David Lang: Dance/Drop (1987)
Winner of the 2008 Pulitzer Prize in Music for his The Little Match Girl Passion, David Lang (b. 1957) straddles the uptown and downtown worlds of the New York new music scene, according to composer and critic Kyle Gann, more effectively than any other composer. Lang’s music often synthesizes a minimalist aesthetic with a rock sensibility; however, his music tends to be less systematic and rhythmically complex than that of his totalist/postclassical contemporaries, as he tends to opt instead for theatrical gestures in his music. Los Angeles Times music critic Mark Swed capitulates to Lang’s un-categorizable style, writing: “There is no name yet for this kind of music.” Many of Lang’s pieces resemble each other only in the fierce intelligence and clarity of vision that inform their structures. His catalogue is extensive, and his opera, orchestra, chamber and solo works are by turns ominous, ethereal, urgent, hypnotic, unsettling and very emotionally direct. Much of his work seeks to expand the definition of virtuosity in music—even the deceptively simple pieces can be fiendishly difficult to play and require incredible concentration by musicians and audiences alike.

Along with composers Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe, Lang founded Bang on a Can, described by the San Francisco Chronicle as "the country's most important vehicle for contemporary music." Once “only” a one-day new music festival, Bang on a Can is now a multi-faceted organization dedicated to commissioning, performing, creating, presenting and recording contemporary music and whose mission is “to expose exciting and innovative music as broadly and accessibly as possible to new audiences worldwide. And through its Summer Festival,”—held at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art in North Adams every July—“Bang on a Can hopes to bring this energy and passion for innovation to a younger generation of composers and players.”

David Lang’s Are you experienced? was commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts for David Stock and the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble in 1987, and originally written for narrator, amplified solo tuba, and large ensemble. In 1989, Lang arranged the two instrumental movements—“Dance” and “Drop”—for the group Sound Pressure—bassoon, baritone saxophone, piano, synthesizer, and percussion; in 1997, he again arranged the two movements, this time for the Da Capo Chamber Players—flute, bass clarinet, piano, violin, cello, and percussion. For this evening’s performance, we have created our own arrangement (replacing the bassoon from the Sound Pressure version with the cello of the Da Capo version), with the permission of the composer.

“Are You Experienced?” is the name of one of Jimi Hendrix’s famous songs that would become anthems of the 1960s counterculture. Lang’s score is a reaction to, rather than an arrangement or appropriation of, the original song, exploring the darker antithesis to Hendrix’s hedonistic “experience” with sex and drugs. Hendrix’s song is the experience of losing your mind to pleasure; Lang’s is about simply losing your mind. In ‘Are you experienced?’ the narrator carries on an odd conversation with an imagined vision of an unconscious listener. In turns, the narrator is amusing, consoling and menacing, and sometimes gives the listener various ominous commands; “Dance” and “Drop” are two of those commands. The complete work is comprised of six sections, progressing through a dissolution of order. After the first movement (“On being hit on the head”), the narrator gives the command, “Dance,” which leads to a raucous, rocking dance of fast, repeated sixteenth notes in rapid, short crescendos. The final movement “Drop” alludes to the scary command school children in the 1950s practiced in case of nuclear attack. As if in the wake of such an attack, the movement is a juxtaposition of pounding strikes with surging aftershocks, menacing/aggressive interjections, and resigned/desperate cries which do not fade away, but simply cease to exist.
Eric Mandat: selections from *Folk Songs* (1986)
American clarinetist and composer Eric Mandat (b. 1957) is well known in the clarinet world for his virtuosity and use of extended techniques. As stated in the Chicago Reader, "Mandat is exploring new worlds, with a unique combination of virtuosity and a creative use of multiphonics...he uses them to create highly personal and expressive compositions that...are loaded with musical meaning."

Most of Mandat’s compositions are for clarinet alone, although some of his works include clarinet in a chamber ensemble. He utilizes extended techniques within a framework largely influenced by jazz and traditional music of non-Western cultures. *The Clarinet* finds that his "process at writing and playing is bound to leave any listener in awe." Mandat is a recipient of the 2000, 2005, and 2009 Illinois Arts Council Artist Fellowship Awards for composition. His music has been featured in concerts and recordings by clarinetists throughout the world and he has premiered his works at international conferences in Chicago, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Vancouver. Mandat is a member of the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW ensemble, which recently performed works by Elliott Carter and Bruno Mantovani under the direction of Maestro Pierre Boulez, and he has appeared as soloist with the Latvian National and Chicago Chamber Orchestras and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony.

