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## Media Kit

# FIRE | WORKS ENSEMBLE

“The hottest classical band in New York”

## About Fireworks

Brian Coughlin, bass  
Leigh Stuart, cello  
Oren Fader, guitar  
Michael Ibrahim, saxophone

James Johnston, piano  
Elizabeth Janzen, flute  
Eric Poland, percussion  
Esther Noh, violin

Founded with the goal of creating a single, small ensemble capable of representing the full scope of today's musical diversity, Fireworks combines the talents of eight classically-trained but musically omnivorous young virtuosi who pride themselves on being able to play just about anything, regardless of style, time period, or instrumentation. Fireworks burst onto the music scene in 2002 with its striking, rock-inspired reinvention of Stravinsky's masterpiece, *The Rite of Spring*. Called "Brilliant" by CD Baby and "Brave, skillful and refreshing" by the Berkshire Eagle, the work quickly drew critical attention and diverse, enthusiastic audiences. Since then, the ensemble has developed a national reputation as one of the premiere ensembles of its kind with its acclaimed programs such as *Dance Mix* (featuring seven hundred years of dance music from around the world and called "the most madly eclectic program of the year" by Alex Ross of the *New Yorker*), *Cartoon* (celebrating music inspired by and written for classic shorts from the golden age of animation, and its portrait of iconoclast Frank Zappa (including the composer's challenging instrumental rock). In its 2003-2004 season the ensemble established its reputation as one of the leading contemporary music groups in New York by presenting a concert of master 20th-century composer Luciano Berio's challenging *Sequenzas*. In 2005 Fireworks was one of four ensembles invited by the Association of Performing Arts Presenters to participate in its Young Performers' Career Advancement Program, which culminated in a performance at Carnegie Hall. The group's 2006-07 season included the a collaboration with the Lied Center of Kansas on the ensemble's *Cartoon* program, and a sold-out portrait of Frank Zappa at the Miller Theater in New York City. Last season the ensemble toured the west coast with its *Dance Mix* project, presented music of Stravinsky on the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society series (including a live performance on NBC's "The 10 Show"), and premiered a major new work written for the ensemble by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer David Del Tredici on its home series at Symphony Space in New York. Upcoming events include performances and residencies in Florida, Idaho, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, and West Virginia, and a return to the Miller Theater for a performance with rock legend Lou Reed. In the course of its seven year history, Fireworks has premiered over a hundred new works, promoting emerging composers worthy of wider recognition, and commissioning works by established masters such as Glenn Branca, Scott Johnson, and Nick Didkovsky. Passionate about its work with young people, the ensemble devotes a large part of its time each year to outreach activities, and has provided a doorway into contemporary and traditional classical music for hundreds of students in elementary, middle and high schools. This season, the ensemble will conduct a ten week residency based on its *Cartoon* program in Peekskill, New York as part of Chamber Music America's Residency Partnership program. Fireworks' three popular recordings: *Dance Mix*, *First Tracks*, and *The Rite of Spring*, have received airplay worldwide from WNYC in New York to Lo Otra Musica in Spain and RadioRock in Italy. This winter the ensemble will record *Cartoon* for Koch Classics.

## Touring Programs: 2009-2010 Season

### CARTOON

Music and video from the golden age of animation, including Raymond Scott's zany cartoon jazz and four soundtracks performed live to classic Warner Bros and MGM animated shorts from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s

#### Raymond Scott:

*Powerhouse*  
*Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals*  
*The Sleepwalker*  
*Celebration on the Planet Mars*  
*Devil Drums*  
*The Penguin*  
*Bird Life in the Bronx*  
*War Dance for Wooden Indians*

#### Scott Bradley:

*Dance of the Weed*  
(played with the original animation)  
*Puttin' On the Dog*  
(played with the original animation featuring Tom & Jerry)

#### Carl Stalling:

*The Village Smitty*  
(played with the original animation featuring Flip the Frog)  
*There They Go-Go-Go!*  
(played with the original animation featuring Roadrunner)

### DANCE MIX

Fireworks frolics, waltzes, swings, and rocks through 700 years of party music from around the world

