

WINTER/SPRING SEASON

Jan 23–24	eighth blackbird <i>Hand Eye</i>
Jan 28–30	Toshiki Okada/chelfitsch <i>God Bless Baseball</i>
Feb 4 and 6–7	Ingri Fiksdal, Ingvild Langgård & Signe Becker <i>Cosmic Body</i>
Feb 11–14	Faye Driscoll <i>Thank You For Coming: Attendance</i>
Feb 18–27	Tim Etchells/Forced Entertainment <i>The Notebook, Speak Bitterness, and (In) Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare</i>
Mar 5–6	Joffrey Academy of Dance <i>Winning Works</i>
Mar 25–26	eighth blackbird featuring Will Oldham (Bonnie “Prince” Billy) <i>Ghostlight</i>
Mar 31–Apr 3	Blair Thomas & Co. <i>Moby Dick</i>
Apr 7–10	Teatrocinema <i>Historia de Amor (Love Story)</i>
Apr 12 and 14–16	Taylor Mac <i>The History of Popular Music</i>
Apr 28–May 1	Kyle Abraham/ Abraham.In.Motion <i>When the Wolves Came In</i>

Mar 25-26, 2016

eighth blackbird featuring Will Oldham (Bonnie "Prince" Billy) *Ghostlight*

Flutes	Nathalie Joachim
Clarinets	Michael Maccaferri
Violin	Yvonne Lam
Cello	Nicholas Photinos
Percussion	Matthew Duvall
Piano	Lisa Kaplan

BRYCE DESSNER: *MURDER BALLADES* (2013, REV. 2015)

1. "Omie Wise-Young Emily"
2. "Hocket"
3. "Dark Holler"
4. "Lewisburg"
5. "Wave the Sea-Brushy Fork"
6. "Underneath the Floorboards"
7. "Pretty Polly-Tears for Sister Polly"
8. "Down in the Willow Garden"

DAVID T. LITTLE: *GHOSTLIGHT* (2015)

(INTERMISSION)

FREDERIC RZEWSKI: *COMING TOGETHER* (1971)
Arranged by Matt Albert (2000/2003)

Speaker	Will Oldham
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WILL OLDHAM: SONGS (to be announced from the stage)

Voice and guitar	Will Oldham
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Stage Direction	Matthew Ozawa
	Matthew Duvall
Lighting Design	Erik Barry
Production Stage Manager	Madeleine Borg

Running time is approximately 100 minutes including intermission.

All works in the program are for the full sextet (flutes, clarinets, violin, cello, percussion, and piano) and with guest artists as noted in the program with the exception of "Lewisburg" from *Murder Ballades*, which is for solo cello.

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD STAFF

Managing Director	Peter McDowell
Business Manager	Kelley Dorhauer
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Director of Development	Anne Cauley
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Lead support for the MCA Stage New Works Initiative is provided by Elizabeth A. Liebman.

Lead support for the eighth blackbird residency is provided by Helen and Sam Zell. Additional generous support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, Anne L. Kaplan, New Music USA (made possible by annual program support and/or endowment gifts from Helen F. Whitaker Fund, Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust), Judy and Bob Duvall, and the Elizabeth F. Cheney Foundation.

Murder Ballades was commissioned by eighth blackbird and Lunapark and was funded by The Doelen Concert Hall, Rotterdam; Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam; and Muziekgebouw Frits Philips, Eindhoven, with the financial support of The Van Beinum Foundation, the Netherlands, and with additional support from the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Ghostlight was commissioned for eighth blackbird by the Abe Fortas Memorial Fund of The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

eighth blackbird is ensemble-in-residence with Contempo at the University of Chicago and the artists-in-residence at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago for the 2015-16 season. Nathalie Joachim is a Burkart Flutes & Piccolos Artist; Michael J. Maccaferri is a D'Addario Woodwinds Artist; Matthew Duvall proudly endorses Pearl Drums and Adams Musical Instruments, Vic Firth Sticks and Mallets, Zildjian Cymbals, and Black Swamp Percussion Accessories. Lisa Kaplan is a Steinway Artist.