Mandat received his education at the University of North Texas (B.M.), the Yale School of Music (M.M.), and the Eastman School of Music (D.M.A.). His principal teachers included Richard Joiner, Lee Gibson, Keith Wilson, Stanley Hasty, and Charles Neidich. He is Professor of Music and Distinguished Scholar at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, where he teaches clarinet and graduate courses in musical analysis.

His *Folk Songs* have been described (by *The Clarinet*) as "a composition of this caliber will most likely enter the performance repertoire as the representative piece of the decade." *Folk Songs* features sounds that are inspired by folk traditions, although the work does not feature direct quotation of any particular folk songs. Two of the five *Folk Songs* will be performed this evening as interludes. The first movement is influenced by Appalachian folk music, and features significant use of multiphonics, while the third movement additionally has the performer sing and play simultaneously to create interesting dissonances.

Alex Mincek: *Nucleus* (2007)
Alex Mincek (b. 1975) is a New York-based composer and performer. His music is typically characterized by unique timbres, dynamic textures, and complex repetitions. In addition to composing notated music, he is also deeply committed to the art of improvisation and has been influenced greatly by his participation in various forms of jazz, punk, rock, and electronic music. He studied composition with Tristan Murail and Fred Lerdahl at Columbia University and with Nils Vigeland at the Manhattan School of Music, where he received a Master of Arts. As a performer, he studied saxophone with Richard Oatts at Manhattan School of Music (Bachelor of Arts) and with Bunky Green at the University of North Florida.

Mincek’s music has been performed frequently at major music festivals including the Festival Présences of Radio France, Voix Nouvelles at the Abbaye de Royaumont, Festival des Musiques Désesurées, the Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD), the Contempuls Festival in Prague, and the Ostrava New Music Days. Mincek has collaborated with groups including the Les Percussions de Strasbourg, Ensemble Cairn, Orchestra of the SEM Ensemble, the Janacek Philharmonic, Talea Ensemble, the Kenners and the JACK Quartet. Mincek’s music has also been recognized through commissions and grants from the New Mendelssohn Chamber Orchestra-Leipzig, Ensemble XXI in Dijon, Present Music, MATA, the French Ministry of Culture, Meet The Composer, Yarn/Wire, the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, Due East, ASCAP and the National Endowment for the Arts.
From 2001-2005 Mincek was a member of the experimental ensemble Zs, with whom he performed his own music, the music of others, and improvisations. Mincek currently serves as the saxophonist, bass clarinetist, and artistic director of the Wet Ink Ensemble, a group dedicated to contemporary music, which he founded in 1998.

Mincek finds inspiration in the writings of French postmodern philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), who wrote in his *Difference and Repetition*:

*Even the most mechanical, the most banal, the most habitual and the most stereotyped repetitions find a place in works of art… The more our daily life appears standardized, stereotyped and subject to an accelerated reproduction of objects for consumption, the more art must be injected into it in order to make evident that little difference which plays simultaneously between other levels of repetition, and even in order to make the two extremes resonate – namely, the habitual series of consumption and the instinctual series of destruction and death. Art thereby connects the tableau of cruelty with that of stupidity, and discovers underneath consumption a schizophrenic clattering of the jaws….*

The notion of meaning being derived from the differences occurring through repetitions is the central narrative in Mincek’s *Nucleus* (2007) for tenor saxophone and drum set. As Mincek writes:

*Nucleus* (2007) is a *Blade Runner*-esque dystopian soundscape. It pits the mechanical against the humane within a narrow margin of ambiguously shared space. The piece was conceived as the starting point for an ongoing collection of works. Just as a cell’s nucleus contains most of its genetic material, this piece contains most of the structural, gestural and procedural material that proliferates in a specific collection of my subsequent work.

