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Eighth Blackbird: "strange imaginary animals - part I"

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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Thursday, October 12, 2006 • 7:30 pm

Camp Concert Hall
Booker Hall of Music

Modlin Center for the Arts presents

eighth blackbird

University of Richmond Ensemble-in-Residence

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

“strange imaginary animals—part I”

Sponsored in part by the Department of Music

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

*The Modlin Center thanks Style Weekly and Richmond.com
for media sponsorship of the 2006-2007 season.*

Tonight's Program

"strange imaginary animals—part I"

Zaka (2003)

Jennifer Higdon
(b. 1962)

A Meet The Composer *Commissioning Music/USA* commission

Demons (1994)

Bret Dean
(b. 1961)

*like dreams, statistics are a form of
wish fulfillment* (2005)

Benjamin Broening
(b. 1967)

—Intermission—

Rush and Lullaby (2005)

Stephen Vitiello
(b. 1964)

Rhiannon's Blackbirds (2006, world premiere)

Joseph Schwantner
(b. 1943)

Matthew Duvall endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Music Instruments.

Funds for *Rhiannon's Blackbirds* have been provided by
Chamber Music America's Commissioning Program, supported by
The National Endowment for the Arts, and the
Chamber Music America Endowment Fund.

eighth blackbird is the recipient of the
2004 NEA/CMA Special Commissioning Award,
made possible by a generous gift from an anonymous donor with matching
funds from the National Endowment for the Arts.



Please silence cell phones, digital watches and paging devices
before the performance. The use of any recording device, either
audio or video, and the taking of photographs, either with or
without flash, are strictly prohibited.

About the Artists



eighth blackbird

Tim Munro, *flutes*

Matt Albert, *violin & viola*

Matthew Duvall, *percussion*

Michael J. Maccaferri, *clarinets*

Nicholas Photinos, *cello*

Lisa Kaplan, *piano*

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

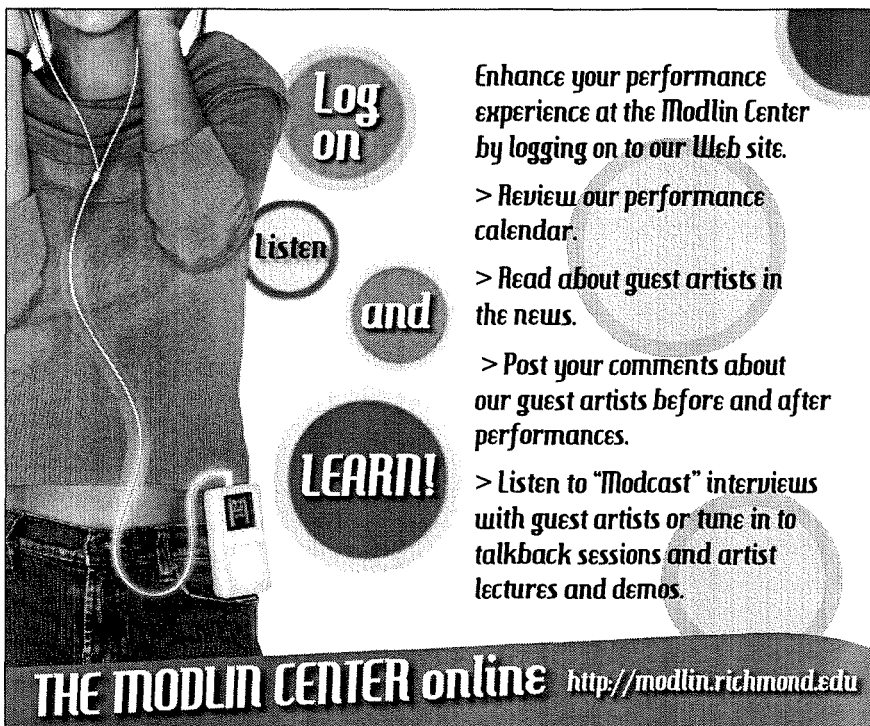
Highlights of eighth blackbird’s 2006-07 season include a return to the Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, two concerts at The Kitchen in New York City, and tours through New York, California, Colorado and Texas. During the ensemble’s tenth anniversary in the 2005-2006 season, the group toured Osvaldo Golijov’s song-cycle *Ayre* with soprano Dawn Upshaw and a special collaboration with the Blair Thomas & Co. puppet theater and soprano Lucy Shelton, performing a fully memorized and staged cabaret-opera version of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*.

