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September 28–30  
Eighth Blackbird  
*composition as explanation*

# COMPOSITION AS EXPLANATION

Composed by David Lang

Directed by Anne Bogart

Assistant Directed by Christopher Murrh

## September 28–30 | Court Theatre

### *Cast*

Dalia Chin, flutes

Zachary Good, clarinets

Maiani da Silva, violin

Ashley Bathgate, cello

Matthew Duvall, percussion

Lisa Kaplan, piano

### *Tech*

Matthew McCabe, Audio Technologist

Brian Scott, Lighting Designer

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## PROGRAM

### DAVID LANG

### *composition as explanation*

1. there is singularly nothing
2. those who are creating
3. of course it is beautiful
4. beginning again and again
5. it is understood by this time
6. and now to begin as if to begin
7. and after that what changes
8. intertext
9. the problem from this time on
10. this then
11. the time in the composition

*composition as explanation was co-commissioned for Eighth Blackbird by the Arts Club of Chicago on the occasion of its centennial, and by Duke Performances at Duke University, with additional commissioning support from Richard Replin and Elissa Stein, and from the Modlin Center for the Arts at the University of Richmond. Support for the recording provided by Cédille Records.*

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



### EIGHTH BLACKBIRD

Hailed as “one of the smartest, most dynamic ensembles on the planet” (*Chicago Tribune*), Eighth Blackbird [8BB] has been operating for 27 years, beginning in 1996 as a group of six undergraduates and continuing under the leadership of two founding members, Lisa Kaplan, Pianist | Executive Director, and Matthew Duvall, Percussionist | Artistic Director.

8BB is firmly entrenched in the fabric of creative music, cited as “a brand-name defined by adventure, vibrancy and quality” (*Detroit Free Press*).

Accolades include: four Grammy Awards for Best Small Ensemble/ Chamber Music Performance, the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions, the Concert Artists Guild Competition Grand Prize, the Musical America Ensemble of the Year, the Chamber Music America Visionary Award, and the APRA AMCOS Art Music Awards Performance of the Year.

In addition to chamber music performance, the members of 8BB

value their roles as curators, educators, and mentors. Beginning exclusively as a chamber music ensemble, 8BB has expanded in recent years to represent numerous mission-driven initiatives.

In 2017, Eighth Blackbird inaugurated its boldest initiative yet: The Blackbird Creative Lab. The Blackbird Creative Lab [The Lab] is an inclusive two-week professional development immersion for performers and composers and an ongoing community of practice for contemporary classical musicians and composers. The Lab fosters expansive artistic vision, collaboration, mentorship, and building a viable life as an artist. It continues its mission beyond the two-week immersion to find opportunities for its network of alumni to present in professional engagements. The Lab’s 2023 iteration was hosted at the historical Yerkes Observatory in Williams Bay, WI.

In 2020, 8BB introduced: The Chicago Artists Workshop. The Chicago Artists Workshop [CAW] was conceived with the purpose of creating work for artists during a time when the performance industry was enormously threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. When work for artists disappeared, CAW created paying livestream engagements for artists during the stoppage of 2020-2021. CAW continues as a presenting series in both live venues and livestream platforms. It is a determinedly cross-genre series defined not by genre or discipline, but by extraordinary caliber and creativity.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Additional Accolades include: Commissions and World Premieres of hundreds of works by established and emerging composers. In addition to traditional chamber music commissioning successes, 8BB has pioneered two particularly noteworthy genres in the classical chamber music field:

Fully Produced Theatrical Chamber Music Productions: David Lang, *Composition As Explanation*; Amy Beth Kirsten, *Columbine's Paradise Theater*; Arnold Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*; David Lang, Michael Gordon, and Julia Wolfe, *Singing in the Dead of Night*; Dan Truman, *Olagón*; and Steve Mackey, *Slide*.

Chamber Ensemble Concertos: Jennifer Higdon, *On A Wire*; Kinds of Kings, *Nine Mothers*; Viet Cuong, *Vital Sines*; and David Schober, *Concerto for Sextet and Orchestra*.

An Extensive Recording Catalog: *Round Nut Tool*, *Thirteen Ways*, *Divinum Mysterium*, *Strange Imaginary Animals*, *Lonely Motel*, *Meanwhile*, *Filament*, *Hand Eye*, *Olagón*, *When We Are Inhuman*, *Double Sextet*, *On A Wire / Q.E.D.*, and *Singing in the Dead of Night*.



### DAVID LANG

David Lang is one of the most highly esteemed and performed American composers writing today. His works have been performed around the world in most of the great concert halls.

Lang's "simple song #3," written as part of his score for Paolo Sorrentino's acclaimed film *YOUTH*, received many awards nominations in 2016, including an Academy Award and Golden Globe.

His opera *prisoner of the state* (with libretto by Lang) was co-commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, Rotterdam's de Doelen Concert Hall, London's Barbican Centre, Barcelona's l'Auditori, Bochum Symphony Orchestra, and Bruges's Concertgebouw, and premiered June 2019 in New York, conducted by Jaap van Zweden. *prisoner of the state* received its UK premiere in January 2020 with the BBC Symphony, and European premieres are rescheduled for 2022–2023.

New works for 2021-2022 include *sun-centered* for the Tallis Scholars — to



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

be interwoven with Antoine Brumel's monumental Renaissance mass for twelve voices *Missa Et ecce terræ motus* ("and the Earth moved"); a new evening-length work for Pam Tanowitz Dance, created as part of the dance work *Song of Songs*; and an evening-length work for the chamber ensemble Eighth Blackbird, composition as explanation.

