

Frank Stemper's 60th Birthday Concert

St. Louis NEW MUSIC CIRCLE

7 April 2012 – 7:30 PM

Kranzberg Center for the Arts

**The Altgeld Chamber Players
with Lucy Shelton, guest soprano**

Douglas Worthen, flute/picc,

Richard Kelley, saxophones

Michael Barta, violin

Eric Lenz, cello

Junghwa Lee, piano

Yuko Kato, piano

Frank Stemper, piano

Ron Coulter, percussion

Christopher Morehouse, conductor

Eric Mandat, clarinet/bass clar. and Artistic Director

Three Pieces for Clarinet and Piano 2006

Eric Mandat, clarinet

Frank Stemper, piano

Isolated Criterion No. 4 2008

Michael Barta, violin solo

Bind I 2001

Douglas Worthen, flute

Yuko Kato, piano

Indirect Discourse 2012

Richard Kelley, baritone sax

Ron Coulter, percussion

Inner Voices 1987

Lucy Shelton, soprano

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Global Warning 2007

Junghwa Lee, piano solo

Rope 2005

Richard Kelley, alto sax

Eric Lenz, cello

Yuko Kato, piano

1963 2009

Lucy Shelton, soprano

Douglas Worthen, flute/picc, Eric Mandat, clarinet/bs.cl.

Michael Barta, violin, Eric Lenz, cello

Junghwa Lee, piano

Ron Coulter, percussion

Christopher Morehouse, conductor

NOTES

***Three Pieces for Clarinet and Piano* (2006)**

Whenever I compose, I find myself trying to write the ULTIMATE piece of music – the musical statement that will answer all the questions! I always fail, of course, and that's what keeps me at it. I think it has something to do with *internally* hearing music that doesn't really exist. I hope that, when beginning each new piece, I will finally find that *something* and capture it.

The first of these three pieces exploits rhythmic disjunctness vs. unity, i.e. sometimes the two voices are playing different lines with identical obtuse rhythms, while other times their individual rhythms are more conservative yet sound disjointed when heard together. The middle piece seems to be stuck on a simple single uninspired idea, fused between the two instruments creating a break from the wilder outer pieces. However, it is the third, goofy, movement that seemed to get me closer to that goal of that *ultimate* piece of music, although I am still a little confused as to why. It contrasts silly and brutal within a schizophrenic platform – if that makes any sense at all. And although it begins and ends, it also doesn't: It's ongoing, continuing, stretching well beyond the last measure, when we will all be at home in our beds. Somehow, at least for myself, I have managed to alter time's usual chronology. I may have built an environment in which the passage of time is only one possibility. There are others.

***Isolated Criterion No. 4* (2008)**

This short work for solo violin is one of four pieces collectively called: ***ISOLATED CRITERIA - Solos for True String Quartet***. These four pieces, solos for the string family (violin, viola, cello and c. bass), were commissioned by the California Music Center for the 2008 Klein International String Competition. They may be performed individually or in groups of two, three or the entire set. Although the four could be performed consecutively, i.e. as a large piece in four movements, the ideal way to perform the entire set, would be to space the four pieces throughout an entire concert, i.e. between the other works on the program, or on a concert series - each of the pieces performed at a different concert, thus providing a long-term continuity. In either of these cases, the four pieces may be performed in any order decided by the performers. Each CRITERION is a complete and self-contained statement, and, although isolated from the other three, creates an identical set of emotional circumstances to the others, as perceived through the vantage point of the slightly differing timbral personalities of the string family. All four then corroborate each other's testimony of the circumstances, which are obvious.

***Bind I* (2001)**

This piece is the first in a set of three duets for flute and piano, each of which is complete in its own microcosm but together make a large virtuosic statement. ***Bind I*** is particularly difficult and exhausting for the players. I keep trying to write music that is simple and fun to perform, but I keep failing. It seems that my ideas aren't fun and simple. Maybe this is because my strongest musical influences are the jazz players and the serial composers who shared the quarter century following World War II. This results in musical gestures that are elaborate, irregular, unbalanced, intricate, and usually counter-intuitive. When these ideas are captured and written down, and then studied and performed by fantastic musicians, they are also very difficult to perform. The individual parts for each musician are difficult enough, but when they are then put in synchrony, well let's just say it's no picnic. I believe in the ideal of performance art, and music is just that. I see the formula as: writer + performer + listener = music. Don't forget to do your part.

