

CONTEMPORARY CHAMBER MUSIC CHAMPIONS

Spring kicks off with fresh new sounds from near and far

We might play a piece 30, 40, 50 — sometimes 100 times,” **eighth blackbird** flutist Tim Munro told me a few years ago. That dedication to rehearsal allows the Grammy-winning, Chicago-based new music sextet to memorize its pieces, which “enables us to have interactions within the group that I never thought were possible in chamber music,” the Australian Munro said, to focus not just on getting the notes but on communicating the music to the audience. Unhindered by music stands or stiffness, the theatrically savvy eighth blackbird gives intense performances by some of today’s most exciting composers. With six acclaimed albums, residencies at various major universities and frequent world tours, eighth blackbird is one of the world’s finest contemporary chamber ensembles.

On Sunday afternoon, April 6, at the UO’s Beall Concert Hall, the ensemble will perform the haunting *Murder Ballades* by Bryce Dessner (the guitarist for The National who also enjoys a burgeoning career as a contemporary classical composer). In addition to *Ballades*, they will take on: the ethereal *Duet for Heart and Breath* by Reed Parry (of Arcade Fire); selections from *Slide*, a theater work whose music (by rock/classical composer Steven Mackey) impressed me when I covered its 2009 premiere in California; and another piece whose subject is losing grip on reality — Australian composer Brett Dean’s *Old Kings in Exile*, a flute and piano arrangement by great 20th-century composer György Ligeti’s celebrated piano etudes.

Eight years after eighth blackbird formed at Oberlin College’s famed music school in 1996, another trio of Oberlin students created the **Prima Trio**, who in 2007 won the nation’s top chamber music prize. On Friday, April 4, they join clarinetist **Boris Allakhverdyan** at the UO’s Aasen-Hull Hall, performing music by the great 20th-century nuevo tango master Astor Piazzolla, Mozart, Max Bruch, Khachaturian and more. Saturday evening, April 5, back at Beall, UO saxophonist **Idit Shner** (with help from pianist **Evan C. Paul**) offers a program of modernist music by 1950s classical composers, the most famous being the great French mystic Olivier Messiaen.

Also on Sunday, April 6, at United Lutheran Church (2230 Washington), catch clarinetist **Doug Wieselmann**, a veteran of the downtown New York avant-garde music scene who’s performed with everyone from Iron & Wine to the Flying Karamazov Brothers to Laurie Anderson. His placid first solo album, *From Water*, features Wieselmann soloing over multiple digital loops (*à la* Bill Frisell) to create sonic aquascapes; the music is all inspired by bodies of water — ocean beaches, streams and hot springs.

There’s more contemporary small-ensemble music on Monday, April 7, at Springfield’s Wildish Theater when **Chamber Music Amici** (featuring three of Eugene’s finest classical players) performs Jon Deak’s fun *The Wager at the El Dorado Saloon*, in which the musicians contribute comic dialogue. The concert also includes music by Ukrainian composer Reinhold Gliere and Beethoven’s magnificent “Ghost” trio.

More contemporary sounds grace the **Eugene Vocal Arts Ensemble**’s April 4 concert with the **Oregon Mozart Players** at Beall: music by one of the Northwest’s finest choral composers, Joan Szymko, who composes for Portland’s Do Jump! theater and teaches at Portland State University. The concert includes Schubert’s little *Mass in G*, music by Baroque titan Georg Philipp Telemann, music by Latin American composers including Astor Piazzolla and a humorous surprise.

St. Paddy’s day is over, but anyone still craving an Irish-music infusion can head over to The Shedd March 27 to hear **Solas**. Solas, one of the finest groups to emerge from the Celtic revival in decades, incorporates flute, guitars, bodhran, whistles, fiddle and vocals in both traditional tunes and ambitious originals. At UO’s Aasen-Hull Hall Wednesday, April 2, see performances by Celtic harpist **Máire Ní Chathasaigh** and guitarist **Chris Newman**, who mix traditional Irish music with jazz, bluegrass, Baroque and original compositions. Also at The Shedd, April 4-6, cabaret singer **Siri Vik** (backed by a veteran jazz-oriented combo) gives a retrospective of her five-year run there, mixing vintage swing, American songbook standards, French chansons and more. ■



EIGHTH BLACKBIRD PERFORMS AT BEALL HALL

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