Lang is a professor of music composition at the Yale School of Music and is an artist in residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He is co-founder and co-artistic director of New York's legendary music collective Bang on a Can.

His music is published by Red Poppy Music and G. Ricordi & Co., New York (ASCAP) and is distributed worldwide by the Universal Music Publishing Group.



### ANNE BOGART

Anne Bogart is one of the three co-artistic directors of SIT1 Company, which she founded with Japanese

director Tadashi Suzuki in 1992. She is a professor at Columbia University, where she runs the Graduate Directing Program. Works with SIT1 include *Radio Christmas Carol*; *Falling & Loving*; *The Bacchae*; *Chess Match No. 5*; *Lost in the Stars*; *The Theater is a Blank Page*; *Persians*; *Steel Hammer*; *A Rite*; *Café Variations*; *Trojan Women (After Euripides)*; *American Document*; *Antigone*; *Under Construction*; *Freshwater*; *Who Do You Think You Are*; *Radio Macbeth*; *Hotel Cassiopeia*; *Death and the Ploughman*; *La Dispute*; *Score*; *bobraschenbergamerica*; *Room*; *War of the Worlds—the Radio Play*; *Cabin Pressure*; *Alice's Adventures*; *Culture of Desire*; *Bob*; *Going, Going, Gone*; *Small Lives/Big Dreams*; *The Medium*; *Noel Coward's Hay Fever* and *Private Lives*; August Strindberg's *Miss Julie*; and Charles Mee's *Orestes*. Recent operas include Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, Ruders' *The Handmaid's Tale*, Handel's *Alcina*, Dvorak's *Dimitrij*, Verdi's *Macbeth*, Bellini's *Norma*, and Bizet's *Carmen*. She is the author of six books: *A Director Prepares*; *The Viewpoints Book*; *And Then, You Act*; *Conversations with Anne*, *What's the Story*, and *The Art of Resonance*.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



### CHRISTOPHER MURRAH

Christopher is a director of theatre and opera as well as multidisciplinary works. In 2016 he joined the faculty of Yale University School of Music's Opera department where he directed and taught acting and movement. He left Yale in 2021 to takeover ownership of Ghostlight Theater Camp. He was previously on adjunct faculty at New York University. In 2014 he was the recipient of the honored Princess Grace Theater Award Honorarium and was previously honored by the Shubert Foundation through Columbia University.

His work in theatre and opera has been seen around the world, including the 2015 production of Verdi's *La Traviata* at the Mariinsky Opera House in St. Petersburg. Yale Opera credits as movement and fight director include Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Don Quichotte* by Massenet. Other productions include *Man of La Mancha* (Wasserman/Darion/Leigh), *The Crucible* (Miller), *Pericles* and *Hamlet* (Shakespeare), *Into the Woods* (Sondheim/Lapine), *Children of Eden*

(Schwartz/Caird), and *The Three Sisters* (Chekhov). New plays and collaborations have included *Peter Pan or the Boy Who Hated Mothers* (Michael Lluberes), *Alphabetical* (Tingying Ma), *The Sounds of My People* (Tabia Lau) and development of works by Matthew Minnicino, Daaimah Mubashshir, and David Kimple. As an associate he has worked with Encores! Off-Center, Classic Stage Company, SITl Company and Kansas City Repertory Theatre.

Furthermore, Christopher is a passionate educator who believes that theatre and art are essential to the internal development of communities. He provides individual audition and career coaching, group master classes and creates curriculums for small groups working towards developing community and ensemble. He is the owner/director of Ghostlight Theater Camp, a summer program for young artists, introducing and furthering the work of young theatre artists through ensemble and the always developing explorations of theatre. He is a professional member of Actor's Equity Association (AEA) and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) and holds a master's degree in directing from Columbia University.

## PROGRAM NOTES

Eighth Blackbird [8BB] has been pushing the interpretative boundaries of chamber music since its first choreographed program in 1996. So far, the organization has created seven full evening-length staged productions. What began as an experiment has become a repertoire coined as “Super Chamber Music” by composer David Lang. This still-unofficial genre falls in the cracks between music and theater and has been a conundrum for marketing professionals for two decades. Nonetheless, 8BB does it anyway. This playground between disciplines is an inevitable extension of Eighth Blackbird’s inner workings. It is the guts and it is the bones of their artistry.

***Composition As Explanation*** is 8BB’s next foray into uncharted aesthetic territories. This time the evening is composed by David Lang and directed by Anne Bogart, though the true hero of the evening is Gertrude Stein. Her essay (by the same name) is the heart and breath of this work.

How should 8BB bring an audience into the repetitive and plainspoken and circular format of Stein’s writing? She has blurred the relationship between her content, her form, and her performance. 8BB follows her lead and blurs performance distinctions between instrumental virtuosity, chamber ensemble dexterity, acting, singing, costume, lighting, audio, and staging.

Is this work really all about Stein though? No. Her writing is the catalyst, but what the audience leaves with is a new point of inquiry regarding how they absorb art. Any art. By lifting Stein’s enigmatic oration from the printed page, 8BB creates layers of interpretation and reveals the human relationship with art from an entirely unprecedented perspective. A perspective that is experienced as thoughtful, clever, humorous, intuitive, insightful, and joyful, rather than as erudite.



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