

The Performers

Tod Brody, flute
Peter Josheff, clarinet
Dale Wolford, saxophone
Rufus Olivier, bassoon
Julie Steinberg, piano
Karen Rosenak, piano (Rzewski)
William Winant, percussion (Rzewski, Cage)
Daniel Kennedy, percussion (Tenney, Rzewski)
Christopher Froh, percussion (Cage)
Steven Schick, percussion and radio (Tenney, Cage)
Roy Malan, violin
Nanci Severance, viola
Stephen Harrison, cello



Greg Kuhn, electronics
Robert Shumaker, recording engineer

Please join us in the lower lounge
for a reception after the concert.

San Francisco Contemporary Music Players
Steven Schick, Artistic Director

**Zone 2: in which an indispensable
morphology is identified**

Monday, November 14, 2011 - 8:00 pm - Herbst Theatre

JAMES TENNEY

Critical Band (1988)

Approximate duration: 17 minutes

MARTIN BRESNICK

Songs of the Mouse People (1999)

Approximate duration: 12 minutes

- I. Common Squeaking (made apparent by its delicacy)
- II. That Peace We Yearn For
- III. Every Disturbance Is An Opportunity
- IV. A Thousand Pairs Of Shoulders Tremble
(under a burden actually meant for one)
- V. Laughter Stops (when we see Josephine)

Stephen Harrison, cello and Daniel Kennedy, percussion

DAVID LANG

Illumination Rounds (1982)

Approximate duration: 10 minutes

Roy Malan, violin and Julie Steinberg, piano

Intermission

FREDERIC RZEWSKI

Bring Them Home! (2004)

Approximate duration: 18 minutes

JOHN CAGE

Credo in Us (1942)

Approximate duration: 14 minutes

This concert is sponsored in part by a grant from
The Ross McKee Foundation.

Program Notes

JAMES TENNEY (1934-2006)

In a 1978 interview with Canadian composer and instrument builder Gayle Young, James Tenney gave an informal account of his deeply held ideas about sound and time. He observed: “That old form/content dichotomy is, to me, a spurious one, because they involve the same thing at different hierarchical levels of perception. What we take to be the substance or content of some sound—say, a string quartet—is really the result of forms—formal shapes and structures at a microscopic, or ‘microphonic,’ level.... All form is just the same thing at a larger level, involving spans of time over, say, five or ten or twenty minutes or more.” This telescoping of micro- and macro-levels, along with a trenchant intellect and a keen interest in human perception, have made both Tenney’s music and his theoretical writings hugely influential and tremendously inspiring to generations of composers and listeners.

Although he studied piano at Juilliard, had composition lessons with Chou Wen-chung in New York City, and earned a master’s degree from the University of Illinois (where he studied composition with Kenneth Gaburo and electronic music with Lejaren Hiller), Tenney’s formative years as a composer arguably came after he graduated. From 1961 until 1964, he did research at Bell Telephone Laboratories in computer music and sound synthesis. Though only a stone’s throw away from the Columbia-Princeton electronic music studio, Tenney eventually gravitated more toward the “downtown” music scene represented in part by Steve Reich and Philip Glass, in whose ensembles he also performed. Even before these groups got off the ground, Tenney himself co-founded the Tone Roads Chamber Ensemble (1963-70) and, indeed, the acts of performance and listening have been fundamental to Tenney’s compositions at every stage of his development.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the California Institute of the Arts, Tenney produced a series of performance pieces, each printed on a postcard (Tenney called them “scorecards”); they sported such playful titles as *Beast*, *Koan*, *Swell Piece #2*, and *A Rose Is a Rose Is a Round*. Founder of the Frog Peak composers’ collective Larry Polansky notes that each postcard piece is “a kind of meditation on acoustics, form, or hyper-attention to a single performance gesture.” Though somewhat variable in performance, the most popular postal piece, *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion*, usually consists of a single, drawn-out crescendo-decrescendo that can last anywhere from eight to twenty minutes. Like many of Tenney’s compositions, these reflect an emphasis on listening reminiscent of John Cage and Morton Feldman, alongside an experimental energy also to be

found in the music of Charles Ives and Edgard Varèse.

