

Stephen Prina: A Lick and a Promise



MoMA

PERFORMANCES

For more details and to order tickets, visit moma.org/prina.

Concerto for Modern, Movie, and Pop Music for 10 Instruments and Voice (2010)

Fri, Sep 12, and Sat, Sep 13, 7:00 p.m.
Floor 4, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio

Beat of the Traps (1992)

Created by Mike Kelley, Anita Pace, and Stephen Prina

Thu, Sep 18, Sat, Sep 20, and Sun, Sep 21, 8:00 p.m.
Floor 2, The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium

String Quartet for Six Players (1976) and The Way He Always Wanted It XI (2013)

Sat, Oct 4, and Sun, Oct 5, 8:00 p.m.
Floor 2, The Donald B. and Catherine C. Marron Atrium

An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music (1982–85)

Thu, Oct 16, and Sat, Oct 18, 7:00 p.m.
Floor 4, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio

Three Folk Songs in Search of a Fanfare—Palate Cleanser (2003)

Sat, Oct 25, 1:00 p.m. (rain date Sun, Oct 26)
Ground floor, The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden

The Way He Always Wanted It II, Movement 4 (2008) and A Lick and a Promise (2025)

Thu, Nov 6, and Sat, Nov 8, 7:00 p.m.
Floor 4, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio

Sonic Dan (1994)

Thu, Nov 13, and Sat, Nov 15, 7:00 p.m.
Floor 4, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio

To the People of (New York City) (2000)

Thu, Dec 4, and Sat, Dec 6, 7:00 p.m.
Floor 4, The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio

PUSH COMES TO LOVE FEST (2025)

Sat, Dec 13, 10:30 a.m.
Ground floor, The Agnes Gund Garden Lobby

FILMS

Modern Mondays: An Evening with Stephen Prina

Mon, Nov 17, 7:00 p.m.
Floor T2, The Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2

Stephen Prina: *A Lick and a Promise*

September 12–
December 13, 2025

For the past five decades, artist, musician, and composer Stephen Prina has developed a singular and irreverent approach to installations, films, and musical performances. Prina frequently mixes disparate cultural references—Joni Mitchell songs, Robert Bresson films, Glenn Gould recordings, Édouard Manet paintings—presenting them in various exhibition contexts to surface new meanings and associations.

Stephen Prina: A Lick and a Promise, the first in-depth survey to focus on the artist's performances and his career-long engagement with music, draws out a central theme in his work: time, and the way it shifts cultural values. Unfolding across multiple locations in the Museum, including the Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio, the exhibition includes restagings of such works as *Sonic Dan* (1994) and *Beat of the Traps* (a collaboration with Mike Kelley and Anita Pace, 1992), along with new works, including *A Lick and a Promise* (2025), an orchestral commission for 16 instruments and voice. The series culminates in a daylong concert featuring a range of collaborators. A trio of the artist's works from MoMA's collection will also be installed throughout the Museum. This survey offers an opportunity to celebrate Prina's innovative approach to appropriation—one singularly focused on sound and music—and the rare warmth and intellectualism that mark him as a prescient and still-evolving artist.

RICHARD MILLE

Media and performance at MoMA are presented through a partnership with Richard Mille.

Leadership support for the exhibition is provided by the Jill and Peter Kraus Endowed Fund for Contemporary Exhibitions, the Steven A. and Lisa Tananbaum Endowment for Contemporary Art Commissions, the Lonti Ebers Endowment for Performance, Jerry I. Speyer and Katherine G. Farley, and the Sarah Arison Endowment Fund for Performance.

Major funding is provided by The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

Annual support for programming in The Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio is generously provided by the Sarah Arison Endowment Fund for Performance.

PERFORMANCES

Concerto for Modern, Movie, and Pop Music for 10 Instruments and Voice (2010)

Fri, Sep 12, and
Sat, Sep 13, 7:00 p.m.

The Marie-Josée and
Henry Kravis Studio

Taking inspiration from a shared chord Prina detected in Anton Webern's Concerto Op. 24 for Nine Instruments (1934) and Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" (1967), this work highlights what Prina calls "the intersection of referentiality and non-referentiality." The artist combines one of his own pop songs, the soundtrack to one of his films, Webern's concerto, and Joni Mitchell's song "A Case of You" (1971). As Prina muses, "Early on, I learned from Joni Mitchell that a pop song could also be art. I could have learned that from Robert Schumann but no, I learned it from Joni."



