The BOX – music by living composers

FIRE|WORKS
ENSEMBLE

Friday, September 12, 2008
Biographies and Poems

Founded with the goal of creating a single, small ensemble capable of representing the full scope of today’s musical diversity, Fireworks Ensemble (www.fireworkensemble.org) combines the talents of eight classically-trained but musically omnivorous young virtuosoi who pride themselves on being able to play just about anything, regardless of style, time period, or instrumentation. Fireworks burst onto the music scene in 2002 with its striking, rock-inspired reinvention of Stravinsky’s iconoclast masterpiece, The Rite of Spring, which quickly drew critical attention and diverse, enthusiastic audiences. Since then, the ensemble has developed a national reputation as one of the premiere ensembles of its kind with its acclaimed programs such as Dance Mix (featuring seven hundred years of dance music from around the world), Cartoon (celebrating music inspired by and written for classic shorts from the golden age of animation), and its portrait of maverick composer Frank Zappa (including the composer’s challenging instrumental rock). This season the ensemble will tour across the United States, with performances and residencies in Minnesota, Idaho, Texas, Florida, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Pennsylvania, and will record its Cartoon project for Koch Classics. In its 2007-08 season the ensemble toured the west coast with its Dance Mix project, performed its acclaimed composer portrait of Frank Zappa on the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society series (including a live performance on NBC’s “The 10 Show”), and presented new programs on its home series at Symphony Space in New York, showcasing major new works written for the ensemble by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Del Tredici, Robert Kyr, and Adam Silverman. Other recent highlights include Carnegie Hall and the Miller Theater in New York City, the Lied Center of Kansas, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and The Deer Valley Music Festival in Salt Lake City, Utah. In the course of its eight year history, the ensemble has premiered over a hundred new works, ranging from young talents to established masters such as Glenn Branca, Scott Johnson, and Nick Didkovsky. Passionate about its work with students of all ages, the ensemble devotes a large part of its time each year to outreach activities, and has provided a doorway into contemporary and traditional classical music for hundreds of students in elementary, middle and high schools. This season, the ensemble will also conduct a major residency based on its Cartoon program in Peekskill, New York as part of Chamber Music America’s Residency Partnership program. Over the course of a nine-week residency, high school band students will learn improvisation techniques, compose a soundtrack to a short animated film, and give an eight-minute joint performance with Fireworks at Peekskill’s Paramount Center for the Arts. The ensemble will also conduct residency and outreach activities at almost all of the stops on its East Coast and Midwest tours. Fireworks’ three popular recordings: Dance Mix, First Tracks, and The Rite of Spring, have received airplay worldwide from WNYC in New York to Lo Otra Musica in Spain and RadioRock in Italy.

Brian Coughlin ’95 is best known as the bassist and director of the Fireworks Ensemble, the acclaimed New York new music ensemble. Hailed as the “hottest classical band in New York,” Fireworks performs at major venues across the United States each season, with a repertoire relying heavily on Coughlin’s compositions and arrangements. In her review of the ensemble’s sold-out tribute to maverick composer Frank Zappa at the Miller Theater in February, Anne Midgette of the New York Times wrote, “Brian Coughlin, Fireworks’ director and bass player, produced some hell-for-leather arrangements that the players, now relaxed and grooving, played the heck out of... Finally labels did indeed cease to matter: this was just music, and it sounded like music to keep.” Mark Greenfest of the New Music Connoisseur described Coughlin’s music as “like great Beatles standards”, and wrote, “Captivating, but impossible to pin down, Coughlin’s music is pleasurable as well as subtle.” Tom
Manoff of NPR wrote of the premier of his String Quartet “Brian Coughlin is certainly a talented and interesting composer... He also possesses something that cannot be taught: a real gift for melody.” Since 2000, Brian has arranged and composed extensively for Fireworks Ensemble. Major contributions to the ensemble’s repertoire include Big Mama Thornton, Stevens Songs, and his celebrated, rock-inspired arrangement of Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring. In addition to his music for Fireworks, Brian has also written for ensembles such as The Eugene Opera, The Berkshire Symphony, Basso Bongo, Oboist Humbert Lucarelli, Cygnus, The Pacific Rim Gamelan, Non-Sequitur, The Island Breeze Steel Drum Band, and the rock band Oneida. Recent awards include the 2008 Bakersfield Symphony New Directions Composition Competition (winner for the chamber music piece Sextet) and the 2008 Long Island Arts Council Composition Competition (winner for the song America). He is currently composing dual commissions for the Hudson Trio and the Creviston/Fader Duo. As a double and electric bassist, he has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the United States in venues ranging from venerable classical music institutions such as the Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood, to prominent jazz venues such as the Saratoga Jazz Festival, to major rock clubs such as Toad’s Place in New Haven. Brian holds both a Master of Music degree in Composition from the University of Oregon and a Master of Music degree in Double Bass Performance from the Hartt School. His teachers include Robert Black and Milt Hinton (bass), and David del Tredici, Robert Kyr, and George Tsontakis (composition).