***Indirect Discourse* (2012)**

This short duet for baritone sax and drummer, is dedicated with thanks to my friend and long-time colleague, Eric Mandat. I guess when one gets older, this is the thing to do. Over the past 30 years the two of us have performed together many times in a variety of circumstances, both on the distant road and very close to the booming metropolis of our reluctant home of Carbondale (DFC: 0.0). I've written several pieces with Eric in mind, and he has premiered many of them. So I thought it would be apropos to dedicate some music to him as a non-musician: I don't think Eric owns a baritone sax, so he CANNOT perform this piece, which, but the way, does not contain a Bb-Db trill. There. Instead, his two younger, talented, perhaps Mandat-influenced colleagues, will serenade Eric P. Mandat, who will be relegated to sit, shut-up, and listen to their dialogue,

which is one of juvenile humor, savvy one-ups-man-ship, healthy 40 proof competition, and the worst poker face on the planet.

Inner Voices (1987)

This study for solo voice was inspired (predicated) by Luciano Berio's *Sequenza No. 3*, which created an entirely new genre of solo performance. Like Berio's, my piece utilizes extended vocal techniques within an abstruse monodrama. However, in addition to notating most of the actual breathing by the singer, my piece also asks the singer to *inhale* a few pitches (talk about micro-managing!) Berio's masterpiece mixes text with incomprehensible mumbling, but my "song" takes that idea one step further: my text is *written* using the International Phonetic Alphabet as its language, and, thus, the "words" in ***Inner Voices*** are invented, concocted solely by their sound. So, any meaning inferred from these totally invented words and phrases ("statements?") can only be subjective/creative interpretation on the part of each listener. This might elevate my "lyrics," which normally bring reality to a musical environment, up to the level of being totally abstract, and unburdens this music from the limitations of emotionally referencing words. For me, these gibberish "words" seem to have a certain meaning within their own language. It's other-worldly. It scares me. This might be because I am their author, but perhaps this abstract gestalt will affect others, as they – you – mingle these sounds with your own past and present interactions, and create your own associations and meanings to this profound nonsense.

Global Warning (2006)

Although the title of this piece (with an "n" – not an "m") is not at all original, it clearly implies at least one of the problems with which the modern world is faced. It would seem that there is very little a composer can do about these troubles. Writing music does little to feed the poor, influence the abhorrence of racism, or stop international conflicts that lead to war. And it certainly can't alter humanity's present course, which, if left unchecked, will certainly destroy the environment upon which we are all so dependant. Man's selfishness and greed is a reality, which is paralleled and actually fueled by world leaders – who have the talent and clout to positively influence the concrete world but, chronically, do not. I guess this pattern and course is set and will eventually play itself out. Although this seems hopeless, there is at least one ideology that might lead to a better conclusion for us: Art. Maybe through some sort of super-reality, listening to music, reading a poem, gazing at a painting, etc., might just save our necks.

ROPE (2006)

