American Composers Orchestra Continues 40th Anniversary Season Performing Steve Reich’s The Desert Music

Symphony Space’s Wall to Wall Steve Reich Marathon with Alan Pierson, Guest Conductor

Sunday, April 30, 2017

Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space | 2537 Broadway at 95th Street, NYC
Wall to Wall Steve Reich runs from 3-10pm. The Desert Music will be performed during Segment 3, which starts at 8:30pm. FREE Admission. Information: www.symphonyspace.org

American Composers Orchestra: www.americancomposers.org

New York, NY—American Composers Orchestra (ACO), under the leadership of Artistic Director Derek Bermel and Music Director George Manahan, continues its 40th Anniversary Season on Sunday, April 30, 2017 with a performance of Steve Reich’s The Desert Music led by guest conductor Alan Pierson. The performance is part of Symphony Space’s Wall to Wall Steve Reich, a free and open-to-the-public celebration of Steve Reich’s 80th birthday featuring dozens of performers. The seven-hour marathon, which runs from 3-10pm at the Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, is the opening event of Symphony Space’s FUSE Project. ACO provides the grand finale, performing The Desert Music during the last set of the day, which begins at 8:30pm.
Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Steve Reich’s music has been influential to composers and mainstream musicians all over the world. Reich’s music is known for steady pulse, repetition, and a fascination with canons; it combines rigorous structures with propulsive rhythms and seductive instrumental color. This is the second major Reich work that ACO has programmed this season – the orchestra presented Reich’s Tehillim in March in a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall, with The New York Times praising it as a “transfixing performance.”

The Desert Music, written in 1982-1983, is a setting of parts of poems by the poet William Carlos Williams. ACO will perform the edition of The Desert Music created by Alan Pierson in 2001, in collaboration with the composer. Of the piece, Reich writes, “I have loved Dr. Williams’ poetry since I was 16 years old and picked up a copy of his long poem Patterson just because I was fascinated by the symmetry of his name – William Carlos Williams. I have continued reading his work to the present. I find Dr. Williams’ finest work to be his late poetry written between 1954 and his death in 1963 at age 80. It is from this period in the poet’s work that I have selected the texts for The Desert Music – a period after the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Dr. Williams was acutely aware of the bomb and his words about it, in a poem about music entitled The Orchestra struck me as to the point: ‘Say to them:/ Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant/ to know how to realize his wishes. Now that he can realize/ them, he must either change them or perish’. . . In the center of the piece is the text, also from The Orchestra, which says, ‘it is a principle of music/ to repeat the theme. Repeat/ and repeat again,/ as the pace mounts. The/ theme is difficult/ but no more difficult/ than the facts to be/ resolved.’ Those at all familiar with my music will know how apt those words are for me and particularly this piece which, among other things, addresses that basic ambiguity between what the text says, and its pure sensuous sounds.”

About ACO

Founded in 1977, American Composers Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world dedicated to the creation, performance, preservation, and promulgation of music by American composers. ACO makes the creation of new opportunities for American composers and new American orchestral music its central purpose. Through concerts at Carnegie Hall and other venues, recordings, internet and radio broadcasts, educational programs, New Music Readings, and commissions, ACO identifies today’s brightest emerging composers, champions prominent established composers as well as those lesser-known, and increases regional, national, and international awareness of the infinite variety of American orchestral music, reflecting geographic, stylistic, and temporal diversity. ACO also serves as an incubator of ideas, research, and talent, as a catalyst for growth and change among orchestras, and as an advocate for American composers and their music. ACO programs seek to innovate and experiment, educate students and the public, and open the orchestra to diverse new influences and audiences.

To date, ACO has performed music by 800 American composers, including 350 world premiers and newly commissioned works. Among the orchestra’s innovative programs have been SONiC: Sounds of a New Century, a nine-day citywide festival in New York of music by more than 100 composers age 40 and under; Sonidos de las Américas, six annual festivals devoted to Latin American composers and their music; Coming to America, a program immersing audiences in the ongoing evolution of American music through the work of immigrant composers; Orchestra Tech, a long-term initiative to integrate new digital technologies in the symphony orchestra; Improvise!, a festival devoted to the exploration of improvisation and the orchestra; coLABoratory: Playing It UNsafe, a new laboratory for the research and development of experimental new works for
orchestra; and Orchestra Underground, ACO’s entrepreneurial cutting-edge orchestral ensemble that embraces new technology, eclectic instruments, influences, and spatial orientation of the orchestra, new experiments in the concert format, and multimedia and multi-disciplinary collaborations.

