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Eighth Blackbird: "lucid, inescapable rhythms"

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Wednesday, September 14, 2005 • 7:30 pm

Alice Jepson Theatre
Modlin Center for the Arts

eighth blackbird

Molly Alicia Barth, *flutes*
Michael J. Maccaferri, *clarinets*
Matt Albert, *violin*
Nicholas Photinos, *cello*
Matthew Duvall, *percussion*
Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

“lucid, inescapable rhythms”

Exclusive Management:
ICM Artists, Ltd.
40 West 57th Street
New York, N.Y. 10019
David V. Foster, President

*The Modlin Center thanks Style Weekly
for media sponsorship of the 2005-2006 season.*

Tonight's Program

"lucid, inescapable rhythms"

Zaka (2002)

JENNIFER HIGDON
(b. 1962)

Inescapable (2005)

ASHLEY FURE
(b. 1982)

Rhythms (2005)

MARCUS MARONEY
(b. 1976)

DiGiT #2 (2002-2003)

MAYKE NAS
(b. 1972)

—Intermission—

Fantasy Etudes (1985)

FRED LERDAHL
(b. 1943)

Musique de Tables (1987)

THIERRY DE MEY
(b. 1956)

Cheating, Lying, Stealing (1993)

DAVID LANG
(b. 1957)

Molly Alicia Barth performs on a Lillian Burkart flute and piccolo.
Matthew Duvall endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Music Instruments.

About the Artists



eighth blackbird

Molly Alicia Barth, flutes

Matt Albert, violin & viola

Matthew Duvall, percussion

Michael J. Maccaferri, clarinets

Nicholas Photinos, cello

Lisa Kaplan, piano

Described by *The New Yorker* as “friendly, unpretentious, idealistic and highly skilled,” eighth blackbird promises its ever-increasing audiences provocative and engaging performances. It is widely lauded for its performing style—often playing from memory with virtuosic and theatrical flair—and its efforts to make new music accessible to wide audiences. A *New York Times* reviewer raved, “eighth blackbird’s performances are the picture of polish and precision, and they seem to be thoroughly engaged...by music in a broad range of contemporary styles.” The sextet has been the subject of profiles in the *New York Times* and on NPR’s *All Things Considered*; it has also been featured on CBS’s *Sunday Morning*, *St. Paul Sunday*, *Weekend America* and *The Next Big Thing*, among others. The ensemble is in residence at the University of Richmond and at the University of Chicago.

Highlights of eighth blackbird’s 2005-06 tenth anniversary season include a California tour, with stops in Los Angeles, La Jolla, Stanford and Davis; a performance at New York’s 92nd Street Y; and the group’s debut concert at Boston’s Celebrity Series. eighth blackbird will showcase its virtuosity in three innovative programs during the season. A tenth-anniversary program, “lucid, inescapable rhythms,” features significant works honoring the ensemble’s mentors and collaborators. A tour of Osvaldo Golijov’s song-cycle *Ayre* with soprano Dawn Upshaw, and a special collaboration with the Blair Thomas & Co. puppet theater and soprano Lucy Shelton, performing a fully memorized

and staged cabaret-opera version of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, round out the trio of presentations.

Last season eighth blackbird made its western European debut in Amsterdam, as well as its Toronto debut. In previous seasons the sextet has appeared in South Korea, Mexico and throughout North America, including performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the La Jolla Chamber Music Society, and it has performed as soloist with the Utah Symphony and the American Composers Orchestra. During the summers the group has appeared several times at the Great Lakes Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and Cincinnati's Music X, and has also appeared at the Tanglewood Music Center and the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival.

Since its founding in 1996, eighth blackbird has been active in commissioning new works from eminent composers such as George Perle, Frederic Rzewski and Joseph Schwantner, as well as groundbreaking works from Jennifer Higdon, Derek Bermel, David Schober, Daniel Kellogg, Carlos Sanchez-Gutierrez, Jefferson Friedman and the Minimum Security Composers Collective. The group received the first BMI/Boudleaux-Bryant Fund Commission and the 2004 NEA/CMA Special Commissioning Award, and has received grants from BMI, Meet the Composer, the Greenwall Foundation and Chamber Music America, among others.

