ABOUT THE ARTIST

Garth has been recognized by the Maryland State Arts Council with two Individual Artist Awards, most recently in 2010 for her performance of John Cage’s Sonatas and Interludes.

www.elizagarth.com

PROGRAM NOTES

From Six Views of the “Sonatas and Interludes”

The Sonatas and Interludes by John Cage, 1912-1992, has the reputation of being a masterpiece, and this is well deserved. A word like “masterpiece” creates certain expectations, however: you expect grandeur, big effects that sweep you off your feet; you expect the exposition, development, and exploration of grand themes; you expect an epic, a monumental journey. You think, perhaps, of other keyboard masterworks: Bach’s Goldberg variations, Beethoven’s Diabelli variations, Ives’ Concord Sonata.

Cage’s masterpiece is quite different from this: it is a big piece with a quiet voice. The very instrument he writes for, the prepared piano, undermines the grand statement. This is an instrument that operates entirely by muting: by attaching objects to the strings of the piano, Cage has altered their sounds in various ways. The results are different from note to note — some resonant, some dry, some metallic, some wooden — but they are always, always quieter than before. The prepared piano is an instrument that is personal and intimate; the music written for it must by necessity be music for a small space, music between two people. Even when the sound is “loud” it is the sort of loudness that is more a function of intensity than of amplitude.

Cage, as a composer for this instrument of lyrical percussion, faced the problem of how to make a large work in such a modest medium. The instrument would seem to demand smaller structures; indeed, before the mid-1940s most of Cage’s music for prepared piano consisted of brief dance movements . . . .

With the Sonatas and Interludes Cage solved the problem. Instead of working by force, he quietly and patiently built his large piece out of short structures. By constructing the work on the timeless foundation of Hindu aesthetics, he could make each piece perfect and unhurried; the focus could be on the subtle modulations of his voice. At its premiere some criticized the work for its monotonous, but the lack of contrast is its strength. His earlier dramatic works speak loudly to grab our attention; this one instead speaks quietly to draw us in. It is as if we are sitting in Cage’s loft, straw mats on the floor, listening to him explore this softly-colored world . . . .

Cage was fond of telling a story from Irish legend, in which a prince and a magical horse follow the path of a magic ball that rolls in front of them. The rolling ball takes them from one adventure to another, ultimately taking them to the object of their quest. These large ongoing pieces of Cage’s have this same quality: start here and follow the rolling ball. While composing them, he knows exactly what he’s doing — he’s following his system — but he has no idea where he’s going.

Writing a large piece that is a journey creates the effect of an epic without being ponderous or monolithic. The Sonatas and Interludes are lacking that feeling of the self-consciously monumental statement that accompanies so many grand works. Instead its epic nature affects you gradually over time as you follow the continuity of events, from point to point in the journey, until you emerge from the other side — transformed.

And it is not just the listener who is transformed. By the time he had finished writing these twenty short pieces, John Cage was not the same composer; he had changed. As he emerged from the other side of this adventure, his technical stance (a tendency towards quietness, the individual sound and silence, the subtle modulations of phrase) and his spiritual stance (a tendency towards quietness, silence, poverty) were permanently altered. The Sonatas and Interludes is not just a string of pieces, it is a passage in Cage’s life.

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Dear Audience,

We are thrilled to be here at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Our journey with The Better Half began more than two years ago when we decided to co-create a dance-theater production, bringing together our shared interest in complex narratives, inventive adaptation, popular appeal, impulsive play and presence in real-time real-space with the audience. We had been working for years on these approaches to performance in our respective fields of dance and theater and were excited to see what would happen when we brought our very different vocabularies into the rehearsal studio.

The Better Half is close to our hearts and we are grateful to our amazing collaborators: our performers, designers, production personnel and producing partners. We are also honored to receive awards, commissions and residencies from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, the New England Foundation for the Arts National Dance Project, the National Performance Network Creation Fund and many others.

And now we are grateful and honored that you are here! Thank you for your presence tonight.  

