Guest Artist Recital

2016–17 Season
543rd Concert
Sunday 9 April 2017
Dalton Center Recital Hall
7:30 p.m.

ROOMFUL OF TEETH
Esteli Gomez, Soprano
Martha Cluver, Soprano
Eliza Bagg, Alto
Virginia Warnken Kelsey, Alto
Ted Hearne, Tenor
Thann Scoggin, Baritone
Jason Awbrey, Bass/Baritone
Cameron Beauchamp, Bass
Brad Wells, Artistic Director

Caroline Shaw
Partita for 8 Voices
I. Allemande
II. Sarabande
III. Courante
IV. Passacaglia

intermission

Ted Hearne
Coloring Book
I. Game
II. You are not the guy
IV. Father

Rinde Eckert
Cesca’s View

Merrill Garbus
Quizassa
ROOMFUL OF TEETH is a Grammy-winning vocal project dedicated to reimagining the expressive potential of the human voice. Through study with masters from vocal traditions the world over, the eight-voice ensemble continually expands its vocabulary of singing techniques and, through an ongoing commissioning process, forges a new repertoire without borders.

Founded in 2009 by Brad Wells, Roomful of Teeth gathers annually at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) in North Adams, Mass., where they’ve studied with some of the world’s top performers and teachers in Tuvan throat singing, yodeling, Broadway belting, Inuit throat singing, Korean P’ansori, Georgian singing, Sardinian cantu a tenore, Hindustani music, Persian classical singing and Death Metal singing. Commissioned Composers include Rinde Eckert, Fred Hersch, Merrill Garbus (of tUnE-yArDs), William Brittelle, Toby Twining, Missy Mazzoli, Julia Wolfe, Ted Hearne and Ambrose Akinmusire, among many others.

Projects in 2016–17 include The Colorado, a music-driven documentary film that explores water, land and survival in the Colorado River Basin (featuring former Kronos Quartet cellist Jeffrey Zeigler and Wilco’s Glenn Kotche); collaborations with A Far Cry and Nick Zammuto of The Books; appearances at new music festivals in the U.S., Canada and Sweden; and partnerships with nearly two dozen higher education institutions across the country.

PROGRAM NOTES

Partita for 8 Voices (2009–11) – The score’s inscription reads: “Partita is a simple piece. Born of a love of surface and structure, of the human voice, of dancing and tired ligaments, of music, and of our basic desire to draw a line from one point to another.”

Each movement takes a cue from the traditional baroque suite in initial meter and tone, but the familiar historic framework is soon stretched and broken, through “speech, whispers, sighs, murmurs, wordless melodies, and novel vocal effects” (Pulitzer jury citation). Roomful of Teeth’s utterly unique approach to singing and vocal timbre originally helped to inspire and shape the work during its creation, and the ensemble continues to refine and reconsider the colors and small details with every performance. Allemande opens with the organized chaos of square dance calls overlapping with technical wall drawing directions of the artist Sol LeWitt, suddenly congealing into a bright, angular tune that never keeps its feet on the ground for very long. There are allusions to the movement’s intended simulation of motion and space in the short phrases of text throughout, which are sometimes sung and sometimes embedded as spoken texture. Sarabande’s quiet restraint in the beginning is punctured in the middle by an ecstatic, belted melody that resolves quietly at the end, followed soon after by the Inuit-inspired hocketed breaths of Courante. A wordless quotation of the American folk hymn “Shining Shore” appears at first as a musical non sequitur but later recombines with the rhythmic breaths as this longest movement is propelled to its final gasp. Passacaglia is a set of variations on a repeated chord progression, first experimenting simply with vowel timbre, then expanding into a fuller texture with the return of the Sol LeWitt text. At Passacaglia’s premiere in 2009, there was spontaneous applause and cheering at the explosive return of the D-major chord near the end—so feel free to holler or clap any time if you feel like it.

Of the premiere of Partita, New York magazine wrote that I had “discovered a lode of the rarest commodity in contemporary music: joy.” And it is with joy that this piece is meant to be received in years to come.

– Caroline Shaw

Coloring Book (2015) – “They will never, so long as their whiteness puts so sinister a distance between themselves and their own experience and the experience of others, feel themselves sufficiently human, sufficiently worthwhile, to become responsible for themselves, their leaders, their country, their children, or their fate.”


Ted Hearne’s piece Coloring Book sets the words of three Black American writers of different generations—Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin and Claudia Rankine. Hearne sets these texts, each addressing the idea of identity, in surprising and personal ways, using stylistic juxtaposition to explore the boundaries separating the authors’ conception of cultural identity from his own, and to better understand the differences between them.
Coloring Book was commissioned with generous support from The Barlow Endowment for Music Composition.

I. The game of keeping
[The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult.]
No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat.
No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed.
[The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting.]
– Zora Neale Hurston from “How it feels to be colored me” (1928)

II. You are not the guy
And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.

Each time it begins in the same way, it doesn’t begin the same way, each time it begins it’s the same. Flashes, a sired, the stretched-out roar—

And you are not the guy and still you fit the description
–roar—
still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.

This is what it looks like. You know this is wrong. This is not what it looks like. You need to be quiet. This is wrong. You need to close your mouth now. This is what it looks like. You can’t drive yourself sane. You are not the guy.

And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description.
Get on the ground now. Then I just knew.
Yes officer rolled around on my tongue, which grew out of a bell that could never ring because its emergency was a tolling I was meant to swallow.
– Claudia Rankine from Citizen (2014)

IV. Letter to my father
Him. He
He has only heard what I
I felt. He
He is far away but I
I see him.
Him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us.
Us. He
He is so pale with his whiteness then and I
I am so colored.
Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him.
He is so pale with his whiteness then and I
I am so colored.
– Zora Neale Hurston from “How it feels to be colored me” (1928)

Cesca’s View (2009) – I spent three weeks at a retreat in the Pyrenées. My apartment had this extraordinary view. Every night this lovely woman named Cesca fixed all of the residents dinner in her home. She and her husband Luis served us. We stayed late to talk about life and art over bottles of their excellent wine. Every morning I was awakened to the sound of bells—goats were being herded down the mountain.
–Rinde Eckert

Quizassa (2011) – I needed to drum up some courage to compose for these amazing singers, so I decided to draw inspiration from some powerful folk music, in particular Bulgarian and other Eastern European choral traditions. The nasal resonance and odd meters of that style of singing offered exciting possibilities. I have been thrilled to work with singers who cry, “more, more!” instead of, “we can’t do that!” and they have taught me so much (including the Inuit throat singing games that begot the middle section of the song).
– Merrill Garbus

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