Like its Hollywood precursor, ***Rope*** (1948), a film experiment by Alfred Hitchcock in which he tells, in one continuous scene, the Nietzsche-related story of two intellectuals committing murder just to prove that they can, ***Rope*** (2006), a two-movement trio for alto sax, 'cello and piano, is an attempt at a seamless study of musical line and lyricism, that develops, or perhaps dissects, a single musical germ from beginning to end, rising and falling, ebbing and flowing, without the introduction of contrasting thematic material except by way of variation, embellishment, ornamentation and especially heterophony, the fourth musical texture, in which slightly different variations of the same tune are performed simultaneously – often sounding improvised with tiny discrepancies (or errors) between versions, which, while achieving some degree of contrast, in this particular context is always related to the original statement throughout the 16 minute composition, including the interim between the first and second movements, as the performers adjust their instruments and music for the remainder of the piece, and you, the audience, take a break, cough, check your cell phones and make comments to the person next to you about the music, the musicians and/or your after-concert plans, a kind of no-man's land within a composition similar to the Hitchcock model with its strange but regularly placed blackouts necessary because it was only possible to get 10 minutes maximum on a single reel of film before reloading the camera(s), with the second movement (***Lament Into Madness***) actually continuing the dissection of the original statement exactly where movement one (***Bad Seed***) concludes, continuing the analysis while uncovering more and more about the sinister tendencies of the motive, eventually coming down to examining the structure of a single cell, musical and neurological, much like the genetic code or DNA of psychosis, specifically, that which sociopathically always chooses bad over good, in this case first degree murder, even though the guilty party is merely being true to his internal instincts, having nothing to do with learned behaviors, and therefore is behaving honorably in this particular musical microcosm, even though this instinct is in fact dangerous psychopathic mental illness. *Good Evening*.

1963 (2008)

My father died of lung cancer a while back from the millions of cigarettes he smoked in his lifetime. Being a heavy smoker, he was, of course, a physician, actually a psychiatrist – and a good one: he was tough but compassionate. For years after his death his patients continued to call my mother, concerned about her wellbeing. Some of the younger *shrinks* at the hospital told me that they were indebted to my dad, because of all the help and advice he gave them as they were beginning their careers.

Like many World War II veterans, he was politically a very conservative young professional during the 1950s and early 60s. He had a daily routine with the nurses at the psychiatric hospital where he worked. Emerging from his office in the late afternoon, he would approach the nurses' station in search of the afternoon newspaper while making his usual irreverent wisecrack about the current Democratic President. On November 22, 1963, as he loudly vocalized his daily joke, his routine became family lore and is the subject of **1963**.

As he got older, however, he became politically very liberal, rooting for me when I grew my hair long and protested the Viet Nam war, supporting me when I left pre-med to study music. He also became quite eccentric: He made tapioca pudding every day for a couple of years, took albums full of photos of his dogs and of his wife laughing, and he drove his 1960 Cadillac until 1982, when it rusted and fell apart. When his seven children started producing grandchildren in the late seventies, he refused to be called "grandpa." At his request, his grandchildren (25 in all) called him "Uncle Clarence." One of his grandchildren, my son, described the old coot with his poem titled Clarence, which I set here – a sort of triple generation piece.

Clarence by Frank Stemper, Jr.

Rock salt under worn
wing tips. The old man hums
a tune he doesn't know. Dirty snow
covered walkway on a bone chilling day.

There is a crumbling red
brick building. Inside the nurses
are weeping over bright
countertops and dim headlines.

The doctor, wearing a slender
Smile, is almost in. He is aware
of his worn down face. His skin drooping
through heavy clouds of cigarette smoke.

And the ladies in white uniforms
Stifle their tears as he speaks:
No crying for old hole in the head.
Not on my watch.

Tears linger on dry pink cheeks
before staining the newspaper.
Ink runs toward the sunlight
through the words of the dead.

Dirty snow covered walkway
on a bone chilling day. Rock salt
under worn wing tips. The old man
hums a tune he doesn't know.

Lucy Shelton

Winner of two Walter W. Naumburg Awards – as chamber musician as well as solo recitalist – soprano Lucy Shelton enjoys an international career singing repertoire of all periods, with a primary focus on contemporary music. Notable among her numerous world premieres are works by Carter, Knussen, Davidovsky, Del Tredici, Grisey, Ruders, Schwantner, Albert and Wuorinen. An avid chamber musician, Shelton has been a guest artist with ensembles such as the Emerson, Mendelssohn, Enso and Guarneri string quartets, the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, Speculum Musicae, Sospeso, New York New Music Ensemble, Da Capo Chamber Players, Boston Musica Viva, eighth blackbird, Da Camera of Houston, the Nash Ensemble, Klangform Wien, Schoenberg-Asko, Ensemble Moderne and Ensemble Intercontemporain. Highlights of recent seasons include her Zankel Hall debut with the Met Chamber Orchestra and Maestro James Levine in Carter's "A Mirror On Which To Dwell", numerous performances of Schoenberg's "Pierrot Lunaire"; and the release of six new CD's with works by Alberto Ginastera (a 2010 Grammy Nominee), Anne Le Baron, Virko Baley, Louis Karchin, Chinary Ung and Charles Wuorinen. She has taught at the Third Street Settlement School in Manhattan, Eastman School, New England Conservatory, Britten-Pears School and the Cleveland Institute. She joined the