Chief among these ideas is the intersection between pure difference (A - 4 - % -& - k - $…), complex sameness (D-d-b-D-D-b-B-d…) and bare repetition (E-E-E-E-E-E…). The latter is a nuanced version of the former, and the last is an even more nuanced version of the previous two. You see, E is not E, and the E after five E’s is not the seventh E. The goal is to reveal subtlety within the seemingly redundant. However, by using repetitive structures within a broader musical framework full of difference, it is also my hope that the arrested flow establishes its own organic continuity – a schizophrenic clattering of the jaws.

**Ileana Perez-Velázquez: Light Echoes (2009)**

“Ileana Perez [Velázquez] is, without question, one of the great talents of the new generation of composers and her future artistic development deserves attention.” Although those words were written in 1986 (by Jose Amer in the Cuban newspaper “Juventud Rebelde”), they still apply. Perez Velázquez’s music has been heard in concerts and international festivals in Cuba, the United States, Mexico, and throughout South America, Europe, and the Middle East. Her music has been praised for everything from its “imaginative strength” (Paul Griffiths, 1999) to its “evocative and dynamic” style (Edward Ortiz, 2002).

Born in Cienfuegos, Cuba in 1964, Perez Velázquez received her B.A. in piano and composition from the Higher Institute of Arts (ISA), Havana, Cuba in 1987. When she moved to the United States in 1993, she was already recognized as one of the up-and-coming talents in Cuban composition, winning several national composition awards in Cuba, including the first prize of composition for chamber music in the contest of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), and the first music composition prize from the first national competition of the Youth Music of Cuba (Juventudes Musicales).
After obtaining her Master’s in 1995 in electroacoustic music from Dartmouth College—where her teachers included Jon Appleton, Charles Dodge, Larry Polansky—Perez Velázquez began her doctoral studies at Indiana University, studying with Claude Baker, Eugene O’Brien, and Marta Ptaszynska. Soon after receiving her D.M.A. in 2000, Perez Velázquez was a recipient of a 2000 Cintas Fellowship in Composition. She was on the faculty of Portland State University for two years (1998-2000), and since 2000 she has been Associate Professor of Music Composition and Electronic Music at Williams College.

Perez Velázquez has written numerous acoustic and electroacoustic works that have been critically well-recognized and that reveal the depth and scope of her artistic imagination. Often inspired by extra-musical stimuli—ranging from the poetic to the psychological, the natural to the supernatural—Velázquez writes music that, while challenging for both performer and listener alike, is deeply expressive and accessible; her music may be uncompromising in its demands, but it also remains intensely dramatic and poignantly evocative. Her rich harmonic language and rhythmically intricate, multi-layered textures reveal her debt to her Cuban heritage. On the other hand, her formal constructions—described by David Cleary as “highly effective”—have in recent years evolved away from mosaic-influenced structures; while many of her earlier works are characterized by a juxtaposition of sharply contrasted blocks exhibiting long periods of suspended motion, her newer works exude a linear freshness—featuring expansive, quasi-improvisatory melodic lines being freely superimposed upon each other—that seemingly evoke the open space of the natural landscape of her current home in upstate New York.

Her music has been featured in numerous festivals, such as the Festival Sonidos de las Americas Cuba, Weill Recital Hall; New Music Miami Festival; Festival of Women Composers International, Pittsburgh; “Music From Almost Yesterday” concert series, Milwaukee; Q-ba Festival in The Netherlands; New Music Festival of Three Cantos Auditorium of Madrid, Spain; International Festival of Contemporary Music in Bogotá, Colombia; 4th International Festival of Electroacoustic Music, Santiago de Chile; and II Festival Iberoamericano de Guitarra in Beirut, Lebanon. Writing largely to commission, Perez Velázquez has written works for numerous performers and ensembles, including Continuum, Aguav New Music Ensemble, Joan La Barbara, Sally Pinkas, the Flux Quartet, Quartet Eco, Insomnio ensemble (the Netherlands), the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, the instrumental ensemble Nuestro Tiempo from the National Symphony Orchestra of Cuba (Casa Editorial de Cuba), and the Berkshire Symphony Orchestra.