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD AND THE MCA

eighth blackbird ensemble members are the 2015–16 artists in residence at the MCA. For the first time, the sextet brings its private rehearsal work into the public areas of the museum, preparing new compositions in the galleries. The residency also offers illuminating open rehearsals, an interactive gallery installation, performances, and public talks.



eighth blackbird
Photo: Saverio Truglia

The group has divided the Dr. Paul and Dorie Sternberg Family Gallery on the museum's third floor into two distinct areas: a rehearsal room and a space for visitor engagement. When the musicians rehearse, museum visitors may witness the creative process in real time. When eighth blackbird is away, a video projected on three walls provides visitors an intimate look at a rehearsal of David Lang's *these broken wings*. In addition to the video, there is an audio recording that captures the group's studio preparations and discussions during their rehearsals and forthcoming concerts. Instruments and scores are on view when the artists are not on-site.

COMPOSERS' NOTES

MURDER BALLADES

When eighth blackbird asked me for a piece, I immediately knew what to do: let great American folk music inspire a great American new-music ensemble. The murder ballad has its roots in a European tradition, in which grisly details of bloody homicides are recounted through song. When this tradition came to America, it developed its own vernacular, with stories and songs that were told and retold over generations.

In *Murder Ballades*, I reexamine several of these old songs, allowing them to inspire my own music. "Omie Wise," "Young Emily," "Pretty Polly," and "Down in the Willow Garden" are classic murder ballads, tales of romantically charged killings that are based on real events. "Hocket," "Dark Holler," "Lewisburg," and "Underneath the Floorboards" are my own compositions, of which "Dark Holler" is loosely modeled on the clawhammer banjo style that would have accompanied many of these early folk songs. "Brushy Fork" is a Civil War-era murder ballad/fiddle tune, and "Wave the Sea" and "Tears for Sister Polly" are original compositions woven in the depths of the many months I spent inhabiting the seductive music and violent stories of these murder ballads.

—Bryce Dessner

GHOSTLIGHT

A ghost light shining in a darkened theater has always struck me as a symbol of both the mysteries of the unknown and the possibility of the sacred. The ghost light itself is, of course, connected with a sense of the supernatural in the superstitions of the theater. For example, one thought regarding the term's origins is this: since every theater has its own ghost, the light is placed on stage as a kind of offering, allowing the ghost(s) a chance to play upon the stage in exchange for the safety of the theater and its actors. Yet, to me, the ghost light has always felt more sacred than spooky; the setting is for a ritual, or is a kind of shrine, where an eternal flame burns, honoring the age and sanctity of the Theater, with its direct lines back to the ancient Greeks and their gods, rituals, and magic. *Ghostlight* was inspired by this sense of ancient ritual and the mysteries that lie within it.

Like many works by the artists to whom each movement is dedicated—Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo, Anne Waldman, and Lou Harrison—*Ghostlight* is a self-contained journey, first inward, then out. It begins with the calm of a summer dusk, then gradually grows darker, as it travels into murkier and stranger

territory—the kind of psychic space where one might begin to hear voices—before emerging again into the sunshine of a new day. It is a journey into the Enchanted Forest of fairy tales, where, as J. C. Cooper notes, the soul enters the “perils of the unknown; the realm of death; the secrets of nature, or the spiritual world which [one] must penetrate to find the meaning.” Like the ghost light itself, the work endeavors to explore the mysteries of the unknown and the possibility of the sacred.

Special thanks are due to Jamie Broumas, Director of Classical and New Music Programs at the Kennedy Center, the staff of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago—in particular Peter Taub as well as Lynne Warren, whose exhibition *Surrealism: The Conjured Life* first brought the paintings of Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo into my life—Jeffrey Edelstein, and Eileen Mack. *Ghostlight* is dedicated to the current and former members of eighth blackbird.

