



Advance Program Notes

Anthony de Mare

Liaisons: Re-imagining Sondheim from the Piano

Friday, September 18, 2015, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Anthony de Mare

Liaisons: Re-imagining Sondheim from the Piano

All works based on material by Stephen Sondheim

| | |
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| <i>A Little Fuggetta</i> (2010) after <i>Anyone Can Whistle</i> and <i>Send in the Clowns</i> | William Bolcom |
| <i>Every Day a Little Death</i> (2008/2010) <i>A Little Night Music</i> | Ricky Ian Gordon |
| <i>Very Put Together</i> (2012) after <i>Putting it Together</i> from <i>Sunday in the Park with George</i> | Mason Bates |
| <i>Send in the Clowns</i> (2011) <i>A Little Night Music</i> | Ethan Iverson |
| <i>No One is Alone</i> (2010) <i>Into the Woods</i> | Fred Hersh |
| <i>Finishing the Hat—Two Pianos</i> (2010) <i>Sunday in the Park with George</i> | Steve Reich |
| <i>The Ladies Who Lunch</i> (2010) <i>Company</i> | David Rakowski |
| <i>The Demon Barber</i> (2010) <i>A Fantasia on The Ballad of Sweeney Todd</i> | Kenji Bunch |

INTERMISSION

Program, continued

FILM INTERLUDE

Onstage interview with Stephen Sondheim, conducted by Mark Eden Horowitz at *Liaisons'* New York City premiere (Symphony Space April 2012)

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|--|-----------------|
| <i>Into the Woods</i> (2013) <i>Into the Woods</i> | Andy Akiho |
| <i>Johanna in Space</i> (2014) after <i>Johanna</i> from <i>Sweeney Todd</i> | Duncan Sheik |
| <i>That Old Piano Roll</i> (2014) <i>Follies</i> | Wynton Marsalis |
| <i>You Could Drive a Person Crazy</i> (2010/2014) <i>Company</i> | Eric Rockwell |
| <i>I Think About You</i> (2010) after <i>Losing My Mind</i> from <i>Follies</i> | Paul Moravec |
| <i>I'm Excited. No, You're Not.</i> (2010) after <i>A Weekend in the Country</i> from <i>A Little Night Music</i> | Jake Heggie |

From the Artist

Like many of us, I have long held in highest esteem the incomparable work of Stephen Sondheim, whose fearless eclecticism has emboldened many a musical risk-taker. Over the years, I often found myself imagining how the familiar and beloved songs of the Sondheim canon would sound if transformed into piano works along the lines of what Art Tatum and Earl Wild did for George Gershwin and Cole Porter, or what Liszt did for Verdi, Schubert, and so many others.

In 2009, after many years of working with talented composers from across the musical spectrum, I decided to pursue a formal commissioning and concert project. With a generous spark of enthusiasm from Sondheim (including some wonderful suggestions for composers to invite), *Liaisons: Re-Imagining Sondheim from the Piano* was born.

Liaisons now features the work of 36 composers ranging in age from 30 to 75, representing seven different countries and 44 Pulitzer, Grammy, Tony, Emmy, and Academy Awards. Taken as a whole, they demonstrate the way Sondheim's influence has extended far beyond the musical theatre to reach into the realms of classical, jazz, pop, theatre, indie, and film. The entire collection now stands as a celebration of Sondheim and the composers who rose to the challenge of adding their voices to his, a creative alchemy that affirms that his work is as much at home in a concert hall as on a Broadway stage.

A project this ambitious in scope is by definition a team effort. Producer Rachel Colbert joins me in thanking all the donors, designers, scholars, skeptics, presenters, partners, and friends who helped us make *Liaisons* a reality. I am also very honored to be performing at Virginia Tech's Moss Arts Center—the first venue in a series of many to host the launch of the complete *Liaisons* 3-CD box set recording on ECM Records this month. We are deeply grateful to Ruth Waalkes and everyone here for believing in the project and for giving us this opportunity to bring the music to you.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. To add further context I've asked each of the composers to write something about their piece, and following are their comments—a true testament to the diversity of talents represented by the project and to the singular impact Sondheim's music has had on us all.

—Anthony de Mare

Notes from the Composers

WILLIAM BOLCOM

The main theme for *A Little Night Fughetta* is taken from *Anyone Can Whistle*, a melody that struck me as a fugue subject—with a countersubject of *Send in the Clowns*. I thought Steve would be amused at a fugue-like, and mercifully short, piece -- thus a fughetta and not a fugue.