Over the course of his career, Tenney became more and more committed to the principles of natural tuning (or “just intonation”) and microtonal music articulated earlier in the century by composer Harry Partch, with whom Tenney had studied briefly in the 1950s. In the 1980s and after, Tenney turned his attention to the intricate relationships between the overtone series (the resonances or “partials” that arise when any fundamental pitch is sounded), tone color, and harmony. Eight of the resulting pieces, completed between 1995 and 2001, were gathered together under the collective title *Spectrum Pieces*. As musicologist Bob Gilmore points out, “Tenney became fascinated by the harmonic series in the early 1970s, partly as an outgrowth of his well-developed interest in psychoacoustics and the mechanisms of aural perception, and also for its musical potential—the pitches of the series depart from the tempered pitches of the piano and offer a host of new, and often highly complex harmonic and melodic possibilities.” As we will hear tonight, Tenney’s music explores the multi-faceted nature of sound itself. In the composer’s own words, “It’s sound for the sake of perceptual insight—some kind of perceptual revelation. Somehow it seems to me that that’s what we’re all doing—searching to understand our own perceptual processes.”

In his distinguished career, Tenney held a number of important university positions, teaching electrical engineering at Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn (1966-70) before moving to the California Institute of the Arts (1970-76, 2000-06) and York University in Toronto (1976-2000).

He received awards from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Fromm Foundation, and the Ontario Arts Council, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, and the Jean A. Chalmers Foundation, and his writings have appeared in every major theoretical journal and several books. From 2000-06 he was Roy E. Disney Family Chair in Music Composition at the California Institute of the Arts.

Tenney, *Critical Band* (1988)

for variable ensemble and electronics (this performance: flute, saxophone, clarinet, bassoon, vibraphone, violin, viola, and cello)

Tenney’s *Critical Band* plays on the idea of “critical bandwidth,” the technical description for a small range of pitches or frequencies wherein we tend to hear a single (perhaps distorted) tone rather than a pair of two distinct notes. In an evocation of the iconic orchestral tuning process, the piece opens by gradually coalescing on the pitch A. The composer writes: “After establishing a continuous unison on this A (the continuity

enhanced by a tape-delay system), the players begin to expand the range of sounding pitches ‘geometrically,’ above and below the central pitch. That is, each successive interval in a given direction is exactly twice the size of the preceding interval in that direction. Although these incremental intervals are always in strictly ‘harmonic’ proportions... they are too small to be recognized as such (or even to be heard as ‘intervals’) during the first half of the piece, in which the total pitch-range never exceeds the limits of the critical band.... Only after the expansion process has exceeded the critical bandwidth do the pitch-relations begin to be heard as ‘harmonic.’”

From the central, opening A (frequency = 440 Hertz), the players gradually stretch upward and downward until they lock into the A’s two octaves above and two octaves below the starting point (880 and 110 Hertz, respectively). The process is slow, predictable, and nonetheless illuminating in ways that Tenney himself has described. In speaking about his slow-moving, process-oriented scores, the composer commented upon their ability to change the way listeners approach and appreciate what they hear. Rather than listening for narrative or drama, he says: “What they can do is begin to really *listen* to the sounds, get inside them, notice the details, and consider or meditate on the overall shape of the piece, simple as it may be. It’s often interesting how within a simple shape there can be relationships that are surprising.”

MARTIN BRESNICK (b. 1946)

In the age-old debates about music and language, many questions have been posed and pondered: should music be considered a language or an escape from language? How best to study its syntax and semantics? What might be gained or lost in the process of translation? While such questions have occupied composers for centuries, only a few have answered with such varied eloquence as Martin Bresnick. In the words of his former student Evan Ziporyn, Bresnick has produced “a veritable compendium of the genres and styles of [the twentieth century]... theater pieces that recall and update Kurt Weill, hard driving works for amplified instruments, groundbreaking music for extended-technique virtuosi, and delicate solo works for marginalized instruments like piccolo, mandolin, and toy piano. This range of output, and Bresnick’s fluency within it, speaks not merely to his considerable skills, but to his always-open ears and mind.”

