New York Festival of Song

Jacque Brel & Charles Trénet: Fire and Fantasy

Thursday, February 21, 2013, 8PM
Joseph & Alma Gildenhorn Recital Hall
Jacques Brel & Charles Trénet: Fire and Fantasy

Steven Blier, Artistic Director
Michael Barrett, Associate Artistic Director

Marie Lenormand, mezzo-soprano
Philippe Pierce, tenor
Bill Schimmel, accordion
Greg Utzig, guitar
Steven Blier, piano and host

Two of the 20th century’s greatest balladeers, the Belgian-born Jacques Brel and Frenchman Charles Trénet are celebrated with an authentically French flair under the graceful touch of tenor Philippe Pierce, making his NYFOS debut, and mezzo-soprano Marie Lenormand, whom French music magazine *Diapason* praised as a “distinguished and emotive musician, whose every phrase is a model of simplicity and elegance.” This tour-de-force includes some of Brel and Trénet’s most famous pieces — Brel’s “Ne me quitte pas” and “Madeleine,” and Trénet’s “Que reste-t-il de nos amours” and “La mer” — along with lesser-known treasures. Joining pianist Steven Blier are virtuoso accordionist Bill Schimmel and Broadway veteran Greg Utzig on guitar.

Approximately 90 minutes, with no intermission.

The New York Festival of Song most recently appeared at the Center in *Manning the Canon* (2011-2012).
Steven Blier is the Artistic Director of the New York Festival of Song (NYFOS), which he co-founded in 1988 with Michael Barrett. Since the Festival’s inception, he has programmed, performed, translated and annotated more than 130 vocal recitals with repertoire spanning the entire range of American song, art song from Schubert to Szymanowski, and popular song from early vaudeville to Lennon-McCartney. NYFOS has also made in-depth explorations of music from Spain, Latin America, Scandinavia and Russia. New York Magazine gave NYFOS an award for Best Classical Programming, while Opera News proclaimed Blier “the coolest dude in town.” Blier enjoys an eminent career as an accompanist and vocal coach. His recital partners have included Renée Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli, Samuel Ramey, Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Susan Graham, Jesse Norman and José van Dam, in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall to La Scala. He is also on the faculty of The Juilliard School and has been active in encouraging young recitalists at summer programs, including the Wolf Trap Opera Company, Santa Fe Opera and the San Francisco Opera Center. Many of his former students, including Stephanie Blythe, Joseph Kaiser, Sasha Cooke, Paul Appleby, Dina Kuznetsova and Kate Lindsey, have gone on to be valued recital colleagues and sought-after stars on the opera and concert stage. In keeping the traditions of American music alive, he has brought back to the stage many of the rarely heard songs of George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Kurt Weill and Cole Porter. He has also played ragtime, blues and stride piano evenings with John Musto. A champion of American art song, he has premiered works of John Corigliano, Paul Moravec, Ned Rorem, William Bolcom, John Musto, Richard Danielpour, Tobias Picker, Robert Beaser, Lowell Liebermann, Harold Meltzer and Lee Hoiby, many of which were commissioned by NYFOS. Blier’s extensive discography includes the premiere recording of Leonard Bernstein’s Arias and Barcarolles (Koch International), which won a Grammy Award. His most recent releases are Spanish Love Songs (Bridge Records), recorded live at the Caramoor International Music Festival with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Joseph Kaiser and Michael Barrett; the world premiere recording of Bastianello (John Musto) and Lucrezia (William Bolcom), a double bill of one-act comic operas set to librettos by Mark Campbell; and his latest recording, Quiet Please, an album of jazz standards with vocalist Darius de Haas. Blier recently joined the artistic team at New York City Opera, where he is a consultant on casting. His writings on opera have been featured in Opera News and the Yale Review. A native New Yorker, he received a Bachelor’s Degree with Honors in English Literature at Yale University, where he studied piano with Alexander Farkas. He completed his musical studies in New York with Martin Isely and Paul Jacobs.

