

## ***DANCING CAGE***



### **a project of the Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo**

"Obviously anyone can exercise ingenuity to enrich this as yet largely unexplored realm with new possibilities." —Pierre Boulez, concerning Cage's prepared piano (1949)

John Cage (1912–1992), one of the most radical and influential American composers of the twentieth-century, developed the idea of turning the piano into a "percussion orchestra" by introducing diverse objects between the strings of the instrument. This invention derived initially from his work with dancers, most saliently Merce Cunningham, but also served the creation of purely instrumental works. Remarkable among these compositions is the rarely performed ***Three Dances for Two Prepared Pianos***, from 1945. For many years, the Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo wanted to play this major work, but it was impractical to program along with other repertoire because of the amount of preparations involved (nearly 200 objects including screws, bolts, weather-stripping, plastic, rubber, coins, etc.). The project DANCING CAGE is based on the idea to commission composers to write for the two prepared pianos as used in the *Three Dances*—a chance to revisit the Cage aesthetic and to produce new works with these legendary sounds.

In order to facilitate the composition of the new pieces, the Duo recorded each tone of both prepared pianos in different dynamic levels. Using these recordings, a software sampler that allows the sound-sets to be used as virtual MIDI instruments was developed. The sampler has served as a valuable working tool for the contributing composers.

## The Works

Three new works accompany Cage's **Three Dances** in the first complete program of the project:

**Myzel**, by Carola Bauckholt (Cologne) was commissioned by the Südwestrundfunk and premiered at the *attacca* Festival in Stuttgart in December 2009. The piece combines Cage's sounds with additional playing techniques developed in part in collaboration with the performers. John King, the co-director of the music committee of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company in New York, followed with **Duelocity** (2010). The piece uses chance operations to create new and unpredictable combinations of the two instruments: not only the order but also the speeds at which the musical materials are presented fluctuate with every performance. Very much in Cage's spirit, *Duelocity* is an ever-evolving piece.

A rather different soundscape, bent by jazz influences, is to be heard in **NOMOLL I** by the Swiss Michèle Rusconi. The piece was made possible thanks to a commission from the UBS Culture Foundation.

Among other composers who are expected to contribute to DANCING CAGE are Chris Arrell (Boston), Marcos Balter (Rio de Janeiro), Caspar Johannes Walter (Cologne), Sebastián Zubieta (New York), Allen Shawn (Bennington), and Erik Oña (Basel).

## The Performers



**THE BUGALLO-WILLIAMS PIANO DUO** has been presenting innovative programs of contemporary music throughout Europe and the Americas since 1995. Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams perform cutting-edge new works and masterpieces of the twentieth century for piano four-hands and two pianos, including works by Cage, Debussy, Feldman, Kagel, Kurtág, Ligeti, Nancarrow, Sciarrino, Stravinsky, Varèse, and Wolpe. They have premiered dozens of works, many of which were written especially for the Duo, and they have worked directly with such renowned composers as Louis Andriessen, Lukas Foss, Betsy Jolas, Bernard Rands, Steve Reich, and Kevin Volans. They also collaborate with composers who explore new approaches to the piano through multimedia applications, electronics, and extended techniques. They frequently perform with additional players in works for multiple keyboards, chamber works for duo piano and instruments, and concertos. They have worked with conductors Peter Eötvös, Reinbert de Leeuw, Stefan Asbury, and Bradley Lubman.

As part of their mission to expand the repertoire for piano duet, the Duo has undertaken an extensive transcription project of the Studies for Player Piano by Conlon Nancarrow. This resulted in their critically acclaimed recording of Nancarrow's complete music for piano duet and solo piano, released by Wergo in 2004. Their CD "Stravinsky in Black and White" (Wergo, 2007) includes original arrangements for piano duet and two pianos by the composer, two of which are world premiere recordings. They have also recorded music of Jorge Liderman (Albany, 2005), Erik Oña (Wergo, 2007), and Alberto Ginastera (Neos, 2010). They recently released the world premiere recording of Edgard Varèse's arrangement of *Amériques* for two pianos, eight hands together with Morton Feldman's works for four and five pianos (Wergo, 2009).

The Duo was formed in 1995, when Williams and Bugallo were graduate students at the State University of New York at Buffalo. They soon became regular performers at the June In Buffalo Festival, where they worked directly with numerous emerging and established composers. They began their Nancarrow project shortly thereafter, leading to the first performances in Europe (at the Aarhus Festival in Denmark in 1998) and South America (the Ciclo de conciertos de música contemporánea in Buenos Aires in 2000). They were fellows at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart, Germany in 2000 and 2001. Other important feature appearances include Miller Theatre (2004), Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik (2005 and 2007), Ojai Festival (2005 and 2007), CAL Performances (2005) and Subtropics Festival (2004 and 2007). Recent performances include the new Louis Andriessen two-piano concerto, *The Hague Hacking*, at the 2010 Warsaw Autumn Festival (with the Warsaw Philharmonic and conductor Reinbert de Leeuw), the Muziekgebouw aan't IJ in Amsterdam, Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, MusikTriennale Köln, and Festival attacca in Stuttgart. Avid proponents of contemporary music, they frequently present master classes and lecture-demonstrations at colleges and universities in the United States and Europe.

