

MEANWHILE **eighth blackbird**

Katzin Concert Hall
Tuesday, October 21, 2008, 7:30 p.m.

Program

Movements from *Powerless* (2001) Dennis DeSantis

1. Ace
2. Own

Arpège (1986) Franco Donatoni

Immutable Dreams (2007) Kati Agócs

1. "I feel the air of other planets. . ."
2. Microconcerto [in memorium György Ligeti]
3. Husks

Les moutons de Panurge (1969) Frederic Rzewski

~ INTERMISSION ~

Meanwhile (2007) Stephen Hartke

1. Procession
2. Fanfares
3. Narrative
4. Spikefiddlers
5. Cradle-songs
6. Celebration

Catch (1991) Thomas Adès

Movements from *Damaged Goods* (2001) Roshanne Etezady

1. About Time
 2. Eleventh Hour
- ASU School of Music Faculty Member*



School of Music

in a special collaboration with the Blair Thomas & Company puppet theater and soprano Lucy Shelton.

The sextet has appeared in Canada, Mexico, the Netherlands, South Korea; at nearly every major chamber music venue in North America, with performances at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, Kennedy Center, Library of Congress, Cleveland Museum of Art, and La Jolla Chamber Music Society; and has been concert soloist with the Utah Symphony and the American Composers Orchestra. During the summer, the group has appeared several times at Cincinnati's Music X, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, also performing at Tanglewood, Ojai, New York's 20th annual Bang on a Can Marathon, and Bravo! Vail. The group is Music Director for the Ojai Music Festival's 2009 season.

Since its founding in 1996, eighth blackbird has actively commissioned and recorded new works from such eminent composers as Steve Reich, George Perle, Frederic Rzewski, and Joseph Schwantner, and has commissioned groundbreaking works from a younger generation (Jennifer Higdon, Stephen Hartke, Derek Bermel, David Schober, Daniel Kellogg, and Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez). The group was honored in 2007 with the American Music Center's Trailblazer Award and a Meet The Composer Award. eighth blackbird received the first BMI/Boudleaux-Bryant Fund Commission, was the first contemporary music group to win the Grand Prize at the Concert Artists Guild International Competition, won the 2000 Naumburg Chamber Music Award 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 many others.

The ensemble is enjoying acclaim for its four CDs released by Cedille Records. The most recent – *strange imaginary animals*, released in November 2006 – won the 2008 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance, and has garnered an almost unprecedented number of rave reviews, both in the U.S. press and internationally. *The Absolute Sound* wrote of the album: "Like the band itself, all the music is fresh, vibrant, exciting, and slightly addictive I don't know what eighth blackbird has planned for the future [but] whatever comes next, their track record strongly suggests that it will be great." The group's first CD, *thirteen ways*, featured works by Perle, Schober, Joan Tower, and Thomas Albert, and was selected as a Top Ten 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." Of *fred*, eighth blackbird's third Cedille disc, comprising three Rzewski works, 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 it all with their trademark panache." In 2006, the group debuted on the Naxos label in a performance of *The Time Gallery*, commissioned by eighth blackbird from 2004 Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Paul Moravec.

eighth blackbird is active in teaching young artists about contemporary music and, in addition to residencies, has taught master classes and conducted outreach activities around the country, at the Aspen Music School System (grades K-12), the La Jolla Chamber Music Series, the Candlelight Concert Series, Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa, and throughout the Greater Chicago area.

The members of eighth blackbird hold degrees in music performance from Oberlin Conservatory, among other institutions. 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 official web site at www.eighthblackbird.com for more information.

