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QuickTakes!

William Paterson University Music Professor Mixes It Up with Art and Athleticism

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Payton MacDonald, William Paterson University music professor, will combine his passions for creative music and ultra-distance mountain biking for his upcoming Sonic Divide project. In June, MacDonald will bike the U.S. Great Divide Mountain Biking Route from Mexico to Canada. He has commissioned 30 original compositions from 30 composers, including William Paterson faculty members Peter Jarvis, John Link, Tim Newman, Kevin Norton, Anton Vishio and David Weisberg. He will perform and document one composition each time he crosses the Continental Divide during the self-supported, 2,500-mile journey.

As a percussionist and singer, Professor MacDonald will utilize his voice, a pair of lightweight mallets and surrounding found objects to perform the compositions throughout his 25-to-30 day adventure, and he will audio and video record the music and ambient environmental echoes for a later CD release. “These are some of the most beautiful pieces I’ve ever experienced in my life ... And I cannot wait to get out and perform them in some of the world’s most gorgeous natural settings,” he said.

Professor MacDonald will climb more than 200,000 feet across mountaintops, deserts, forests and off-road terrains to physically and artistically accomplish the feat. “I view this event as a metaphor of rugged American individualism, a celebration of our potential and our place in the vast cosmos.”

Dr. MacDonald is a professional percussionist, composer, educator and Fulbright Scholar whose area of research includes a wide range of Indian music and composition. Numerous ensembles have performed his works around the world, including Alarm Will Sound, Los Angeles Philharmonic, So Percussion, Quintet Mont Royal, Classical Jam and table soloist

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Shawn Mativetsky. He has performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, and at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles.

Personal Statement:

I've been playing music since I was nine years old, but my love of music goes back much further. In fact, my earliest memories are of standing up in my crib and rocking back and forth to music from the radio.

I was born and raised in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Although Idaho Falls is essentially a suburban town, my parents had a cabin in the woods near the Idaho/Wyoming border and I spent most of my weekends there skiing, sledding, hiking, riding motorcycles, and just generally tramping around through the woods. It was a fabulous childhood. The deep rhythms of nature entered my spirit at a young age and have shaped my life ever since. I now live in West Orange, New Jersey, just 12 miles from New York City. It is one of the most densely populated parts of the world and it is noisy, energetic, and infinitely fascinating.

I'm a percussionist, a composer, singer, and improviser. I've spent over 25 years honing all of those areas and they are completely intertwined at this point. My creative work is deeply connected to my playing. My years at the University of Michigan and the Eastman School of Music were years of intense saturation, and at times I wasn't sure how everything would connect, but with time and much effort they did connect. Indian classical music has also had a profound influence on my creative work and I've made four trips to India to study table drumming and Dhrupad vocal, including an extended trip in 2013 on a Senior Fulbright-Nehru Fellowship to study Dhrupad vocal with the Gundecha Brothers.

When I'm not a musician I'm also an endurance athlete, competing in triathlons, Xterra, bike packing adventures, and trail races. I've also been married for 16 years to Jessica Johnson, who now works in arts administration. We have two young daughters, Madeline and Maia.