Lois V Vierk is an American composer of a wide variety of works for ensembles small and large, usual and unusual; her works, mostly stage and chamber, have been performed all over Europe and the USA to much acclaim. Ms. Vierk received her BA (major in piano and ethnomusicology) from UCLA in 1974. She then studied composition at the California Institute of the Arts with Mel Powell, Leonard Stein and Morton Subotnick, receiving her MFA in 1978. For ten years, she studied gagaku (Japanese court music) with Suenobu Togi in Los Angeles, and for two years, in Tokyo with Sukeyasu Shiba, the lead ryuteki flautist of the Imperial Court Orchestra. Ms. Vierk has spent most of her career in New York City. Her music has achieved an impressive international reputation, and has been performed by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Kronos Quartet, electric guitarists Seth Josel and David Seidel, cellist Ted Mook, the Paul Dresher Ensemble, the Reigakusha Ensemble of Tokyo, and the Relâche Ensemble, among others. Among the many performers who have commissioned Ms. Vierk are cellist Maya Beiser, accordionist Guy Klucevsek, pianists Ursula Oppens, Frederic Rzewski, Aki Takahashi, and Margaret Leng Tan, and percussionist Steven Schick. The Bang on a Can Festival, Ensemble Modern, l’Art pour l’Art, Music from Japan, and the Paul Dresher Ensemble have also commissioned works from her. Co-creations with tap dance choreographer Anita Feldman have been commissioned by the American Dance Festival, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Meet the Composer, and others. Ms. Vierk’s music has been performed at major venues worldwide, including the Adelaide Festival, Carnegie Hall, Darmstadt, the Edmonton New Music Festival, Glasgow, the Huddersfield Festival, Lincoln Center, Radio Bremen, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, and the Suntory Festival (Tokyo). Her music is available on CDs from CRI, OOdiscs, Sony Classical, Starkland Records, XI Compact Discs, and most recently, Tzadik. Her recent work includes Deep Water Waves, written for the Paul Dresher Ensemble, and a duo for cello and piano for cellist Maya Beiser.

Composer Scott Johnson has been a pioneering voice in the new relationship being forged between the classical tradition and the popular culture that surrounds it. Since the early 1980’s, he has played an influential role in the trend towards incorporating rock-derived instrumentation into traditionally scored compositions, and the use of taped, sampled and MIDI-controlled electronic elements within instrumental ensembles. His music has been heard in performances by the Kronos Quartet, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Bang On A Can All-Stars, and his own ensembles; in dance works performed by the Boston Ballet, the London Contemporary Dance Theater, and the Ballets de Monte Carlo; in Paul Schrader's film Patty Hearst, and in recordings on the Nonesuch, CRI,
Point, and Tzadik labels. Johnson's scores generally mix acoustic and electric/electronic instruments, and he has premiered most of his electric guitar writing himself. Compositions which feature sampled voice include the groundbreaking 1982 John Somebody, as well as How It Happens, commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, and based upon voice recordings of the late journalist I.F. Stone. Johnson’s recent concert appearances include Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Japan Society, the Lincoln Center Festival, the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival, Yale University, the Schleswig-Holstien Festival, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s “Great Day In New York” series. Other premieres include works for the Bang On A Can All-Stars at Lincoln Center, and the New Millennium Ensemble and Cygnus at Merkin Hall. Awards include a 2006 Guggenheim Fellowship and a Koussevitsky commission. Johnson has also lectured at leading conservatories and universities, including San Francisco and Peabody Conservatories, Senzaku Ongaku Daigaku, New York University, The Manhattan School of Music, and Yale.

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Since the 1968 premiere of Second Composition for Large Orchestra by the Seattle Symphony, David Kechley has produced works in all genres, which have been performed by major orchestras, chamber groups, as well as colleges and universities throughout the United States and abroad.

His music draws from a variety of sources including the “usual suspects” of twentieth century concert music, concert 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 the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, North Carolina Arts Council, Massachusetts Cultural Council, and the Barlow Foundation. Pieces that have received awards or prizes include Five Ancient Lyrics on Poems by Sappho, Concerto for Violin and Strings, In the Dragon’s Garden, and Restless Birds before the Dark Moon.

His most recent work, COLLIDING OBJECTS: Interactions for Piano and Percussion was jointly premiered in spring of 2008 on the Barge Music series in Brooklyn, NY and in Chapin Hall by Matthew Gold and Doris Stevenson and will also be performed on the January BOX concert. Kechley has just returned from a month long residency at Copland House, an opportunity awarded to composers to work in uninterrupted solitude for an extended period. The bulk of tonight’s premiered work, MIXED MESSAGES: Variations on a Fragment, was completed during this residency.