+ Matthew Duvall endorses Pearl drums and Adams Musical Instruments. July 2008

Program Notes

Dennis DeSantis: Movements from *Powerless* (2001)

1. Ace
2. Own

Dennis DeSantis is a composer, sound designer, and percussionist. He received a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Eastman School of Music. His electronic music appears on labels such as Global Underground, Cocoon, and Kanzleramt, and he has performed throughout North America, Europe, and at SONAR Tokyo. He previously was percussionist for Alarm Will Sound, a leading contemporary music ensemble based in New York. His concert music is widely performed, and his commissions include a 2007 Carnegie Hall commission to arrange the music of Autechre for chamber orchestra. DeSantis is in charge of documentation for Ableton, and previously worked for Native Instruments. About *Powerless*, the composer writes:

Powerless takes its title from Stravinsky's infamous quote about music being powerless to express anything. Each of the work's four movements shares material with the others, and each movement progresses to a point where it becomes "powerless" to continue without intervention. At these points, I introduce the deus ex machina of the piece - the woodblock. In "Ace", the woodblock serves to jumpstart music that's stalled and in "Own" it helps to reel in music that's gotten out of control.

-Nicholas Photinos

Franco Donatoni: *Arpège* (1986)

Franco Donatoni (1927-2000) was considered among the most prominent of Italian composers of his generation, which includes contemporaries Berio, Nono, and Scelsi. He spent his entire career almost exclusively in Italy, studying with composers Desderi, Liviabella, and Pizzetti in Milan, Bologna, and Rome, and teaching at conservatories in Bologna, Turin, Milan, and Siena. His music went through several periods of development: in the 1950s he came under the influence of Boulez and Stockhausen in Germany and Bruno Moderna in Italy, which led to a turn to strict serial techniques. Beginning in the 1960s, the introduction of chance procedures and the influence of John Cage can be seen in such works as *For Grilly* "improvvisazione per sette" for 7 performers. In the mid-1960s and mid 1970s he underwent 2 periods of compositional crisis where he wrote nothing for over a year; the first, which was broken in 1966 by the composition of *Etwas ruhiger im Ausdruck* for quintet (fl, cl, vn, vc, pno), led him to destroy and denounce much of his earlier music. The music from his late period, from 1980 until his death, is marked by driving rhythms and the extended development of terse compositional materials, sometimes using the same melodic fragments in multiple works.

Arpège, a study in virtuosity, is representative of his late period, with several sections of varying length connected compositionally by short motivic cells that are developed over the course of the piece. The work is approximately 12 to 13 minutes in length.

-Nicholas Photinos

Kati Agócs: *Immutable Dreams* (2007)

1. "I feel the air of other planets. . ."
2. Microconcerto [in memorium György Ligeti]
3. Husks

Composer Kati Agócs (kuh-tee ah-goch) was born in 1975 in Windsor, Ontario, of Hungarian and American background. Agócs was recently appointed to the composition faculty of the New England Conservatory in Boston. She has received awards from ASCAP, Fulbright Program, American Academy of Arts and Letters and U.S. Department of Education. Recent commissions include the CBC Radio Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Albany Symphony Orchestra, Canada Council for the Arts, American Composers Orchestra, Da Capo Chamber Players,

PRISM Saxophone Quartet, pianist Frederik Ullén, Budapest Autumn Festival, Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, and the Juilliard School. Agócs holds a Doctor of Music Arts degree from The Juilliard School. Her principal composition teachers are Milton Babbitt, Robert Beaser, and George Tsontakis.

Immutable Dreams was commissioned by the Da Capo Chamber Players in 2006 with a grant from the American Composers Forum. The quintet configuration originated in the quintessential work from the early Second Viennese School, Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. *Immutable Dreams* responds to music from that milieu without imitating its language. The "Pierrot" grouping possesses a huge range of expressive and timbral possibilities: It can be symphonic or intimate, elegant or raw. The first movement takes its name from the first line of a poem by Stephan George, set for soprano by Schoenberg in his Second String Quartet. This short "upbeat" captures a sense of being "on the cusp". The middle movement is a miniature piano concerto dedicated to the composer, beloved by me, who passed away in the summer of 2006 as I was starting the piece. It treats the violin, cello, flute, and clarinet as a little orchestra behind the "solo" piano part. The Microconcerto is a sonic reflection of my Hungarian roots. The third and final movement uses layered ostinati (or short repeated figures) that cycle and build in a continuous arc. The figures start out as fragments, but accumulate greater weight and resonance, growing into something much larger over the course of the movement. Dreams (or resonances) that become larger, continuing to persist and live - - even when the people who dreamt them are gone - - are the source of the work's title, *Immutable Dreams*. Their intractable nature arises from the fact that they are not dreamed alone.