***Beat of the Traps (1992)* Created by Mike Kelley, Anita Pace, and Stephen Prina**

Thu, Sep 18, Sat, Sep 20,
and Sun, Sep 21, 8:00 p.m.

The Donald B. and
Catherine C. Marron Atrium

New York premiere

"The beat is the regular pulse, or heart of pop music," notes Stephen Prina. This notion is interrogated and unraveled in *Beat of the Traps*. Presented for the first time since the year of its debut in 1992, this collaborative performance created by Mike Kelley, Anita Pace, and Prina assembles a dance performance, a percussion recital, a rock drum solo, a music fanatic's vaudevillian monologue about rock star excess, and the number one song on *Billboard*'s Hot 100 at the time of the performance.

With special thanks to Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts.



String Quartet for Six Players (1976) and The Way He Always Wanted It XI (2013)

Sat, Oct 4, and Sun, Oct 5,
8:00 p.m.

The Donald B. and
Catherine C. Marron Atrium

New York premiere of
String Quartet for Six Players

This program pairs two works that underscore Prina's recombinant approach to art. *String Quartet for Six Players* takes the first movement of Mozart's String Quartet No. 15 in D Minor as source material. Prina introduces two significant modifications into Mozart's composition: doubling the violin parts and incorporating the roll of a six-sided die. Influenced by the Fluxus movement, Prina applies chance and indeterminacy to sonata-allegro, one of the most fundamental forms of Western classical music. *The Way He Always Wanted It XI* is a flute sextet using a melody programmed for player piano by the architect, painter, and composer Bruce Goff.



An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music (1982–85)

Thu, Oct 16, and
Sat, Oct 18, 7:00 p.m.

The Marie-Josée and
Henry Kravis Studio

Informed by Theodor Adorno's concern that Western classical music had been trivialized, producing increasingly passive listeners, Prina asks how the form can be reinvigorated. A piano duet is constructed from excerpts of piano reductions of the nine Beethoven symphonies. The tempo and dynamic markings of the original manuscripts are eliminated and a description of performances is substituted: "Begin playing as softly and slowly as possible, begin an accelerando and crescendo until the midpoint of the work, when the performers are playing as loudly and quickly as possible, and then begin a rallentando and a decrescendo until the end."



Three Folk Songs in Search of a Fanfare—Palate Cleanser (2003)

Sat, Oct 25, 1:00 p.m.
(rain date Sun, Oct 26)

The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Sculpture Garden

In Prina's daylong composition for a brass octet, timpani, guitar, and voice, two brass quartets are separated at a distance in the Sculpture Garden; both perform for the duration of the afternoon, creating antiphonal effects across the space. Then, the two brass quartets are reassembled as an octet and joined together by timpani, guitar, and voice to perform songs associated with Pete Seeger, Richie Havens, and Odetta, coupled with a song by Prina. The performance concludes with a "respatialized" interpretation of a Charles Ives brass melody by the octet.



The Way He Always Wanted It II, Movement 4 (2008) and A Lick and a Promise (2025)

Thu, Nov 6, and
Sat, Nov 8, 7:00 p.m.

The Marie-Josée and
Henry Kravis Studio

World premiere

The Way He Always Wanted It II, Movement 4, a marimba/vibraphone duet derived from Prina's film of the same name, uses a musical fragment from the architect, painter, and composer Bruce Goff.

A Lick and a Promise is scored for an ensemble of 16 musicians and voice. Beginning with an animated unison melody, the ensemble gradually moves toward maximum dispersal and individuation. Returning to unison, another melody is slowed down so that it is beyond recognition. Prina then restores this melody to its initial tempo in an a cappella version.



Sonic Dan (1994)

Thu, Nov 13, and Sat, Nov 15,
7:00 p.m.

The Marie-Josée and
Henry Kravis Studio

New York premiere

Sonic Dan alternates the songs of Steely Dan and Sonic Youth—two bands that by 1994 had recorded the same number of albums—alongside a recording of Anton Webern's complete string quartets. Prina performs Sonic Youth songs in reverse chronological order, while covering Steely Dan songs in chronological order. The first Sonic Youth album was released in 1982 and, at the time *Sonic Dan* was composed, the last Steely Dan album had been released in 1980. Splitting the difference with the year 1981, Prina inserts his performance of *Billboard*'s number one single for 1981, Olivia Newton-John's "Physical."