Something of this openness must also underlie Bresnick’s extraordinary gifts as a teacher. As critic Joshua Kosman puts it: “[He] has devoted his career to two complementary and intertwined pursuits: composing music of wiry, tender-hearted eloquence, and training a younger generation to write brilliant music that sounds nothing like it.” In addition to serving as musical godfather—or perhaps patron saint—to the composer-founders of

the Bang on a Can Festival (Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and David Lang) his many years as the Coordinator of the Composition Department at Yale University and guest appearances at dozens of colleges and conservatories across the country have allowed him to count among his proteges Michael Tenzer, Christopher Theofanidis, Michael Torke... and that's just the "T" section of the alphabet!

Also suggesting a notable diversity of approaches are Bresnick's own teachers: John Chowning at Stanford (where he earned his D.M.A.), Gottfried von Einem in Vienna, and especially György Ligeti, whom he sought out with great determination and with whom he shares a skeptical respect for musical tradition. One can hear the impact of Ligeti's innovative "micropolyphony," in which tiny motivic cells circulate to create an active but indistinct musical surface, in a number of Bresnick's scores from the 1970s and 1980s, including *Wir weben, wir weben* (We weave, we weave) (1978) and *B's Garlands*, for eight cellos (1973). Ziporyn observes: "His music is often scored for massed forces of a single sound... and yet this collective energy sings of personal, individual longing. His music is generated out of cycles, repeating patterns and recurring events, yet each piece moves forward with a narrative logic. In sum, the music seems poised between impersonality and expressivity, individuality and collectivity, circularity and linearity, all generated by a masked rigor."

If Bresnick is ecumenical in his sources of musical inspiration, he is equally so in his love of literature. The piece we will hear tonight, *Songs of the Mouse People*, is his fourth score written in response to the writings of Franz Kafka. Dante's *Divine Comedy* provides the epigraph for his Third String Quartet (1992); *Tent of Miracles* (1984, for saxophone and electronics) recreates the magical realism of Brazilian author Jorge Amado; and *Pine Eyes* (1999, for clarinet, percussion, piano, and narrator) is based on "The Adventures of Pinocchio." Bresnick's concerto for two marimbas, *Grace* (2000), treats an essay by Heinrich von Kleist called "The Puppet Theatre," assigning one marionette-like marimba to play "straight man" to the other's voluble effusions.

In *My Twentieth Century* (2002), which takes its title from Tom Andrews's paean to the counterculture of the 1960s, Bresnick unites his keen understanding of poetry with an evocation of (or perhaps a nostalgia for) the progressive politics that have often glinted through even his most refined scores. This leftist spirit is occasionally overt—after all, he grew up in a union-based cooperative housing project in the Bronx—but more often subtle. *Wir weben, wir weben* alludes to Heinrich Heine, who expressed his sympathy with striking German textile workers in the 1844 poem "The Silesian Weavers." More recently, the composer organized a number of his shorter works into a cycle called *Opere della musica povera* (Works of

poor music), emphasizing each one's striving against constraints—whether musical or social. As he told Joshua Kosman, “my music is often concerned with the insulted, the oppressed, the downtrodden—the Sancho Panzas rather than the Don Quixotes, the horse of Alexander the Great rather than Alexander himself.”

In 1998, Bresnick became the first composer ever to be awarded the Charles Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters; he was elected to membership in 2006. In addition he has received Fulbright, Guggenheim, and MacDowell Colony Fellowships, the Rome Prize, the Berlin Prize, three NEA Composer Grants, prizes from Composers Inc. and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and numerous teaching awards. His many commissions include those from the Koussevitzky and Fromm Foundations, and his scores have been performed by the San Francisco and Chicago Symphonies, American Composers Orchestra, Kiel Philharmonic, City of London Chamber Orchestra, Izumi Sinfonietta Osaka, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Da Capo Chamber Players, Speculum Musicae, Bang on A Can All Stars, Zeitgeist, and the Left Coast Ensemble, among others. Bresnick's music was featured at this year's Festival of New American Music at CSU Sacramento, where he was also invited to give the keynote address.

Bresnick, *Songs of the Mouse People* (1999)
for cello and vibraphone

Like his Second String Quartet “Bucephalus” (1983-84) and his chamber works *The Bucket Rider* (1995) and *BE JUST!* (1995), Bresnick's *Songs of the Mouse People* takes its inspiration from Franz Kafka. In fact, it was shortly after playing the latter two chamber works that Steven Schick and cellist Maya Beiser approached Bresnick to commission this Kafka-inspired duo. The composer took as his text “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse People,” in which Kafka explores the inner life and unusual vocal prowess of a mouse diva who “has to put such a terrible strain on herself to force out not a song—we can't call it song—but some approximation.”