The ensemble is enjoying acclaim for its three CDs released to date on Cedille Records. The first, *thirteen ways*, featuring works by Perle, Schober, Joan Tower and Thomas Albert, was selected as a Top 10 CD of 2003 by *Billboard* magazine. *beginnings*, featuring Kellogg's *Divinum Mysterium* and George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae*, was praised by the *New York Times*: "The performances have all the sparkle, energy and precision of the earlier outings...It is their superb musicality and interpretive vigor that bring these pieces to life." eighth blackbird's third disc for Cedille, *fred*, with three works of Rzewski, was released in June 2005. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported: "The music covers all kinds of moods and approaches, from dreamy surrealism to caffeinated unison melodies, and the members of eighth blackbird deliver



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it all with their trademark panache." A fourth CD, titled *strange, imaginary animals*, is scheduled for release on Cedille Records in fall 2006.

eighth blackbird is active in teaching young artists about contemporary music and its members, in addition to their residencies, have taught master classes and conducted outreach activities throughout the country, including the Aspen Music School System (grades K-12), the La Jolla Chamber Music Series, the Candlelight Concert Series and Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa. The members of eighth blackbird hold degrees in music performance from Oberlin Conservatory, the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory and Northwestern University. The group derives its name from the Wallace Stevens poem "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The eighth stanza reads:

*I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know*

Visit the ensemble's Web site at www.eighthblackbird.com for more information.

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Notes on the Program

Jennifer Higdon: *Zango Bandango* (2003)

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962) is an active freelance composer. She is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Pew Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship and two awards from the American Academy of Arts & Letters. Higdon enjoys more than 100 performances a year of her works. Her recordings by the Atlanta Symphony on the Telarc label have made the Classical Billboard charts, and the 2004 release of *Concerto for Orchestra/City Scape* was nominated for four Grammy Awards. Some of her recent commissions include works for the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Atlanta Symphony, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Chicago Symphony, National Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Cypress String Quartet, the Verdehr Trio and the Ying Quartet. She is on the composition faculty at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Regarding *Zango Bandango*, the partner-piece to *Zaka* that was commissioned by eighth blackbird in 2003, the composer offers these lines:

a racing dance
a romping angle
a final stance
a new-style jangle
for the audience
we Zango, we Bandango!

—Nicholas Photinos

Ashley Fure: *Inescapable* (2005)

Ashley Fure (b. 1982) was raised on the coast of Lake Superior in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. She began composing and studying classical piano at age five and started formal compositional studies at the Interlochen Arts Academy in 1998. After graduating from Interlochen with top honors in 2000, Fure entered the Oberlin Conservatory. While she was at Oberlin, her works were featured in several Midwest Composers Symposia, and she received the grand prize in composition in 2004. After graduating in 2004, Fure entered the Ph.D. program in composition at Harvard University, where she is currently a doctoral candidate. Fure has also attended the American Academy in Fontainebleau, France, and the Acanthes Music Festival, under the direction of Wolfgang Rihm and Pascal Dusapin. Her piece for string quartet, *Shrapnel*, recently won the Blodgett Composition Prize and will be performed by the Ying Quartet in the spring of 2006. Current projects include a piece for the Arditti Quartet to be premiered in the spring of 2006 and a solo work for female voice and live electronics. Her primary teachers have included Lewis Nielson, Harrison Birtwistle, Bernard Rands, Joshua Fineberg and Julian Anderson.

Inescapable (in broken form) fuses two radically different experiences of musical time. Starting with rapid, pulsed, directional sounds, the work cracks open into an atmosphere of stretched, ethereal timbres. While the beginning texture is sliced

by beats and ruptured by violent gestures, the second unfolds free of attacks; each event melts into the next, and separate instruments fuse together into one continuous soundworld. Like a brittle eggshell cracked open to reveal its bright, viscous yolk, so too the different parts of *Inescapable* form one single object. The rich timbre of the tam-tam, a focal point of the opening material, is transferred later to the rest of the ensemble. The second section, then, could be heard as one single stroke of the tam, drastically slowed and orchestrated so that each sliding partial, each subtly changing timbre, has time and space to speak.

—Ashley Fure

Marcus Karl Maroney: *Rhythms* (2005)

Marcus Karl Maroney studied at the University of Texas at Austin and the Yale School of Music, where he also served on the faculty. Maroney joined the faculty at the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston in fall 2005. His commissions include those by such notable ensembles as the Orchestra of St. Luke's and Toronto's Gryphon Trio. The recipient of two ASCAP/Morton Gould Young Composer's Awards, he has also received consecutive Woods Chandler Memorial Prizes from Yale University, a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the First Hearing Prize from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Aside from his interest in the music of Poulenc and Radiohead, Mahler and Coltrane, Schubert and Nina Simone, to name a few influences, he also enjoys fine wine, volleyball, poetry and tennis. About *Rhythms*, Maroney comments:

As a composer who always titles his works after they're finished or very far along, knowing that the title of this piece would be *Rhythms* from the get-go added an exciting new dimension to my compositional process. I asked many of my friends what pieces they thought of primarily as 'rhythmic' and the variety of answers was astonishing--from Bolero, with its constant snare drum figure underlying rhythmically elastic solos, to the incessant 7/8 energy of the Precipitato finale of Prokofiev's 7th sonata, to the rhythmic stasis of Arvo Pärt's Für Elina. After revisiting countless masterworks, I narrowed my choice of strategies down to (a) attempting to manipulate the listener to focus primarily on the rhythmic aspects of the piece or (b) creating a game with rhythms that would guide the structure of the music but still maintain balance with other musical elements. Opting for (b), I chose two rhythmic ideas--the simple, obsessive snare drum figure and the quintuplet. They are presented immediately and combine and combat throughout, forming the backbone for the melodic and harmonic material of the piece. In the end, the two rhythms combine in all the instruments and usher in a quick coda. *Rhythms* is dedicated with respect and affection to Joan Panetti.