RICKY IAN GORDON

In 1973, when Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* was running on Broadway, I was 17 years old and I was obsessed with it. I saw it six times. There was one song, though, that I couldn't wait to hear at every show—*Every Day A Little Death*. So when I began this piece for Tony I didn't even look at the music—I just started riffing on what I myself might like to play, as if I were playing that song for someone, introducing its delicate intricacies, its stunning melody, and the counter melody of the duet. I took some things out of their original time and meter... I guess you could say I sort of made love to it, with gratitude for all the pleasure it has given me over the years.

MASON BATES

The manic energy of Sondheim's *Putting It Together*—which showcases the collision of art and schmoozing at a spectacular art opening—seemed an intriguing challenge to compress into a piano solo. The two primary themes of the scene are, well, put together here—smashed together, actually—in a quicksilver showpiece for one of the most gifted and inventive pianists, Anthony de Mare.

ETHAN IVERSON

Some songs we never tire of no matter how many times we hear them. My reasonably straightforward arrangement of *Send in the Clowns* can be played on a concert grand but might be even better on a barroom upright. The original melody at the beginning recurs and interferes, eventually provoking a humiliating outburst in G major (instead of the correct G minor).

FRED HERSCH

No One Is Alone from *Into the Woods* appealed to me because its diatonic melody (like many of the great tunes by Richard Rodgers) enabled me to make subtle changes in the harmony that reflect my jazz sensibility. I could make the arrangement sound lush and pianistic—and just let the melody sing. And I love what the lyric says—it is a very relevant song.

STEVE REICH

Finishing the Hat—Two Pianos for Stephen Sondheim is a rather faithful re-working of one of Sondheim's favorite songs from *Sunday in the Park with George*, and incidentally, the title of his recent book. Harmonically very close to the original, and melodically adding only occasional variations, my only real change is in the rhythm of constantly changing meters. This gives my two piano version a rhythmic character more in line with my own music and, hopefully, another perspective with which to appreciate Sondheim's brilliant original. For this performance, Anthony de Mare accompanies himself with his own recording of the Piano 2 part.

Notes from the Composers, continued

DAVID RAKOWSKI

Like all of the composers in the Liaisons project, I was presented with the problem of reframing a song that is already perfect—and in my case, my favorite Sondheim song, *The Ladies Who Lunch*. My solution was, to the best of my ability, to concentrate on the character's deep sadness, thereby eschewing the song's big finish for a slow, introspective one.

KENJI BUNCH

My first exposure to *Sweeney Todd* came as a 10-year-old watching a PBS broadcast of the Broadway production. I was both terrified and fascinated, and have felt the work's and Sondheim's influence ever since. For *The Demon Barber*—an homage to the seething, menacing introductory song, *The Ballad of Sweeney Todd*—I highlighted the original song's oblique references to the Dies Irae Gregorian melody into a persistent, ominous chant that surfaces throughout. I also wanted to amplify the work's horror-show qualities with low register rumblings, shrieking high clusters, and insistent rhythmic ostinato patterns.

ANDY AKIHO

The first time I listened to it, I loved the concept of *Into the Woods*—being lost in and confused by the woods and the consistent and driving rhythms of the opening prologue. I was also intrigued by Sondheim's innovative and witty use of spoken narrative against his catchy melodies, particularly during each character's introduction. My goal in re-imagining this prologue was to orchestrate each character's personality with the use of prepared piano—for example, dimes on the strings for the cow scenes, poster tack on the strings for door knocks and narrated phrases, and credit card string-clusters for the wicked witch. My goal was to portray each character's story and mystical journey using exotic piano timbres in place of text.

DUNCAN SHEIK

By some happy twist of circumstance my mother took me to see the original Broadway production of *Sweeney Todd* when I was nine years old. I remember a shocking amount of blood. Returning to see the show in John Doyle's 2006 production, I more fully appreciated the neat trick of how *Johanna* morphs from a plaintive, hopeful declaration of love into the pathos and pathology of love completely lost. Two opposite ends of the human condition oscillating back and forth. Not being a virtuoso pianist myself, I wanted to simplify the actual piano part to its most basic components—the Satie version of *Johanna*, if you will. But I also wanted to have the atmosphere of *Johanna*'s celestial beauty and the idea that, like a shooting star, she is out of reach. To this end I employed a technique of layering dozens of takes of guitar improvisation through a tape echo, thus creating a blanket of sound for the piano to linger within. So a piece for piano and tape echo, *Johanna in Space*.

