

CROCUS HILL GHOST STORY

Music by Julie Johnson • Story by Cheri Johnson
Script by Cheri Johnson • Projection Design by D.J. Mendel
Sound Design by Eric M.C. Gonzalez • Dramaturgy by Robert Cowgill

Performed by Zeitgeist

Heather Barringer and Patti Cudd, percussion
Pat O'Keefe, woodwinds; Nikki Melville, piano
and featuring
Julie Johnson, flute; KrisAnne Weiss, narration

ARTIST STATEMENTS

In the summer of 2014, Julie asked me to write a ghost story that would be part of a new piece that combined text and music. Since we would be creating the piece with Zeitgeist, I wanted the story to be set in St. Paul. For the setting, I used details from a summer I spent in a big house in the Crocus Hill neighborhood on Fairmount Avenue. I was interested in the challenge of writing a dark ghost story set in a pretty, airy, light-filled house.

My favorite ghost stories (such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, Poe's "Ligeia" and "The Black Cat") share a common element: the hauntings are powerfully connected to, cannot be divided from, some searing emotion or set of emotions on the part of the haunted characters—desire, love, guilt, shame. Ghosts can function as a way for people to metaphorically or literally shift the blame for some of the terrible things that happen in their lives. Or, in the case of "The Black Cat," Poe's narrator is well aware that it is his inability to overcome his own personal demons that has summoned the supernatural terror that is now upon him. These kinds of themes are at play in my story "Crocus Hill." —**Cheri Johnson**

My first step in creating this work was to simply read Cheri's ghost story, then to write music that "went with it" in some way: music that spoke to a character and his/her mood, feelings, or actions, or music that brought out an unspoken emotion, tension, or fear. Later, I formed ways to think about how the music, the story, and the film functioned together in performance. I wanted to create a score that is more like a film score than a play with music or a musical. I wanted the words and the music to form a kind of duet: sometimes the music solos, sometimes the words do, and sometimes they are working together to create melody, harmony, and accompaniment.

I create soundscapes by using recurring motives, colors, and themes that get tossed around to all of the instruments. The story lives and breathes within this bed of soundscape. My hope is that through this soundscape, we can experience the story more fully, with D.J.'s images adding even more powerfully to the effect that we are in this house with these characters and living through these disturbing experiences with them. —**Julie Johnson**

Zeitgeist invited Julie Johnson to explore new musical ideas with us through the Zeitgeist/Composer Workshop. We were taken with her American roots inspired compositions and were certain that together we could create something unique to share with audiences. She, in turn, invited her sister and frequent collaborator to join as well. We readily embraced the idea.

Little did we know we had invited a ghost into our midst! Our haunt led us to explore the sometimes dark and complicated side of a variety of relationships – between words, music, and images, lovers, friends and adversaries (living and otherwise) while continually moving between that veil of what is and what might be. The manifestation of our work, Crocus Hill Ghost Story, invites you into this shaded world as well. Welcome to our house. —**Heather Barringer**

BIOGRAPHIES

Cheri Johnson's fiction, poetry, reviews, and literary biographies have appeared in *Glimmer Train Stories*, *Pleiades*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *New South*, *The Rio Grande Review*, *Provincetown Arts*,

and the *American Writers Supplement*. Her chapbook of poems, *Fun & Games*, was published in 2009 by Finishing Line Press, and she has written two series of nonfiction books for young readers (*Origins: Urban Legends* and *Origins: Whodunnit*) for Full Tilt Press. She has won grants and residencies from Yaddo, The McKnight Foundation, The Bush Foundation, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Minnesota State Arts Board, and the Metropolitan Regional Arts Council. She studied writing at Augsburg College, Hollins University, and The University of Minnesota, and has taught at Augsburg and the Loft Literary Center.