In previous seasons the sextet has appeared in South Korea, Mexico, Canada, Amsterdam and throughout North America, including performances at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum, the

Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress, the Cleveland Museum of Art and the La Jolla Chamber Music Society, and has performed as soloist with the Utah Symphony and the American Composers Orchestra. During the summer the group has appeared several times at the Great Lakes Music Festival, Caramoor International Music Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and Cincinnati's Music X, and has also appeared at the Tanglewood Music Center and the Bravo! Vail Valley Music Festival.

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

The ensemble is enjoying acclaim for its three CDs released to date on Cedille Records. The first, *thirteen ways*, featuring works by Perle, Schober, Joan Tower and Thomas Albert, was selected as a Top 10 CD of 2003 by *Billboard* magazine. *beginnings*, featuring Kellogg's *Divinum Mysterium* and George Crumb's *Vox Balaenae*, was summed up by *The New York Times*: "The



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performances have all the sparkle, energy and precision of the earlier outings... It is their superb musicality and interpretive vigor that bring these pieces to life." eighth blackbird's third disc for Cedille, *fred*, with three works of Rzewski, was released in June 2005. *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported: "The music covers all kinds of moods and approaches, from dreamy surrealism to caffeinated unison melodies, and the members of eighth blackbird deliver it all with their trademark panache." A fourth CD, titled *strange, imaginary animals*, is scheduled for release on Cedille Records in late 2006. 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 their residencies, has taught master classes and conducted outreach activities throughout the country, including the Aspen Music School System (grades K-12), the La Jolla Chamber Music Series, the Candlelight Concert Series and Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa.

The members of eighth blackbird hold degrees in music performance from Oberlin Conservatory, 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.

Notes on the Program

Jennifer Higdon: *Zaka* (2003)

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962) maintains a full schedule of commissions, writing on average 6-12 works a year, while enjoying more than 100 performances of her works each year. Her list^{of} of commissioners is extensive and includes such groups and individuals as the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Atlanta Symphony, the National Symphony, pianist Gary Graffman, the Tokyo String Quartet, the Ying Quartet and eighth blackbird. She has been honored with awards and grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Academy of Arts & Letters, the Pew Fellowship in the Arts, Meet-the-Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts and ASCAP. She is currently composer-in-residence with the Philadelphia Singers. In the summer of 2003, she was the first woman to be named a featured composer at the Tanglewood Contemporary Music Festival. Her works have been recorded on over two dozen CDs. In spring 2003, Telarc released *blue cathedral* with the Atlanta Symphony and conductor Robert Spano, on a disc that made the Classical Billboard charts. Telarc has also recently released *Higdon: Concerto for Orchestra/City Scope*, which was nominated for four Grammy Awards. She holds degrees from Bowling Green State University, University of Pennsylvania and The Curtis Institute of Music, where she is currently on the composition faculty. About *Zaka*, the composer writes:

As the dictionary might say: **Zaka**, pronounced "za'- ka"...verb: To do the following almost simultaneously and with great speed: zap, sock, race, turn, drop, sprint. See also **eighth blackbird**.

Zaka was commissioned as part of the national series of works from Meet the Composer Commissioning Music/USA, which is made possible by generous support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Helen F. Whitaker Fund, the Target Foundation, and through the fiscal sponsorship of Concert Artists Guild.
—Jennifer Higdon

Brett Dean: *Demons* (1994)

Australian composer and violist Brett Dean (b. 1961) studied in Brisbane before moving to Germany in 1984 where he was a permanent member of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra for 15 years. Dean returned to Australia in 2000 to concentrate on his growing compositional activities. One of the most internationally performed composers of his generation, his music is played by orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Munich Philharmonic and BBC Symphony.

