

Sonic Escape



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Group Biography

The house darkens as stage lights focus upon two young men and a lady. Flute to lips and bows to violin & cello, the first note heralds a journey across borders, worlds and time steeped in legends and magic. “I’ve never heard anything like this,” audiences exclaim; *Sonic Escape* responds by playing harder, composing better, digging deeper.

As graduates of The Juilliard School, Shawn Wyckoff (flute), Maria Kaneko Millar (violin) and Michael Haas (cello) have performed in classical music’s greatest halls – The Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, to name a few. They’ve also traveled the world in roles as diverse as fiddle-dancing in *Riverdance*, jamming with Beale Street blues bands, soloing & drumming with taiko troupes, improvising with Native-American flute masters, dancing while performing the tango music of Astor Piazzolla, and playing rock clubs across NYC. This lifelong commitment to devouring new sounds and pushing boundaries – both within themselves and the musical establishment – is why *Sonic Escape* (formerly *Silver Roots*) came to be. It’s also how the trio amassed a ridiculous technique that makes audiences swear they’re hearing an orchestra of a dozen different instruments or the synchronous voice of one.

Ultimately, the total *Sonic Escape* experience is what makes lifelong believers out of initiates. Humor and candid conversation draw audiences into the music, while the players’ backgrounds in acting, singing and dancing turn concerts into unforgettable performance events. Improvisation takes it up a notch, infusing shows with pure, dynamic energy. As music and stories intertwine, audiences are taken on a rollercoaster ride of emotions, revelations, and ultimately, the desire to learn more. Interaction and innovation are the hallmarks of *Sonic Escape*.

Sonic Escape is the recipient of two Canada Council for the Arts Composition Grants (2011 & 2012), a Puffin Foundation Award (2012) and a Chamber Music America Residency Grant (2010). Summer of 2012 marks the release of *Sonic Escape*’s debut album as well as the trio’s introduction to the folk festival circuit! Performance highlights include concerts for Lincoln Center (NYC), Irish Arts Center (NYC), Touhill Performing Arts Center (St. Louis, MO), Eckhardt-Gramatté Concert Hall (Calgary, AB), Penn State Erie’s *Music at Noon* (Erie, PA), Japan Foundation (Toronto, ON), Cherry Blossom Festival (Philadelphia, PA), Discovery Times Square Exposition (NYC) and The Juilliard School (NYC). *Silver Stage* – an initiative that encourages audiences to participate in concerts through improvisation, storytelling, poetry writing, roundtable discussions and musical requests – was introduced to local communities through a six-week tour of 10 states/provinces. With concerts and workshops in libraries, universities, concert halls, arts centers and even a bank, the tour was a celebration of *Sonic Escape*’s commitment to enchanting first-timers and seasoned concertgoers alike.



Photo: Chris Marolf

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Individual Biographies

Violinist and composer **Maria Kaneko Millar** has performed as a soloist throughout Canada, Ireland, China, Japan and the US; The Canadian, British and American Broadcasting Corporations as well as The WB's *One World Jam*, CBS Sunday Morning and CBS The Early Show have aired her work. 170 performances as Solo Dancing Fiddler in *Riverdance On Broadway* and the North American and Asian Tours of *Riverdance: The Show* featured improvised solos and simultaneous dance. Maria also performed in Radio City Music Hall's *One World Jam* and premiered her creation for 5 prerecorded violin tracks and 1 live dancing violinist, *All for One*, on CBC's nationally televised *The Great Canadian Music Dream*. Maria has toured North America with her one-woman show of original works for violin, voice and dance, playing venues such as The Kennedy Center and The Library & Archives of Canada. Canada Council for the Arts, Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council have awarded Maria with composition and space grants; Samson sponsors Maria, providing audio, wireless and effects processing equipment specific to her roles as singer, acoustic/electric violinist and dancer. Maria lives to improvise: her arrangements and aural transcriptions of Asian, Celtic, Gypsy, Klezmer, Tango, Turkish, blues, jazz, pop, rock and classical music have laid the foundation for fearless ad-libbing in any setting. Maria holds accelerated BM/MM's in Violin Performance from The Juilliard School.

