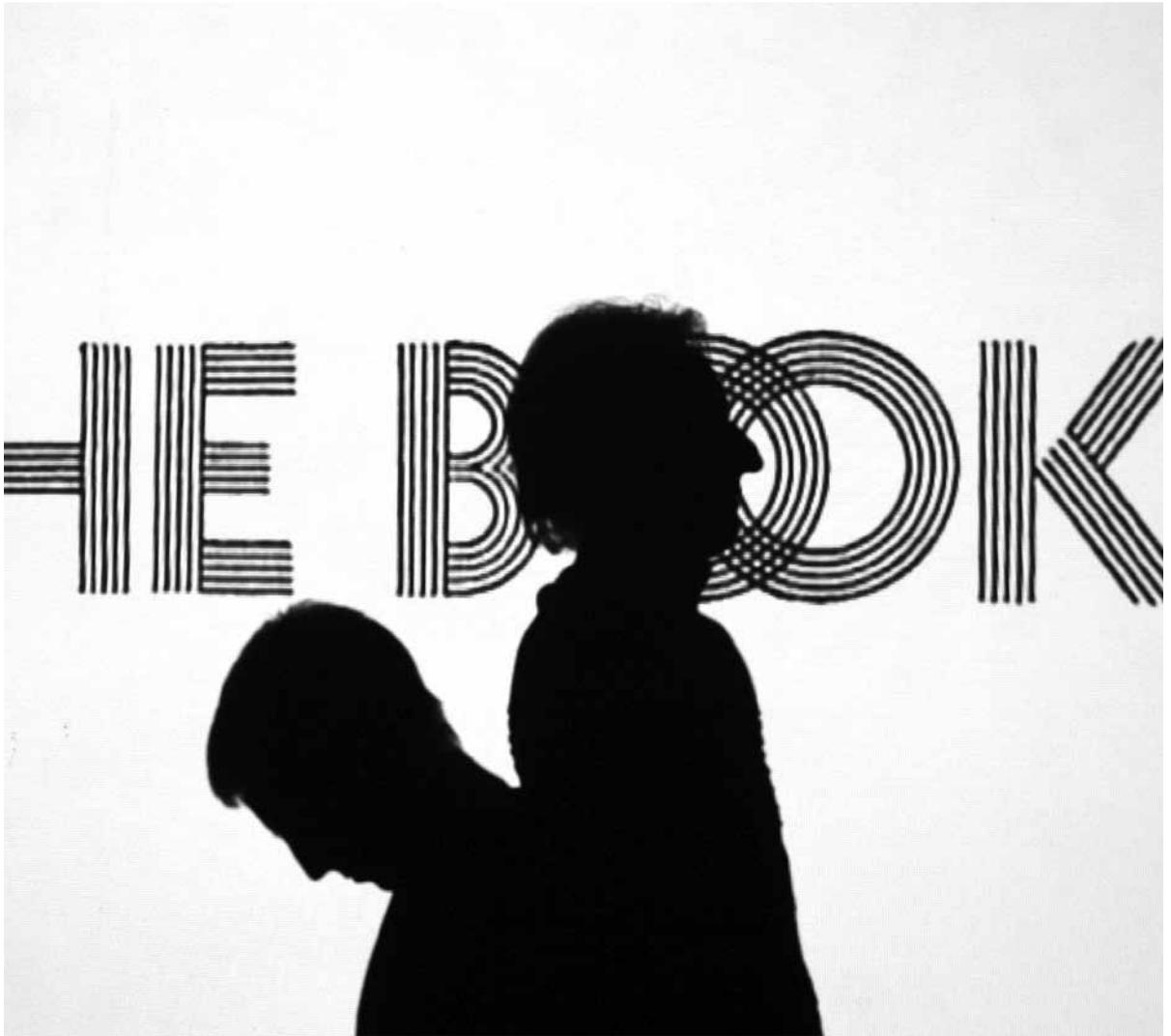


THE BOOKS

Sunday, May 3, 2009

Presented by The Empty Bottle with the MCA



Museum of
Contemporary
Art
mcachicago.org CHICAGO



THE EMPTY BOTTLE WITH THE MCA PRESENTS THE BOOKS



All photos of The Books courtesy of the artists

Original music composed by
Nick Zammuto and Paul de Jong

Performed by Nick Zammuto
and Paul de Jong

For more information about The Empty Bottle
and a schedule of upcoming events, visit
emptybottle.com.

To increase appreciation of The Books, the MCA, and Third Coast International Audio Festival organized this additional opportunity earlier today for audience members to engage with the artists.

Sunday, May 3, 4–6 pm

Third Coast Festival Listening Room

The Loneliest Road

Written and directed by Gregory Whitehead

Original music by The Books

This 90-minute audio drama, produced by sound artist and storyteller Gregory Whitehead with The Books, is best experienced as a pirate radio broadcast from the obstructed heartland of the American Dream. Haunted by dead poets, Marilyn Monroe, and an angel's solemn whisper, the drama unfolds through layers of Whitehead's signature humor, sonic playfulness, and astute observations about human triumph and folly. *The Loneliest Road* was originally commissioned for BBC Radio 3 and won the Sony Gold Award for Radio Drama in 2004.