About her *Light Echoes*, written in 2009 for the French piano/percussion duet of Thierry Miroglio and Ancusza Aprodu, Perez Velázquez writes:

*Light Echoes* was inspired by an extraordinary astronomical event. For reasons unknown, star V838 Mon’s outer surface suddenly expanded greatly and as a result it became the brightest star in the entire Milky Way Galaxy in January 2002. Then, just as suddenly, it faded. A stellar flash like this had never been seen before. Supernovas and novas expel matter out into space; although the V838 Mon flash appears to have expelled material into space, what was seen in the image from the Hubble Space Telescope was actually an outwardly moving light echo of the bright flash. In a light echo, light from the flash is reflected by successively more distant rings in the complex array of ambient interstellar dust that already surrounded the star. V838 Mon lies about 20,000 light years away toward the constellation of the unicorn (Monoceros), while the light echo above spans about six light years in diameter. The composition is itself an echo of this stellar phenomenon.
Rebecca Saunders: *Into the Blue* (1996)

*When composing I imagine holding the sounds and noises in my hands, feeling their potential between my palms, weighing them. Skeletal textures and musical gestures develop out of this. Then, like pictures placed in a large white room, I set them in silence, next to, above, beneath and against each other.*

- Rebecca Saunders

Born in London in 1967, Rebecca Saunders studied violin and composition at Edinburgh University, before putting her instrument to one side when she won a scholarship to Karlsruhe Music College, Germany, where she studied with Wolfgang Rihm. She returned to Edinburgh between 1994 and 1997 to pursue a PhD in composition with Nigel Osborne, and she currently lives in Berlin.

Saunders’s work has been recognized with many honors and awards, including membership in the Berlin Academy of Arts, the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival’s Paul Hindemith prize, the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Award for chamber music in 2008, and the Ernst von Siemens Förderpreis, the ARD and BMW AG musica viva Prize. She has lectured at the Darmstadt summer school and was chosen as Capel-Compositeur (composer-in-residence) for Staatskapelle Dresden 2009–10.

Saunders’s compositions often feature unusual combinations of orchestral instruments with others such as accordion, electric guitar, and whistle. They range in size from pieces for soloists and duos to large-scale works, such as *Chroma*, (2003, revised 2010) which features 20 different “modules” made up of solo or grouped musicians, as well as gramophones and music boxes. Her 2003 work *Insideout* accompanied Sasha Waltz’s “dance installation, while *Traces* was featured at the BBC Proms in 2009. Later works, such as *Stirrings Still I and II*, and most recently *Murmurs* from 2009, are quiet and fragile collage compositions in which Saunders continues to address her fascination with the separation of the musicians in the performing space.

Gramophone described her work as “music of great integrity and purpose.” One of Saunders's foremost concerns is the interplay between silence and sound, specifically the novel sounds and unusual timbres that she creates by delving into the strange and surprising sound world beneath the surface of its instrumental palette. Here the influences of Lachenmann and, to a lesser extent perhaps, early Rihm (and other composers whose use of "acoustic" instruments has also been influenced strongly by electronic music/recording technology) are perceptible; Saunders chooses her materials as carefully and sparingly as her instruments: repeated notes or events, sustained notes, and an array of unstable or “noise-based” sounds of all sorts are deployed with great precision.

Saunders’s music isn’t really about pitch, or about changing pitch in such a way as to evoke melody or harmony. Within a passage, she tends to limit pitch to a narrow range in order to keep changes in dynamics, timbre, articulation, and other parameters from becoming secondary to the moment. As Robert Kirzinger observes: “It’s as though one is studying a particular detail, the join of two sections of a David Smith sculpture: One’s eye picks up the subtleties of angle involved, the beginnings of surface rust, the slight spatter of a weld, not feeling the need necessarily to continue to follow the shape of the rest of the piece, just being made aware of the moment….”

Saunders adds: “What we call silence is for me comparable to a dense knot of noise, frequencies, and sounds. From this surface of apparent silence I try to draw out and mould sound and colour.” A possible parallel between her music and the literary efforts of Samuel Beckett lies in “the increasing sparseness of a language that gradually shuts out the inessential and ornamental” (Michael Struck-Schloen). The synaesthetical use of colours, meanwhile, is conceptually linked to artists from Goethe to Kandinsky.
*Into the Blue* is scored for clarinet/Eb clarinet, bassoon, percussion, piano, violoncello, and contrabass. It was commissioned by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science and Arts and was given its first performance in 1996 in Freiburg, Germany by the Ensemble Aventure.