Both the strain and the overriding impulse to sing are amply evident in Bresnick's mercurial score. The coloratura cellist vaults into its highest registers, the vibraphone mallets scamper to and fro over the keys. The piece unfolds like Kafka's own prose—sometimes astonishingly compact, sometimes charmingly digressive, always turning each of its numerous new corners with a sense of wonder and surprise. Composer John Halle (at one time Bresnick's colleague at Yale) notes that Kafka's original possesses “the tragi-comic tenderness of what is nearly a children's tale.” Not coincidentally, these same qualities permeate the *Songs of the Mouse People*. As Kafka's narrator tells us: “Something of our poor brief childhood is in

it, something of lost happiness that can never be found again, but also something of active daily life, of its small gaieties, unaccountable and yet springing up and not to be obliterated.”

DAVID LANG (b. 1957)

“There is no name yet for this kind of music,” Los Angeles Times critic Mark Swed has observed of David Lang’s compositions. Indeed, neat labels remain elusive, but multiple descriptions proliferate when writers encounter his works: “relentlessly inventive,” remarks Anthony Tommasini of *The New York Times*; “insolent, puckish,” “a vivid melange of minimalism, rock, Romanticism, and performance art,” according to Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Remarkably, Lang’s oeuvre yields more than a quirky sum of these eclectic parts. Force of personality, intellect, and wit have made him one of the most consistently provocative voices in contemporary music and one of the most frequently performed. The San Francisco Contemporary Music Players devoted an entire concert to his music in 2004.

Born in Los Angeles, Lang studied at Stanford and the University of Iowa before making his way to the East Coast to earn a doctorate from the Yale School of Music. His teachers have included Jacob Druckman, Hans Werner Henze, Martin Bresnick, Roger Reynolds, and Henri Lazarof. Two years prior to his graduation in 1989, Lang had already made a name for himself as a co-founder of New York City’s first Bang on a Can festival. A brainchild of Lang and composers Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe, the first festival brimmed with youthful optimism—and a 12-hour marathon concert. In subsequent years, the festival has settled in without settling down, growing into a year-round organization renowned for the international scope and innovative programming of its permanent and touring ensembles.

“Bang on a Can” suggests Lang’s penchant for evocative titles and for percussion. Junk metal, tuned flowerpots, and all manner of percussion instruments have found their way into his scores as he attempts to rouse ears that may have become complacent. In fact, Lang’s music reminds us how wide a world of cultural references percussion music can encompass—not just the noise of the contemporary city, but also the sounds of nature, and of cultures from around the world. Equally impressive are the range of textual references Lang’s scores incorporate. Last month Trio Medieval and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra gave the world premiere of his *reason to believe*, which offers an existential meditation crafted from the internet search results attached to the phrase “and I will make it.” A more politically pointed message can be heard in *statement to the court* (2010, for chorus and

orchestra), which sets the valedictory speech of American socialist Eugene Debs after he was convicted of sedition for speaking out against World War I.

Staged works have always been an increasingly important part of Lang's creative output, and in recent years they have earned him spectacular acclaim, including a Pulitzer Prize for his oratorio *the little match girl passion* (2008). In 1989, Lang wrote a chamber opera for puppets, *Judith and Holofernes* using his own libretto. Five years later, he composed *Modern Painters* for the Santa Fe Opera, based on the life of art critic John Ruskin, and since that time he has completed or contemplated several more unusual operatic projects: *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field* (1999), written on a libretto by Mac Wellman for the Kronos Quartet, soloists, and small choir; a "comic book opera" titled *The Carbon Copy Building* (1999) in collaboration with cartoonist Ben Katchor and his Bang on a Can colleagues Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe; and the opera *Anatomy Theater* (2006), composed in collaboration with visual artist Mark Dion. In addition to producing a large quantity of incidental music for Bay Area theater productions while composer-in-residence at the American Conservatory Theater, Lang became interested in oratorio, composing *Lost Objects* in 2004 (for baroque orchestra, chorus, soloists, and DJ). All these varied experiences coalesced in the *little match girl passion*, commissioned by Carnegie Hall for Paul Hillier's vocal ensemble Theater of Voices, and using a text that Lang himself compiled from sources including Hans Christian Andersen and St. Matthew. Speaking about Lang's Pulitzer award, juror and *Washington Post* columnist Tim Page remarked: "I don't think I've ever been so moved by a new, and largely unheralded, composition as I was by David Lang's *little match girl passion*, which is unlike any music I know." According to *The New Yorker*, with this score, "Lang, once a postminimalist *enfant terrible*, has solidified his standing as an American master."

