



**RETROSPECTIVE**

**RHYS CHATHAM**

**RHYS CHATHAM  
A 15 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE**

PROGRAM (Thursday and Friday):

1. TWO GONGS (1971) for two amplified Chinese gongs.  
Performers: Rhys Chatham and Yoshi Wada
2. MERCI, CHOPIN (1984) for 4 electric guitars, bass and drums.
3. WATERLOO, NO.2 (1985) for solo percussionist and three brass instruments. With special appearance by choreographer Yves Musard.
4. THE OUT OF TUNE GUITAR, NO.3 (1984) for 4 electric guitars, bass and drums.
5. DRASTIC CLASSICISM (1981) for 4 electric guitars, bass and drums.
6. GUITAR TRIO (1977) for 3 electric guitars, bass and drums.  
With a presentation of PICTURES FOR MUSIC (1979) by Robert Longo.

(INTERMISSION)

7. MINERVA (1988) for 6 electric guitars, two trumpets, bass and drums. Commissioned by SERIOUS FUN! at Lincoln Center.
8. DIE DONNERGOTTER (1984-86) for 6 electric guitars, bass and drums.

Core Band Musicians:

Conductor: Rhys Chatham

Electric Guitars: Karen Haglof  
Robert Poss  
Susan Stenger  
Ben Neill  
Evans Wohlforth  
Wayne Frost

Electric Bass: Ron Spitzer

Drums: Jonathan Kane

Trumpets: Pamela Fleming  
Ben Neill

The electric guitars for the recreation band for DRASTIC CLASSICISM are Rhys Chatham, Joe Disney, Scott Johnson, and Ned Sublette, with Ron Spitzer on bass and Jonathan Kane on drums.

The electric guitars on GUITAR TRIO are Rhys Chatham, Joe Disney and Robert Longo; Ron Spitzer on bass, and a special appearance by Wharton Tiers on drums. Jules Baptiste will appear Friday.

DIE DONNERGOTTER is soon to be re-released as an LP on the Homestead Label.

Special thanks to Sue Latham, Alain Sinturel, Herr Lugus, Leopold Zappler, Paula Court, Isabelle Marteau and the staff at The Kitchen.

PROGRAM (Saturday):

1. TWO GONGS (1971) for two amplified Chinese gongs.  
Performers: Rhys Chatham and Yoshi Wada
2. MINERVA (1988) for 6 electric guitars, two trumpets, bass and drums. Commissioned by SERIOUS FUN! at Lincoln Center.
3. DIE DONNERGOTTER (1984-86) for 6 electric guitars, bass and drums.

(INTERMISSION)

4. ZEPHYR CHORUS (1989) for amplified trumpet, 2 electric guitars, bass, drums and midi-controlled electronics. (Work-in-progress) ZEPHYR CHORUS is an excerpt from a large work which will be presented in March 1989 at St. Mark's Dance Space.

With special appearance by choreographer Robert Kovich with Iris Hoffman, Diane Vivona and Jan Harks.

Guitar Band Musicians:

Conductor: Rhys Chatham

Electric Guitars: Karen Haglof  
Robert Poss  
Susan Stenger  
Evans Wohlforth  
Bill Brovold  
Wayne Frost

Electric Bass: Ron Spitzer

Drums: Jonathan Kane

Musicians on ZEPHYR CHORUS are Rhys Chatham on trumpet; Robert Poss and Karen Haglof on electric guitars; Ron Spitzer on bass; and Jonathan Kane on drums.

My desire to compose was sparked largely by the influence on my flute teacher, Sue Anne Kahn, who introduced me to the work of composers such as Edgar Varese, Pierre Boulez, Ralph Shapey and Stefan Wolpe. My interest thereby kindled, I began in 1965 to study theory and counterpoint with Tom Manoff and Donald Stratton. I soon started working in a serial vein and in 1968 began studying with Morton Subotnick at NYU. Mort initiated my enthusiasm for electronic music and the Buchla. While there, I met Maryanne Amacher, Charlemagne Palestine, Eliane Radigue and Serge Tcherepnin. Because I was only sixteen at the time, I had a "kid brother" relationship with these people, who introduced me to minimalist tendencies in music.

