



ArtSmarts

2002-2003 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

SOUND STAGE

Performed by Zeitgeist with Paul Dresher

April 11, 2003 11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this teacher's guide helpful in preparing your students for the Sound Stage matinee. The guide provides information about the performance and artists, a short glossary of terms, and some topics for discussion. Also included in the guide is a review of theatre conventions and audience protocol.

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Experience a Musical Jungle Gym

“...This beats all. It’s a musical jungle gym – every square inch playable ... works such as this are the future of the arts; a cross-pollination of music, visual art and theater limited only by the imagination.”

–Minneapolis Star Tribune, June 24, 2001

Imagine the thrill of a jungle gym on which not only you climb and hang, but beat and strum – one on which you make awesome sounds!

This is Sound Stage – a set built entirely of huge invented musical instruments. It’s an exploration of musical virtuosity, rhythms, humor, lighting, science, and the sound potential of everyday objects.

The musicians, who perform the compositions of Paul Drescher, call themselves Zeitgeist. They are traditional instrumentalists, improvisers, and actors as they inhabit their “stage” with precision and imagination.

The Sound Stage architecture is an 18-foot tall rolling “A” frame with two pendulums swinging silently on either side. Over the course of the show this giant instrument, whose every surface and material produces sound, becomes many things: a childhood home with an attic full of memories; a set of giant harps plucked by the swinging pendulums; a drum set for all five performers; and ultimately a place of collective musical mystery and discovery.

You will indeed experience the fascination of a musical jungle gym!

From Conception to Performance: The Evolution of Sound Stage

Since 1980, composer Paul Dresher has produced music theater, typically combining opera singers with chamber and live electronic music. After 1993, he saw the many possibilities of acoustic instrument innovation as well as the theatrical component to musical performance with invented musical instruments.

Thus, he proposed to the company *Zeitgeist* the invention of a stage set comprised primarily of large-scale invented musical instruments combined with traditional instrumentation and electronic music. “In other words,” said Mr. Dresher, “a piece that combined pretty much all the important attributes of my work since I was a teenager.”

In the summer of 1998, he established an instrument-building shop and worked closely with Daniel Schmidt on the design and construction of his vision.

Mr. Dresher employed Rinde Eckert, who as a director, choreographer and musician built a theatrical and human dimension from the existing materials setting the stage.

Contributing to all phases of the project are the musicians of *Zeitgeist*.

Meet Some of the Collaborators

Composer, Designer, Performer

Paul Dresher was born in Los Angeles in 1951, received a bachelor of arts degree in music from UC Berkeley and a master of arts in composition from UC San Diego.

Paul Dresher is one of the foremost internationally active composers of his generation. Noted for his ability to integrate diverse musical influences and media into his own coherent and unique personal style, he pursues many musical forms including experimental opera and music theater, chamber and orchestral composition, and live instrumental electro-acoustic. He has received commissions from the Library of Congress and San Francisco Symphony among many others. His work has been performed worldwide at venues such as the Munich State Opera, the New York Philharmonic, the Festival d'Automne in Paris, Arts Summit Indonesia '95, and Festival Interlink in Japan.

The Director

Rinde Eckert is a writer, composer, singer, actor, and director whose music, dance, and theater pieces have been performed throughout the United States and abroad. He has collaborated with composer Paul Dresher since 1980.

Performer/Pianist

As a concert pianist, Tom Linker, has performed throughout the world playing standard repertoire and is a regular concert pianist with the Crystal Cruise Line. He enjoys introducing audiences to new and little-known music through unique stage performances and recordings and often works with other composers to create new work. He also works as a composer for theater, dance, and film.

Musical and Theatrical Performers

Founded in 1977, Zeitgeist's mission is to enliven today's music and expand its public with performances that absorb, stimulate, and hearten. Through concerts, commissions, recordings, and dialogue with audiences, Zeitgeist strives to forge new links between musicians and music lovers. The company has commissioned more than 70 works by both emerging composers and some of the finest established composers of the time.

Instrument Designer and Builder

Daniel Schmidt began building musical instruments as a teenager, developing a fascination for combining sound and sculpture. Building instruments and composing have been intertwined throughout his life in a quest to develop sounds to fulfill his compositional imagination. He has worked in theater and dance, built exhibits at the Exploratorium, a science museum in San

Francisco, designed a tap-dance floor, built instruments for other composers, and since the mid-1970s, has collaborated with Paul Dresher on instrument-building projects.

Learn Some New Terms

Acoustic

Relating to a musical instrument, such as a guitar, that does not feature electronically modified sound.

Electronic Music

Any music involving electronic processing and whose reproduction involves the use of loudspeakers. The composer must anticipate the electronic processing applied to his or her musical concept. This is no different from saying that a composer should have in mind an orchestra when composing a symphony and a piano when composing a piano sonata. Electronic music is produced from a wide variety of sound resources – from sounds picked up by microphones to those produced by complex computer installations and microprocessors. Generally, electronic music is played back through loudspeakers either alone or in combination with ordinary musical instruments. (Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica Online)

Virtuosity

The technical skill, fluency, or style exhibited by a musician with masterly skill.

Zeitgeist

While this is the moniker for the performers, “Zeitgeist” has another meaning: the spirit, genius, feeling, or outlook characteristic of a period or age.

Think About It!

Talking with your teacher, friends and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt, you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more.

1. How would you describe Sound Stage to a friend?
2. What emotions did you have while you watched the show?
3. Did you participate by merely watching and listening? Did you participate in any other way?
4. What did you like best and why? Was the program different from what you had expected? Was it different from other concerts you've attended? Explain.
5. Sound Stage is a collaboration of many talents. Who and what are those talents and what did they contribute to the whole?
6. Describe some of the "invented" musical instruments. What everyday sounds did they imitate or exaggerate? What did these instruments inspire in you? How might any of these change the way you think about traditional musical instruments?
7. Design your own "sound stage." Think about what shape and form it would take; what instruments, sounds and rhythms it would contain; and what emotions you would want it to evoke. Then draw your design on paper. You're limited only by your own imagination!

This Teacher's Guide was written and partially adapted from material available at
<http://dresherensemble.org/new_music_theater/soundstage.html>
by Merlyn Potters undergraduate coordinator
Department of English, UC Davis.

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.