The Third Coast International Audio Festival (TCIAF) was created by Chicago Public Radio in 2000 to support producers and other artists creating audio documentary and feature work of all styles, and to bring this fresh and vital work to audiences throughout the world.

CAST

Karen Lee as Candy Mintz

Thom Whaley as Terry Trenton

Jeff Kent as the Post-Mortem Narrator

Cynthia Atwood as Una

Jon Swan as Ted Stebbins

Daniel Klein as Stu Berkowitz

Gregory Whitehead as Oswald Norris

Anne Undeland as Ava Ravenella

Original music composed by Paul de Jong and Nick Zammuto, and performed by Paul de Jong, Nick Zammuto, Anne Doerner, and Gregory Whitehead



ABOUT THE BOOKS

Nick Zammuto and Paul de Jong met through a friend in 2000, when they were living in the same New York apartment building. Coming from vastly different backgrounds, they soon learned they shared a love of acoustic music and found sound. They experimented and plunked away until, with some urging by Tom Steinle of Tomlab Records, they recorded what would become their debut album, *Thought for Food*, in 2002. The Books recorded and released *The Lemon of Pink* in fall 2003 and, a year later, began recording in an old Victorian home in North Adams, Massachusetts. On their next album *Lost and Safe*, in April 2005, The Books departed from the folktronica sound they pioneered in their first two efforts and incorporated a new set of instrumental sounds, including vintage clavinet, and homemade electro-acoustic sound sculptures made from filing cabinets. Yes, filing cabinets.

The Books did not invent the audio collage, but they have perfected the idea of incorporating found sound into music with a cut-and-paste musical aesthetic. Not interested in repeating snippets of sound or vocals as in hip-hop, The Books use whole sections of speech in which natural pauses and repetition create an atmosphere all their own. As Zammuto explains, The Books record “little pieces and use the computer to organize those bits,” resulting in a less-is-more future-folk that is cliché-free and miraculously organic. *Stylus* magazine comments, “The sample-heavy music of The Books provides post-modernists ample thought for food, casual listeners something to giggle at, and those in between something to marvel over.”

The Books are just beginning to explore the balance between lyrics, found sounds, and traditional song structure. “Home studios have ushered in

a new kind of folk music,” says Zammuto. “Not to bastardize that word more than it already is, but it allows pretty much anybody to create music within small circles, within the context of their friends or families, and within their own homes. It’s a new way of working that allows us to live really close to the ground financially, and circumvent the whole pro-studio atmosphere and corporate aspect of music.”

The Books have always defied categorization. As *XLR8R* once put it, “It sounds like everything from Asiatic Appalachian folk to a soundtrack for a future where robots made of empty tomato cans, dam radios, and duct tape rule the world.” On the heels of three critically acclaimed releases and worldwide tours, The Books went on hiatus to focus on family, deconstruction, reconstruction, film scoring, organic gardening, babies, and reassessment.

In 2008, Zammuto focused on family life and welcomed the birth of his second child. He built a home studio, refined his “Sound Sculptures” (the most notable being his “Spoonbox”), gardened, and experimented with new methods of making music. de Jong spent time adding to the band’s vast found-sound archive, working on his solo work, canning, collaborating with Zammuto on a film score, and devoting more time to his family. The hiatus proved to be a much-needed break for the band. By the end of 2008, de Jong and Zammuto dusted off “the books” and sifted through archival material with a new record in mind. Their latest album, planned for release in 2009, promises to be the band’s most ambitious to date.



THE LONELIEST ROAD

Photo by Alex Marentes



Way back in 1951, the philosopher Gaston Bachelard published an obscure little essay titled *Radio and Reverie*. My favorite passage proposes, “that if our psychic radio engineers are poets concerned for the welfare of humankind, tenderness of heart, the joy of loving, and love’s voluptuous trust, then they will lay on splendid nights for their listeners.”

Possibly I am so attracted to this idea because I first fell in love with radio during long solitary nights as a twelve-year-old boy with a cheap transistor under my pillow and the great Allison Steele, the Night Bird, on the air. It could be that I was still unaware of the beauty of the medium and was simply in love with her voice, and beneath the spell of her irresistible invitation, *come fly with me*. The Night Bird, with her mixture of playful intimacy and cool precision, provided many splendid adventures for my adolescent ears.

In 2003, partially in homage to my first encounters with such a quietly seductive disembodied, I imagined a young aspiring psychic engineer from New England. She spends some time as an intern at Boston public radio station WGBH but soon becomes frustrated by the Byzantine rules of a

game she neither anticipated nor wanted to play. So she packs her bags and heads out west, where she starts a one-person low-power pirate station called WDOA in the naked state of Nevada—the W and her pronunciation of “Nevada” proud emblems of her stubbornly rhizomatic New England roots.

Her name is Ava Ravenella, The Hungry Raven, and she goes live to air on WDOA—Dead On Arrival, Deserts Of America, Degenerate Or Artful? The choice is yours, along Route Five Zero, as Ava flies into the tense borderlands of the American psyche: between moral idealism and righteous violence; between abandoned mines and ghost town golf courses; between lap dances and autopsies; between the orphic voice of the poet and the assassin’s itchy finger.

*A Hungry Raven in the sky
A wounded rabbit, slow to die
Bones piled in the sun
America has all the fun
It’s The Loneliest Road*

—Gregory Whitehead