Flutist and composer **Julie Johnson** has a distinct sound and approach—rougher and more soulful than a typical classical sound, yet more pure than a typical jazz player's—that she brings to many multi-genre projects, including places where, she's been told, the flute doesn't belong. As a creator and a performer of new music, Julie's work walks the line between composition and songwriting, art music and popular music, between genres as seemingly different as classical and blues. A finalist for the McKnight Fellowship for Performing Musicians and a winner of grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board, the American Composers Forum, the Lanesboro Arts Center, Springboard for the Arts, MacPhail Center for Music, MRAC, and a Banff Centre residency, she plays in many styles, working to bring both the flute and her audiences to music they haven't been in contact with before.

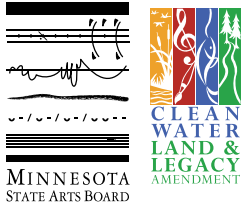
D.J. Mendel is an actor, director, writer and filmmaker who has worked extensively with avant-garde theater-makers as well as emerging new writers, directors, and theater groups. His one-man show, *Dick Done Broke*, was presented at the Bushwick Starr Theater and he most recently starred in the European Premiere of *Elizabeth ou l'equity*, which played at the Theatre du Rond Point in Paris. He starred in Hal Hartley's feature film, *Meanwhile*, and other film roles include Richard Sylvarnes' *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and *H.C.E* (2007), both debuting at the Tribeca Film festival, and the title role in Salvatore Interlandi's critically acclaimed *Charlie*. Mendel has been a longtime collaborator with Cynthia Hopkins, directing many of her shows and others such as Daniel Bernard Roumain's *Symphony for the Dance Floor* and Darwin's *Meditation for the People of Lincoln*. He has directed two feature films: *Make Pretend* (which he also wrote) and *Planet Earth: Dreams*, penned by Richard Foreman as well as many shorts, including the award winning, *Crazy for The Ballet*. His plays, *Tom, Dick & Harry* and *Dick Done Broke*, were presented at The Ontological-Hysteric Theater in New York and *Exhaust Pipes and Manifolds* was presented by the Ground Floor Theater Lab. Mendel is the Head of Advanced Actor Training at Playwrights Horizon's Theater School at NYU's Tisch School for the Arts.

Robert Cowgill, Associate Professor of English at Augsburg University, was long ago associate dramaturg at the Guthrie Theater. He was delighted to consult with author Cheri Johnson and composer Julie Johnson on Crocus Hill.

Eric M.C Gonzalez is a composer of solo works, chamber pieces, electroacoustic, electronic music and works for film and theater. Eric is the director and cellist of the string ensemble Forest City Chambers. Eric studied composition with Andrew Rindfleisch and Greg D'alessio, cello performance with David Allen Harrell of The Cleveland Orchestra, and film music with Michael Baumgartener at Cleveland State University. He recently moved to St. Paul.

KrisAnne Weiss, mezzo-soprano, has performed leading roles in many operas, including *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *The Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte*, *Carmen*, and *Madama Butterfly*. She has appeared with the Pine Mountain Music Festival, Fargo Moorhead Opera, Opera Omaha, and Minnesota Opera. She has performed with Valley Chamber Chorale, St. Catherine Choral Society, the Bakken Trio, Mississippi Valley Orchestra, Bel Canto Chorus of Milwaukee, Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra, Nautilus Music-Theater, and the Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, among others. An advocate of contemporary music, Ms. Weiss has premiered a number of works, among them John Tartaglia's orchestral work *Dark Night*, Glad Day, Edie Hill's *Amy Lowell: A Rare Pattern*, and the lead role in Chris Gable's opera *The Ladysmith Story*.

Lauded for providing “a once-in-a-lifetime experience for adventurous concertgoers,” **Zeitgeist** is a new music chamber ensemble comprised of two percussion, piano and woodwinds. One of the longest established new music groups in the country, Zeitgeist commissions and presents a wide variety of new music for audiences in the Twin Cities and on tour. Always eager to explore new artistic frontiers, Zeitgeist collaborates with poets, choreographers, directors, visual artists and sound artists of all types to create imaginative new work that challenges the boundaries of traditional chamber music. Find out more at zeitgeistnewmusic.org.



Zeitgeist's 2020 tour of Crocus Hill Ghost Story is made possible by the voters of Minnesota through a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.