School of Music, and Yale University.

GRAMMY®-nominated for his latest solo album "Lord, How Come Me Here?"—a collection of reimagined Negro spirituals—and named one of the 2023 Musical America Top 30 Professionals of the Year, Nigerian-American composer Shawn E. Okpebholo's music resonates globally, earning widespread acclaim from critics and audiences alike. The press has described his music as "devastatingly beautiful" and "fresh and new and fearless" (Washington Post), "affecting" (New York Times), "lyrical, complex, singular" (The Guardian), "searing" (Chicago Tribune), "dreamy, sensual" (Boston Globe), and "powerful" (BBC Music Magazine). Okpebholo has garnered numerous accolades, including awards from The Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Prize in Composition, the Music Publishers Association, ASCAP, and was awarded the Inaugural honoree of the Leslie Adams-Robert Owens Composition Award.

Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, Barlow Endowment for the Arts, Illinois Arts Council, Tangeman Sacred Music Center, The Mellon Foundation, Wheaton College, and many others have supported the work of Okpebholo. Some notable commissions include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, United States Air Force Strings, Copland House Ensemble, Tanglewood, Aspen, and Newport Classical Music Festivals, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Imani Winds, Sparks and Wiry Cries, Urban Arias, and the Kennedy Center. His art songs have been presented in concert by the Chicago Lyric Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Portland Opera, and Des Moines Metro Opera. His chamber music has been performed by eighth blackbird, Copland House Ensemble, Picoso, Fifth House Ensemble, Lincoln Trio, and others. Orchestras including the Chicago, Cincinnati, and Houston Symphonies and the Lexington Philharmonic have featured his music. Okpebholo has also collaborated with renowned solo artists including vocalists J'Nai Bridges, Lawrence Brownlee, Rhiannon Giddens, Will Liverman, Michael Michael Mayes, Ryan McKinney, and Tamera Wilson; pianists Aldo-López Gavilán, Mark Markham, Paul Sánchez, and Howard Watkins; and instrumentalists including Rachel Barton Pine, Steven Mead, and Adam Walker. His extensive artistic reach has led to regular performances at prestigious venues like Carnegie and Wigmore Halls, Lincoln, Kennedy, and Kimmel Centers, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

PBS NewsHour and radio broadcasts across the country, including NPR's All Things Considered, NPR's Morning Edition, SiriusXM's "Living American" series on Symphony Hall Channel, and Chicago's WFMT have highlighted Okpebholo's music. NPR selected his art song "The Rain" as one of the 100 Best Songs of 2021, with only a handful of classical works making the ranking. His compositions are featured on twelve commercially released albums, three of which are GRAMMY®-nominated.

As a pedagogue, Okpebholo has conducted masterclasses at various academic institutions worldwide, including two universities in Nigeria. His research interests have led to ethnomusicological fieldwork in both East and West Africa, resulting in compositions, transcriptions, and academic lectures. He earned his master's and doctoral degrees in composition from the College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati. During his upbringing, a significant part of his music education came from The Salvation Army church, where he received free music lessons regularly. Inspired by that altruism, Okpebholo is deeply passionate about music outreach to underserved communities.

Recently, he completed a residency with the Chicago Opera Theater, culminating in the premiere of his opera, "The Cook-Off," with librettist Mark Campbell (librettist of the Pulitzer-prize-winning opera *Silent Night*). Currently, he serves as the Jonathan Blanchard Distinguished Professor of Composition at Wheaton College-Conservatory of Music and the Saykaly Garbulinska Composer-in-Residence with the Lexington Philharmonic.

Shawn E. Okpebholo is based in Wheaton, IL, a suburb of Chicago, with his wife, violist Dorthy, and their daughters, Eva and Corinne.

Gemma Peacocke is a composer from Aotearoa New Zealand. She has a particular interest in interdisciplinary projects. Her first album, *Waves & Lines*, which sets poems by Afghan women, was released on New Amsterdam in March 2019. Gemma is co-founder of the Kinds of Kings composer collective which is focused on amplifying and advocating for under-heard voices in classical music. A joint Ph.D. candidate in Music and Humanistic Studies at Princeton University, Gemma previously studied with Julia Wolfe at NYU Steinhardt and at the New Zealand School of Music. Gemma has been commissioned by the Auckland Philharmonia, Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, Rochester Philharmonic, Third Coast Percussion, PUBLIQuartet, Bang on a Can, Rubiks Collective, Stroma, and Alarm Will Sound. She lives in Princeton with her family and her biggest fan, a standard

poodle called Mila. She also spends as much time as possible in New Zealand.  
[www.gemmapeacocke.com](http://www.gemmapeacocke.com) [www.kindsofkings.com](http://www.kindsofkings.com)

## Support For Fulcrum Point New Music Project

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