Through Charlemagne and Maryanne's influence, I became interested in music of long duration which utilized the overtone series. These pieces would range anywhere from one to twelve hours in length. After composing a number of works in this style, I discovered composers who had been doing similar work for nearly ten years--Tony Conrad and La Monte Young; so I began studying with La Monte. I was a harpsichord tuner by trade, and La Monte gave me lessons in exchange for tuning his piano in just intonation. I was also fortunate enough to be playing with Tony Conrad's group during this period.

Thoroughly immersed in minimalism and the Fluxus movement, I decided to start doing more concerts of my own. There was a shortage of performing venues at that time for composers who were not writing in the then predominant modernist style. In 1970, I began collaborating with video artists Woody and Steina Vasulka, showing our tapes at Max's and then renting a large loft for video screenings at the Mercer Arts Center, which they called The Kitchen. I wanted to make a space specially available to composers, free of charge, which would allow them to do whatever they wanted in terms of music, audience placement, etc.. When I asked the Vasulkas if I could produce a music series at The Kitchen they agreed.

In 1971, I received a small grant to run this music program from NYSCA. I offered composers free space, advertising, a sound system, a Steinway piano and technical assistance. They received 100% of the box office. At first, concerts at The Kitchen were sporadic, but we soon had concerts every Monday night, spanning 1971-73. It was very exciting. In addition to programming, fund raising, sound teching and floor sweeping, I also played in as many of the composers' concerts as I could. I exhausted myself producing anyone and everyone of any worth working outside formalized modernist technique in New York.

After working in the minimalist style for a number of years, I began to grow interested in other genres of music. Like many classically trained musicians of those years, I knew very little about the technical aspects of other forms, such as jazz or rock. I had played with Musica Electronica Viva (NY) and was fascinated with the way composers such as Frederic Rzewski, Anthony Braxton, Karl Berger, Muhal Richard Abrams and Garrett List were working to break down the traditional hierarchical barriers between the predominantly white Western art music and black American music. Something unusual was happening at this point. Even though the two genres of music were very different, they had both evolved to a point where there were intersections of common interest; practitioners of each respective field were learning from each other.

By this time composers Peter Gordon and Jill Kroesen had arrived on the scene from the West Coast, confirming my intuitions about adapting rock instrumentations for my own compositions. I went with Peter to CBGB's where I saw the Ramones live for the first time. After hearing them, I came to the conclusion that I had a lot in common with what was happening in rock at that point in time. I felt it logical to do with rock what people like Anthony and Frederic were doing with black American music and Western art music. I picked up an electric guitar in 1976, and by 1977 had composed my first piece in this genre, Guitar Trio. It's melodic vocabulary came out of the work I had done with Conrad, Palestine and Young, in addition to the work I had done as a harpsichord tuner, i.e. using the natural overtone series generated by the electric guitar as the raw musical material.

It was as important to me then as it is now that my work not be merely an appropriation of a given form. I'd never had any insecurities as a classical musician; it was rock music that I didn't know about, at the time. Rather than rejecting my classical training, I decided to juxtapose rock techniques against it, and consequently immersed myself in the music and vagaries of that lifestyle. I already knew that I could play music in art spaces--after those years of outrageous Fluxus pieces we had already learned that it was possible to get away with almost anything. I wanted to make music which could reach people on a number of levels, a music which would be approachable even if you didn't have a Master's degree in music or art history; but that wouldn't melt in your hands if you did. So I decided to hang myself out to dry at real clubs like Max's and CB's to sort of test the water, as few other composers were bothering to at the time.

The mid-seventies was a period of great excitement on the New York music scene. While Patti Smith, Television, Richard Hell and the Talking Heads were certainly invigorating and clearly innovative in terms of what their audiences expected of them both in music and in message, it wasn't until the next wave of groups that the public became genuinely imbued with a tolerance of more unique forms of musical expression within a rock context. Suddenly half of the New York art world was showing up at CBGB's and Max's to see the new groups, and it seemed that the other half was actually in them. The new thing about these groups was their expanded sound palette. Unbeknownst to them, many of their ideas such as the use of noise and tone-clusters, the idea that people who are basically non-musicians can make wonderful music, too; were pioneered by composers John Cage, Robert Ashley (remember Wolfman?) and members of the Fluxus movement. In the 1950's, Cage was doing entire concerts about the noises and sounds we hear around us, proving all sound is music. Lydia Lunch's Teenage Jesus and the Jerks, the Contortions, and DNA, perhaps unintentionally, but certainly fortunately created a climate which allowed composers of Western art music working with electric instruments to play in rock clubs on a non-anomaly basis for the first time.