-Kati Agócs

Frederic Rzewski: *Les Moutons de Panurge* (1969)

Born in Westfield, Massachusetts in 1938, Frederic Rzewski studied with Charles Mackey, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, Milton Babbitt and Luigi Dallapiccola. His compositional career has had many phases; his music from the late sixties and early seventies (*Les Moutons de Panurge*, *Coming Together*) combine elements of written and improvised music, which in the seventies led to a greater experimentation with forms in which style and language are treated as structural elements (*The People United Will Never Be Defeated*). He briefly returned to experimental and graphic notation (*Le Silence des Espaces Infinis*, *The Price of Oil*), before exploring new uses of the twelve-tone technique in the eighties (*Antigone-Legend*, *The Persians*). His more recent work (*Whangdoodles*, *Sonata*) adopts a more free and spontaneous approach. eighth blackbird commissioned Frederic Rzewski to write *Pocket Symphony*, which was premiered in 2001.

Les Moutons de Panurge (the Sheep of Panurge) takes its title from a story found in the fourth book of Francois Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Pantagruel is traveling by ship with his rascally companion, Panurge, when their boat meets with a merchant ship carrying sheep. The merchants make fun of Panurge, though Panurge manages to buy one sheep from them after much haggling. Panurge then chucks the sheep into the sea, whereby all of the other sheep follow the first sheep overboard, one after another. To this day, the phrase "sheep of Panurge" implies a person who blindly follows the lead of another.

Rzewski's work, which is scored for any instruments, follows this concept in several ways. The work is constructed of only 65 notes, though Rzewski instructs the performer to follow an additive and then subtractive process. The performer plays the notes as follows: 1, 1-2, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4 etc. until the 65th note is reached, at which point the process is reversed by subtracting notes from the beginning (1-2-3-4...65, 2-3-4...65, 3-4...65, etc), until the 65th note is reached and held. The pitfall is, of course, that no two people can stay together the whole time, and Rzewski indicates that when a performer gets off from the others, they stay off and continue to follow the rules. We have found that in rehearsing this work, as soon as one person gets off, other people gradually begin to get off as well, and so each player is obliged to follow the lead of the person who originally got lost.

-Nicholas Photinos

Stephen Hartke: *Meanwhile: Incidental music to imaginary puppet plays* (2007)

Stephen Hartke (b. 1952) has been hailed by the New York Times as one of America's "Young Lions." His music reflects the diversity of his musical background, from medieval and renaissance polyphony, of which he was once quite an active performer, to very personal syntheses of diverse elements from non-Western and popular music. He has enjoyed commissions and performances from numerous groups throughout the world, including the New York Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, and the Moscow State Philharmonic Orchestra, among many others. He recently completed a full-length opera, *The Greater Good, or the Passion of Boule de Suif*, for Glimmerglass Opera. In 2004, he was awarded the Charles Ives Living Composers Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the purpose of which is to free him from the need to devote his time to any employment other than music composition. Hartke's music is available on CD on CRI, ECM New Series, EMI Classics, Naxos American Classics, and New World Records. Stephen Hartke lives in Glendale, California, and is Professor of Composition at the University of Southern California. About *Meanwhile*, the composer writes:

Meanwhile was composed on a commission from eighth blackbird and the Barlow Foundation. It is one of several works of mine that has grown from a long-standing fascination I have had for various forms of Asian court and theater music, and in preparing to write this piece, I studied video clips of quite a number of puppet theater forms, ranging from the elegant and elaborate, nearly-life-sized puppets of Japanese *Bunraku*, to Vietnamese water puppets, both Indonesian and Turkish shadow puppets, and to classic Burmese court theater that mixes marionettes with dancers who look and act like marionettes.