—Julia Rhoads and Leslie Buxbaum Danzig
Leslie Buxbaum Danzig (Co-creator/Co-director) is delighted to return to the Clancey Smith Performing Arts Center, where she has been previously with 500 Clown and Blair Thomas & Company. She is co-founder of the Chicago-based physical theater company 500 Clown, where she co-created and directed 500 Clown Macbeth, Frankenstein, Elephant Deal and Christmas. 500 Clown has played in Chicago at venues including Steppenwolf and Lookingglass and tours regularly throughout the U.S. Other credits include directing Redmoon’s Hustleback at New Victory Theater (NYC) and Float (About Face Theater); touring nationally and internationally as an actor with NYC’s Elevator Repair Service; assisting director Julie Taymor; and appearing at Maska in The Sogull in Cheltenham, Lake Lucille in New York (director Brian Mettes). Danzig received her BA from Brown University and PhD in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, and trained in physical theater and clown with Jacques Lecocq and Philippe Gaulier. For the past five years, she has taught at the University of Chicago, and is currently at the university as Program Curator for the Richard and Mary L. Gray Center for Arts and Inquiry. Upcoming projects include co-directing The Elephant and the Whale, an original Redmoon production commissioned by Chicago Children’s Theater.

Julia Rhoads (Co-creator/Co-director/Mrs. Manningham) is choreographer and founding Artistic Director of Lucky Plush Productions, and has created more than 25 original works with the company. Her independent work has been commissioned by Alaska Dance Theater, Mordine and Company Dance Theater, and twice for River North Chicago Dance Company, and she has choreographed for theater companies including Tony Award-winning Lookingglass Theatre, Redmoon Theater, Walkabout Theater, Hyperdolic and M5, among others. Rhoads has received a Cliff Dwellers Foundation Award for Choreography, two Illinois Arts Council Fellowships for Choreography, a Jacob K. Javits Fellowship, a Chicago Dance Artists Foundation Award, and a Fellowship from the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography, and her collaborative work with Lucky Plush has been awarded a National Dance Project Production Award and a National Performance Network Creation Fund Award. In 2010, she was named one of Dance Magazine’s “25 to Watch” and has been included in NewCity’s feature “The Players: The 50 people who really perform for Chicago” in 2010 and 2012. Rhoads is formerly a company member of the San Francisco Ballet and collaborating ensemble member of XSIGHT! Performance Group. She earned a BA in history from Northwestern University and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and is currently the Theater and Performance Studies Dance Advisor at University of Chicago, and part-time faculty in the theater department at Columbia College Chicago.

Francisco Ávila (Nancy) has worked as a dancer in such projects as: Celine Dion’s A New Day, Newsin, Batman and Robin, Michael Jackson’s Sisterella, Fame L.A. (the TV series), The World Billboard Music Awards, and corporate industrials for Adidas, Canon, Nike, Reebok, Asics, Nintendo and Aveda. He is a former company member of Hubbard Street 2, River North Chicago Dance Company and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago. Choreography credits include Giannai Versace fashion show in Singapore, 16th Annual American Choreography Awards in Los Angeles, Nickoloden’s Kids’ Choice Awards with Justin Timberlake and three works for Hubbard Street 2, one of which won a national choreography competition. He has also created a work for DanceWorks Chicago and co-created a work for Luna Negra with Stephanie Martinec. In Mexico City, Ávila choreographed Disney High School Musical la seleccion, which led to Disney High School Musical Mexico-The Movie, and he choreographed Yo Mexico, which was a multimedia production celebrating the bicentennial anniversary of Mexico’s independence and the centennial anniversary of its revolution with more than 350 artists including dancers, aerialists and musicians. He is also the resident choreographer for Digital 9 in Shibuya Tokyo where he returns regularly to set new works.

Adrian Danzig (Mr. Manningham) Recent credits include The Feast: An intimate Tempest at Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, The Sogull at Lake Lucille and Orlando at The Court Theatre, in addition to the development of The Better Half over the past years. He regularly performs in the 500 Clown touring repertories: 500 Clown Macbeth, 500 Clown Frankenstein, 500 Clown Christmas and 500 Clown Tapped. Danzig has led workshops in physical theater all around the country, and internationally for the past ten years. He has performed in shows at The Goodman, The Second City, Steppenwolf Studio, Berkeley Rep, Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Public Theater and with Shakespeare & Company and Lookingglass. He has performed his solo works at The Kitchen, P.S. 122, The Ontological Hysteric Theater and Soho Rep. He was an early Neo- futuristic and a founding member of Redmoon Theater, Hubinspoke Theater and is the founding Producing Artistic Director of 500 Clown. He graduated from New York City’s High School of Performing Arts, received his BA from Oberlin College and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has studied clown with Cribor Turba, Philippe Gaulier, Ronlin Foreman, Dominique Jando, Els Comediantes, David Shiner and Ayner the Eccentric and was a clown with Big Apple Circus Clown Care for seven years. He is currently writing a book on physical theater with support from the Raven Foundation.