In 1977, I was playing a twenty minute version of Guitar Trio, which used the natural overtones of the electric guitar as its primary melodic material. The overtones are elicited by flat-picking directly over various pre-determined points on the fretboard of the guitar. A rhythmic tension is created by the symmetrical 4/4 meter of the right hand's flatpicking technique and the more ethereal rhythms of the overtones. To my knowledge, Guitar Trio was the first musical composition to make use of multiple electric guitars to merge the extended-time music of the sixties and seventies with serious hard rock.

My next composition was called The Out of Tune Guitar. The band consisted of Jules Baptiste, Robert Longo, and myself on guitars, and Wharton Tiers on drums. My good friend, composer Ned Sublette, used to curse about how out of tune electric guitars always are; this gave me the idea to do a piece where the guitars are really out of tune. At first, this involved the band getting together and playing in completely random tunings. After experimenting for a while, we finally decided to set an out-of-tune tuning. Each player invented a melodic line around a musical structure which I built. Later, I transcribed a tape of set we had played and did a version of the piece for brass octet and percussion, commissioned by the Groupe de Recherche Choregraphique de l'Opera de Paris. We were also continuing to develop Guitar Trio during this period. Robert Longo, who was starting to receive significant attention as a visual artist, came up with a series of fantastic slides called Pictures for Music to accompany Guitar Trio. We played with this lineup for about a year.

In 1980, I formed a new band which eventually became known as The Din. It consisted of a group of composers and guitarists with whom I had been working: Nina Canal, Ned Sublette, Scott Johnson, Joe Disney, Craig Bromberg, David Rosenblum; Michael Boone on electric bass; and David Linton on drums. This was the band that developed Drastic Classicism, the collaborative piece I made with the dancer Karole Armitage and video artist Charles Atlas.

In 1982, I formed a new band consisting of guitarists Karen Haglof, Susan Springfield, Craig Kafton and David Linton. We toured Europe and the U.S. developing Guitar Ring. David started to be busy with his own work, so we asked James Lo of Live Skull to play with us.

Despite the fact that I was working with a rock rhythmic orientation and instrumentation and was playing pretty much exclusively in rock clubs (since they were the only places with large enough sound systems for my band), I still thought of myself as a composer of Western art music, part of what we used to call the "avant garde." While art music, rock and black American music are undoubtedly of equal importance and musical worth; their sound, technique and respective histories are clearly different. Composers of Western art music working in a (post)modern vein are now in a uniquely difficult position, precisely because their music is so hard to define.

It has been a long fifteen years since I started working with non-notated music of various sorts, finally to focus on rock music in 1976. Essentially, my idea has been to draw upon the vocabulary of the classical avant garde to form a music with a rock-like veneer behind which lies a more universal, hence Western set of concerns. Even though the music I make without question comes out of the classical avant garde (Cage, Ashley, Webern, Boulez, Behrman, Stockhausen), I felt the time dictated playing the work in a rock context, there were so many rock people I loved just as much.

Using the instrumentation and sounds of serious hard rock as raw material, my music has been a "representation" rather than an appropriation, attempting to invest and re-code a familiar music with new and different meaning.

RHYS CHATHAM NYC 1987

WAYNE FROST is a guitarist and composer who has written music for several films, appeared with Johnny Thunders, the Psychedelic Furs and worked with the National Hockey League.

YVES MUSARD has been collaborating with Rhys Chatham on Journey I-III, 1815, Parts of a Battle, Human Scale and Waterloo. This year he has been commissioned by the American Dance Festival to create a new company work for the Bicentennial of the French Revolution of 1789.

BAND OF SUSANS' second LP, LOVE AGENDA, will be released on Blast First/Restless Records.