## Press Quotes

"Very impressive was the performance of the Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo. Cage's *Three Dances* turned into a fascinating work of sound: the colors and percussive sounds of the prepared pianos achieved in their speedy hands an overwhelming effect."

—Markus Dippold, Stuttgarter Zeitung (2009)

"The Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo opened the proceedings [of the 2007 Ojai Festival] with a dazzling recital.... Man and machine and nature all interacted in the Thursday duo piano recital of Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams. Stravinsky's two-piano versions of his *Septet* and his *Dumbarton Oaks* concerto began the evening with great glitter."

—Mark Swed, Los Angeles Times (2007)

"The piano was in the assured hands of duo Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams, a pair of keyboard experts who bring to their instrument a bond of mutual musical sensitivity so finely tuned that their performances are distinguished by their rapport as well as their eagerness to tackle areas of piano literature others only admire from a distance."

—Rita Moran, Ventura County Star (2007)

"Bugallo-Williams gave masterful two-piano readings of Stravinsky's bright-toned *Dumbarton Oaks* as well as the lesser-known *Septet*, a fascinating mixture of neo-classical sounds and Stravinsky's late-blooming brand of serialism.... The pinnacle of their concert [at the Ojai Festival] came with a 20th-century two-piano classic, Mr. Ligeti's mesmerizing *Three Pieces for Two Pianos*."

—Joseph Woodward, Santa Barbara News Press (2007)

"More astounding even than the Nancarrow Studies was the *Sonata for Two Pianos* by Salvatore Sciarrino. Though the notes are confined entirely to the top half of the keyboard, the Italian composer makes tortuous demands with lightning alternation between 14 types of specified trills, cluster chords and sweeping glissandi played with the forearm. The women's digital and physical virtuosity was nothing short of jaw-dropping as they managed to surmount all the technical hurdles and put across a graceful communicative musical performance that stands as one of the most thrilling feats of musical virtuosity heard this year."

—Lawrence A. Johnson, Miami Herald (2007)

"Ligeti sounded with extraordinary precision... and the interpretation of the closing *Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky was magistral."

—Federico Monjeau, El Clarín (Argentina) (2006)

"The performance was impeccable; they put into total evidence a superior technique, a moving spiritual blending, and a refinement characteristic of two great artists."

—Juan Carlos Montero, La Nación (Argentina) (2006)

"Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams tackled [Vic Hoyland's *The Attraction of Opposites*] with total conviction and a seemingly limitless tonal palette. Whether clattering like xylophones, exchanging muted chords or rising to the brilliant coup-de-theatre with which Hoyland closes his first movement, they gave what must have been the premiere of any composer's dreams."  
—Richard Bratby, *The Birmingham Post* (UK) (2006)

"Something felt very right on Thursday's opening-night appearance of the remarkable Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo, delivering what was probably the highlight of this [Ojai] festival.... The evening's chief fascination came with their daring, four-hands arrangements of the legendary studies by the iconoclastic great American composer Conlon Nancarrow.... Bugallo-Williams chose 13 of the *Studies* that were humanly possible to play, and the experience of hearing this music played by human hands, and on a richly resonant Steinway instead of Mr. Nancarrow's thinner-sounding instrument, proved a revelation.... They dived in with similar devotion and focused intensity on [Stravinsky's] *The Rite of Spring*, certainly one of the most compelling piano pieces of the 20th century, in addition to its orchestral version. In some way, the piano version has an effect more lucid and integrated, and it packs considerable punch, especially when played with the kind of insight and visceral paw the duo brought to the score."  
—Josef Woodard, *Santa Barbara News Press* (2005)

"Bugallo and Williams, who alternated on opposite ends of the keyboard throughout the night, play with a matching sensibility and skill that enables them to produce a sound that magically seems to flow from a single pair of hands and a single artistic soul."  
—Rita Moran, *Ventura County Star* (2005)

"The program was fascinating; the playing was beyond brilliant."  
—Michelle Dulak Thomson, *San Francisco Classical Voice* (2005)

"...they were constantly in harmony with the music and with each other without ever falling into bad habits like humiliating their instruments or showing off. They are both deeply rooted in the sadly more and more neglected tradition of exclusively recreating the composers intentions with taste and with an instinctive sensitivity for the art of piano playing."  
—Hans-Theodor Wohlfahrt, *Music on the Web* (2003)

"Wolpe liked extremes, but he could also settle for less extreme extremes, as in the two-piano version of the Moses ballet *The Man From Midian*, whose intensive fugal chases and moments of waiting were energetically put across by Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams.... Performances were thoroughly prepared and strongly, passionately projected. Wolpe's looping continuities were found, as were his playfulness, his fantas and his anger."  
—Paul Griffiths, *The New York Times* (2002)