Born in Seattle, Washington, March 16, 1947, 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.

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Generally recognized as the father of the Neo-Romantic movement in music, David Del Tredici has received numerous awards (including the Pulitzer Prize) and has been commissioned and performed by nearly every major American and European orchestral ensemble. Stylistically, over the course of his compositional life, Del Tredici has moved – controversially – from mid-20th-century serialism (exemplified by his elaborate vocal settings of James Joyce) to an individualistic musical language re-embracing tonality. The breakthrough came with his unique series of “Alice” works, based on stories and poetry of Lewis Carroll and written for amplified soprano and large orchestra (including Final Alice and In Memory of a Summer Day, which was awarded the 1980 Pulitzer Prize). Beyond Joyce and Carroll, Del Tredici in recent years has set to music a cavalcade of contemporary American poets, producing a number of song cycles and several works celebrating a gay sensibility. OUT Magazine, in fact, has twice named the composer one of its people of the year. Over the past several years Del
Tredici has ventured into the more intimate realm of chamber music and – harkening to his musical beginnings as a piano prodigy – has written a large number of solo-piano works. Most recently premiered was *Magyar Madness*, commissioned by Music Accord for clarinetist David Krakauer and the Orion String Quartet. Still, the extravagant Del Tredici remains at large. *Paul Revere’s Ride* – an impassioned work for soprano soloist, large chorus and orchestra – was inspired by Del Tredici’s 9/11 experience. (Recorded by Telarc, it became a Grammy Award nominee for Best New Classical Composition of 2006). *Rip Van Winkle*, for narrator and orchestra, was commissioned for Leonard Slatkin and the National Symphony. Over the next few years, Maestro Slatkin and the National Symphony Orchestra plan to record all of Del Tredici’s “Alice” works, beginning with *Final Alice* in 2008-09. Distinguished Professor of Music at The City College of New York, Del Tredici makes his home in Greenwich Village with his life-partner, Ray Warman.

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Hailed as “brilliant” by The New York Times and given “high marks” by The Wall Street Journal, versatile soprano Melissa Fogarty’s wide range of experience includes performances with New York City Opera, New York Collegium, Sequitur and Seattle Baroque Orchestra. Last season, Melissa appeared in New York City Opera’s VOX 2007’s showcase of new opera, and returns this season in *Agrippina* and *King Arthur*. A favorite with Seattle audiences, she appears as Serpina in La Serva Padrona with SBO. Last season she was in demand for her interpretations of the music of David Del Tredici for many of his 70th birthday celebrations: she performed “Dracula”, “Miz Inez Sez” (both with the composer), “Paul Revere’s Ride” with Canticum Novum, and covered “Final Alice” at Maverick Concerts, and two world premieres of Del Tredici’s are scheduled in New York City in 2008, written with Melissa in mind. Numerous awards and fellowships are to Melissa’s credit, mostly recently 2006 Outmusic Award (OMA) for her recording “Handel: Scorned & Betrayed” on Albany Records. Past fellowships include the Adams Fellowship at the Carmel Bach Festival and the Giorgio Cini Foundation Fellowship for study in Venice.

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Chris Pedro Trakas is noted for the intensity he brings to a broad and eclectic repertoire. His career highlights include Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Metropolitan Opera (James Levine), Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortileges* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (Seiji Ozawa) and the title role in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* with the St. Louis Symphony (Hans Vonk). Mr. Trakas is a distinguished recitalist and has collaborated with many important pianists including James Levine (*Dichterliebe, Histoires Naturelles, Don Quichotte a Dulcinée* - Ravinia Festival), Francois Rene Duchable (interreise - Newport), James Tocco and Ruth Laredo (Bernstein - *Arias and Barcarolles*, Symphony Space) and David Del Tredici at Weill Hall in the world premiere of the composer/pianist's *Three Baritone Songs*. On Lincoln Center's *Great Performers* series he shared recitals with Amy Burton, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson and pianists Glenn Parker, John Musto, Michael Barret and Steven Blier. Mr. Trakas sang the "Count" opposite Renee Fleming's "Countess" in Gian Carlo Menoti' Spoleto Festival production of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and recently received critical acclaim for his performance of "Alberich" in Christopher Alden's new production of Wagner's *The Rheingold* with Jonathan Sheffer's Eos Orchestra. His many recordings include Hyperion's *Complete Songs of Ernest Chausson* with Felicity Lott, Ann Murray and pianist Graham Johnson, chosen by London's *The Guardian* as "Classical CD of the Week" upon it's release. Formerly on the voice faculty of the North Carolina School of the Arts, he has also been a guest instructor at the Juilliard School, where he covered the songs of Brahms, Barber, Wolf, Ravel and Musto. He holds B.A. and M. M. degrees in music history, organ and voice from Eckerd College and the University of Houston.
SONJA HENIE SONNET
In high school we danced the lindy white-style like Sonja Henie on her skates curvetting her way around the rinky-dink back-first, front-first, leaving a trail of scars. Splitting in air or dissolving in a spin she came out holding her muff to cheeks dimpled and rosy under Bo-Peep bonnet as snowflakes starred her blond and marcelled head, and curtsying, her little behind peek-a-booed under fluffy skirt when she braked to a stop before the cameras in a cloud of powdery ice. Below, blunt feet in leather with blades of steel dug in their points and held.

