

## Sam Reider and the Human Hands *Study Guide: Roots of Freedom*



### **Workshop Overview:**

Sam Reider and the Human Hands take audiences on a journey through the diverse landscape of American roots music, from New Orleans and the Mississippi delta, through the Appalachian mountains, to New York City.

### **Objectives:**

**INTRODUCE** audiences to a range of acoustic instruments and roots music styles.

**EXPLORE** American culture through the lens of music and music history and **CELEBRATE** the diverse origins of the folk music styles that travelled to this country in the hands of immigrants and slaves.

**EMPOWER** students to use art as a means for self-expression.

**MODEL** a powerful, open-minded community through the demonstration of effective co-leadership skills, mutual respect, and collaboration.

## About the Artists:

**SAM REIDER** is an American accordionist, pianist, composer, and singer-songwriter. He's been featured at Lincoln Center and on NPR and collaborated with pop stars, jazz and folk musicians around the world. Reider is the leader of a "staggeringly virtuosic band" (RnR Magazine) of bluegrass and jazz musicians based in Brooklyn called The Human Hands.

Following the release of their critically-acclaimed record *Too Hot to Sleep* (2018), Sam and the Human Hands have appeared at major festivals and venues throughout the US and the UK and performed live on the BBC. Irresistible melodies, fiery improvisation and otherworldly sounds collide in what *Songlines Magazine* has dubbed "mash-up of the Klezmatics, Quintette du Hot Club de France and the Punch Brothers."

Representing the U.S. Department of State as a musical ambassador, Sam has travelled to China, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Estonia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, carrying his accordion on his back everywhere he goes and collaborating with international artists. Sounds and stories from these travels frequently serve as the inspiration for Reider's compositions, which together form an ongoing musical travelogue.

As a side-man, collaborator and recording artist, Reider has worked with artists including Sierra Hull, Jorge Glem, Phoebe Hunt, Courtney Hartman, Jon Batiste and Stay Human, T-Pain, David Amram, Nellie McKay, Ranger Doug, the Brother Brothers and more. A passionate educator, Reider leads ongoing performances for public school students throughout the New York City area in partnership with Jazz at Lincoln Center. He has designed curricula and taught courses at the Stanford Jazz Festival, San Francisco Jazz, and other private institutions around the country.

**EDDIE BARBASH** plays American roots music on alto saxophone. He is a founding member of Jon Batiste Stay Human, the house band for *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. He has performed with stars in almost every genre: jazz with Wynton Marsalis, classical with Yo-Yo Ma, rock with Lenny Kravitz, country with Vince Gill, funk with Parliament, He brings his horn and sensibility to Texas and Appalachian fiddle tunes, bluegrass, old time, R&B, soul, and classic New Orleans.

He has performed at major festivals worldwide. He debuted at Carnegie Zankel Hall with Stay Human in 2013. His portrait graced the t-shirt for the Newport Jazz Festival two years later. In New York City he has led residencies at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, the Django, and the Manderley Bar in Chelsea. He has taught master classes at Carnegie Hall.

His luminous sound and creative vitality first caught the attention of legendary drummer Chico Hamilton, who invited him to join his sextet when he was 19 (70 years younger than Chico) and a freshman at The Juilliard School. He began playing with Batiste the same year (2008). New

York Times critic Ben Ratliff in a review of a performance at the Rubin Museum that fall described him as “gifted, young and driven.” He was raised in Oaxaca, Mexico, Atlanta, Georgia and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He is 30 and lives in Brooklyn.

**DOMINICK LESLIE** has been around live music all his life, having attended his first bluegrass festival when he was just five months old. Growing up he was surrounded by music, listening to and jamming with his dad’s bluegrass band, and thanks to his Dad’s influence, he has been playing instruments since he was old enough to hold one. At the age of four, Dominick acquired a ukulele tuned like the bottom four strings of a guitar, igniting a deep passion for music that still burns brightly. Dominick’s abilities progressed rapidly on guitar, fiddle and mandolin, but eventually the mandolin became his obsession and demanded his total focus.

By the time he was 12, Dominick was writing his own music and practicing every day. At 15, he recorded his first solo CD, “Signs of Courage”, receiving rave reviews from Bluegrass Unlimited Magazine, among others. Dominick’s technique and emotive style were far more advanced than his young age would suggest. In 2004, Dominick became the youngest contestant ever to win the Rockygrass mandolin contest. He also placed first in the Merlefest mandolin contest, and second in the Walnut Valley International Mandolin Contest.

Dominick was featured in Mike Marshall’s Young American Mandolin Ensemble. In October 2007, this elite group of seven young musicians was invited to perform with Mike at the Mandolines de Lunel festival in France.

Dominick has also had the unique opportunity to study with mandolin virtuosos David Grisman, Mike Marshall, Chris Thile, Don Stiernberg, Andy Statman, Mike Compton, and Hamilton de Holanda at the Mandolin Symposium. Over the years his bluegrass roots have evolved into interests in Jazz, Classical and other World music. These musical directions led him to enroll in the Berklee College of Music in 2008.

**ROY WILLIAMS**, an American songwriter, guitarist, and multi-instrumentalist, writes music with a curious ear and an open mind. From the classic pop tunes heard on the first cassette Roy owned—The Beatles “Live at the BBC in 1963”—to the incomparable instrumental canon of Django Reinhart, Roy’s influences eclipse genre categorization, a trait that is reflected in the adventurous spirit of his own original songs.

