

JULIAN LAGE TRIO



JULIAN LAGE PHOTOS BY JUSTIN CAMERER

Artist Partner Program presents

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FEATURING SCOTT COLLEY & KENNY WOLLESEN

Friday, October 16, 2015 . 7PM

Friday, October 16, 2015 . 9PM

Robert & Arlene Kogod Theatre

JULIAN LAGE, guitar

SCOTT COLLEY, bass

KENNY WOLLESEN, drums

This performance will last approximately **1 hour and 10 minutes** with no intermission.

JULIAN LAGE TRIO: ABOUT THE ARTISTS

World's Fair, Julian Lage's first solo guitar album, is so spontaneous and intimate in feel that it's as if this prodigious guitarist had just arrived in your living room, picked up his vintage Martin and simply started to play. It's very much a project created in the moment, a dozen acoustic guitar tracks recorded over the course of a mere two days, at Sear Sound in New York City. In concept, however, *World's Fair* was more than a year in the making, as Lage gradually came to embrace the rich musical and emotive possibilities within the austere format of one musician and one acoustic guitar.

"I always had a fantasy about doing a solo guitar project," Lage explains, "especially one that highlighted various orchestrational aspects of guitar playing and guitar techniques, drawing from the structure of the three- to four-minute song, pieces that did not depend as much on improvisation but on moods, or musical attitudes. At first, when I was writing this music, I kind of overlooked the sonic and emotional impact of one guitar, trying to find ways to make it sound more robust or like a full ensemble. But then I started recording and I discovered what a rare opportunity this was for me to recalibrate my senses to one instrument and within that recalibration learn to savor the vast world of intimacy and nuance, both qualities so inherent to the guitar."

The album title is a clue to Lage's intentions, the phrase conjuring up a bygone hopeful vision of the future, a "tragic optimism," in Lage's words, since the future never quite turned out as the presenters at those grand expositions had predicted. The understated beauty of these tracks is laced with a certain melancholy, especially on the ruminative opening cut "40s" or when Lage gently delivers a spare rendition of Rodgers and Hart's "Where Or When." *World's Fair* seems suspended in time, using the past as a reference, yet seeming somehow daring and contemporary in its unadorned arrangements and unabashed melodicism. The mood is often contemplative but, on tracks like "Peru" and "Red Prairie

Dawn," he kicks the tempo up a notch, with his fingers scampering quickly across the strings.

While conceiving of and recording *World's Fair*, Lage was inspired by the orchestral approach to the guitar of the great Andres Segovia and by the music of the early 20th century, of "jazz before be-bop": "There is this era that is like the wild west, when there were jazz songs that were popular tunes and virtuosic, that had incredible lyrics, from writers like Willard Robison or Hoagy Carmichael." He found a similarly unbound spirit in the early seventies' work of singer-songwriters like Randy Newman, who managed to incorporate a sophisticated range of ideas into the concise pop-song format: "It was hard to pin down what it was, but the music felt so true to itself, completely fresh and yet you couldn't imagine a time when it didn't exist." He was drawn, in other words, to sounds that were both challenging and pleasing — work, much like his own, that defies easy categorization.

Though still in his twenties, Lage has already enjoyed a remarkable, genre-crossing career. As the *New York Times* has put it, Lage is an artist whose roots are "tangled in jazz, folk, classical and country music." A child guitar prodigy, he was the subject of the 1997 Oscar-nominated documentary short, *Jules at 8*. He made his first recording, with David Grisman, at the age of 11 and subsequently caught the notice of the world at large when he appeared alongside Gary Burton at the 2000 GRAMMY Awards. His first recording as a leader, 2009's *Sound-ing Point*, garnered a GRAMMY nomination for Best Contemporary Jazz Album. Up to now, collaboration has been essential to Lage's process; he has toured and/or recorded with such artists as Burton, Nels Cline, Fred Hersch and Jim Hall, who was a major influence on the young Lage. His most recent project is *Room*, a live-in-the-studio exchange with experimental guitarist Cline. Earlier this year, he released *Avalon*, a duo recording with fellow guitarist Chris "Critic" Eldridge (of Punch Brothers) that surveyed the American Songbook with an easygoing virtuosity. After seeing that pair in concert performing songs from *Avalon*, *New Yorker* writer Alec Wilkinson noted that Lage's playing "is cerebral, and sometimes playful, but because his vocabulary is so

expansive, it is also riveting ... he is in the highest category of improvising musicians, those who can enact thoughts and impulses as they receive them.”

Though Lage alone performs on *World's Fair*, the project is also, in a sense, a collaboration: he enlisted two long-time musician colleagues, the jazz guitarist Matt Munsteri and the multi-instrumentalist Armand Hirsch, as, respectively, his co-producer and engineer-mixer. Munsteri offered extensive knowledge of the early 20th-century music that was captivating Lage, and served as a discerning ear throughout. Hirsch brought technical innovation and an adventurous soul to the recording itself.

“We had a year to figure out the sonic fingerprint of the album,” says Lage. “The whole aesthetic is derived from early Segovia. There is an upfront quality to the sound that is almost surreal, like you’re kneeling down in front of a guitar and listening to it. Most of the time when you hear an acoustic guitar it’s been saturated and diffused into the walls. With one recorded source, we wanted the image to be as wide as possible without being goofy. That immediacy and all encompassing quality was something they got so well with those early radio-style recordings.”

Being in front of Hirsch’s mic set-up with just himself and his guitar was, says Lage, “like a psychological marathon. If I were doing something like *Avalon* with Critter or doing a trio session, I would be bouncing off of people in a certain way. You play, you let your mind wander, you listen to the other person, come back to yourself. But this was so focused on the role of the guitar that the quality that took precedence was a sense of losing yourself in the music. I had to forget where I was, to not worry if I was playing good or bad, fast or slow. None of it mattered. What seemed to transfer to tape was the degree to which I could lose myself — and sound like I was grateful for the opportunity. When I tried to nail it and get it right, I would inevitably be stuck in a paradigm I couldn’t get out of. We had two days to make this record so the takes we used are the ones in which I felt the most reckless, and kind of let the sound of guitar swallow me up.”

—Michael Hill

THE CLARICE AND THE COMMUNITY

The Clarice is building the future of the arts by training, mentoring and presenting the next generation of artists and creative innovators. As artists develop their craft as performers, they must become instigators of meaningful dialogue, creative research and audience connection. These skills are developed through engagement activities both on and off campus. Engagement at The Clarice is characterized by facilitated audience interactions with artists, scholars and community leaders that are focused on process and research rather than product and performance. The Clarice supports artists in their quest for a connection with audiences through its engagement work.

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

- Julian Lage kicked off this season’s *Concert in Close Quarters* series by performing for a group of students from the UMD Scholars program at their dormitory community room in Cambridge Hall. He played unplugged and answered questions from students about his start in music.
- The full trio performed and answered questions in Prof. Chris Vadala’s jazz clinic that meets regularly in the School of Music.