In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, Lang has garnered other honors, including fellowships to Tanglewood, Aspen, and the MacDowell Colony, the Rome Prize, Munich's BMW Music Theatre Prize, BMI and Kennedy Center/Friedheim Awards, and a Revson Fellowship from the New York Philharmonic. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim and ASCAP Foundations, the New York Foundation for the Arts, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1999, Lang's music for choreographer Susan Marshall's *The Most Dangerous Room in the House* earned a Bessie Award and was performed live by the Bang on a Can All-Stars at the Next Wave Festival of the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In 2000, his *Carbon Copy Building* won the Village Voice OBIE Award for Best New American Work. In 2010, the commercial recording of *the little match girl passion*, released on Harmonia Mundi, received the Grammy Award for Best Small Ensemble Performance.

Lang, *Illumination Rounds* (1982)

for violin and piano

In Lang's hands, even works that eschew the operatic stage can have dramatic, almost visceral impact—and occasionally a few stage directions. His violin-piano duo *Illumination Rounds* is a case in point, with an opening gesture marked “like bullets” and a kinetic energy that was part of the work's conception. The composer recalls receiving a commission from violinist Leslie Shank, in preparation for her debut recital at Weill Hall with pianist Jon Kimura Parker: “I knew they were both amazing and could play anything, and my first impulse wasn't musical but more technological—I thought how great it would be to write a really hard piece for them, so that they could show off what they could do. That I got so interested in going this direction scared me a little. I was so quick to forget what music does and sounds like, in order to concentrate just on how music could be flashy and impressive. I started looking around for other stories or experiences or instances around me that also required someone to pay so much attention to a technological situation that an artistic or moral situation might be overlooked. What I came up with was how new weapons were designed for use in the war in Vietnam.”

Lang explains: “A team of brilliant designers invented a type of bullet that would leave a phosphorescent vapor trail hovering in the air behind it—the bullets themselves would still be invisible in the darkness but the trail of where they had gone would light up behind them, gravity pulling it down in a slow, incandescent arc. They called these bullets ‘illumination rounds.’ I loved that there were two entities married together in this image—the bullet and its shadow—and that I could use them as a model for how a violin could relate to a piano.” Lang's generalization holds true—apart from one mysterious interlude, the violin typically presents focused motion with the keyboard providing chordal resonance right behind. Yet, as the frenzied action unfolds the two are intertwined: violin and piano, projectile and aura, shock and awe.

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FREDERIC RZEWSKI (b. 1938)

In the June 1998 issue of *Chamber Music*, critic Mark Swed called attention to the three-fold reputation of Frederic Rzewski, calling him “a people’s artist, an obsessive bean-counting musical theorist’s composer, and a musician’s musician” (*Chamber Music*, June 1998). These three aspects of Rzewski’s career—the revolutionary, the abstract thinker, and the performer—have brought him into contact with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players many times, beginning in the late 1980s. In addition to featuring such works as his quartet *Song and Dance* (1977), *To the Earth* (1985, for speaking percussionist and four flower pots), and *Whimwhams* (1993, United States premiere), the Players commissioned and gave the world premiere of his octet *Roses* (1989). Rzewski himself performed his Piano Sonata during the ensemble’s 1991-92 season, and he appeared as narrator in a 1989 rendition of the now-classic *Coming Together* (1972).