WYNTON MARSALIS

Stephen Sondheim employs many syncopated and expressive devices in *That Old Piano Roll*. My arrangement uses these concepts to evoke the styles of three great jazz pianists. The basic stride style of James P. Johnson is answered by the jagged, obtuse style of Thelonious Monk. Both find resolution in the ragtime-swing style of New Orleans pianist Jelly Roll Morton. The parlor piano elegance of the second theme, with its tresillo rhythm, is juxtaposed to a 4/4 New Orleans ragtime stomp. In the 1920s a heated debate swirled around jazz as polite society music or red hot dance music. Now, we happily play it all.

Notes from the Composers, continued

ERIC ROCKWELL

I tried to keep the craziness to a minimum in *You Could Drive a Person Crazy*, opting instead to create a straight-ahead piano arrangement of Sondheim's wonderful song. I picture it taking place in a cabaret room where the patrons are loud and drunk and not really listening to the pianist. As a result, he occasionally tries to catch someone's ear by channeling his inner Liberace, as well as other assorted demons lurking inside him. The result is what I call a "Schizo Scherzo."

PAUL MORAVEC

I Think About You takes its title from the second—and oft repeated—line of *Losing My Mind* from *Follies*. In my re-imagining for piano solo, the eponymous musical phrase repeats maniacally to the point of "losing its mind." The piece is a musical meditation on obsession, heartbreak, and, finally, the timeless need to love and be loved.

JAKE HEGGIE

I'm Excited. No, You're Not. is my take on Stephen Sondheim's amazing ensemble, *A Weekend in the Country*. I tried to capture the energy and the momentum, as well as a few bumps in the road, in creating a big, fun, splashy tour-de-force for Tony de Mare.

The Liaisons Project features the following composers

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Andy Akiho | Tania Leon |
| Mason Bates | Ricardo Lorenz |
| Eve Beglarian | Wynton Marsalis |
| Derek Bermel | Paul Moravec |
| Jherek Bischoff | Nico Muhly |
| William Bolcom | John Musto |
| Jason Robert Brown | Thomas Newman |
| Kenji Bunch | David Rakowski |
| Mary Ellen Childs | Steve Reich |
| Michael Daugherty | Eric Rockwell |
| Peter Golub | Daniel Bernard Roumain (DBR) |
| Ricky Ian Gordon | Frederic Rzewski |
| Annie Gosfield | Rodney Sharman |
| Jake Heggie | Duncan Sheik |
| Fred Hersch | David Shire |
| Ethan Iverson | Bernadette Speach |
| Gabriel Kahane | Mark-Anthony Turnage |
| Phil Kline | Nils Vigeland |

Biographies

ANTHONY DE MARE

Anthony de Mare is one of the world's foremost champions of contemporary music. Praised by *The New York Times* for his "muscularly virtuosic, remarkably uninhibited performance, [and] impressive talents," his versatility has inspired the creation of over 60 new works by some of today's most distinguished artists, especially in the speaking-singing pianist genre, which he pioneered over 25 years ago with the premiere of Frederic Rzewski's groundbreaking *De Profundis*.

Liaisons: Re-Imagining Sondheim from the Piano is a landmark commissioning and concert project that perfectly expresses his vision to expand both the repertoire and the audience for contemporary music. Most recently, the *Chicago Sun-Times* declared "that de Mare's passion and vision almost radiate from the stage ... he causes all involved—composers, performer, and audience members—to think about how music is made and how we listen to it."

As creator, performer, and co-producer of The Liaisons Project, de Mare has added another 27 composers to the list of those he has commissioned, as well as another 36 compositions to the contemporary piano repertoire, bringing the work of musical theatre maestro Stephen Sondheim into the concert hall while spanning the classical contemporary, jazz, film, theatre, and indie worlds.

Sold-out houses and raves in the *New York Times* greeted the first New York premieres of The Liaisons Project at Symphony Space. Anthony Tommasini of the *New York Times* extolled de Mare's "formidable virtuosity" and "dynamic and stylish playing." Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* raved that, "*Liaisons* is a revelation... de Mare's playing was superb throughout, a combination of lyrical reflection and extroverted pyrotechnics." In a live onstage interview, Sondheim called the project "flattering... to hear composers take my music and take it seriously is a thrill."