**David Kechley: Design and Construction (2010)**

Since the 1968 premiere of Second Composition for Large Orchestra by the Seattle Symphony, David Kechley (b. 1947) has produced works in all genres. His music draws from a variety of sources including the “usual suspects” of twentieth-century concert music, composers from the more distant past and present, and many forms of vernacular, popular, and ethnic musics. Although these influences are generally integrated into a consistent style, the resulting musical narratives often create sharp contrasts between lyricism, virtuosity, and dramatic gesture.

Kechley's work has been recognized by a Fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (1979), grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (1976, 1979), and commissions from the Barlow Foundation (1998) and the New England Orchestra Consortium (2004). He also won the 1994 Lee Ettelson Prize, as well as first prizes in the Shreveport Symphony Composers’ Competition (1980-81) and the Opus I Chamber Orchestra Contest for Ohio Composers (1979). His works have been commissioned and performed throughout the USA and abroad by ensembles such as the Boston Pops, Cleveland Orchestra, United States Military Academy Band, Kronos String Quartet, Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, and Vienna Saxophone Quartet, among others. Some of his most recent premieres are *WAKEFUL VISIONS/ MOONLESS DREAMS: A Symphony in Four Movement*, premiered by the Berkshire Symphony in February 2008; *MIXED MESSAGES: Variations on a Fragment* by the Fireworks Ensemble in September 2008; and an arrangement of *RUSH* for mixed ensemble premiered by Opus Zero Band in March 2010. He was awarded residencies at The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in 2002, Yaddo in 2006, and the MacDowell Colony in 2009.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Kechley was educated at the University of Washington, Cleveland Institute of Music, and Case Western Reserve University. His teachers include Paul Tufts, Robert Suderburg, William Bergsma, James Beale, and Donald Erb. His music is available and released on the Liscio Recordings, Albany Records, Reference Recording, and others.

The first movement of *Design and Construction*, “Framing/Ripping,” was premiered last January, while the entire work was given its official premiere this past May. Kechley has written the following about his latest work:

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION is a virtuosic, reflective, and often playful work written specifically for Steven Bodner, Tom Bergeron, and Matthew Gold. The idea for the unusual combination of instruments grew from a composition assignment I gave to my students in 2008. It was one of several assignments designed to provide experience in writing for diverse combinations and specific numbers, i.e., solos, duos, trios, etc. In this case the selection was based on who was available to play that week rather than what they played. Such choices are not unusual in the history of music and composers, being easily led by such circumstances, often try new things and pursue directions that may not have otherwise occurred to them. The success of the assignment and the fact that we all enjoyed working together sparked my own interest in writing an extended work for I/O New Music to be premiered in the BOX.

I knew from the outset that, unlike the original assignment, I would expand the timbral palette and use a different set of horns in each movement. However, we did decide to limit the size and number of percussion instruments and even discussed the idea of a piece in which all the percussion could fit into a suitcase. Unfortunately we never settled on the size of the suitcase! It was always clear though that we would not include the standard keyboard percussion instruments, but emphasize smaller, non-pitched items. We did not
quite achieve that secondary goal either when we added pedal bass drum, tom toms, etc., but the results of our well intended austerity program did create a very different kind of drum set, which includes circular saw blades, beer and wine bottles, a washboard, and 4 tuned pine planks courtesy of the college carpentry shop.

I have long believed that composition or musical design is much like architecture and that performance is like the construction phase where “blue prints” are transformed into actual structures even if they are temporal rather than three-dimensional. The title, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION, reflects this belief and the individual movement titles are even more explicit in that regard. Framing/Ripping, which pairs the standard C trumpet and alto saxophone, is energetic and fast moving, but gradual in its development of the simple opening figure. It takes its name from one of the circular saw blades in the drum set and refers to both vision and process. Rounding Corners, for flugelhorn and baritone saxophone, is less edgy and slower paced, but nevertheless challenges the listener’s expectations at each new turn. In contrast to the darker timbres of movement 2, the brightness of piccolo trumpet and soprano saxophone dominate the soundscape in Cross Cuts, a title that refers to yet another saw blade, another process, and one which is quite appropriate to this abruptly sectional form characterized by a gigue-like refrain interspersed with texturally varied verses alluding to the simple figure that opened the entire work.