To the People of (New York City) (2000)

Thu, Dec 4, and
Sat, Dec 6, 7:00 p.m.

The Marie-Josée and
Henry Kravis Studio

New York premiere

To the People of (New York City) draws upon the songs with English lyrics that Peer Raben composed for the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, as well as one song from Chantal Akerman's film *The Eighties* (1983). For each performance of the work, its title adapts to the city in which it is performed. The work oscillates between the familiarity of a pop song and the wall of sound produced by an orchestral ensemble.



PUSH COMES TO LOVE FEST (2025)

Sat, Dec 13, 10:30 a.m.

The Agnes Gund
Garden Lobby

This all-day celebratory culmination of *Stephen Prina: A Lick and a Promise* establishes bridges between “modern classics” and love songs, musique concrète and cabaret—with doses of noise and rage—played by collaborators past, present, and future. Participants include David Grubbs, Ken Okiishi and Emily Sundblad, Ursula Oppens, Marina Rosenfeld, TILT Brass, and White People Killed Them (Raven Chacon, John Dieterich, and Marshall Trammell).



FILMS

Modern Mondays: An Evening with Stephen Prina

Mon, Nov 17, 7:00 p.m.

The Roy and Niuta Titus
Theater 2

For this Modern Mondays evening, Stephen Prina joins us to present a pair of films. Shot in the galleries at the Getty Museum, *Vinyl II* (2000) captures the performance of a musical score by Prina that traces the slippage between two Baroque paintings—Gerrit van Honthorst's *Christ Crowned with Thorns* (c. 1620) and Georges de La Tour's *The Musicians' Brawl* (1625–30)—as Prina spins together sexual and spiritual imagery in an imagined, unrequited love letter to de La Tour. *The Way He Always Wanted It, II* (2008) focuses on the painter, composer, and architect Bruce Goff. Semicircular tracking shots capture the interior of Goff's Ford House in Aurora, Illinois, from different vantage points.



RELATED PRESENTATIONS

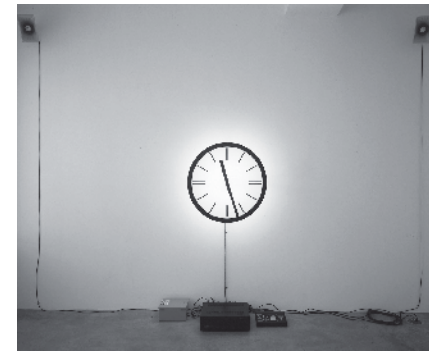
**Hyundai Card First Look:
Stephen Prina**

**The Top Thirteen Singles
from Billboard's Hot 100
Singles Chart for the Week
Ending September 11, 1993.
1993**

Floor 2

At the top of each hour, this work chimes a musical motif derived from one of the top *Billboard* hits from the week of the work's debut in September 1993. To convert the original songs to clock chimes, Prina transcribed their motifs in traditional manuscript form; they were then performed and recorded on a carillon, a set of bells controlled by a keyboard. Described by the artist as a “monument to the ephemeral,” Prina's clock celebrates music's ability to mark the sensibilities of an era, while calling attention to the ever-changing systems that measure popular taste.

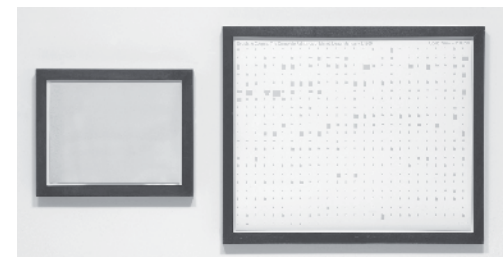
Organized by Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, with May Makki, former Curatorial Assistant, Department of Media and Performance, Elizabeth Wickham, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Painting and Sculpture, and Lydia Mullin, Manager, Collection Galleries, Department of Curatorial Affairs.