The full 3-CD box set recording of the project, produced by Judith Sherman, will be released on ECM in September 2015, accompanied by another major national tour. Upcoming performances include all 36 works performed in a three-concert series in New York at Birdland, The Sheen Center, and Symphony Space. The adaptability of the program to jazz, theatre, and classical spaces speaks once again to the range of de Mare's versatility as a performer.

De Mare was invited to perform on Lincoln Center's American Songbook series special event *Reich and Sondheim: In Conversation* earlier this year, and *Liaisons* was chosen to represent Sondheim's oeuvre in the festivities surrounding his receipt of the 2013 Medal of Honor from the MacDowell Colony at the Monadnock Music Festival. An excerpt from the project was also recently featured in the HBO documentary *Six by Sondheim*.

He has performed *Liaisons* programs across the U.S., Canada, and Cuba, including The Ravinia Festival, the Gilmore Keyboard Festival, the Virginia Arts Festival, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Schubert Club in Minneapolis, Mondavi Center at UC Davis, Rockport Music Festival, the Cliburn Series in Fort Worth, and Music at Meyer in San Francisco.

de Mare's performances over the years span five continents, allowing him to develop a growing fan base that extends far beyond the traditional contemporary music audience. In addition to The Liaisons Project, he has premiered works by Frederic Rzewski, James Mobberley, Meredith Monk, Jerome Kitzke, David Rakowski, David Del Tredici, Aaron Jay Kernis and Paul Moravec, Fred Hersch, and Jason Robert Brown, among others. He has been profiled by the *Chicago Tribune*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Time Out NY*, *The Contrapuntist*, and *BroadwayWorld.com*, among others, and has been heard in performances and interviews on nationally syndicated shows with WNYC's John Schaefer, NPR, WQXR, and numerous stations across the country.

Biographies, continued

Since his debut with Young Concert Artists in 1986, his accolades and awards include First Prize and Audience Prize at the International Gaudeamus Interpreters Competition (The Netherlands) and The International Competition of Contemporary Piano Music (France). He gave his Carnegie Hall debut at Zankel Hall in 2005. Among his best-known performances are his national tour of *The American Piano* (with pianist Steven Mayer); *Playing With Myself*, a multi-media concert event that enjoyed a sold-out run at HERE Arts Center (New York, 2001); *Missing Peace*, an eclectic series of old and new works inspired by the exhibition, *The Missing Peace: Artists Consider the Dalai Lama* at The Rubin Museum in NYC; *Cool—A Journey into the Influence of Jazz*; and *Unities: Music of Pride and Celebration*. De Mare has also collaborated and performed with the Bang-On-A-Can All Stars, Meredith Monk/The House, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, among many others.

de Mare has nearly 20 recordings in his discography. In addition to the current release of *Liaisons* on ECM, his recording *SPEAK!—The Speaking-Singing Pianist* (Innova) is the first disc devoted completely to the genre he created over 20 years ago. Both *SPEAK!* and *Out of My Hands* (KOCH Entertainment) were short listed for Grammy Awards in 2011 and 2005, respectively. For *Out of My Hands*, *American Record Guide* raved that “his exquisite touch and impassioned beauty of utterance imbue this program with artistry of the highest order.” *American Record Guide* also named *Wizards and Wildmen: Piano Music of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison* (CRI /New World) as one of 2000’s Ten Best Releases. Other acclaimed recordings include *Pianos and Voices: Music by John Cage and Meredith Monk*, an unprecedented pairing of these two mavericks of the American avant-garde (Koch); *Frederic Rzewski—Anthony de Mare* (O.O. Discs), and *Oblivion*, with cellist Maya Beiser (Koch).

Currently professor of piano at Manhattan School of Music and New York University, his commitment to education is evidenced by his residency work at universities across North America, through which he has inspired a whole new generation of pianists and contemporary music advocates, encouraging them to initiate creative strategies as innovative entrepreneurs.

De Mare is a Steinway Artist. For more information, please visit www.anthonymare.com.