Born in Massachusetts, Rzewski studied at Harvard University with Walter Piston and Roger Sessions before spending two years at Princeton University, working with Milton Babbitt and taking classes in philosophy and Greek. After leaving Princeton in 1960, Rzewski spent the next decade primarily in Europe, beginning with a two-year Fulbright to Italy, where he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola and became familiar with the politically engaged composers at the forefront of the Italian avant garde—Luciano Berio and especially Luigi Nono. Although he began and ended the 1960s in Rome, Rzewski’s reputation as a pianist specializing in new music took him all over Europe, playing works by Pierre Boulez and Mauricio Kagel as well as those of his countrymen John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Christian Wolff. He gave the world premieres of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück X* (1962) and *Plus-Minus* (1964), taught at the Cologne Courses for New Music, and won a Ford Foundation grant to study with Elliott Carter in Berlin where he began composing such electronic works as *Zoologischer Garten* (1964). Rzewski brought these varied experiences back to Rome in 1966 and, together with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum, founded Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), one of the first ensembles devoted to live electronic music and group improvisation, an interactive process that he employed in his own *Work Songs* (1967-69).

Political themes began to appear in Rzewski’s work during the late 1960s, and this trend quickly gathered force. Back in New York City, struggling to make ends meet, he became concerned both with socialism and the accessibility of his scores. “It seemed to me,” he recalls, “that there was no reason why the most difficult and complex formal structures could not be expressed in a form which could be understood by a wide variety of listeners.” These two concerns led to some of his most famous pieces, including the mammoth set of piano variations known as *The People*

United Will Never Be Defeated (1975). Taking its title and theme from a song composed by Sergio Ortega and the Chilean leftist organization Quilapayún, *The People United* brings together 18th-century counterpoint and 20th-century serial techniques, unified by a driving rhythmic energy and scheme of precise numerical relationships. As Rzewski's friend and colleague Christian Wolff has observed, "The movement of the whole piece is towards a new unity—an image of popular unity—made up of related but diverse, developing elements (not to be confused with uniformity), coordinated and achieved by a blend of irresistible logic and spontaneous expression." This diversity of perspectives is matched by the broad spectrum of musical techniques that Rzewski has employed to communicate with his audiences, from the evocation of folk song in *Four North American Ballads* (1978-79), to the graphic notation of *Le Silence des Espaces Infinis* and *The Price of Oil* (1980), to the twelve-tone writing he used in his operatic treatment of Aeschylus's *The Persians* (1985).

Although much of Rzewski's reputation has been made outside the conventional channels of musical prestige, he has nonetheless held many important teaching posts. Since his return to Europe in the late 1970s, he has taught in Rome and at the Liege Conservatory and has been a Composer in Residence at Berlin's Hochschule der Künste, the Yale School of Music, The Royal Conservatory of The Hague, Mills College, U. C. San Diego, and the California Institute of the Arts, among others. His music has been commissioned and performed by artists from around the world, including Ursula Oppens, Evelyn Glennie, Musique Vivante, the Society for New Music in Basel, the Minneapolis-based Zeitgeist group, California E.A.R. Unit, and the Abel-Steinberg-Winant trio, for whom he wrote *Whangdoodles* in 1997.

Rzewski, *Bring Them Home!* (2004)

for two pianos and percussion

There is considerable diversity of text and subject matter within Rzewski's overtly political scores. His chamber oratorio *Triumph of Death* (1987) is based on Peter Weiss's retelling of the 1964 Auschwitz Trial; his political choruses *Stop the War!* and *Stop the Testing!* (1995) echo the slogans of public protest; and his famous prison pieces, *Coming Together* and *Attica* were written on the heels of the 1971 uprising at the Attica Correctional Facility. Like these works, and like his epic variations on *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, Rzewski's *Bring Them Home!* responds to current events, in this case the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with intensity and conviction. Despite its trademark exclamation point, however, the musical language of *Bring Them Home!* is subtle, at times even poignant, in its reflection of loss and longing.

As is the case in *The People United*, *Bring Them Home!* unfolds as a series of

variations on a theme. Here the unifying thread is a seventeenth-century Irish anti-war song, “Siuil A Run,” better known to American audiences with the Revolutionary or Civil-War text: “Johnny Has Gone for a Soldier.” Around this thread, Rzewski has created a rhapsodic structure of fits and starts, allowing the performers to interpolate moments of improvisation or to follow the score’s suggestions for solo spontaneity. There is plenty of opportunity for foot stomping and hand clapping, for the thudding of piano lids and the noisy growls of makeshift percussion. But there are also moments of real intimacy, particularly in the lullaby sounds of glockenspiel and in the wistful trailing off of motifs from the plaintive theme. Even the snare drum can be made to sound nostalgic, suggesting a military presence that is both far away and close at hand. In Rzewski’s words, the music “speaks of the past but turns our eyes to the present.”

