

Sandbox Percussion: 2025-26 Season Bio

Long Bio: Sandbox Percussion

Described as “exhilarating” by *The New York Times* and “utterly mesmerizing” by *The Guardian*, the GRAMMY®-nominated Sandbox Percussion champions living composers through its unwavering dedication to contemporary chamber music. In 2011, Jonathan Allen, Victor Caccese, Ian Rosenbaum, and Terry Sweeney were brought together by their love of contemporary music and interest in expanding the percussion repertoire; they have since captivated audiences around the world through visually and aurally stunning performances. Today, the foursome are established leaders in contemporary music for percussion, engaging a wider audience for classical music through multidisciplinary collaborations with leading composers and artists.

In 2025, the group made its long-awaited debut on NPR’s immensely popular *Tiny Desk* series, with a genre-defying program that consists of music by Andy Akiho and Viet Cuong, two of the most important voices in contemporary classical music. Sandbox Percussion also recorded percussion music for its first feature film, *The Wild Robot* (DreamWorks, 2024), an animated science fiction film directed by Chris Sanders, with music by Kris Bowers. It received three Academy Award nominations.

Sandbox Percussion is the first percussion ensemble to receive the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. At the 2024 ceremony, the group performed “Pillar V,” from *Seven Pillars*, a 2021 feature-length suite for percussion quartet composed by Akiho and commissioned by Sandbox Percussion, with stage direction and lighting design by Michael Joseph McQuilken. *The New York Times* praised *Seven Pillars* as “a lush, brooding celebration of noise” and “as pure as music gets.” It was nominated for two GRAMMY® awards—Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance and Best Contemporary Classical Composition—and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist. Since the world premiere, Sandbox Percussion has taken *Seven Pillars* on tour around the globe, from Paris to Beijing.

After winning a 2024 Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation commission, Sandbox Percussion and Akiho embark on a project in the 2025-26 season to create a new work with Akiho joining on steelpan. Building on the success of *Seven Pillars*, the project is pushing the boundaries of contemporary chamber music; “Pentalateral I,” the first completed movement, is available now as a single on all streaming platforms. Throughout the season, the quintet continues to create and record the rest of the piece, giving premieres of individual movements in select venues; in Omaha, NE, they perform at KANEKO, the art center founded by the international artist Jun Kaneko. The full work will be completed in summer 2026.

This season, Sandbox Percussion continues to champion *Re(new)al*, Cuong’s green energy and environment-themed 2017 concerto for percussion quartet, inspired by the power of hydro, wind, and solar energies, with which the group made its Carnegie Hall debut in 2022. Performances of *Re(new)al* take place with the Columbus Symphony, Springfield Symphony Orchestra, Duke University Wind Symphony, Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra, and Topeka Symphony. Sandbox Percussion and Cuong also reunite for the world premiere of a yet-untitled

new work to be performed with the Albany Symphony, which commissioned and premiered *Re(new)al*.

Another season highlight is the collaboration with violinist Kristin Lee, the founder and artistic director of Seattle's Emerald City Music, where Sandbox Percussion is ensemble-in-residence this season. Together, they present FIVE!, a program featuring the world premiere of a work by Vivian Fung, and the Pacific Northwest premiere of recent works by Joan Tower and Gabriella Smith. The cutting-edge program, presented in Seattle and Olympia, WA, showcases the diverse interplay possible between violin and percussion. Lee joins Sandbox Percussion again at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for *Sonic Spectrum IV*, a program that includes Lou Harrison's rarely performed Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra.

Over the season, Sandbox Percussion performs Dutch composer Simeon ten Holt's enthralling minimalist work *Canto Ostinato*. The group's arrangement for percussion quartet and two pianos—played by Matthew Aucoin and Conor Hanick—was performed at Lincoln Center's latest *Summer for the City* festival. Sandbox Percussion revisits the piece with Aucoin and Hanick at Cal Performances and Dumbarton Oaks. Multi-instrumentalist Erik Hall, Metropolis Ensemble, and students and faculty from the University of Washington School of Music also join Sandbox Percussion for two performances at Emerald City Music. A new recording by Sandbox Percussion, Erik Hall, and Metropolis Ensemble is scheduled for release in spring 2026 on the Western Vinyl label.

At Duke University's Duke Arts, Sandbox Percussion and the Tyshawn Sorey Trio present *Max Roach at 100*, a collaborative tribute that celebrates the legacy of the influential jazz drummer. Each group performs its own set first, followed by Sorey's *Cogitations*, composed for the two groups joining forces as a septet. "Throughout the performance, Sandbox members displayed the rhythmic affect just as easily as their melodic prowess shined," wrote *CapitalBop* about last season's performance at the Library of Congress.

Sandbox Percussion also joins the choir The Crossing at Stanford Live, conducted by Donald Nally. The program consists of *You Are Who I Love*, the last work by the late composer Harold Meltzer, set to Aracelis Girmay's poem about the undocumented immigrant experience in the U.S. Meltzer composed the piece for the two ensembles, calling for ample interplay between them. It is one of his largest and most thoughtful pieces, with the four percussionists playing over 100 instruments.

The group's latest release is *Don't Look Down* (PENTATONE, 2025), an album that "stretches and challenges the listeners' ears" (*BBC Music Magazine*), featuring music by longtime collaborator Christopher Cerrone, with Hanick on piano and mezzo-soprano Elspeth Davis. The album received three GRAMMY® Award nominations, for Best Classical Compendium, Best Contemporary Classical Composition (the title piece), and Best Engineered Album, Classical.

Sandbox Percussion also recorded percussion music for its first feature film, *The Wild Robot* (DreamWorks, 2024), an animated science fiction film directed by Chris Sanders, with music by Kris Bowers. It received three Academy Award nominations, and a GRAMMY® Award nomination for the score.

Besides maintaining an international performance schedule, Sandbox Percussion holds the positions of ensemble-in-residence and percussion faculty at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and The New School's College of Performing Arts, where they have created a curriculum with entrepreneurship and chamber music at its core. The 2025-26 season is the group's second year on faculty at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

Sandbox Percussion has led masterclasses and coachings across the United States, including at Curtis Institute, the Juilliard School, the Yale School of Music, and the Peabody Institute. In 2016, the Sandbox Percussion Seminar was founded, which invites percussion students to rehearse and perform today's leading repertoire for percussion. Sandbox Percussion launched the Creator Mentorship Program in 2022, a commissioning program for early-career creators who are selected to compose a new work and receive funding for workshops and development.

Sandbox Percussion endorses Pearl/Adams musical instruments, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks and mallets, Remo drumheads, and Black Swamp accessories. sandboxpercussion.com

[1,000 words]

[September 2025]