Much of Dean's work draws from literary, political or visual stimuli, including a number of compositions inspired by paintings of his partner Heather Betts. *Carlo* for strings, sampler and tape was inspired by the music (and murderous tendencies) of Carlo Gesualdo; Dean brings ancient Rome to life in the orchestral work *Amphitheatre*; and his *Pastoral Symphony* (2001) is a meditation on our natural environment and the threats to its existence. His current work includes

a violin concerto for Frank Peter Zimmermann, a piece for the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, and an opera, *Bliss*, based on Peter Carey's novel.

Demons was written for the letter 'D' volume of flutist Sharon Bezaly's *From A-Z* CD project on BIS Records, an alphabetical summary of solo flute music from around the world.

Dean wanted to investigate the aggressive, forceful side to the flute, and he throws us into his instrumental drama straight away with a repeatedly hammered high note, to be played in a "manic, highly agitated manner." A plethora of extended techniques "dirty" the flute sound: multiphonics (multiple notes played simultaneously), key-slaps, singing while playing, out of tune notes, slides and flutter-tonguing.

This impetuous opening music dominates the work, reappearing four times. There are contrasting episodes: a slow, dreamy passage; a club-footed, earthy, irregular dance; and a "lightly flowing, buoyant" scherzo-like passage, inspired by Mendelssohn's music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After the explosive main material's last, desperate gasp, the music gradually loses steam. The mysterious end to the work calls for the flute player to sing while playing, producing sounds reminiscent of a distant, distorted hymn tune.

—Timothy Munro

Benjamin Broening: *like dreams, statistics are a form of wish fulfillment* (2005)

Benjamin Broening (b. 1967) is a composer of acoustic and electroacoustic music. His music has been performed and broadcast across the United States and in Europe and Asia. His numerous commissions include works for the Charlotte Symphony, the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, the Band and Orchestral Division of Yamaha Corporation of America, the Arts Now Series at North Carolina State University, the James River Singer as well as solo and chamber works. A recipient of the Presser Music Award, Broening has also received other recognition including a teaching award from the University of Richmond and a Fulbright to lecture in Estonia. His music has been recorded on the Centaur, Equilibrium, MIT Press and SEAMUS labels. Broening is founder and artistic director of Third Practice, an annual festival of electroacoustic music at the University of Richmond, where he is Associate Professor of Music. He holds degrees from the University of Michigan, Cambridge University, Yale University, and Wesleyan University. About this piece, Broening writes:

I've always been taken with Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. It's beautiful, very striking and in a strange way, memorable (having heard it you are not likely to forget the opening flute solo). But when I try and go back and remember the details, the exact order of things gets a bit fuzzy, and I find myself half-remembering or putting parts of different passages together out of order. My experience of the piece while I am listening is similar—I am carried along by the seeming inevitability of the music, despite its discontinuities, only to suddenly realize I am not sure how I got where I am. I've known it for a long time and was initially attracted to the dream-like mystery of the piece. Later I was drawn to its

luxurious sound world and later still to the musical “logic” of the piece. Like dreams, statistics are a form of wish fulfillment that takes those things that I liked so much from the Debussy and filters them through my own musical preoccupations. The result is a bit like the dream music I pilfered—half remembered, powerful, but ephemeral, and possessed of an internal logic whose evanescence is apparent only in retrospect.