—David T. Little

COMING TOGETHER

I wrote *Coming Together* in November and December of 1971 in response to a historical event; in September of that year, inmates at the state prison in Attica, New York, revolted and succeeded in taking possession of a part of the institution. Foremost among their demands was the recognition of their right to be treated as human beings. After several days of fruitless negotiations, Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered state police to retake the prison by force, justifying his action on the grounds that the lives of the guards whom prisoners had taken as hostages were in danger. In the ensuing violence, forty-three persons, including several of the hostages, were killed and many more were wounded. One of the dead was Sam Melville, a prisoner who had played a significant role in organizing the rebellion. In the spring of 1971, Melville had written a letter to a friend describing his experience of the passage of time in prison. After his death, the letter was published in the magazine *Ramparts*:

I think the combination of age and a greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. It's six months now, and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. I am in excellent physical and emotional health. There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead, but I feel secure and ready. As lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am I dealing with my environment. In the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men, I can act with clarity and meaning. I am deliberate, sometimes even calculating, seldom employing histrionics, except as a test of the

reactions of others. I read much, exercise, talk to guards and inmates, feeling for the inevitable direction of my life.

As I read it, I was impressed both by the poetic quality of the text and by its cryptic irony. I read it over and over again. It seemed that I was trying to capture a sense of the physical presence of the writer and, at the same time, to unlock a hidden meaning from the simple but ambiguous language. The act of reading and rereading finally led me to the idea of its musical treatment.

—Frederic Rzewski

SONGS

The original music of singer-songwriter William Oldham has been linked to Americana, folk, roots, country, punk, and indie rock. He describes his work as “Appalachian post-punk solipsist.” He is also known as Bonnie “Prince” Billy, the name he has used for most of his musical output since 1998. Oldham explains his numerous monikers—including Palace Brothers, Palace Songs, Palace Music, and others—offering insight into his performance ethos: “I thought it would be better if there was sort of an implied character. Somebody that people could live with. If they had the record in their house, they could feel 100 percent comfortable about living with that person. I just mean that when they hear the voice, they’re allowed to disassociate it from the life—the lives—of the singer. Hopefully, people identify the songs with themselves, and not with the singer.”

Mar 31–Apr 3
at MCA Stage

Blair Thomas & Co.

