



department of **music**  
EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

## NAPOLEON ELECTRONIC MEDIA FESTIVAL

presents

Altered Bodies: newly commissioned  
works for Piano and Electronics

Matthew Mason, piano

February 3, 2026, 7:30 p.m.  
Doudna Fine Arts Center  
Black Box Theater

### Program

Rain Does a Body Good	Matt A. Mason
Footprints in the Concrete	Lucy Shirly
Prelude: Rocks Sparkle Because They Break the Light	Lucy Shirly
Thus I Have Heard	Qing Xu
Inflorescence	Matt A. Mason
Memorandum	Derek Allen
Scarlet	Tori Ovel
Madonna	Matt A. Mason

Matthew Mason, piano

RAIN DOES A BODY GOOD is from a set of works titled "How A Garden Grows" that uses the piano as an intermediary between the sounds of birdsong and synthesizers. The piano engages with these sounds through mimicry, response, and conversation to weave all three together in a sensitive reflection. Rain Does A Body Good was written my mother's cancer treatment, during which my family made an active effort to visit parks, rivers, and scenic views throughout Illinois. The birdsong reminds me of these moments, while the synthesizers remind me of the machines used to ensure her good health.

The inspiration for FOOTPRINTS IN THE CONCRETE comes from a recent walk I took where I stepped over a sidewalk of freshly set concrete. The pavement's surface was perfectly smooth, save for a set of tiny paw prints where a small critter had made its mark overnight. This piece depicts the scurry of little feet, running, tripping, gliding, and jumping in the pursuit of new paths. The musical material is also inspired in part by Debussy's *Footprints in the Snow*, with the word "concrete" doubling as a silly pun alluding to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century *Musique Concrète*.

The trio form of PRELUDE: ROCKS SPARKLE BECAUSE THEY BREAK THE LIGHT echoes back to a Baroque dance. The work begins with a lithe bouncing melody, using ghost tones to create a shimmering sound and creating an intricate melodic interplay. The middle section, a slow and jazzy ballad creates a sweet-yet-somber contrast to the dance previously heard.

THUS I HAVE HEARD is made of tense constellations of melody and harmony, mixing with a sound-reactive electronic patch to create a fantastical journey. The sound clips included in this piece come from an aerospace sound database. Sounds include recorded rumblings of vehicles, talk-permit tones, and the whirl of machinery. Alongside the specifically notated elements, this piece includes open, aleatoric parts for improvisation.

INFLORESCENCE is the process of flowering. This piece is inspired by my work as a piano teacher. The piece with which I found the most success (as measured by student enthusiasm) was Bach's *Prelude in C major*. One of the exercises I would do with my students was to have them play the notes of each chord in the prelude out of order so they could gain a better feel for the shape of each chord. I took this exercise, created a new harmonic progression, and added a series of delay pedals.

The purpose of MEMORANDUM is to confuse time and memory. Using electronics and pre-recorded piano sounds, future and past moments are able to happen concurrently.

I wrote SCARLET as a reflection of the song "Scarlet Ribbons" by Harry Belafonte. My grandmother used to sing it to me and my sister as a lullaby when we were little. She was one of my cornerstone supporters and she passed (kind of suddenly) in 2017. Scarlet is made up of a left-hand piano loop that continually adds or removes a beat, creating a sense of unevenness. Overhead, the right-hand wanders, aimlessly plucking tones from the air.

MADONNA refers to the depiction of the Virgin Mary and an infant Jesus in art, canonized as theotokos iconography during the renaissance. The particular instance of a Madonna that inspired this piece was a crumbling statue found in the garden of a church in the middle of Iowa.

Hailed as "one of Chicago's preeminent pianists" by Access Contemporary Music, **Dr. Matt Mason** is a pianist, composer, and educator whose music crosses multiple genres and mediums. Matt currently serves on the faculty at Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois where he teaches composition, electronic music, music theory, and piano. Well regarded for his music for dance, Matt's recent projects include a triptych of dance film collaborations with Christina Hughes showcasing music and dance against the backdrop of the Alaskan wilderness. Matt has worked with ensembles such as the JACK quartet, Hypercube, Ensemble Dal Niente, Random Access Music, Flannau Duo, LIGAMENT, and more. His upcoming projects include a reimagined score for *Nosferatu* (1922), a re-scoring of the claymation horror short film *Toe* (2025) for the Sound of Silent Film Festival, an album of piano works titled *How A Garden Grows*, and a concerto for saxophones. Matt plays piano with the Chicago-based Prog-rock fusion band *Origin of Animal* and the experimental-classical group *New Third Space Ensemble*. In his spare time, Matt writes articles about piano pedagogy and disabilities studies or the music theory of Hip Hop, hosts a horror movie podcast, and plays *Magic the Gathering*.