This piece is a set of incidental pieces to no puppet plays in particular, but one in which the ensemble has been reinvented along lines that clearly have roots in these diverse Asian models. The piano, for instance, is prepared for much of the piece with large soft mutes to resemble a Vietnamese hammered dulcimer. The viola is tuned a half-step lower in order to both change its timbre and to open the way for a new set of natural harmonics to interact sometimes even microtonally with those of the cello. The percussion array includes 18 wood sounds, plus 4 cowbells, 2 small cymbals, a water gong, and a set of bongos. Finally, there is a set of three Flexatones, whose tone is rather like that of small Javanese gongs, and so I have given this new instrument the name of Flexatone Gamelan.

Meanwhile is played as a single movement, with 6 distinct sections: *Procession*, which features the Flexatone Gamelan; *Fanfares*, with the Piccolo and Bass Clarinet linked together much as a puppeteer and his marionette; *Narrative*, in which the Bass Clarinet recites the 'story' of the scene in an extravagant and flamboyant solo reminiscent of the reciter in Japanese *Bunraku*; *Spikefiddlers*, which requires a playing technique for the viola and later the cello that stems from Central Asian classical music; *Cradle-songs*, the outer parts of which feature natural harmonics in the viola and cello combined with bell-like 9th-partial harmonics from the piano; and *Celebration*, where the Flutist and Clarinetist take up Flexatones to play the closing melody.

-Stephen Hartke

Thomas Adès: *Catch* (1991)

Despite his relatively young age, British composer Thomas Adès (b. 1971) has won numerous awards and prizes, including the prestigious Grawemeyer Award (2000) of which he is the youngest ever recipient. However, the New Yorker recently remarked that "he has outgrown his status as the wunderkind of a vibrant British scene and become one of the most imposing figures in contemporary music," such that a number of European festivals have focused programming on his music and Carnegie Hall appointed him to the R and B Debs Composer Chair in the 2007-2008 season, featuring him as composer, conductor and pianist. He has been Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival since 1999. About *Catch*, the composer writes:

Catch structures itself around various combinations of the four instruments. There are several games going on: at the start, the clarinet is the outsider, the other three are the unit,

then, after a decoy entry, the clarinet takes the initiative. All four then play jovial 'pig-in-the-middle' with each other. The clarinet is then phased out leaving a sullen piano and cello, with interjections based on the clarinet's original tune. This slower passage gradually mutates back into fast music, and this time the game is in earnest: the piano is squeezed out, only to lure the clarinet finally into the snare of its own music.

-Thomas Adès

Roshanne Etezady: Movements from *Damaged Goods* (2001)

1. Eleventh Hour
2. About Time

Roshanne Etezady was born in 1973 in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Her works have been commissioned by the Albany Symphony, Dartmouth Symphony, Music at the Anthology, and the PRISM Saxophone Quartet. She has been a fellow at the Aspen Music Festival, the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and at the Atlantic Center for the Arts. Performers and ensembles including Rêlache, Amadinda Percussion Ensemble, Ensemble De Ereprijs, and the Dogs of Desire have performed Etezady's music throughout the United States and Europe. Etezady's music has earned recognition from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Korean Society of 21st Century Music, the Jacob K. Javits Foundation, Meet the Composer, and ASCAP.

Etezady holds academic degrees from Northwestern University and Yale University, and she has worked intensively with numerous composers, including William Bolcom, Martin Bresnick, Michael Daugherty, and Ned Rorem. She completed her doctorate at the University of Michigan in March, 2005.

The title *Damaged Goods* plays on the idea of objects damaged in transit; however, the 'damage' to which the title refers is more closely related to the sort of emotional 'baggage' that all of us accumulate as a routine part of life. Each of the movements of *Damaged Goods* is characterized by a different mood. "Eleventh Hour" is an aggressive study in perpetual motion, while "About Time" is about delicate musical gestures that are primarily static. *Damaged Goods* was written for eighth blackbird as part of a collaborative project with the Minimum Security Composers Collective.

-Roshanne Etezady