Masterful French mezzo-soprano Marie Lenormand has been praised for her performances on both the operatic and concert stage. This season she begins as Le Prince in Cendrillon with Grand Théatre Grande Salle and Grand Théatre Massenet, followed by Stephano in Roméo et Juliette with Opera de Tours and later Opera D’Avignon, the title role in La Périchole with New York City Opera, and Berlioz’s Les Huit Siècles de Faust with the Dresden Philharmonic. Her 2011-2012 season began with the Fox in The Canning Little Vixen with New York Philharmonic, and performances of Così fan tutte; first as Dorabella for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and then as Despina with New York City Opera. Future seasons include the White Cat and Squirrel in L’enfant with the Saito Kinen Festival in Japan and Meg in Falstaff with Opera de Massy. In the 2010-2011 season, she was heard as Cherubino with Houston Grand Opera and L’Opéra de Rouen, and Fragoletto in Offenbach’s Les Brigands at the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux and at l’Opéra du Luxembourg, among others. After a dazzling turn in the title role in Ambroise Thomas’ Mignon at l’Opéra comique de Paris, her performance was met with popular and critical accolades. In recognition of her portrayal, the French national press awarded her the honor of “2010 Musical Revelation." She was the first vocal artist in six years to win the award after a succession of renowned conductors and a string quartet. She has sung Dorabella with l’Opéra de Rouen, Hermina in Britten’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream at Houston Grand Opera and Annio in Mozart’s Clemenza di Tito at l’Opéra d’Avignon. She appeared in concert with François-Xavier Roth and Les Siecles in Mozart’s Requiem in Aix en Provence, France, and with the Houston baroque ensemble Ars Lyrica. For her San Francisco Opera debut, she reprised the role of The Fox, a role she created in worldwide premiere of The Little Prince by Rachel Portman for Houston Grand Opera in 2003. She then sang in the opening night gala of Berkshire Opera and spent the rest of the summer at the Saito-Kinen Festival in Japan singing Lapak and covering the Fox, in a new production of The Canning Little Vixen by Laurent Pelly, conducted by Seiji Ozawa. She debuted with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by François-Xavier Roth in Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 at the Florida International Festival. She has performed Siegrune in Die Walküre at the Châtelet under Christoph Eschenbach, and sang Rosina in Il barbiere di Siviglia and Dorabella in Così fan tutte in Stuttgart. A distinguished oratorio singer, she was the alto soloist in Haydn’s Lord Nelson Mass under Robert Shaw, as well as in Elijah with a cast headed by Sherrill Milnes. She has appeared with NYFOS in A Multitude of Sins (2004), The Banquet Years (2006) and We Open in Paris (2007).
Philippe Pierce is earning critical acclaim as an outstanding singing actor in the character tenor repertoire. In the current season and beyond, performances include Beppe in I Pagliacci with Austin Lyric Opera, and Basilio in Le nozze di Figaro with Dayton Opera. Recent engagements have included Beppe in I Pagliacci with Michigan Opera Theatre and Opera Cleveland; Gerard/Narrator in Philip Glass's Les Enfants Terribles with North Carolina Opera; Gastone in La Traviata with Nashville Opera and Dayton Opera; Jaquinino in Falstaff with Dayton Opera; and Spolella in Tosca and Remendado in Carmen with Opera Western Reserve. A favorite with Opera Cleveland, he has performed there as Giuseppe in La Traviata, Belmonte (cover) in Die Entführung aus dem Serail, Frederic in The Pirates of Penzance, Don Basilio and Don Curzio in Le nozze di Figaro, Normanno in Lucia di Lammermoor, Henriek in A Little Night Music and Marc in the world-premiere production of Florida. As a young artist with the Central City Opera he has appeared as Gherardo in Gianni Schicchi, Lacouf in Les Maîtres de Tirrania, the Second Bottle in Weill's Seven Deadly Sins, Mercury in Orpheus in the Underworld and Goro (cover) in Madama Butterfly. In addition, he performed Emma and the tenor soloist in Handel's Messiah with the Paris Choral Society, marking his European debut as well as Prunier in La Rondine in Arzno (Italy). He is a frequent performer in New England with recent appearances as Frantz, Spalanzzani and Nathanael in The Tales of Hoffmann with Longwood Opera; Marco in The Gondoliers with The Harvard-Radcliffe Gilbert and Sullivan Players; Laurie in The New England premiere of Mark Adamo’s Little Women; the Station Master in Opera Boston’s La Vie Parisienne; the Sailor Dido and Aeneas with Melopoeia Musica; and Le Prince Charmant in Les Beaux Arts with Opera Tunicy; Monsieur Triquet in Eugene O’Neill at the Lowell House Opera, where he returned in performances as Le Petit Volland, La Théâtre and La Rainette in L’enfant et les sortilèges. He has appeared with the New England Conservatory in productions of Trouble in Tahiti (Trio), The Magic Flute (Second Priest) and Candide (Spanish Don), L’Incoronazione di Poppea (Lucano) and Barber’s A Hand of Bridge (Bill). With Brown University, he appeared as Brother Hannibal Jackson in Kurt Weill’s Happy End, and took part in two world premieres — Artistic License and Emma. He went on to perform the latter at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC. Pierce was born in France, and now resides in New York City. He received his BA in theater arts from Brown University. While at Brown, he was the recipient of the Weston Fine Arts Award. In 2009, he was awarded Opera Cleveland’s “Belle O. Morse Young Artist Award” for Exceptional Promise and Outstanding Vocal Performance. This is Pierce’s debut with NYFOS.