Flutist **Shawn Wyckoff** is an avid solo and chamber musician who has been featured in performances at Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, The Kennedy Center, Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, The Library of Congress, BargeMusic, MOMA and the Guggenheim Museum. Shawn is the artistic director, flutist and music arranger for *TetraWind*, a woodwind quartet specializing in contemporary American music. Shawn's orchestral work includes concerts with *Continuum*, One World Symphony and The Harmonia Opera Company. Shawn is a First Prize winner of The Judith Lapple National Flute Competition, the Flute Society of Washington Competition and The Friday Morning Music Club Woodwind Competition. He was named a Maryland Distinguished Scholar of the Arts and received the Stephen Brewster Award (as chosen by a panel of National Symphony Orchestra musicians), the John Philip Sousa Award and the National Alliance for Excellence Award. Shawn holds a BM in Flute Performance from The Juilliard School.

Cellist **Michael Haas** is an experienced performer of chamber and orchestral music, frequently appearing in New York City and across the country. He is the cellist of the *Momenta Quartet*, a group that champions works by living composers and holds residencies at Temple, Yeshiva and Cornell Universities. Most recently, Michael performed at the Society for Ethical Culture, Alice Tully Hall and The Kennedy Center. He is a member of the New Haven Symphony Orchestra and has also performed with the New York Philharmonic, American Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's and as Principal Cellist of the Haddonfield Symphony. Michael holds a BM from the Curtis Institute of Music and an MM from The Juilliard School.

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Concert Programs - Highlights

Japan Meets World

Japan Meets World explores Japan's most beloved folk songs and anime soundtracks alongside compositions by Maria Kaneko Millar and contemporary classical works that infuse western forms with Japanese sounds and scales. Powerhouse virtuosity and soulful lyricism on the flute, violin and cello combine with song, dance and an extended technique that transforms western instruments into a traditional Japanese orchestra! Music from China, Ireland, Germany, Austria and Canada color the evening, highlighting the uniqueness of each while showcasing the universal bond shared by all.

Maria Millar	<i>Tsuru</i> (for Solo Dancing Violinist with Fabric)
Toshitsugu Ogihara	<i>Trio</i> - 1970
Katherine Hoover	<i>Kokopeli</i> (for Solo Flute performed in conjunction with poem, <i>Whip Man</i>) - 1990
Maria Millar (arr.)	<i>Japanese Folk Tune Medley</i> - <i>Ureshii Hinamatsuri</i> / <i>Hanayome Ningyo</i> / <i>Tōryanse</i>
Joe Hisaishi	<i>Tonari no Totoro</i>

Echoing Voices: A Musical History of America

Echoing Voices presents music from the homelands of immigrants through their stories and history of coming to America. The music of 10 regions – the Netherlands, England, Ireland, Germany, Russia, Italy, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Egypt and China – is featured alongside interactive activities for audience members of all ages. *Echoing Voices'* debut run as part of Lincoln Center's 2009/10 *Meet the Artist* series in New York City sold out so quickly that additional shows had to be booked to accommodate demand!

Julius Röntgen (arr.)	<i>Passepied & Pieternelle</i> (The Netherlands - circa 1600)
Franz Danzi	<i>Trio for Flute, Violin & Cello, Opus 71</i> (Germany - circa 1800)
Maria Millar (arr.)	<i>Slumber Song & Folk Melodies</i> (Egypt - traditional)
Li Guo Quan (arr.)	<i>Singing the Night Among Fishing Boats</i> (China - traditional)
Maria Millar (arr.)	<i>Weeping, Sad & Lonely</i> / <i>Devil's Dream</i> / <i>Chicken Reel</i> (USA - traditional)

Ancient Dances

Ancient Dances takes its cue from the dances and traditional music of Europe; up-tempo dance tunes from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Ireland and England are presented with classic *Sonic Escape* flair. A narrative, theatrically woven throughout the program, tells the story of where the music traveled and how it came to be. Solo works by J.S. Bach introduce Irish traditional tunes of like rhythm and step. *Sonic Escape's* musical arrangements and eclectic tastes pave the way for a mind-bending, sonic adventure!