JOHN CAGE (1912-1992)

“Wherever we are,” John Cage observed, “what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating.” In the process of calling our attention to the sounds around us, Cage also transformed the very actions, ethics and aesthetics of contemporary music performance.

Born in Los Angeles, Cage counted among his early mentors Henry Cowell, whose sound experiments and interest in music from around the world were to have far-reaching consequences. Cowell also encouraged Cage to make his first trips to New York City, where he would prepare himself to study with the magisterial Arnold Schoenberg back in Los Angeles. Their unlikely relationship is most often remembered by way of Schonberg’s declaration that Cage was “not a composer, but... an inventor—of genius.” In fact, Cage absorbed from the Viennese emigre certain ideas about musical structuring and the transformative power of art.

Beginning in 1937, Cage took a job as a dance accompanist, first at UCLA, and then in the interactive environment of Seattle’s Cornish School. Here he met dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham, for whom the score we will hear tonight was written. He also found support for his first forays into musical electronics (using radio), and conceived his most famous musical “invention”: the prepared piano, an outgrowth of his fascination with percussion music. In his famous essay “The Future of Music: Credo,” Cage considered percussion music “a contemporary transition from keyboard influenced music to the all-sound music of the future.” Although it required only a single performer, Cage’s music for prepared piano—most especially his famous *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1946-48—transformed the concert piano into a one-player percussion orchestra by inserting into the

piano strings metal screws, pieces of wood, rubber erasers and the like.

In the mid-forties, having moved to New York's Lower East Side, Cage underwent a number of spiritual and personal crises coinciding with his separation from his wife Xenia in 1945 and his increasing closeness to Cunningham. After considerable distress about his marriage and his sexuality and a very brief attempt at psychoanalysis, Cage discovered new sources of strength in his study of philosophy—first in Indian aesthetics, then in the Zen Buddhism of Daisetz Suzuki and the medieval mysticism of Meister Eckhart, all of which suggested to him an aesthetic of renunciation that would grow more pronounced as the composer grew older.

Crucial elements of this new aesthetic involved the celebration of silence and acceptance that the goal of music is “to quiet and sober the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.” Cage's exploration of silence culminated in his famous “Lecture on Nothing” and his infamous “silent” piece, initially titled “Silent Prayer,” but eventually published with the impersonal designation *4'33*—the combined length of its three movements at the premiere given by pianist David Tudor in 1952. Similar in many ways to the “white” paintings of Robert Rauschenberg (whom Cage had met while teaching at North Carolina's Black Mountain College in 1948), *4'33* provides an empty frame for the sounds that come from the listener's own physical environment. Creating a formidable controversy even within the avant-garde, the piece affirmed that silence was not the absence of sound but the purposeful negation of authorial intent.

Getting rid of authorial intent is easier said than done. The music that Cage wrote during his last four decades serves as an idiosyncratic and thought-provoking manual for achieving sounds that could appear independent of composerly volition. His experiments flourished in the New York apartment that served as studio and meeting place for Morton Feldman, David Tudor, Christian Wolff, and later Earle Brown, who gathered to share their ideas about improvisation, indeterminacy, and chance operations. In the early 1950s, Cage began to use the ancient Chinese “Book of Changes,” or *I Ching*, and as his fame grew through the fifties and sixties, so did the variety of his “chance operations”—seeking out imperfections in staff paper, tracing the outlines of rocks in the Zen garden *Ryoanji*, selecting sounds and symbols from the writings of Joyce or Thoreau, or using star charts.

Cage will always be remembered for expanding the horizons of what we consider musical sounds and musical actions—for granting the status of art to the rumble of a truck or the sound of one's own heartbeat and for transforming the composer's “choices” into “questions” that could be answered (though not framed) independently of volition: “...if I have the

opportunity to keep working,” he said, “I think the work will resemble more and more, not the work of a person, but something that might have happened even if the person weren’t there.” It was this mixture of individuality and self-renunciation that allowed Cage to embrace the ephemeral, to blur the boundaries between choice and chance, to divide his time between mushroom hunting and music making, and to copyright certain periods of silence.