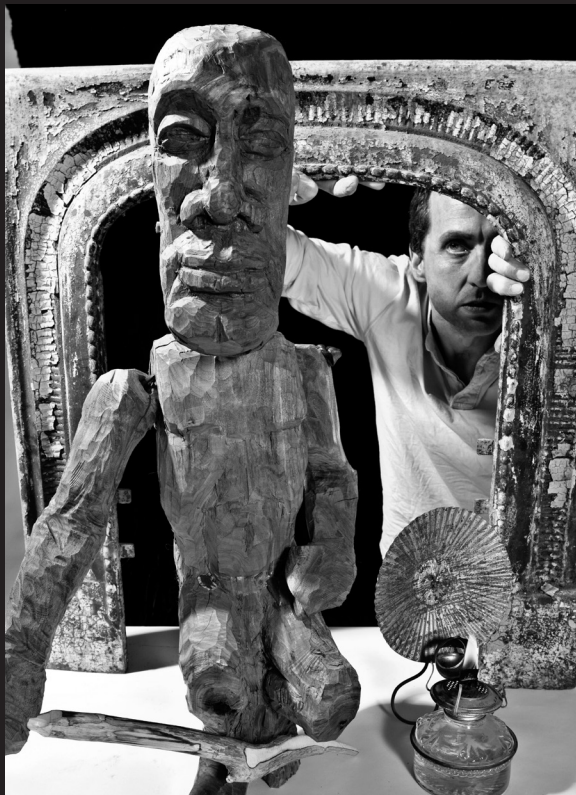


Photo: Kipling Swehla

Moby Dick

Tickets at mcachicago.org

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

BRYCE DESSNER

is one of the most sought-after composers of his generation, with a rapidly expanding catalogue of works commissioned by leading ensembles. His orchestral, chamber, and vocal compositions have been commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Metropolitan Museum of Art (for the New York Philharmonic), Kronos Quartet, BAM Next Wave Festival, Barbican Centre, Edinburgh International Festival, Sydney Festival, eighth blackbird, Sō Percussion, New York City Ballet, and many others. Recently Dessner was invited to compose music for Alejandro González Iñárritu's film *The Revenant*, which received a 2016 Golden Globe nomination for Best Original Score. His recordings include *Aheym*, a Kronos Quartet disc devoted to his music (Anti-); *St. Carolyn by the Sea* on Deutsche Grammophon, with the Copenhagen Phil under Andre de Ridder; and *Music for Wood and Strings*, an album-length work performed by Sō Percussion (Brassland). Dessner's music is marked by a keen sensitivity to instrumental color and texture. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Yale University. Dessner formed the instrumental quartet Clogs and in 2001, cofounded the critically acclaimed, Grammy Award-nominated band The National.

DAVID T. LITTLE

is one of the most imaginative young composers on the scene.

His operas *Soldier Songs* (Prototype Festival) and *Dog Days* (Peak Performances/Beth Morrison Projects) have been widely acclaimed. His recent and upcoming works include *AGENCY* (Kronos Quartet), *CHARM* (Baltimore Symphony/Marin Alsop), *Hellhound* (Maya Beiser), *Haunt of Last Nightfall* (Third Coast Percussion), the opera *JFK* with Royce Vavrek (Fort Worth Opera/American Lyric Theater), a new opera commissioned by the MET Opera/Lincoln Center Theater new works program, and the music-theatre work *Artaud in the Black Lodge* with Outrider legend Anne Waldman (Beth Morrison Projects). His music has been heard at Carnegie Hall, LA Opera, the Park Avenue Armory, the Bang On A Can Marathon, and elsewhere. Educated at University of Michigan and Princeton, Little is cofounder of the annual New Music Bake Sale, has served as executive director of MATA, serves on the Composition Faculty at Mannes-The New School and Shenandoah Conservatory, and is Composer-in-Residence with Opera Philadelphia and Music-Theatre Group. The founding artistic director of the ensemble Newspeak, his music can be heard on New Amsterdam and Innova labels. He is published by Boosey & Hawkes.

MATTHEW OZAWA

spans multiple artistic disciplines in his work, notably having worked for Lyric Opera of Chicago, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Canadian Opera Company, San Francisco Opera, Santa Fe Opera, the Macau International Festival,

Performance view, eighth blackbird:
Hand Eye, MCA Chicago
January 2016
Photo: Elliot Mandel



and Opera Siam. He has collaborated with artists Peter Sellars, Francesca Zambello, Rob Ashford, Meredith Monk, and Isaac Mizrahi. Ozawa's recent directing credits include *Arizona Lady* (North American premiere, Arizona Opera), Matt Aucoin's *Second Nature* (world premiere, Lyric Unlimited), *Tsuru* (world premiere, Houston Ballet/Asia Society), *Y Portraits* (world premiere art gallery event, Mozawa), *Porcelain* (Prologue Theatre Company), *Snow Dragon* (world premiere, Skylight Music Theater/Opera Siam), *Fallen* (world premiere, Mozawa), *Les mamelles de Tirésias/Le Pauvre Matelot* (new production, Wolf Trap Opera), *A Little Night Music* (Houston Grand Opera) and *The Memory Stone* (world premiere, Houston Grand Opera). Upcoming directing credits include *Nabucco* (Lyric Opera of Chicago) and *The Roof of the Wind is Water* (Houston Grand Opera). Among Ozawa's numerous awards are a 2007 directing and a 2008 dramaturgy fellowship with Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and the James S.