Mayke Nas: *DiGiT #2* (2002-2003)

Mayke Nas (b. 1972) studied piano and composition at the conservatories of Amsterdam and The Hague. Recent commissions include Dutch Fund for the Creation of Music, Festival November Music, Nieuw Ensemble, ASKO ensemble and Slagwerkgroep Den Haag. She wrote monologues for harpsichordist Anne

Faulborn and bassist Cristin Wildbolz, both directed by the famous Dutch actress Adelheid Roosen. Nas also programs the chamber music concerts of De Link in Tilburg, Netherlands. Currently she is in Melbourne, on scholarships from the Dutch Fund for the Performing Arts and the Prince Bernhard Culture Fund, to study with Warren Burt.

*Say, say, oh playmate,
Come out and play with me
Clap your hands and knees
Climb up the apple tree*

*Say, say, oh playmate
I cannot play with you
My dolly's got the flu
Boo hoo hoo hoo hoo*

—Nicholas Photinos

Fred Lerdahl: *Fantasy Etudes* (1985)

Currently the Fritz Reiner Professor of Musical Composition at Columbia University, Fred Lerdahl (b. 1943) has held teaching appointments at Harvard University, the University of Michigan and the University of California at Berkeley. His teachers include Babbitt, Core, Kim and Fortner.

Lerdahl is known for utilizing the technique of “expanding variation” in his works, whereby each variation is longer than the preceding by a predetermined ratio. Aspects of this method are readily apparent in *Fantasy Etudes*. The work is divided into 12 sections: eleven “etudes” and a coda that recapitulates all the preceding material. Within each etude, an idea—whether a melodic fragment, rhythmic motive or even a single note in the case of the opening—is developed and expanded through several statements, though never finishes before the next etude begins to take shape. This gradual transformation from section to section can also be seen in the tempo relations; one section’s quarter note becomes the next section’s dotted eighth, and so on.

—Nicholas Photinos

Thierry de Mey: *Musique de Tables (Table Music)* (1987)

Born in 1956, Belgian filmmaker and composer Thierry de Mey came to music composition after studying film arts through his contacts with modern dance. He has written music for the dance companies of Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Wim Vandekeybus and Michèle-Anne De Mey and for ensembles such as the Quatuor Quadro, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Ictus Ensemble and the Nederlands Blazerensemble. He formed the group Maximalist! as a laboratory for young Belgian composers. He writes about himself: “melomany, workaholism and a natural attraction to chaos characterize me; I like Jimi Hendrix and Paul Valéry, topology, mushrooms.”

The composer calls his eight-minute *Musique de Tables* an “exploration of

the relationship between movement and sound." More a ballet for six hands than a percussion piece, the title refers to the historical form of "Tafelmusik," its structure essentially that of a baroque suite—but for fists, fingertips, knuckles and nails. De Mey directed a film version of the work in 1999.

—Nicholas Photinos

David Lang: *Cheating, Lying, Stealing* (1993)

Co-founder of the Bang on a Can new music festival in New York, David Lang (b. 1957) has won numerous awards and his music has been performed throughout the world. He holds degrees from Stanford University, the University of Iowa and the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Jacob Druckman, Hans Werner Henze and Martin Bresnick. David Lang's music is published by Red Poppy (ASCAP) and distributed by G. Schirmer, Inc. About *Cheating, Lying, Stealing*, the composer writes:

A couple of years ago, I started thinking about how so often when classical composers write a piece of music, they are trying to tell you something that they are proud of and like about themselves. Here's this big gushing melody, see how emotional I am. Or, here's this abstract hard-to-figure-out piece, see how complicated I am, see my really big brain. I am more noble, more sensitive, I am so happy. The composer really believes he or she is exemplary in this or that area. It's interesting, but it's not very humble. So I thought, what would it be like if composers based pieces on what they thought was wrong with them? Like, here's a piece that shows you how miserable I am. Or, here's a piece that shows you what a liar I am, what a cheater I am. I wanted to make a piece that was about something disreputable. It's a hard line to cross. You have to work against all your training. You are not taught to find the dirty seams in music. You are not taught to be low-down, clumsy, sly and underhanded. In *Cheating, Lying, Stealing*, although phrased in a comic way, I am trying to look at something dark. There is a swagger, but it is not trustworthy. In fact, the instruction on the score for how to play it says: Ominous funk.