Bill Schimmel is a virtuoso accordionist, author, philosopher and composer. He is one of the principal architects in the tango revival in America, the resurgence of the accordion and the philosophy of Musical Reality (composition with pre-existing music). He received his diploma from the Neupauer Conservatory of Music and his BM, MS and DMA degrees from The Juilliard School. He has taught at The Juilliard School, Brooklyn College CUNY, Upsala College, New School University, Neupauer Conservatory (dean) and has lectured at Princeton, Columbia, Brandeis, University of Missouri, Duke University, Manhattan School of Music, the Graduate Center CUNY, Santa Clara University, The Janacek Conservatory in Ostrava, Czech Republic and at Microsoft. Regarded as the world’s greatest accordionist by NPR, he has performed with virtually every major symphony orchestra in America (and the Kirov). Pop star colleagues range from Sting to Tom Waits, who has made the legendary statement: “Bill Schimmel doesn’t play the accordion, he is the accordion.” He is creator of the Tango Project, which, in addition to his hit recordings with them, has appeared with Al Pacino in the film Scent of a Woman, for which Pacino won an Oscar. The Tango Project also won the Stereo Review Album of the Year Award, received a Grammy nomination and rose to number one on the Billboard Classical Charts. He is an authority on the music of Kurt Weill, having recorded all of Weill’s music that employs the accordion. He is a prolific composer with many commissions from concert music to Broadway and off-Broadway. He has written countless accordion pieces for himself and others including a test piece for the Coupe Mondiale, the accordion’s most prestigious world competition. His Portrait No 1 for orchestra was conducted by the late Leopold Stokowski. His theatre works in collaboration with Micki Goodman have made accordion history; He now heads the Neupauer Conservatory Order of the Shield program, a private studies program for gifted students on a graduate and postgraduate level. He conducts a successful three-day masterclass and concert series sponsored by the American Accordionists’ Association, The Confederations International of Accordionists has awarded Dr. Schimmel the distinguished merit award for the AAA Master Class and Concert Series as well as his contribution to the international accordion scene. He received the American Accordionists’ Association Distinguished Service Award for Fifty Years of Accordion activity and his work as Lecturer in Residence. He is listed in Who’s Who in America and Great Minds of the 21st Century. Keyboard magazine has sited him as “best accordionist” and the figure who has done the most to promote the accordion in mainstream art forms including classical, jazz, rock and roll, world music and avant-garde. He is an authority on the accordion and its place in the arts. He is an authority on the accordion and its place in the arts. He is a frequent guest on morning radio and television shows including Good Morning America, Martha Stewart, The Today Show, the Late Show with David Letterman, Good Morning America and the Dick Cavett Show. His large discography includes recordings of Desa Rose, Fiddler on the Roof, Hair, Oklahoma, Ragtime, Spittfire Grill, Side Show, Steel Pier, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and Shenandoah. He has played with the Kirov Ballet Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, the American Composer’s Orchestra, the American Symphony Orchestra and the St. Luke’s Chamber Orchestra. His television credits include appearances on Martha Stewart, Regis and Kelly, the Today Show, the Late Show with David Letterman, Good Morning America and the Dick Cavett Show. His large discography includes recordings of Desa Rose, Fiddler on the Roof, Hair, Oklahoma, Ragtime, Spittfire Grill, Side Show, Steel Pier and Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. He has appeared with NYFOS in A Night in Paris (1997), Harry, Hoagy and Harold (2000 & 2008) and Lust Tribes of Vaudenville (2003 & 2005).
Associate Artistic Director **Michael Barrett** started NYFOS in 1988 with his friend and colleague Steven Blier. Barrett was Chief Executive and General Director of the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts from 2003-2012, and will continue at Caramoor as Artistic Advisor for the coming season. In 1992, he co-founded the Moab Music Festival with his wife, violist Leslie Tomkins. From 1994 to 1997, he was the Director of the Tisch Center for the Arts at the 92nd Street Y in New York. A protégé of Leonard Bernstein, Barrett began his long association with the renowned conductor and composer as a student in 1982. He is currently the Artistic Advisor for the estate of Leonard Bernstein. Barrett has been a guest conductor with the Orchestra of St. Luke’s, the New York Philharmonic, the London Symphony, the Israel Philharmonic and the Orchestre National de France, among others. He also has served variously as conductor, producer, and music director of numerous special projects, including dozens of world premieres by Bernstein, Musto, Bolcom, Rorem, and D’Rivera. Barrett’s discography includes: *Spanish Love Songs*, recorded live at Caramoor with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, Steven Blier and Joseph Kaiser; *Live from the Moab Music Festival*, the Grammy-nominated *Evidence of Things Not Seen* (New World Records); Aaron Kernis: *100 Greatest Dance Hits* (New Albion); *On the Town* (Deutsche Grammophon); *Kaballah* (Koch Classics) by Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie; Schumann Lieder with Lorraine Hunt and Kurt Ollman (Koch); and *Arias and Barcarolles* (Koch) by Leonard Bernstein (Grammy Award).

**Elizabeth Ellis Hurwitt** joined NYFOS as Executive Director in November of 2000 after four seasons as Executive Director of the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival. Under her directorship, NYFOS took on its first fully professional administrative staff and offices; conducted its first strategic plan; established professional training residencies with The Juilliard School, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, and Glimmerglass Opera; produced *Spanish Love Songs*, a CD featuring Joseph Kaiser with the late Lorraine Hunt Lieberson and NYFOS Artistic Directors, Steven Blier and Michael Barrett; won a $100,000 grant from The New York State Music Fund to commission, premiere and record *Bastianello/Lucrèzia*, a double-bill of comic operas by Bolcom, Musto & Campbell; and launched NYFOS’s first nationally syndicated radio series on WFMT Radio.