David Lakein (Detective Rough) has more than 20 years’ experience with dance, theater and performance art forms, and with somatic arts (body-mind-centering, Alexander technique), martial arts (aikido, qi gong) and meditation practices. He is an interdisciplinary artist, choreographer-director, performer, educator and writer, whose work swirls around the borders between dance, theater, cabaret, installation and performance art. He collaborates extensively with other artists, and performs-researches-crosses the globe in diverse venues, festivals and schools. Known for his inquisitive nature, Lakein is a well-respected teacher dedicated to his students and a rigorous learning process. Whether facilitating students in workshops and performance projects or bringing artists together in laboratories or festivals, he is committed to research as a creative art and dialogue as a transformational encounter. Lakein studied philosophy and literature, and acting and directing in the United States, trained as a dancer and performer in Berlin and Amsterdam, and studied visual arts in Chicago. He holds a BA from Wesleyan University, a BFA from the School for New Dance Development | Amsterdam School for the Arts and an MFA in Studio Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. www.lakeinworkshops.wordpress.com.

Meghann Wilkinson (Elizabeth) is a graduate of Northwestern University and is in her ninth season as a full-time ensemble member with Lucky Plush Productions. She is a former company member of Mordine & Company Dance Theater and has appeared in Chicago with Smith/’Wymore Disappearing Acts, Cie Felix Rackert, Raizel Performances, NU Group and Peter Carpenter Performance Project. Wilkinson has been a guest teacher and choreographer for the Cecchetti Council of America, Fairbanks Summer Arts Festival and the Evanston Dance Ensemble. She served as Assistant Choreographer for Lookingglass Theatre’s The Great Fire and was a Movement Director for Walkabout Theater’s Cous. Currently on faculty in the theater and dance programs at Columbia College Chicago, she has taught at Northwestern University, Dance Center Evanston and Visceral Dance Chicago and has organized for the Chicago Seminar on Dance and Performance and the Society of Dance History Scholars.

John Boesche (Video Design) designs projections and scenery for dance, opera, theatre and music. His designs for dance include the Joffrey Ballet, Liz Lerman Dance Exchange (Washington DC), Lucky Plush Productions and Mordine & Company (Chicago), among others. Projection design accompanying live music includes The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Eos Orchestra (New York) and The Ravinia Festival Chicago. His designs for opera have been seen at Austin Lyric Opera, Barbican Theatre Centre (London), Brooklyn Academy of Music, Canadian Opera Company (Toronto), Dallas Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opera Lyon, Opera Lyra Orwawa, Opera Pacifica, Portland Opera, Salt Lake Opera, San Francisco Opera, Theatre de la Monnaie (Brussels), Washington Opera (DC) and Vancouver Opera, among others. His scenic and projection designs for theatre include Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, Denver Center Theatre
Company, Geffen Playhouse (Los Angeles), Goodman Theatre (Chicago), Lookingglass Theatre (Chicago), McCarter Theatre (Princeton), New York Shakespeare Festival (NYC), Seattle Repertory Theatre, Shakespeare at the Folger (Washington DC), South Coast Repertory (Costa Mesa, CA), Steppenwolf Theatre (Chicago), Theater On The Square (San Francisco) and Victory Gardens Theatre (Chicago), among others. Boesche received Joseph Jefferson Awards for his theatre designs in 1985, 2005 and 2011. Currently he serves as Chair of Digital Media Design and Production for Live Performance, University of Illinois.