—Benjamin Broening

Stephen Vitiello: *Rush and Lullaby* (2005)

Stephen Vitiello (b. 1964) is a sound and media artist, originally from New York, now based in Richmond. CD releases include *Scratchy Monsters*, *Laughing Ghosts* (New Albion Records), *Buffalo Bass Delay* (Hallwalls) and *Bright and Dusty Things* (New Albion Records). Vitiello's sound installations have been presented in solo exhibitions at Galerie Almine Rech, Paris and The Project, N.Y. Group exhibitions include the 2002 Whitney Biennial, *Ce qui arrive*, curated by Paul Virilio at the Cartier Foundation, Paris and *Yanomami: Spirit of the Forest*, also at Cartier. His ongoing collaborative projects include work with Pauline Oliveros, Scanner and a forthcoming installation with painter Julie Mehretu for the Sydney Biennale. Stephen Vitiello is on the faculty of Kinetic Imaging at Virginia Commonwealth University and is also the archivist for The Kitchen, N.Y.C. About *Rush and Lullaby*, he writes:

Four members of eighth blackbird were recorded individually, provided not so much with a “score” but a list of tasks to perform—a very high note, a very low note, percussive sounds, the sound of an unspecified animal. These samples were then collected and treated as raw material for the composition. By layering tracks, collisions of time, pitch and sensitivity were discovered and singled out, sometimes manipulated in the computer but not always. I was interested, among other things, in how the players might be connected (psychically or otherwise) even when not playing together—how each one would deal with time and choice of notes without knowing what the others had done.

Rush and Lullaby was commissioned by Third Practice Festival of Electroacoustic Music at the University of Richmond.

—Stephen Vitiello

Joseph Schwantner: *Rhiannon's Blackbirds* (2006)

Joseph Schwantner (b. Chicago, 1943) received his musical and academic training at the Chicago Conservatory and Northwestern University. Previously he served on the Yale, Eastman and Juilliard faculties and was composer-in-residence with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra as part of the Meet the Composer/Orchestra Residencies Program. Worldwide performances of Schwantner's music have been performed by the London Symphony, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and BBC Philharmonic, and by such artists as Leonard Slatkin, Christoph von Dohnanyi, Gunther Herbig, Yoel Levi, Evelyn Glennie, Emanuel Ax, Dawn

Upshaw, Sharon Isbin and Lucy Shelton. His awards include the Pulitzer Prize, Guggenheim, Rockefeller, Friedheim, Fromm, Dupont, National Endowment for the Arts Awards, and the first recipient of the Charles Ives Scholarship along several Grammy Award nominations. Schwantner's commissions include those from the orchestras in New York, Boston, Saint Louis, Dallas, San Diego, St. Paul, and National Symphony, and organizations such as Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, International Horn Society, Chamber Music America, Fromm and Naumburg Foundations and AT&T. Schwantner's music is published by Schott-Helicon Music Corporation and recorded on several labels including, BMG/RCA Red Seal, EMI/Virgin Records, Innova Records, Koch International Classics, New World Records and Sony Classical CD. Schwantner, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, currently serves on its Board of Directors. About *Rhiannon's Blackbirds*, the composer writes:

Rhiannon's Blackbirds (moto perpetuo) was completed in April 2006. I first worked with the members of eighth blackbird while on the Yale faculty during several of their residencies at Yale's Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. I was immediately impressed with the breadth and depth of their commitment to an eclectic and challenging repertoire, performed with great skill, imagination and intensity. Later I happily accepted their invitation to write a work for them. Chamber Music America's Commissioning Program, supported by The National Endowment for the Arts and the Chamber Music American Endowment Fund, has provided funds for this commission.

The title refers to Rhiannon (Great Queen), the Welsh mythological Goddess of fertility and protector of the earth along with her three magical blackbirds whose bewitching songs sung at twilight could "awaken the dead and lull the living to sleep." With supernatural powers that symbolize the flight of spirits to the Otherworld, these birds are prominent totem animals important to the Celtic Druid tradition. Scored for flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, violin/viola, cello, piano and percussion, the work is marked "relentlessly, with rhythmic intensity and exuberance."

As a moto perpetuo, the music inhabits an evolving world of color, sonority and line, linked to an unrelenting web of rapid articulations that help to advance the work's momentum. The use of palindrome is employed as a formal device within the large-scale arch like design where the ordering of extended sections frequently reverse at their midpoint. Throughout, a series of repetitive phrases gradually unfold, sometimes transparent other times dense, framed by shifting meters where dynamics, register, harmony and texture fluidly evolve and develop.

—Joseph Schwantner