OLD ACQUAINTANCE
Old friend, we’ve come through in pretty good shape, so far, better, in fact, than during those angst-filled years when you wrecked my life and I wrecked yours. Remember? But, back then, we didn’t appreciate each other, did we—like an ill-matched couple, a bad job by an incompetent marriage broker, or who just got married out of general horniness rather than any real compatibility. I never liked your looks or your size and you had ideas of your own I couldn’t figure out, though I responded to your goading and roamed the nights away. My God, what you led me into, and I got you into some pretty tight fixes myself. Life is less strenuous now. In our golden years, you make few demands. We’ve both come to like a bit of a wank, with none of the old recriminations after. And I’ve even learned to admire, as I pose in the mirror, your silky length, respect your sulky independence. I wonder that I ever thought you insufficient, myself under-endowed—or else you’ve grown. Best of all, I’m impressed by how good we look together—the proportions seem just right. So, Good Cock, dick, prick, dong, lul, bite, schwantz, wang, willie, weenie,
and all your other names,
if you’ve a mind to, now,
and I’d say you’ve earned it,
stand up, old friend, with me
and take a bow.

THE BOOK OF SORROW
This notebook, empty.
What shall be written in it?
It is waiting for the words of pain,
the life to come without my dear one.
The record of a wanderer without a home.
So many pages and each
a day of loneliness.
How long can this go on?
After this book is filled
there will be another, and another,
and another…
The story of my life.

BESIDE A POOL
In the pool
there are polliwogs
so there must be something else here,
something that eats polliwogs,
or maybe nothing bothers to eat polliwogs.
Come on, you know something is eating those polliwogs.
Nothing’s too insignificant to be eaten,
like who’d think anyone would bother
to eat sunflower seeds—you crack
and there’s hardly anything there
but a mouthful of shells.
Still, half the world is seed-eaters
and the other half lives off the seed-eaters,
those innocents. Really,
you have to be half-innocent at least
to eat seeds by the hour.
I sit here by the pool where the polliwogs wiggle
and tiny ants are eating me
not to speak of landlord, government, gnats, and devils:
Nobody’s too insignificant to be eaten.

SWEET GWENDOLYN’S TALE
[This is the sad tale of sweet Gwendolyn and the Countess in her black and dirty leather
Foolish poor Gwendolyn, dreadful Countess]*
The Countess rode out on her black horse in spring
wearing her black leather riding costume.
She was scouting for disciples in the countryside
and flicked with her whip the rosebuds as she passed.
Sweet Gwendolyn in her white dress
was out gathering May flowers.
Under sunshade hat, her pale face
blushed to the singing bees,
and her golden curls lay passive on bent shoulders
as she stooped to pluck a white lily.
The Countess passing by took one look, 
galloped up, and reined her stallion sharply in, 
high over the modest figure 
of Sweet Gwendolyn with the downcast eyes. 
She leaped down from her horse and knelt, 
laying the whip in tribute before the golden girl. 
That foolish one swooned forward to the ground 
in a great white puff of dress fabric 
and a scattering of flowers. At that, 
the Countess rose in all her black pride 
and put her dirty leather boot on Gwendolyn’s bent neck, 
pushing down the golden head to the grass, 
and gave her a smart lash across her innocently upturned behind. 
Gwendolyn looked up with begging eyes 
and a small whimper of submission, 
as the Countess pushed her over and threw the skirt up, 
exposing legs and bottom bare, 
and shoved the leather whip handle between squeezed thighs of virtue 
forcing them apart to reveal the pink pulsing maidenhood. 
Foolish Gwendolyn for not wearing panties 
but how could she have known what was in store? 
Her skirt fell over her head like petals of a fully-opened flower 
and her legs waved in the air like stamen and pistil, 
inviting the bee of the Countess’s tongue 
to slip in and sip nectar in the golden fuzz. 
Poor Gwendolyn moaned with shame and pain 
as she lay back crushing her May flowers, exposed and unresisting—
until the Countess, in full charge, pulled her to her feet, 
tied the whip end around her neck, 
remounted the big black horse 
and slowly trotted off, 
leading the sobbing girl a captive behind her 
off to her dark castle. 
*introductory words by the composer