McLaughlin Memorial Prize in Theater for his work at Oberlin. He is founder and artistic director of the performing arts company Mozawa.

FREDERIC RZEWSKI

was born in Westfield, Massachusetts, in 1938. He studied with Charles Mackey, Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, Milton Babbitt, and Luigi Dallapiccola. His compositional career has had many phases: his music from the late sixties and early seventies (*Les Moutons de Panurge* and *Coming Together*) combines elements of written and improvised music, which in the seventies led to a greater experimentation with forms that treated style and language as structural elements (*The People United Will Never Be Defeated*). He briefly returned to experimental and graphic notation (*Le Silence des Espaces Infinis* and *The Price of Oil*) before exploring new uses of the twelve-tone technique in the eighties (*Antigone-Legend*, *The Persians*). Rzewski adopts a freer and spontaneous approach to his more recent work. eighth blackbird commissioned

Frederic Rzewski to write two pieces: *Pocket Symphony* (2001) for sextet, and *Knight, Death and Devil* (2008) for sextet and string quartet.

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD

is a four-time Grammy Award-winning sextet celebrating its twentieth year in the 2015-16 season. It formed in 1996 as a group of six entrepreneurial Oberlin Conservatory students, who quickly became known for performing from memory, often employing choreography, and frequently collaborating with artists across multiple disciplines and genres in an effort to create visually compelling musical experiences.

The sextet has commissioned and premiered hundreds of works by dozens of composers, including David T. Little, Steven Mackey, Missy Mazzoli, and Steve Reich, whose commissioned work *Double Sextet* (2007) went on to win the 2009 Pulitzer Prize. Their long-term relationship with Chicago's Cedille Records has produced seven acclaimed recordings, including four Grammy Awards for *strange imaginary animals* (2008), *Lonely Motel: Music from Slide* (2011), *Meanwhile* (2013), and *Filament* (2016).

eighth blackbird's mission extends beyond performance to curation and education. The group served as music director of the Ojai Music Festival (2009), enjoyed a three-year residency at the Curtis Institute of Music, and holds ongoing ensemble-in-residence positions at the University of

Richmond and the University of Chicago.

Highlights of the 2015-16 season include the MCA's Artist in Residence program, debut performances in Poland and with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and the ensemble's awaited return to Carnegie's Zankel Hall, The Kennedy Center, the Philharmonic Society of Orange County, Vancouver New Music, UT Austin, and UC Berkeley.

eighth blackbird's members hail from the Great Lakes, Keystone, Golden, Empire, and Bay states. The ensemble's name derives from the eighth stanza of Wallace Stevens's evocative, aphoristic poem, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (1917). eighth blackbird is managed by David Lieberman Artists. For more information, please visit eighthblackbird.org.



Performance view, eighth blackbird:
Hand Eye, MCA Chicago, January 2016
Photo: Nathan Keay, © MCA Chicago

**EIGHTH BLACKBIRD
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Apr 7-10
at MCA Stage

Teatrocinema



Photo: Montserrat Quezada A.

Historia de Amor

Tickets at mcachicago.org

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MCA Stage's groundbreaking performances are an integral part of the MCA's artist-activated, audience-engaged programming. Along with the museum's exhibitions and educational initiatives, they encourage a broad and diverse community to experience and discuss the work and ideas of living artists.

PARKING

Validate your ticket at the coat check for \$12 parking in the MCA garage (220 East Chicago Avenue) or the Bernardin garage (747 North Wabash). Discounted parking is limited to six hours on the date of performance.

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To inquire about a lost item, call the museum at 312-280-2660. Unclaimed articles are held for thirty days.

SEATING

Please switch off all noise-making devices while you are in the theater.

Patrons are seated at the management's discretion. Food and open beverage containers are not allowed in the seating area.

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Wednesday–Sunday: 10 am–5 pm

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Program notes compiled by Yolanda Cesta Cursach

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