Otto M. Christensen	<i>Baroque Folk Suite</i> (Commissioned by Sonic Escape)
Maria Millar	<i>Spökskepp</i> (Ghost Ship)
Henry Cowell	<i>7 Paragraphs</i>
Franz Joseph Haydn	<i>Divertissement No. 2, Opus 100</i>
J.S. Bach / Maria Millar	<i>Gigue + Jig</i> / <i>Corrente + Slip Jig</i> / <i>Allegro + Reel</i>
Turlough Carolan	<i>John Hugent</i> / <i>Mrs. Edwards</i> / <i>Carolan's Receipt</i>
Shawn Wyckoff (arr.)	<i>Scandinavian Suite</i> - <i>Reinlender</i> / <i>Lars Persson</i> / <i>Hornpipe</i>

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Workshops - Highlights

Since 2008, *Sonic Escape's* members have presented workshops, masterclasses and outreach programs for students and audiences of universities, schools (Grade 3-12), libraries and youth orchestras, including Lincoln Center, The Juilliard School, University of Alberta, University of Calgary and Irish Arts Center in NYC. Participants' ages have ranged from under 5 to over 65 with skill sets ranging from no musical experience to professional classical or folk musician. The following are synopses of select *Sonic Escape* workshops:

Introduction to Improvisation

Learn basic tools that allow you to instantly unleash your inner improviser! The workshop begins with exercises that sensitize and strengthen the students' ears (such as reproducing sounds and phrases by ear, group and individual call-and-response and musical telephone). Improvisation is then taught in two stages. Stage 1: students learn how to derive improvisational ideas from technique, personal experiences, senses, surroundings and movement. Stage 2: students learn to hone and thematically develop their improvisations by setting parameters (such as improvising within a set rhythm, key or tempo). Finally, students are divided into groups of 2 - 4 and exercises are assigned that utilize improvisation to create collaborative pieces.

How to Produce and Present Your Own Concert

Sonic Escape walks you through the steps involved in successfully producing your own concert, including seeking out a venue, creating a preparation timeline, structuring a program, speaking in front of an audience, and documenting/disseminating your work via audio and video recordings to review your performance and generate future opportunities. The definitive course on how to grow and sustain a rich career in music.

Technique for Strings and Woodwinds

Learn how to play your instrument better! With simple answers to even the most complex questions, *Sonic Escape* addresses all technical issues and obstacles that confront string and woodwind players.



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Testimonials

Touhill Performing Arts Center (St. Louis, MO)

"They are a force of epic proportion... it is almost impossible to believe that there are only 3 musicians on stage. Having produced fourteen seasons, I say without hesitation [that] *Sonic Escape* ranks in the top five percent of the over seventy concerts we have included in our programming. *Sonic Escape* is in the process of becoming an American Treasure."

- Terry Marshall, Manager, International Performing Arts Series

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Inc (New York, NY)

"Your ability to showcase virtuosic performance coupled with a palpable connection to your audience results in an absolutely riveting experience. I personally have learned so much about the cultures whose music you feature and the emotion with which each piece was composed. The audience response to each of your appearances has been tremendous! I would recommend your programs to anyone looking for an interesting, informative, and lively performance! I look forward to working with you many more times in the future!"