**Johann Strauss** : *Thunder and Lightning*

**Anonymous** (14th Century) : *Istampita Palamento*

**Franz Josef Haydn** : *Minuet from Quartet No. 62*

**AFX** : *Analogue Bubblebath*

**Duke Ellington** : *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*

**New Order** : *Blue Monday*

**The Bee Gees** : *Stayin' Alive*

**David Byrne** : *Ngoma/I Zimbra*

**Astor Piazzolla** : *Libertango/Tres Minutos con la Realidad*

**R.D. Burman** : *Tum Kitne Din Baad Mile*

**Traditional** (Norway) : *Norwegian Folk Music Suite*

**Sapo Perapaskero** : *Turceasca*

**Aaron Copland** : *Hoe-Down*

### DEL TREDICI: A FIELD MANUAL

A thrilling new work commissioned by Fireworks from one of America's most beloved and exciting composers "A Field Manual," 40-minute setting of five of New York poet Edward Field's most ebullient, funny and sexy poems pushes the boundaries of the Del Tredici's tonal, expressive style into fresh territory to create a startling synthesis of lush romantic tonality and gritty, rock-influenced vitality. Fireworks is joined by maestro Del Tredici as conductor, baritone Chris Pedro Trakas, and soprano Melissa Fogarty to present this stunning new contribution to the contemporary music literature by the "Father of Neo-Romanticism." Fireworks can present the work by itself or in combination with other pieces from its repertoire.

### THE RITE OF SPRING

Stravinsky's groundbreaking 20th-century classic returns to its Pagan roots in this stunning, rock-inspired version. The centerpiece of Fireworks' repertoire, the group's daring conductorless performance of the work continues to wow audiences everywhere and remains one of the ensemble's most-requested and most popular works. Fireworks can present the work by itself or in combination with other pieces from its repertoire.

## Residencies and Outreach

### **THE CARTOON PROJECT** – for middle school, high school, or college music students

Developed as part of Chamber Music America's Residency Partnership Program, Fireworks works with students to create an original, collaborative score for a classic cartoon based on the principles used by masters of the genre Carl Stalling and Scott Bradley throughout the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Students learn improvisation techniques and choose their favorite music to accompany the animation, and then work with Fireworks members to rehearse and perform the original score. Fireworks can conduct the residency as a long-term, multi-session residency over the course of several weeks, or can present an abbreviated version as part of a shorter residency.

### **COMPOSER READINGS** – for college, graduate, or appropriate high-school student composers

Fireworks specializes in working with student composers. Collaborating directly with the ensemble provides an invaluable opportunity for emerging composers to hear their works prepared and played by a professional new music ensemble. The group provides candid feedback to the composers on instrumentation, score and part writing, the etiquette of working with an ensemble in the "real world," the music preparation process, and on using new compositional and instrumental techniques. In most cases, composers will receive complete reference recordings of their works performed by the ensemble.

*"As for their work with student composers, I was very impressed with Fireworks' approach. Each piece was thoroughly rehearsed. The musicians were consistently friendly, helpful, and open to the students, making the process as stress-free as possible. Their renditions were excellent, and the students came out with excellent studio versions of their pieces."*

— Robert Carl, Chair of Composition, The Hartt School

### **MASTERCLASS** – for middle school through conservatory-level student ensembles

In a master class setting, one or more Fireworks members will work with student ensembles or soloists by listening, coaching, and commenting on pieces performed by the students. Fireworks can suggest a work to focus on (if given the instrumentation of the ensemble) or the ensemble/soloists can perform their own selection(s). Members are also available to work one on one with students. If there is interest, sessions in composition & arranging, improvisation, performance presentation, the business of music, etc., are also available.

### **FIREWORKSHOP** – tailored for either middle- or high-school students

Fireworks members lead a conversation centering on the newest developments in chamber music. Fireworks performs a mini-concert demonstration or samples of different works from its programs such as "Dance Mix" and "Cartoon" to provide a focal point for how the current concert repertoire has expanded to include new sounds, performance styles, and techniques that cross many musical genres including classical, rock, pop, jazz, experimental and more. Workshops can be tailored to involve student performers and/or ensembles. Fireworkshop encourages open dialogue between the players and those in attendance. The 'conversational' approach offers all of the participants a chance to take part, to share in the discussion, and often to help to shape the direction in which the activity goes.