**Stephen Prina. Exquisite
Corpse: The Complete
Paintings of Manet, 41 of
556, Nympe Surprise
(The Startled Nymph),
1861, Nasjonalgalleriet,
Oslo. December 31, 1988**

Floor 2, Gallery 203: Post-
Atomic Abstraction

Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet is an ongoing series of 556 diptychs begun January 1, 1988. The left panel for each pair is a unique drawing in the same dimensions as a painting by French artist Édouard Manet, executed by applying diluted sepia ink with a natural sea sponge. The diptychs' right panels, identical from one to the next, depict a grid showing the proportions of all 556 paintings known to have been made by Manet. Prina drew his inventory of Manet's work from an unofficial catalogue raisonné, and created his diptychs in chronological order according to that document.



Stephen Prina.
Untitled/“The history
of modern painting,
to label it with a phrase,
has been the struggle
against the catalogue”—
Barnett Newman/
(Monochrome Painting,
1988–1989). 1991

Floor 4, Gallery 414:
 Stephen Prina

In this drawing project, Prina references his earlier work, *Monochrome Painting* (1988–89), which includes 14 panels spray-painted with green metallic car paint and identical in dimensions to historic single-color paintings by Kazimir Malevich, Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt, and Blinky Palermo, among others. This subsequent installation is a “ghost” version of its source; Prina maintains the original components’ dimensions but changes their materials and layout. Everything—from the paintings to the exhibition’s labels and graphic title—is translated into ink wash drawings and arranged by category. The catalogue that American artist Barnett Newman resists—as referenced in the work’s title—is the project’s focus: what is included and excluded in the process of historicizing an artwork.

Organized by Samantha Friedman, Curator, with Rachel Rosin, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.



Stephen Prina. A Lick and a
Promise: Poster. 2025

Floor 2, north elevator bank



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stephen Prina: A Lick and a Promise is organized by Stuart Comer, The Lonti Ebers Chief Curator of Media and Performance, with Sibia Sarangan, Curatorial Assistant, May Makki, former Curatorial Assistant, and Gee Wesley, former Curatorial Associate, Department of Media and Performance. Performances produced by Lizzie Gorfaine, Director, and Kate Scherer, Senior Manager and Producer, with Olivia Rousey, Jessie Gold, Aminah Ibrahim, Kayva Yang, and Monica Nyenkan, Assistant Performance Coordinators, and Nora Chellew, former Assistant Performance Coordinator, Performance and Live Art.

Audiovisual design by Paul DiPietro, Senior Manager, Audio Visual Design and Live Performance, with AV Technicians Omer Leibovitz (sound), Christopher Brown (lighting), and Mitchell Leitschuh (installation and rigging).

Musical direction by Christopher McIntyre.

Stephen Prina’s costume by Engineered Garments.

The curatorial and production teams would like to thank the following MoMA staff for their contributions to this project: Sarah Suzuki, Associate Director; Christy Thompson, Senior Deputy Director of Exhibitions and Collections; Meagan Johnson, Acting Senior Deputy Director of External Affairs; Lydia Mullin, Curatorial Affairs; Jason Persse, Editorial and Content Strategy; Lana Hum, Eduardo Roman, Aimee Keefer, Boris Chesakov, and Andrew Tedeschi, Exhibition Design and Production; Sara Beth Walsh, Communications and Public Affairs; Stina Sawdust, Claire Adkisson, Itamar Benitez, Christie Zhong, and Claire Corey, Graphic Design; Anna Barnett and Virginia Gresham, Publications; Sarah Primm, Collection Management and Exhibition Registration; Ava Childers, Associate General Counsel; Daniel Perez, Chief Financial Officer; Elizabeth Wickham, Department of Painting and Sculpture; Samantha Friedman and Rachel Rosin, Department of Drawings and Prints.

Stephen Prina would like to thank, first and foremost, Stuart Comer, for the invitation to work on this survey

together, along with his MoMA colleagues: May Makki, Gee Wesley, Sibia Sarangan, Lizzie Gorfaine, Kate Scherer, Olivia Rousey, Nora Chellew, Paul DiPietro, Samantha Friedman, Rachel Rosin, and Josh Siegel. In addition, he thanks Friedrich Petzel, Jason Murison, Seth Kelly, Farid Djamelov, Maddie Ligenza, and Lucas Page, Petzel Gallery, New York; Gisela Capitain, Regina Fiorito, and Jonas Schenk, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne; Monika Sprüth, Philomene Magers, and Marta Fontolan, Sprüth Magers, Berlin, London, Los Angeles, New York; Maureen Paley and Oliver Evans, Maureen Paley, London; Anita Pace; Mary Clare Stevens, Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, Los Angeles; Christopher McIntyre; David Grubbs; Daiki Suzuki and Ryan Resurreccion, Engineered Garments, New York; Kelley Shih and Masha Tsinring; Christian Joy; Scott Benzel; Devon McDonald-Hyman; Alex Sloane, MOCA Los Angeles; and the many musicians from the New York area and beyond, without whom this project would be impossible. Last, he thanks José Luis Blondet for his love, dedication, and support.