Cage, *Credo in Us* (1942)

for four players (piano, two percussionists, and radio or phonograph)

Originally written as music for a dance choreographed by Cunningham and Jean Erdman, Cage’s *Credo in Us* is frankly satirical in spirit. Rather than professing a particular belief, it calls into question many things once held sacred: the venerable masterworks of the classical canon, the necessity of compositional control, and the standard habits of concert hall performance. Written in 1942, while other composers in the United States were producing patriotic fanfares and wartime symphonies, Cage wrote a score that pokes fun at both “US” and “Us” by juxtaposing the revered sounds of classical music with radio excerpts, tin cans, electric buzzers, gongs, tomtoms, and pieces of wood.

According to composer Charles Amirkhanian, who interviewed Cage in preparation for the San Francisco Symphony’s all-Cage concert in 1983, “phonograph recordings of the classics face off against shattering flurries from Cage’s then-current obsession, the percussion ensemble.” Even the concert piano, finding itself surrounded by sounds more commonly associated with the modern kitchen, seems to succumb, speaking its own idiosyncratic language of pitched and percussive sounds.

Like any good satire, however, *Credo in Us* is not merely comic. The performer entrusted with playing pre-recorded music is instructed to use “some classic” such as Beethoven, Dvorak, Sibelius, or Shostakovich. While the selection of music is quite free, Cage specifies precisely the points at which the recording should fade (or blast) into hearing, playing with listener expectations in a way that is comic and serious at the same time. As for the radio, the only limitation is to “avoid news programs during national or international emergencies”—perhaps a nod to its wartime genesis. The element of randomness that Cage so appreciated in his radio pieces, can also be understood as a way of making every performance “local” and “present” in time and space. Indeed Cage’s *Credo* is never the same piece twice. Given the characteristic autonomy of its various moving parts (including its autonomy from the original choreography), Cage’s score might properly be considered not a “credo” but a declaration of independence.

—*Program Notes by Beth E. Levy*

The Performers

Stephen Harrison is cellist of the Ives Quartet and a member of the faculty at Stanford University. He was a founding member of the Stanford String Quartet and is former principal cellist of the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco. He has been on the artist faculty of the Schlern International Music Festival in Italy and the Rocky Ridge Music Center in Colorado. Most recently he has served as principal cellist of the Mendocino Music Festival, coached at the San Diego Chamber Music Workshop and performed at the Telluride Chamber Music Festival. He joined the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players (SFCMP) in 1984.

Percussionist **Daniel Kennedy** is a specialist in the music of the twentieth century. He received his M. F. A. degree from the California Institute of the Arts, and his D. M. A. from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. Widely recorded, Kennedy was a founding member of the California E.A.R. Unit and the Talujon Percussion Quartet. He has been featured as a percussion soloist for the California Arts Council Touring Program and in performances at the Kennedy Center and the Los Angeles County Museum. Kennedy is currently Instructor of Percussion and Artistic Director of the Festival of New American Music at California State University, Sacramento. He is a member of Earplay and the Emyrean Ensemble, and has been a member of SFCMP since 1993.

Violinist **Roy Malan** was educated in London with Yehudi Menuhin, and at Juilliard and the Curtis Institute where he was a student of Ivan Galamian and Efrem Zimbalist. Malan is concertmaster and solo violinist for the San Francisco Ballet. He is also the founding director of the Telluride Chamber Music Festival in Colorado and serves on the faculty of the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has been a member of SFCMP since 1976.

An active proponent of new music, pianist **Julie Steinberg** has given critically acclaimed performances of music by John Cage, Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, Olivier Messiaen, Frederic Rzewski, John Zorn, and many others. Joined by violinist David Abel and percussionist William Winant, she was a founding member of the Abel-Steinberg-Winant Trio, a virtuoso ensemble specializing in new music from the Americas and Pacific Rim. Since 1980, she has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony in the world premiere of John Adams's *Grand Pianola Music*, as a soloist in Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa*, and in Michael Tilson Thomas's Mavericks concerts. She has appeared at New Music America, the Ravinia Festival, Japan Interlink, and Lincoln Center Outdoors. Other performances include *Le Sacre du printemps* with the Paul Taylor Dance Company in San Francisco, Seattle, and Paris, and masterclasses with Jean-Pierre Rampal and Mstislav Rostropovich. She holds a D. M. A. from Stanford University and taught for years at Mills College and U. C. Berkeley. She has been a member of SFCMP since 1989.