After growing up in Clark’s Green, Pennsylvania, in a musical house where Neil Young, Buffalo Springfield, and especially The Beatles were religion, Roy began playing gigs in nearby Scranton and soon moved to New York City to perform gypsy jazz with renowned guitarist Stephane Wrembel. Roy worked with Wrembel for four years and toured throughout Central America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. He now lives in Brooklyn, New York, where he regularly plays out with his mentors and friends Jim Campilongo, Nick Driscoll, and Alex Hargreaves, and leads his own band.

Roy often performs on piano, mandolin, bass, and has known how to play a G chord on guitar since he can remember. He released his debut solo album, *Throwing Punches*, in February 2015, which features ten original compositions. Roy is currently at work on two upcoming albums: a compilation of instrumental songs by his group Roy Williams and the Human Hands (featuring Alex Hargreaves and Nick Driscoll), and a solo record of rock n roll tunes.

**DUNCAN WICKEL** is, in the words of *The Boston Globe*: “A considerable talent...as persuasive in a traditional ballad as he is country fiddling or ripping through cascading classical flourishes or atonal double stops.”

In 2016, Duncan performed on two consecutive episodes of CBS's *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. He has toured and recorded with major Folk Artists including Rising Appalachia, Molly Tuttle, The Duhks, John Doyle, Karan Casey, Ruth Moody, Rushad Eggleston, and many others.

Duncan's music has echoed off the walls of Carnegie Hall, The Lincoln and Kennedy Center(S), the Grand Ole Opry and the famed Biblioteca Alexandria in Egypt. He has performed and taught in over 22 countries spanning every continent on earth that is normally inhabited by humans (sorry, Antarctica).

### **Pre-Performance Activities:**

Students should have an understanding of the history of slavery in the American south, immigration in the 19th and early 20th century, and a familiarity with the different regions in the eastern part of the country including New Orleans, the Appalachian mountains, and New York City.

Students should have a basic familiarity with American roots music styles—jazz, blues, country, bluegrass—including some of the most famous musicians and the instruments they played:

*Jazz:* Louis Armstrong (b. 1901 New Orleans, LA) trumpet, singer. Duke Ellington (b. 1899 Washington D.C.) composer, piano.

*Blues:* Bessie Smith (b. 1894 Chattanooga, TN) singer. B.B. King (b. Itta Bena, MS), guitar, singer.

*Bluegrass:* Bill Monroe (b. 1911 Rosine, KY) mandolin, singer.

*Country:* Maybelle Carter (b. 1909 Nickelsville, VA) guitar, singer. Hank Williams (b. 1923 Mount Olive, AL) guitar, singer.

**Keywords:**

Democracy - a system in which everyone can share in decision making

Freedom - the right to do what you want, to form your own decisions, and express your own opinions

Improvisation - the act of making something up on the spur of the moment

**Discussion Topics**

What is an acoustic instrument?

What is folk music?

Does music convey emotion and how?

Where did your ancestors come from?

Do your parents or grandparents play music?

When music has no words, how does it convey meaning?

What makes art or music quintessentially American?

**Instruments in the band:**

**Piano:** a keyboard instrument that produces sound by hammers striking strings. Origin: Italy

**Accordion:** a keyboard instrument that produces sound using bellows to pump air through metal reeds. Origin: Germany

**Violin:** a string instrument that produces sound by using an animal-hair bow to vibrate four strings. Origin: Italy

**Saxophone:** a wind instrument that produces sound by blowing air across a wooden reed. Origin: Belgium

**Guitar:** a string instrument that produces sound by using a pick or fingers to pluck or strum six strings. Origin: Spain

**Mandolin:** a string instrument that produces sound by using a pick to pluck or strum four strings. Origin: Italy

**Post-Performance Activities**

- Talk about the concert and what you liked about it.
- Explore and listen to all the genres of music that you heard at the concert again in the classroom.
- Make students aware of other live concerts that are happening in their community
- For students who don't already play an instrument, help them get an instrument and private lessons
- For students who do play instruments, encourage them to put on your own concerts for their friends and family and in their community.

## Resources

**Online:** You can find all the music you need on the internet. Spotify, iTunes, YouTube, and a host of other services offer access to a wealth of recordings. Students can explore on their own and also access our Human Hands playlists which feature different types of folk music from around the world:

*Spotify:*

[https://open.spotify.com/user/122424370/playlist/4rSvQs5UXHFQuI0fbB7XVR?si=LlpvOMT5RWOf\\_xGadld2LQ](https://open.spotify.com/user/122424370/playlist/4rSvQs5UXHFQuI0fbB7XVR?si=LlpvOMT5RWOf_xGadld2LQ)

*YouTube:*

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLo29OJZI-U7T-zuIPJU8KDIIftr50mjUE>

Ethnomusicologist *Alan Lomax's* archive is a treasure trove of video recordings of folk music from around the country. It is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/AlanLomaxArchive>

*Les Blank* was a filmmaker who documented various styles of regional folk music around the country. His videos are available here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/lesblankfilmsinc/videos>

Additional video and audio recordings are available on the Library of Congress website:

<https://www.loc.gov/film-and-videos/collections/>

**Live Music:** The best way to experience music is to go out and hear it live. Support local musicians in your communities. Bring students to jazz clubs, symphonies, folk festivals, and more.

## Contact

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