IMAGES

Front cover: Stephen Prina. *The Top Thirteen Singles from Billboard’s Hot 100 Singles Chart for the Week Ending September 11, 1993*. 1993. Enamel on aluminum, acrylic, electronic hardware, and carillon. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York. © Stephen Prina

Page 4, top: Stephen Prina. *Concerto for Modern, Movie, and Pop Music*. 2010. Performed at Contemporary Art Museum, Saint Louis, March 18, 2010. Photo: Peter Wochniak. © Stephen Prina

Page 4, bottom: Mike Kelley, Anita Pace, Stephen Prina. *Beat of the Traps*. 1992. Performed in *Expanded Art*, Wiener Festwochen, The Remise, Vienna, Austria, 1992. Performers (from left): Jonathan “Butch” Norton, Carl Burkley, Alan Abelew, Stephen Prina, Anita Pace, M.B. Gordy. Photo: Karl Krauss. © Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts. All Rights Reserved/VAGA at ARS, NY., Anita Pace, Stephen Prina

Page 5, top: Stephen Prina. *String Quartet for Six Players*. 1976. Performed at JUBG, December 2023. Photo: Alexander Eckhardt. © Stephen Prina. Courtesy the artist, JUBG, Cologne & Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne

Page 5, bottom: Stephen Prina. *An Evening of 19th- and 20th-Century Piano Music*. 1982–85. Performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, April 8–10, 1988. Performers (from left): Gaylord Mowrey, Lorna Eder.

The Foundation for Art Resources, Los Angeles, provided support for the world premiere of this work at Symphony Space New York, December 4, 1985. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Page 6, top: Stephen Prina and ensemble performing at the opening of *Dia:Beacon*, Beacon, New York, May 17, 2003. Photo: Stephanie Berger. Courtesy Dia Art Foundation

Page 6, bottom: Stephen Prina’s accordion. Photo: Stephen Prina. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Page 7, top: Stephen Prina. *Sonic Dan*. 1994. Performed at SO 36, Berlin, Germany, November 3, 1996. Photo: David Brandt. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Page 7, bottom: Stephen Prina. *To the People of Berlin*. 2000. Performed at Hamburger Bahnhof, Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart, June 21, 2000. Photo: Johannes Zappe. © Stephen Prina, Freunde Guter Musik Berlin e.V.

Page 8, top: Stephen Prina. *PUSH COMES TO LOVE*. 1999. Album cover. Design: Barbara Bloom. Publisher: Drag City, Chicago, IL. © 2025 Stephen Prina. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York

Page 8, bottom: Stephen Prina. Still from *Vinyl II*. 2000. Commissioned by the Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

© 2025 Stephen Prina. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York

Page 9, top: Stephen Prina. *The Top Thirteen Singles from Billboard’s Hot 100 Singles Chart for the Week Ending September 11, 1993*. 1993. Enamel on aluminum, acrylic, electronic hardware and carillon. Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Page 9, bottom: Stephen Prina. *Exquisite Corpse: The Complete Paintings of Manet*, 41 of 556, *Nympe Surprise (The Startled Nymph)*, 1861, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo. December 31, 1988. Ink wash and offset lithograph. © 2013 Stephen Prina

Page 10, top: Stephen Prina. *Untitled/“The history of modern painting, to label it with a phrase, has been the struggle against the catalogue”—Barnett Newman/(Monochrome Painting, 1988–1989). 1991*. Ink wash on rag, barrier paper, and cardboard, 67 parts. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Page 10, bottom: Stephen Prina. *A Lick and a Promise: Poster*. 2025. Chromogenic print. © 2025 Stephen Prina

Back cover: Sharon Lockhart. *Prina Live! at the MAK daddy Schindler paddy*. 2001. Billboard. Lockhart’s contribution to *In Between: Art and Architecture*, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, 2001. Courtesy of Sharon Lockhart

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