



PHOTO BY JACOB BLICKENSTAFF

GABRIEL'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

Composer and singer Gabriel Kahane presents the Oregon premiere of 'Gabriel's Guide to the 48 States' at OBF

Ever since his sly 2007 breakthrough — the witty *Craiglistlieder* — songwriter-guitarist-pianist-composer Gabriel Kahane has rightly resisted the classical label originally affixed because of his music's relatively sophisticated arrangements and instrumentation and the fact that his dad, Jeffrey (with whom he'll share the stage at the Oregon Bach Festival), is a renowned classical pianist and conductor.

While proud of his pop (in both senses), the junior Kahane also has written an original musical, scored commissions from Kronos Quartet, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, as well as recorded with Sufjan Stevens, Rufus Wainwright, Chris Thile and classical pianist Jeremy Denk.

In a pair of Portland shows I attended this past year, Kahane appeared equally at home as an opening act for and collaborator with Thile's folk-rock band The Punch Brothers and the string quartet Brooklyn Rider. The latter show featured Kahane originals that revealed the meaninglessness of the alleged boundary between pop song and art song. Kahane's music is too ambitious to squeeze into arbitrary categories.

A deeply insightful writer and observer, Kahane seems especially inspired by the relationship between people and historic places, as in his beautifully poignant albums about his Los Angeles birthplace — *Where Are The Arms* and *The Ambassador* — and a musical set in a midcentury bohemian artists' rooming house in his current hometown of Brooklyn.

The 35-year-old composer's OBF showcase, "Gabriel's Guide to the 48 States," sets

to music moving Great Depression-era words mostly drawn from the Federal Writers Project's famous Works Progress Administration guides, which "serve as a time capsule of a very different America than the one in which we now live," Kahane's notes explain.

A non-pedantic combo of cultural history, geography and music, the orchestral song cycle's lyrics derive from sources as diverse as old cowboy songs to tourist-touts that "mine the comedy of juxtaposing really discursive text with music that belies that discursiveness — a celebration of these wonderful motor tours that were the 1930s equivalent of Google Maps directions," Kahane tells *EW*.

"It's very meaningful to me to have the Oregon premiere," he adds. "Two of the most substantial, emotionally weighty parts of the piece have to do with Oregon."

As with his Punch Brothers buddies, the breadth of Kahane's artistic reach has drawn exceptionally diverse audiences — a sign that young, genre-busting musicians like them are breaking down walls that have long separated classical music from contemporary culture.

"The Punch Brothers audience pulls from a lot of places," he observes. "It's really gratifying to see our attempts to create a new generation of listeners validated by some kind of metric." — *Brett Campbell*

Gabriel Kahane performs with The Punch Brothers 7:30 pm Tuesday, July 5, and plays with his father Jeffrey Kahane 7:30 pm Friday, July 8, at the Hult Center; \$20-\$66; college and youth discounts available. See oregonbachfestival.com for ticket info.