Mikhail Fiksel (Composer/Sound Design) is originally from Siberia, and is currently a Chicago-based sound designer, composer, musician and a deejay and a member of Strawdog Theatre Company and 2nd Story. He is also an Artistic Associate with Teatro Vista, Collaboration and Redmoon Theatre and on the faculty at Loyola University. Recent Chicago work includes projects with The Goodman Theatre, Writers Theatre, Redmoon, Victory Gardens, Lifeline, Northlight, Albany Park Theatre Project, The Hypocrites, Teatro Vista, About Face and Collaboration, Regional and Off-Broadway: Dallas Theatre Centre, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, The Geffen Playhouse, 2nd Stage, St. Louis Repertory and Milwaukee Chamber Theatre. International: TukkersConnexion (Arnhem, Holland) and Festival FILO (Londrina, Brazil). Recent film composition credits include The Wise Kids, In Memoriam and bothland. He has received six Joseph Jefferson Awards, a Lucille Lortel Award and an After Dark Award for an Original Musical. He had also been nominated for the Henry Hewes Design Award and was recently honored with The Michael Maggio Emerging Designer Award. When he is not busy fighting crime he performs with his band Seeking Wonderland or his Dynamic DJ Duo, The Ordeal. www.mikhailfiksel.com.

Heather Gilbert (Lighting Design) Chicago credits include: The Caretaker, The Real Thing, A Streetcar Named Desire and The Old Settler ( Writers’ Theatre); Home, Comedy of Errors and The Mystery of Irma Vep (Court Theatre); Hurry up, Mr. and The Boys and Not Enough Air (Timeline Theatre); Our Town and Cabaret (Hypocrites); and A Separate Peace (Steppenwolf Theatre Company). Regional credits include A Streetcar Named Desire (Williamstown Theatre Festival and the Broad Stage, LA) and The Farnsworth Invention (Alley Theatre). Off-Broadway credits include Our Town (Barrow Street Theatre). Upcoming projects include A Raisin in the Sun (Milwaukee Rep), Our Town at the Huntington (Boston) and Equivocation (Victory Gardens). Gilbert was a 1999-2001 recipient of the NEA/TCG Development Program Award. She serves as the Head of Lighting Design at Columbia College and received her MFA from The Theatre School at DePaul.

Jeff Hancock (Costume Design) has been designing and constructing costumes for more than 20 years, and his design company, ish, was formed in 2007. He has created costumes for River North Dance Chicago, Hubbard Street Inside/Out, Gus Giordano Dance Chicago, Danceworks Chicago, Peter Carpenter, Molly Shanahan Mad/Shak and Lucky Plush Productions, among many others. Hancock was a founding member of River North Dance Chicago, has danced for Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, the Lyric Opera and formerly directed Same Planet Different World Dance Theater. His independent choreography has been created for River North Dance Chicago, Hubbard Street 2, the Edinbugh Festival and Same Planet Different World, among others. He has been nominated for Ruth Page Awards for his dancing and choreography, and is an Illinois Arts Council grant recipient. Hancock currently teaches at Northwestern University.

Clare Roche (Stage Manager) Stage management credits include: 13 Clocks (Lifeline), Sinbad: The Unofficial Tale and The Giver (Adventure Stage), Cabaret (Hypocrites), Red Nose (Strawdog), Taming of the Shrew (Theo Ubique), Woody Guthrie’s American Song (Blindfaith), On My Father’s 100th Wedding Anniversary (Side Project) and The Magic Parlour (House Theatre). Roche is the Production/Touring Stage Manager with 500 Clown and Lakeside Shakespeare Theatre. She also is faculty as Resident Lighting and Sound Technician at Loyola University Chicago and Master Electrician at Lifeline Theatre. As a lighting designer Roche has assisted on The Nutcracker, Cyrano and Death and Harry Houdini (House Theatre), Short Shakespeare! Macbeth (Chicago Shakespeare) and was the designer for MeTube (Victory Gardens).

CREDITS
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CREDITS

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Lucky Plush Productions is represented exclusively by Elsie Management, Laura Colby, Director (www.elsieman.org). Information about Lucky Plush Productions’ activities may be obtained by contacting Laura Colby at 718-797-4577, or at info@elsieman.org.

For additional information about Lucky Plush Productions, or to learn about our Board of Directors and other volunteer activities, please contact us at www.luckyplush.com.