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GREY BIRD MUSIC 

JOEL PHILLIP FRIEDMAN

Long Bio

Energetic, detailed, and inquisitive, composer Joel Phillip Friedman is a synthesist at heart. Striving to fashion a unified whole from diverse elements and experiences, Joel creates music that is informed equally by his classical training and his engagement with the vernacular. His varied portfolio comprises music for small and large ensembles, musical theater, opera, dance, film, and rock, and is constantly refreshed through collaborations, teaching activities, and new creative projects.

Early on, Joel was drawn to both narrative and abstract music, composing chamber works and jazz charts as he simultaneously collaborated on what would become the popular Off-Broadway/London West End hit show, *Personals*. However, this natural, creative impulse to work across genres proved a challenging path as he was urged by his teachers to specialize *among* his musical activities -- to choose *between* musical theater and concert music. Joel resisted this, instead resolving to synthesize, rather than compartmentalize his creative work. As a result, Joel has developed a formidable tool kit as a composer, coupled with an impressive list of performances, commissions, and awards.

Many gifted artists have performed Joel's music. His *Viola Concerto*, which former NY Philharmonic principal Paul Neubauer premiered at Carnegie Hall, garnered significant praise ("*beautiful and intelligent*" by Andrew Porter in *The New Yorker*; "*Brilliant*" by James Oestreich in the *New York Times*), is an early example of Joel's ability to unite dramatic contour with the craft and scale of absolute music. Thomas G. Hall in his *Journal of the America Viola Society* review described the work as "...*masterly constructed*" whose "*orchestration is meticulous, reminiscent of Tchaikovsky or Mahler in attention to detail*" while also "*dramatic, passionate, lyrical, eloquent, acerbic, tender, rough, sentimental ...*" The concerto received ASCAP's Morton Gould Young Composers Award and was a competition winner of the National Orchestral Association's New Music Orchestral Project. Additional artists include pianists Stephen Gosling, Evelyne Luest, and Kathleen Supové, cellists Fred Sherry, Joshua Roman (Symphony Space), and Maria Kitsopoulus (Miller Theater, NYC), the Eberli Ensemble (as part of MATA), and Margaret Lancaster, flute (Roulette).

Just a few years earlier Clive Barnes in the *New York Post* described the popular Off-Broadway/London West End hit *Personals* (which in New York starred Jason Alexander and Dee Hoty, among others) as "PERSONALS is a winner!...*The brightest revue of the year, and indeed of many a year.*" Larry Ledford (the Christian Science Monitor) effused that "*The most effective songs are by Seth and Joel Friedman*" with special mention made of their songs *I Think You Should Know*, *A Little Happiness*, and *Picking Up The Pieces*. *Personals* received awards from the American College Theatre Festival and the New England Theatre Communications Group, toured Europe for the USO, and was also nominated for numerous Outer Critics Circle and Drama Desk Awards (receiving one). The London cast album is available on Jay Records. Both *Personals*, and his work in the musical revue *Let Freedom Sing!*, were presented by the John F. Kennedy Center For the Performing Arts.

Joel's affinity for collaboration and theater has made him an ideal partner for directors, choreographers, and presenters. He wrote the book, music and lyrics for *Stew!*, a children's musical theater piece (for which he received a grant from Meet The Composer), composed songs for the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Parks/NEA *Shakespeare in American Communities* production of *Twelfth Night* that toured throughout the Midwest, and produced incidental music for Vincent Dowling's Chester Theater production of *The Gravity of Honey*. Joel collaborated with choreographer Sally Hess on the

whimsical *T Tables*, a series of short dance vignettes scored for John Alston's rich solo baritone voice (Performed at Swarthmore College and at the DanceNOW/NYC Festival at Joe's Pub). He has received commissions from the American Music Theater Festival and American Opera Projects and others. And, in addition, Joel served as a Consulting Editor for the Library of Congress's restored critical (piano-vocal) editions of two musicals by George and Ira Gershwin: *Strike Up The Band!* and *Pardon My English*.

His art song setting of Marie Howe's powerful poem *What The Living Do* was premiered by Grammy award winning soprano Susan Narucki and pianist Alan Feinberg, who subsequently brought the work to audiences coast-to-coast (including the 92nd St Y and the Monodnack Festival) as part of their program *Extraordinary Vistas: Words & Music Of the MacDowell Colony*. Their definitive interpretation is available on the Americus label.

The playful quality and compact, colorful forces of a virtuoso mixed ensemble served as the ideal foundation/inspiration for *Elastic Band*, scored for clarinet, string quartet, and percussion. This work has been performed by ensembles in New York, New Jersey, and California, including: Speculum Musicae, the New York Chamber Ensemble, and the Adorno Ensemble. Richard Scheinin of the Mercury News described *Elastic Band* as "a work of serious fun,...[Friedman] has ingeniously transformed popular themes in a chamber setting."

By chance, Joel's path led to a meeting with writer/director Ralph Hyver and an invitation score Hyver's full length independent supernatural thriller, *Red Ice*, in 2011. The music, which was created from live and electronic sources, employs a rich palette of avant-garde orchestral textures, electronic sounds, Latin-infused music, delicate music for pipa and gongs, as well as the striking fusion of flute improv (played by Steve Adams of the Rova Saxophone Quartet) and the edgy heavy metal of San Francisco-based band Kaos. *Red Ice* was accepted to both SF IndieFest's *Another Hole In the Head* and the *Chicago Horror* festivals and is distributed by Entertainment 7.

Current projects spotlight the scope of Joel's interests: commissions for a string orchestra piece from the San Jose Chamber Orchestra and the Takoma Ensemble and a series of solo string pieces for the 2013 *Irving M Klein International String Competition*; *Fallings*, an experimental chamber music theater piece with librettist-brother Seth (for which Joel received a Lucas Fellowship to the Montalvo Arts Center); and *The Emily Songs* his recent indie rock settings of Emily Dickinson's poetry.

For Joel teaching is an extension of his creative process. Mirroring his diverse compositional interests, he has taught a range of university-level courses in composition, theory/analysis, and history, as well as originating courses on The Beatles, History of Rock and Jazz, and Musical Theater. Starting this fall Joel will be Visiting Associate Professor at Georgetown University for the 2014-2015 academic year. Joel has been on faculty at Swarthmore College, as well as Notre Dame de Namur, Santa Clara, Stanford (Continuing Studies), and Seton Hall Universities. His teaching extends well beyond the classroom, however. Highly regarded for his ability to engage with audiences and make complex topics both accessible and entertaining, Joel has been invited for engagements (including hosting, curating performances, speaking, and teaching) by organizations including the Hudson River Museum, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Baltimore and Fairfax Symphonies (*Symphonic Explorations* and *And In Closing...* respectively), the United Nations Association Film Festival, New England Theater Conference, and the Washington Chorus (the recent panel discussion with Washington Post music critic Anne Midgette and musicologist Saul Lilienstein at the Italian Embassy in DC). He also writes commentary for such organizations as the Washington Chorale.

Joel received his Mus. B and MM from Boston University, and his DMA from Columbia University where he was a President's Fellow. His works are recorded on the Jay, Crystal, and Americus labels, and published by Samuel French and Grey Bird Music (via Scorestreet.net). Joel recently relocated to Washington DC with his wife Jenny Bilfield, their daughter Hallie, parrots extraordinaire Percy and Heathcliff, and Sugar Lucille (Dog Of Wonder). For more information see www.joelfriedman.com.

Joel Phillip Friedman (March 2014)