### **DISCOVER FIRE** – for young students ages 5-10

Fireworks helps young students explore the music around them. Fireworks broadens horizons with demonstrations of contemporary techniques, improvisation, special effects, and electronic modifications, based on their featured programs such as "Cartoon" and "Dance Mix." Collaborative performances expose young audiences to the fun and excitement of the wide variety of today's music. Fireworks' varied instrumentation allows students to see and hear members of all the instrument families and provides an excellent forum for introducing younger audiences to classical music and the broad range of contemporary music.

## Reviews and Quotes

“A whole new feeling came into the auditorium, as if, formalities now concluded, everyone could kick off shoes and dance till dawn. Brian Coughlin, Fireworks’ director and bass player, produced some hell-for-leather arrangements that the players, relaxed and grooving, played the heck out of... Finally labels did indeed cease to matter: this was just music, and it sounded like music to keep.”

— **Anne Midgette, The New York Times**

“Adventurous and ahead of the curve... The classically trained Fireworks players say they're out to “redefine the chamber music experience for a new generation of listeners” by expanding the repertoire into new areas, and this we can only applaud. The world of chamber music can feel airless, smothered in the kind of tonier-than-thou connoisseurship that makes sensible people flee for the hills, but the Fireworks players threw open the windows and let the air in. Chamber music definitely got a kick in the pants.”

— **Stephen Brookes, The Washington Post**

“This was music turned on its head by world-class players who seem to thoroughly enjoy defying convention in the name of digging into the details of a composition to find the heart and soul of each piece of music they choose to play. The effect was a stunningly beautiful piece of music that straddled the chasm between the new and the old.”

— **Robert Chiarito, The Wanderer**

“The hottest new classical band in New York... Call it what you will, their performances are astute and extremely entertaining... I have never seen happier performers and a more relaxed and receptive audience... Run, don't walk, to their next performance and buy their CDs too. This eclectic ensemble of flute, sax, violin, cello, bass, guitar, percussion, and keys is magic. The experience is ecstatic.”

— **Mark Greenfest, The New Music Connoisseur**

“Where else could one have heard such richly varied and perfectly executed scores where bits of classical, opera, jazz, folk and schmaltz combined with such telling effects? Serious fun of the highest order. Bravo, Fireworks!”

— **Chuck Berg, Topeka Capital-Journal**

“Explosive... transcends the traditional chamber music world”

— **Bob Banister, Time Out New York**

“Wow. Whatever your opinion of the remixes, they were anything but boring. And the players are skillful, talented and energetic. Also, the Fireworks Ensemble gets a very enthusiastic thumbs up for being so creative and original... it's refreshing to hear some truly original thinking. And it's healthy to challenge accepted, established notions of the way art should be. And these players do just that.”

— **Rebecca C. Howard, The Deseret Morning News**

“Brave, skillful and refreshing... We should all be aflame with such passion.”

— **Andrew Pincus, The Berkshire Eagle**

“The prize for the most madly eclectic program of the season goes the NYC ensemble Fireworks”

— **Alex Ross, The Rest Is Noise**

## Fireworks on Record

### **CARTOON** (2009)

Music written for the golden age of cartoon animation (scheduled for release on Koch Classics in 2009)

Raymond Scott:  
*War Dance for Wooden Indians*  
*Bird Life in the Bronx*  
*Devil Drums*  
*The Sleepwalker*  
*The Penguin*  
*Dinner Music for a Pack of Hungry Cannibals*  
*Powerhouse*  
*Celebration on the Planet Mars*

Scott Bradley:  
*Dance of the Weed*  
*Puttin' On the Dog*

Carl Stalling:  
*The Village Smitty*  
*There They Go-Go-GO!*

### **DANCE MIX** (2006)

A survey of dance music throughout Western Music history, all arranged especially for Fireworks.

Johann Strauss: *Thunder and Lightning*  
Anonymous (14<sup>th</sup> Century): *Istampita Palamento*  
Josef Haydn: *Minuet from Quartet No. 61 in D Minor*  
Duke Ellington: *Don't Get Around Much Anymore*  
AFX: *Analogue Bubblebath*  
New Order: *Blue Monday*  
Jean-Baptiste Lully: *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme Suite*  
The Bee Gees: *Stayin' Alive*

### **THE RITE OF SPRING** (2003)

Igor Stravinsky's colossal masterpiece arranged for the ensemble by Brian Coughlin and Dean Lentz.  
"A breathtaking interpretation... Brilliant!" — CD Baby