

WILLIAM WINANT



“William Winant is simply the best percussionist working today... whichever piece it is, he’s not afraid to make it come alive.” – Kim Gordon

“William Winant always plays his ass off!” – John Zorn

“WILLIE WINANT IS A MUSICAL HURRICANE. A UNIQUE FORCE OF NATURE THAT WE MAY ONLY HAVE THE CHANCE TO EXPERIENCE ONCE IN OUR LIFETIME, AND ONE THAT WILL INSPIRE US FOREVER.”

– Mike Patton

“Willie is very much responsible for my life-long infatuation with percussion and remains to this day a true inspiration to me.” – Danny Elfman

William Winant is the single greatest living avant garde percussionist. Few musicians of any kind—popular, experimental, or otherwise—are like him. During his career he has worked with musical acts as diverse as Sonic Youth, Mr. Bungle, John Zorn, and Oingo Boingo. John Cage, Terry Riley, and Lou Harrison have written music for him. He has studied with James Tenney, Steve Reich, and John Bergamo, played music with The Kronos String Quartet, Anthony Braxton, Cecil Taylor, Roscoe Mitchell, Keith Jarrett, and Yo-Yo Ma, and recorded music with Christian Wolff and Danny Elfman. He has performed on soundtracks for directors Tim Burton and Werner Herzog, and participated in numerous musical premieres throughout the world, including the American premiere of Luc Ferrari’s “Cellule 75.”

In the 20th century, America’s cup brimmed over with brilliant and legendary artists. But, as Peter Garland points out, William didn’t just play alongside them. Winant is a legend himself: “That’s why so many composers love working with Willie. Because he’s not just a performer. He’s a co-conspirator. He’s one of us.”

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William was born in Brooklyn in 1953. His parents left New York for Hollywood in 1956, when William was just three. He attended University High School in Los Angeles, where he first met lifelong friends Michael Byron, Danny Elfman, and Kim Gordon. Their friendship, and his curiosity, led William to an interest in jazz music. He began studying jazz drumming privately in high school with percussionist Clarence Johnston, a jazz veteran who had played with everyone from Dinah Washington to Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane. After high school William attended Los Angeles City College for one year, studying music and performing in the symphonic band. To his lessons with Clarence Johnston he added private studies with percussionist Karen Ervin, who played an integral part in turning him on to contemporary percussion music.

Winant joined The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo with Danny Elfman in 1972, the same year he enrolled at Cal Arts. His mentor there was percussionist and composer John Bergamo. Under his tutelage, Winant immersed himself in the percussion music of Henry Cowell, John Cage, and Lou Harrison. At age 19 he received a scholarship to work as Steve Reich's assistant at a summer world music program held at the University of Washington in Seattle, where Reich was studying and researching Indonesian music, teaching classes, and leading workshops. In addition to putting on and performing a concert of Reich's music at the end of the summer, that fall William was invited to tour with Steve Reich and Musicians. That same year James Tenney programmed and conducted an all-percussion ensemble concert featuring Winant and composer Peter Garland. One of the first concerts of its kind on the West Coast, it included music by John Cage, Henry Cowell, John Luther Adams, Lou Harrison, and Edgard Varèse. Broadcast live on KPFC Pacifica Radio, it offered audiences everywhere the rare opportunity to hear pieces like "Ionisation" and "Canticle No. 3" on the same program.

In the fall of 1975, he moved to Toronto to study at York University with percussionists he had met while on tour with Steve Reich. James Tenney arrived in Toronto the next year and William continued his studies with him. In 1976, Tenney introduced him to John Cage. Cage was looking for American musicians living in Canada to perform a Canadian Broadcasting Company-commissioned piece celebrating the American bicentennial. Soon after, William took part in the 1976 American premiere of "Lecture on the Weather" at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

Winant completed his degree at York University in 1978, then travelled to Indonesia and Southeast Asia in the fall of '79. He moved to the San Francisco Bay area in 1980, reconnected with Lou Harrison, completed his master's degree at Mills College, and became a professor of contemporary and avant garde percussion at UC Santa Cruz. Shortly thereafter he began producing several albums of Harrison's work, including the career spanning *Drums Along the Pacific* and *La Koro Sutro*, which was the *New York Times* Critic's Choice for best contemporary recording in 1988.

In 1984 he became the Artist-in-Residence at Mills as part of the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio, founded Room, a trio that included pianist Chris Brown and reed-man Larry Ochs and in 1985 he met and started performing with Anthony Braxton and David Rosenboom in the electro-acoustically focused Challenge Trio. In 1989 William was guest artist at the annual Ojai Music Festival with the LA Philharmonic under the direction of Pierre Boulez.

William performed on Danny Elfman's soundtrack for Tim Burton's *Batman Returns* in 1992 and he entered the studio with John Zorn for the recording of *Elegy*, which also featured Mr. Bungle members Mike Patton and Trey Spruance. This meeting led to his eight year relationship with Mr. Bungle, with whom he recorded *Disco Volante* in 1995 and *California* in 1999. He joined the band on tour for both records.

Before 1992 was over, he had participated in the premiere of John Cage's "Four6" — a piece dedicated to Winant, Pauline Oliveros, Joan La Barbara, and Leonard Stein—at Central Park's SummerStage. It was the last concert Cage performed in before his death in August of that year. Performances with the Mark Morris Dance Group followed in 1997 and lasted for eight years.

In '99 he worked with Sonic Youth on *SYR4: Goodbye 20th Century*. He both performed and assisted with the selection of the pieces featured on the album. New York's *Village Voice* and *Pitchfork* both praised it, and the *Los Angeles Times* exclaimed: "There is... no better single anthology representation of conceptual American music (along with one brief British example by Cornelius Cardew) currently available."

In 2003 Winant celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company with Takehisa Kosugi and Christian Wolff. Together they created music for a series of eight special Events staged by Merce Cunningham and Dancers at London's Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern. William was the principal percussionist for the company until Merce Cunningham died in 2009.

Since 2009 William has recorded with Roscoe Mitchell, David Rosenboom, Annea Lockwood, and John Zorn, embarked on two tours of Australia and one of South America with Mike Patton's Mondo Cane group, participated in numerous concerts for Cage's Centennial Festival, and performed on the premiere recording of Cage's *The 10,000 Things*. He's also toured with Fred Frith, premiered new music by Zeena Parkins with the Eclipse String Quartet, and recorded music with David Lindley and Henry Kaiser for Werner Herzog's *Encounters at the End of the World*.

Now, with the release of *Five American Percussion Pieces* on Poon Village, he has an artist release available, the first of his career, featuring performances of music by Lou Harrison, James Tenney, Michael Byron, and Alvin Curran.

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