resident artist faculty of the Tanglewood Music Center in 1996. In the fall of 2007 she joined the Manhattan School of Music's Contemporary Performance faculty. Shelton was last heard in St. Louis when she premiered Joseph Schwantner's "Magabunda" with the Symphony.

The Altgeld Chamber Players

Performing together for nearly 20 years, the *Altgeld Chamber Players* is a flexible instrumentation ensemble composed of distinguished music faculty and outstanding graduate students from Southern Illinois University Carbondale. The repertoire of this dynamic and exciting ensemble ranges from cutting-edge contemporary works to the great classics of chamber music. Recently the ensemble has performed music by Mozart, Saint-Saens, Schönberg, Stravinsky, Ives, Copland, Messiaen, Kurt Weill, Andrew Imbrie, Bernard Rands, Shulamit Ran, Terry Riley, Chen Yi, Augusta Read Thomas, and Lee Hyla, as well as faculty composers Kathleen Ginther, Eric Mandat, and Frank Stemper. Concerts by the *Altgeld Chamber Players* are presented during the *Outside the Box* new music festival and on the SIUC campus as part of the School of Music's *Altgeld Performing Artists Series*.

Frank Stemper

The Music of Frank Stemper has been heard on the fringe of the music world for well over 30 years. His scores for orchestra, chamber ensemble, voice and computer have somehow found their way from his home in rural mid-America, to much of the United States and over a dozen foreign countries. His music has been performed in venues such as *Teatro de Los Heroes* (Mexico); *Antiel Roman* (Romania); *Pannonalma Budapest* (Hungary); *Kulturhaus Dornbirn* (Austria); *Cowell Theatre at Fort Mason* (San Francisco); *Uihlein Hall* (Milwaukee); *Symphony Center* (Chicago); *Symphony Space, St. Ignatius of Antioch, Weill and Carnegie Halls* (NYC); and *The Kennedy Center* (Washington DC); plus hundreds more. He has maintained a consistent presence on the new music scene, serving often as Guest Composer and/or performer at many international music festivals, such as *Incontri Europei Con La Musica – Bergamo* and *Festival Spaziomusica – Cagliari*, Italy; *The Happening: New Music – Calgary, Canada*; *International De Musica Contemporanea – Alicante*, Spain; *Vancouver Contemporary Music Festival*; *Saptamina Internationala A Muzicii Noi, Zilele Muzicii Contemporane* and the *George Enescu International Festival of Contemporary Music – Bucharest*, Romania; the *Bregenzer Festspiele – Austria*; etc. His music has also been aired – and often performed for live broadcast – on the National Radio stations of Mexico, Hungary, Cyprus, Romania, Radio France, and the BBC.

He has received to date nearly 40 commissions for new works from foundations and ensembles. Among his numerous accolades are the *George Ladd Prix de Paris*, a *Pulitzer* nomination, and, most recently, the *New York Virtuoso Singers Competition*. His work has been supported by the *National Endowment for the Arts* (NEA), *ASCAP*, *Meet the Composer*, *MTC – Global Connections*, *The American Music Center*, *The Rockefeller Fund for Music*, and the State Arts Councils of Illinois, California and New York. He has been in residence with many national and international ensembles and has received multiple "Guest Composer" invitations by the governments of Romania, Mexico, Austria, Spain and The Netherlands. Closer to home, he is founder and director of *The Center for Experimental Music* at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where he is Composer In Residence (Professor) and occasionally serves as pianist with the *Altgeld Chamber Players*.