ROBERT LONGO, a visual artist living in New York, is also well known for his work in performance, video, film and music.

Composer SCOTT JOHNSON, noted primarily for teaching Rhys Chatham to play his first bar chord, has also released two records on the Nonsuch Label, JOHN SOMEBODY and PATTI HEARST and has also done some other stuff.

YOSHI WADA is a composer/performer/musical instrument builder involved with Fluxus at the end of the sixties. His latest work is a sound installation: APPOINTED CLOUD SERIES.

NED SUBLETTE was born in Lubbock, Texas and has lived in NYC since 1976. Since 1982 he has been the leader of the Ned Sublette Band, a large, ornery outfit that plays in honky-tonks and dives. He is a graduate of the Missouri Auction School.

WHARTON TIERS, a founding member of Theoretical Girls, has worked as engineer/producer on over 40 recording projects of bands including Sonic Youth and Glen Branca. He is currently writing and arranging material for his keyboard ensemble, Aurora.23.

JOE DIZNEY is a guitarist with the Ordinaires, a fixture on the New York music scene for the past 10 years or so. The Ordinaires' second album, ONE, will be released this March on Bar/None Records.

JULES BAPTISTE has written extensively for dance, video and film. Currently composing radical chamber music, he heads the instrumental quintet, Red Decade. Tapes of his chamber work are available through C.R.S., 213 Mott Street, Suite 10, NYC 10012.

BILL BROVOLD plays guitar and sings with the Zen Vikings and makes paintings.

EVANS WOHLFORTH is a freelance guitarist and teacher. He has worked with composers ranging from Steve Reich to Milton Babbitt.

RON SPITZER plays drums with Band of Susans. He has also played bass with New York bands, Western Eyes and Andy Shernoff's Valient Bros.

ROBERT POSS is a member of Band of Susans. He also performs and records with Nicolas Collins, Ben Neill, Susan Stenger and Alva Rogers.

KAREN HAGLOF has been playing with Rhys Chatham since 1982. She is currently playing with Band of Susans.

JONATHAN KANE has toured and recorded with numerous NYC bands and composers including Rhys Chatham, Elliott Sharp, Bill Obrecht, Swans and the Ordinaires. He has also composed music for choreographers Bebe Miller and Lisa Fox, and co-wrote music for ABC News, 20/20 with Daniel Galliduan. He is currently working with singer Josh Colow.

Choreographer ROBERT KOVICH has collaborated with artists John King, Lynda Benglis and Robert Combas. This is his first work with Rhys Chatham.

BEN NEILL is active as a composer and performer of new music, frequently performing on the mutantrumpet, an instrument of his own design. His first LP/CD, MAINSPRING, has recently been released on the Ear/Rational Label.

SUSAN STENGER plays electric bass with Band of Susans. As a flutist, she has worked with Phill Niblock, Jackson Mac Low, Petr Kotik and many others. She performed one of her solo compositions at the 1987 NMA festival and was a 1988 artist-in-residence at Studio P.A.S.S.

PAM FLEMING is an Eastman School of Music graduate who has been touring the world with reggae legend Burning Spear. She can be heard on several of his albums. Currently, she is freelancing in NY playing all styles of music as well as writing her own and working on her upcoming debut album.

TECHNICAL STAFF FOR THE KITCHEN:  
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What I came up with was the decision, which I think was the most important, never to talk about language or sound at all. I left that completely up to the performers. What I was left with was basically structure  
JOHN ZORN  
VOL. 11, NO. 2

*We would listen to the music, to the connected sounds, not the associated image... I treat the sounds as a material, as blocks of sound, from which I construct a piece texturally.*  
CHRISTIAN MARCLAY,  
VOL. 12, NO. 8

I started trying to create that position, to be inside the music where when someone plays something extraordinary, I could try to capture that moment and build that moment on the spot.  
BUTCH MORRIS, VOL. 13, NO. 9

There's a search for something that will inspire a new movement, so a lot of us are looking at old forms. I never thought that about myself, but now I find myself listening to older music.  
CURTIS FOWLES  
VOL. 12, NO. 7

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PHOTO: PAULA COURT

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