- Hillary McAndrew-Plate, Senior Manager, Meet the Artist & Community Programming

Irish Arts Center (New York, NY)

"*Sonic Escape* played to a sold out crowd at the Irish Arts Center. Their ability to captivate audiences, transcend musical boundaries and inspire curiosity is truly unique. Most gratifying to us were the die-hard fans of Irish trad who left with a new-found appreciation for classical music. This knack for opening listeners' minds to sounds and ideas they'd never previously considered is what sets *Sonic Escape* apart - they combine great skill, personality and creativity to create an unforgettable concert experience."

- Aidan Connolly, Executive Director

The Colonial Theater (Pittsfield, MA)

"I was extremely impressed by the concert you presented. Your extraordinary musicianship was worth much more than the price of admission. What impressed me even more, as an experienced presenter of the performing arts, was your spot on sense of the right balance of content, spontaneity, charm, humor, scholarship, and technique. The net result was a concert that was entertaining, accessible, and artistically satisfying. You are superb musicians with a great sense for what pleases audiences."

- Dave Fleming, President of Theater Strategic Services & Former Executive Director

The Arts Center (Jamestown, ND)

"Your ensemble's professional training and musical virtuosity were more than entertaining. The audience especially enjoyed the "stump the musicians" segment. What a clever way to engage an audience and to showcase your abilities... everything from *Riverdance* fiddling and dance to jazz, Asian-inspired, pop and classical."

- Taylor Barnes, Director

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Testimonials / Performances

Japan Foundation (Toronto, ON)

"The performance was met with great enthusiasm and praise from the audience. In fact, as soon as we began promoting the concert, reservations were fully booked within one day. They are talented musicians with a gift for blending cultures, genres and eras in a way that beautifully embodies cultural exchange."

- Masayuki Suzuki, Director

Madison Valley Public Library (Ennis, MT)

"*Sonic Escape* was a major hit in Ennis MT. They drew a standing room only audience on a Wednesday night in February. Ennis is a small town and there were 100 folks who came to hear them (10% of the total population). The audience was most involved by a poetry contest that Shawn suggested in the weeks before the concert. Two winning poems were read by the winners and were spontaneously accompanied by *Sonic Escape*. They were very popular; folks appreciate their musicality AND their wonderful rapport with the audience."

- Lucy Ennis, Library Board Trustee

Upcoming Concerts - Highlights

Lincoln Center - New York, NY
Johnson Hall Performing Arts Center - Gardiner, ME
Blue Skies Music Festival - Claredon, ON
Green Lake Festival of Music - Green Lake, WI
Fairmont Chamber Music Society - Fairmont, WV
Stonecroft Folk - South-West Oxford, ON

Past Concerts & Workshops - Highlights

Lincoln Center - New York, NY
Irish Arts Center - New York, NY
WQXR (Radio) - New York, NY
Cathedral of St. John the Divine - New York, NY
United Nations - New York, NY
Discovery Times Square Exposition - New York, NY
BAMcafé - Brooklyn, NY
Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum - Bronx, NY
Hofstra University - Hempstead, NY
Elmira College - Elmira, NY
Touhill Performing Arts Center - St. Louis, MO
Penn State Erie's *Music at Noon* - Erie, PA
University of Mary - Bismarck, ND
Embassy of Japan in Canada - Ottawa, ON

Chamber Music America (Official Showcase) - New York, NY
OCFF (Official Showcase) - Niagara Falls, ON
Cherry Blossom Festival - Philadelphia, PA
Arts Barn - Gaithersburg, MD
Historic Homestake Opera House - Lead, SD
Dakota Discovery Museum - Mitchell, SD
The Arts Center - Jamestown, ND
Kansas City Public Library - Kansas City, MO
Ogunquit Museum of American Art - Ogunquit, ME
Glacier Discovery Square (Residency) - Columbia Falls, MT
MELSA (5-City/Concert Residency) - Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN
The Juilliard School (Concert/Workshop) - New York, NY
University of Calgary (Concert/Workshop) - New York, NY
University of Alberta (Workshop) - Edmonton, AB