

Zeitgeist's Early Music Festival

Frederic Rzewski

November 19-20, 2021

Studio Z



Zeitgeist

Heather Barringer and Patti Cudd, percussion;
Pat O'Keefe, woodwinds; Jill Dawe, piano

With special guests

Rolf Erdahl, James Devoll, Allen Otte, Alyssa Anderson, Alex Hecker,
Douglas R. Ewart, Ryann Daisy Swimmer, Dameun Strange, Eric M.C. Gonzalez, Isaac
Mayhew, Ivan Cunningham, George Cartwright

Artist Statement

Zeitgeist enjoyed an artistically fruitful and politically sympathetic relationship with Frederic Rzewski, especially in our early years. He wrote four works for the ensemble, and we toured and recorded together. Of our relationship, Rzewski states, " Writing music is a solitary business. One feels sometimes like a marooned sailor tossing messages into the sea. Then, one day, a boat appears on the horizon and draws nearer, carrying four musicians and badly needed supplies. We could sail away together and leave this godforsaken place forever; but suddenly there is the realization that, for better or for worse, it has become home, and one will never leave it."

Rzewski's music will always feel like home to us.

PROGRAM AND NOTES

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 19

Song and Dance (1977)

Heather Barringer, vibes; James Devoll, flute, Rolf Erdahl, double bass, Pat O'Keefe, bass clarinet

SONG AND DANCE was written in December 1977 for *Speculum Musicae*. The title refers to two kinds of time that reappear in alternation throughout the piece. The first, "song" time, is slow and lyrical; the second, "dance" time, is fast and rhythmical. Generally, in the "song" the instruments are treated as soloists (with or without accompaniment), and the individual expressive qualities of each are emphasized; whereas in the "dance" it is the harmonic and contrapuntal relationships between them that tend to dominate.

Writing *Song and Dance* was a rare occasion both for working with remarkably gifted musicians and for experimenting, as I have tried to do in several other compositions, with the possibilities offered by a synthesis of written and improvising traditions. A new kind of creative musician appears to be emerging as a result of this synthesis, of a sort that flourished before the 19th century but gradually disappeared around Beethoven's time in Western music: a musician equally skilled in reproducing a written text with technical fidelity and in improvising a subjective commentary on it. In the synthesis of composing and playing techniques I have aimed for in *Song and Dance*, the virtuosity of the players is at least as important as the compositional scheme. — Frederic Rzewski

The Lost Melody (1989)

Heather Barringer, steel pan; Patti Cudd, marimba; Jill Dawe, piano; Pat O'Keefe, clarinet and bass clarinet

In *THE LOST MELODY*, Zeitgeist becomes a kind of neo-klezmer band. In 1985, Pete Seeger sent me his anthology of American labor songs, *Carry It On!* (published by Sing Out, P.O. Box 5253, Bethlehem, PA 18015). I think I should just transcribe the Yiddish text of Morris Rosenfeld's 1887 song, which I found in Seeger's collection:

[I have a little boy, such a fine son! When I look at him, it seems to me that the whole world is mine. It's seldom though that I see the boy awake, for I always find him sleeping and see him only at night. My job drives me from home at dawn and lets me return only late, so that I hardly know my own child's face. My pale wife tells me how nicely the child plays, how sweetly

he speaks, how cleverly he asks: "Oh, Mama, when will dear Papa come and bring me a penny?" I kiss the little blue eyes. They open, look at me and quickly close again. Depressed and embittered, I think to myself: One day, when you awake, my child, you will not find me anymore.] — Frederic Rzewski

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20

***The Fall of the Empire* (2007)**

Allen Otte, speaking percussionist

THE FALL OF THE EMPIRE, a collection of solos for a speaking percussionist, was written for Allen Otte in 2007 and has been added to occasionally over the years. The entire collection is 12 pieces, each with a unique instrumental setting.

The empires and dynasties of human history have fallen, not so much by the hands of outside conquerors, but rather have crumbled from within. The collection of texts assembled by Rzewski into a kind of drama—variously individual "snapshots" isolated in time and place, but connectable—are meant as yet another retelling of that familiar story.

Prolog (Thomas Jefferson)

Act 1

Scene 1 Angel Shoot (FR)

Scene 2 Monsters (Charles Dickens)

Act 2

Scene 1 Three Sons (Mother Goose)

Scene 2 Global Warming (FR)

Act 3

Letter from Reading Jail (Oscar Wilde) [FR, '91, arr. AO, '16]

Pause

Entr'act (Isaiah 59, 14 & 15) [arr AO, '21]

Act 4

Scene 1 The Ground (FR)

Scene 2 Sacrifice (FR)

Scene 3 Sabbath (Mark Twain)

Epilog

The Flood (Zohar) [FR '01. Arr. AO, '21]

PLAN FOR SPACECRAFT (1967) is a written text outlining an improvisational process that dismantles the usual rules of musical and social being and replaces them with a music that transforms space, people, and relationships. Performers are Alyssa Anderson, Heather

Barringer, George Cartwright, Ivan Cunningham, Patti Cudd, Douglas R. Ewart, Eric M.C. Gonzalez, Alex Hecker, Pat O’Keefe, Dameun Strange, Ryann Daisy Swimmer

FREDERIC RZEWSKI (April 13, 1938 – June 26, 2021) was an American composer and pianist who is considered to be one of the most important American composer-pianists of his time. His major compositions, which often incorporate social and political themes, include the minimalist *Coming Together* and the variation set *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, which has become a modern classic.

Rzewski studied music privately with Charles Mackey in Springfield, Massachusetts as a child and studied composition with Walter Piston, counterpoint with Randall Thompson and orchestration with Claudio Spies at Harvard University from 1954–58. He studied composition with Milton Babbitt and Roger Sessions and the music of Richard Wagner with Oliver Strunk at Princeton University from 1958–60, where he also studied literature and philosophy from Greece. In addition, he studied composition privately with Luigi Dallapiccola in Rome in 1960.

As a pianist, he frequently performed with the flautist Severino Gazzelloni in the 1960s. He then co-founded with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum the improvisational and live electronic ensemble *Musica Elettronica Viva* in Rome in 1966 and performed with it from 1966–71. He was thereafter active as a pianist, primarily in performances of his own pieces and music by other contemporary composers.

He taught at the Conservatoire royal de musique in Liège from 1977–2003, where he was Professeur de Composition from 1983–2003. He gave lectures in Germany, the Netherlands and the USA.

ALLEN OTTE was a co-founder in 1972 of the historic Blackearth Percussion Group, and in 1979 of Percussion Group Cincinnati, having toured for decades throughout the world performing new and experimental music created for him and his colleagues. Otte regularly presents his own creative work—solo and collaborative performances (*The Innocents Project*, with John Lane; the improvisation trio *Vaster Than Empires*), often in residencies centered around the theme of performing social justice; he has appeared with the medieval music group *Trobar* since 2018. He is Professor Emeritus, University of Cincinnati, and in 2017 was inducted into the International Percussion Arts Society Hall of Fame.

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.

With Gratitude to our Annual Fund Donors

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