STEPHEN SONDHEIM

Stephen Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night* (1954), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Anyone Can Whistle* (1964), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *The Frogs* (1974), *Pacific Overtures* (1976), *Sweeney Todd* (1979), *Merrily We Roll Along* (1981), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), *Into the Woods* (1987), *Assassins* (1991), *Passion* (1994), and *Road Show* (2008). He wrote lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957), *Gypsy* (1959), and *Do I Hear A Waltz?* (1965), as well as additional lyrics for *Candide* (1973). Anthologies of his work include *Side by Side by Sondheim* (1976), *Marry Me A Little* (1981), *You’re Gonna Love Tomorrow* (1983), *Putting It Together* (1993/99), and *Sondheim on Sondheim* (2010). For films and television, he composed the scores of *Stavisky* (1974) and *Reds* (1981), as well as songs for *Dick Tracy* (1990) and *Evening Primrose* (1966). Sondheim is on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, having served as its president from 1973 to 1981. His collected lyrics with attendant essays have been published in two volumes: *Finishing the Hat* (2010) and *Look, I Made A Hat* (2011). In 2010 the Broadway theatre formerly known as Henry Miller’s Theatre was renamed in his honor. The *Liaisons Project* has been produced with the express permission of Stephen Sondheim.

List of Commissioners

William Bolcom was commissioned by William E. Terry.

Ricky Ian Gordon was commissioned by Ted and Mary Jo Shen.

Mason Bates was commissioned by James & Ellen Marcus and Annaliese Soros in celebration of the marriage of Beth Sapery and Rosita Sarnoff.

Ethan Iverson was commissioned by Frank K. Godchaux and Mark Murashige.

Fred Hersch was commissioned by Dan Gallagher and Peter Shearer for their son Ian Gallagher Shearer.

Steve Reich was commissioned by Ben and Donna Rosen.

David Rakowski and Eric Rockwell were commissioned by Beth Rudin Dewoody.

Kenji Bunch and Jake Heggie were commissioned by The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (University of Maryland).

Wynton Marsalis and Andy Akiho were commissioned by Bob and Anna Livingston.

Duncan Sheik was commissioned by Richard and Linda Sweetnam in memory of Anthony Razzano.

Paul Moravec was commissioned by Martin L. and Lucy Miller Murray.

All pieces were commissioned expressly for The Liaisons Project; Rachel Colbert and Anthony de Mare, producers.

Liaisons title design by David Prittie

Liaisons projection design by Aestheticize Media

Visit www.liaisonsproject.com to learn more or get in touch.

Engagement Activities

Thursday, September 17, 1:30 PM

A CONVERSATION WITH GUEST ARTIST ANTHONY DE MARE

Lecture, Q&A, Demonstration

Hillel at Virginia Tech

Hosted by the Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech

Guest artist de Mare shares his experience commissioning new works from 36 of the world's foremost contemporary composers to "re-imagine" Stephen Sondheim's songs as solo piano pieces for participants in the inaugural term of the university's Lifelong Learning Institute.

The Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech is a member-driven, volunteer organization that draws on the wealth of academic and community resources in the New River Valley to provide intellectual, cultural, and social experiences for curious adults 50 and older.

Thursday, September 17, 3:30 PM

PIANO TECHNIQUES WORKSHOP BY ANTHONY DE MARE

Squires Recital Salon

Virginia Tech students of piano and music composition will benefit from de Mare's instruction in this private session focused on piano techniques.

Special thanks to Tracy Cowden, Patricia Hyer, and Rick Masters

In the Galleries

PHILIP TAAFFE

September 3–November 15, 2015

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

Artist Spotlight: Philip Taaffe

A distinguished, internationally acclaimed artist, Taaffe has created a prolific body of work masterfully synthesizing references to art history, architecture, anthropology, and the natural sciences. A fascination with symbols, cultural traditions, and rituals across civilizations throughout time is expressed through ancient and oriental decorative motifs, references to Islamic art and design, and 19th-century natural history illustrations, among other wide-ranging sources. Beyond the rich cultural history of mankind, Taaffe's interests also extend into the realm of science, and in particular, botany. In a unique and highly unusual combination of techniques, Taaffe interweaves silk screening, stenciling, collage, marbling, staining, and many other approaches to image making in his rich, complex paintings.

Art historians have described Philip Taaffe's work as a visual quest, one that integrates the decorative with the narrative, the natural with the man-made, and the ancient with the modern.

Hear Philip Taaffe speak about his work Thursday, October 15 at 6 PM in the Ruth C. Horton Gallery. Artist talks are free and open to the public.

ALSO ON VIEW

Beyond Real: Still Life in the 21st Century

September 3–November 15, 2015

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery, Sherwood P. Quillen Reception Gallery

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday-Friday, 10 AM-6 PM; Saturday-Sunday, 10 AM-4 PM; closed for VT home football games