Composer development has been at the core of ACO’s mission since its founding. In addition to its annual Underwood New Music Readings and Commission, ACO also provides a range of educational and professional development activities, including composer residencies and fellowships. In 2008, ACO launched EarShot, a multi-institutional network that assists orchestras around the country in mounting new music readings. Recent and upcoming EarShot programs have included the Detroit, Berkeley, La Jolla, Nashville, Memphis, Columbus, Colorado, San Diego Symphonies, the New York Philharmonic, New York Youth Symphony, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Recently, EarShot introduced an initiative to provide career development and commissions for emerging female composers, and launched an online archive featuring audio excerpts, program notes, and score samples by more than 140 composers whose works have been performed through the EarShot Network. The Jazz Composers Orchestra Institute, launched in 2010, supports jazz artists who desire to write for the symphony. For more information visit www.EarShotnetwork.org.

Among the honors ACO has received are special awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and from BMI recognizing the orchestra’s outstanding contribution to American music. ACO is the 2015 recipient of the Champion of New Music Award given by American Composers Forum. ASCAP has awarded its annual prize for adventurous programming to ACO 36 times, singling out ACO as “the orchestra that has done the most for American music in the United States.” ACO received the inaugural MetLife Award for Excellence in Community Engagement, and a proclamation from the New York City Council. ACO recordings are available on ARGO, CRI, ECM, Point, Phoenix USA, MusicMasters, Nonesuch, Tzadik, New World Records, InstantEncore.com, Amazon.com and iTunes. ACO’s digital albums include Playing It UNsafe (March 2011), Emerging Composers Series: Vol. 1 (February 2012), Orchestra Underground: X10D (June 2012), Orchestra Underground: Tech & Techno (July 2014), and SONiC Double Live (July 2016), a collection of premiere performances from its groundbreaking SONiC: Sounds of a New Century festival. ACO has also released Orchestra Underground: A-V, a groundbreaking album of multimedia works available for free streaming at www.vimeo.com/channels/orchestraunderground. More information about American Composers Orchestra is available online at www.americancomposers.org.

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This press release is available online at www.americancomposers.org/press-media

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The Underwood New Music Readings and Commission are made possible with lead support from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Underwood.

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EarShot is a program of American Composers Orchestra in partnership with American Composers Forum, the League of American Orchestras, and New Music USA. Made possible with the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and with public funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional funding provided by the League of American Orchestras with support of the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation.
Friday, October 28, 2016 at 7:30pm – Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall
Seventh Avenue and 57th Street. New York, NY
Orchestra Underground: Contempo-Scary Music
   George Manahan, Music Director and Conductor
   Nancy Allen Lundy, narrator and soprano
   Maxwell Tfrin, electronics engineer
PAUL MORAVEC: The Overlook Hotel Suite from The Shining (World Premiere, ACO commission)
JUDITH SHATIN: Black Moon (World Premiere, ACO/Carnegie Hall commission)
BERNARD HERRMANN: Psycho Suite
DAVID DEL TREDICI: Dracula
Information: www.carnegiehall.org/Calendar/2016/10/28/0730/PM/American-Composers-Orchestra

Friday, March 24, 2017 at 7:30pm – Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall
Seventh Avenue and 57th Street. New York, NY
Orchestra Underground: Past Forward
   George Manahan, Music Director and Conductor
   Elizabeth Bates, lyric soprano
   Martha Cluver, lyric soprano
   Mellissa Hughes, alto
   Rachel Calloway, high soprano
   Mami Kosemura, video artist
STEVE REICH: Tehillim
DAVID HERTZBERG: Chamber Symphony (World Premiere, ACO/Underwood commission)
TREVOR WESTON: Flying Fish (World Premiere, ACO/Carnegie Hall commission)
PAOLA PRESTINI: The Hotel That Time Forgot (World Premiere, ACO/Toulmin commission)
Information: www.carnegiehall.org/Calendar/2017/3/24/0730/PM/American-Composers-Orchestra

Sunday, April 30, 2017, 8:30pm – Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space
2537 Broadway at 95th Street, New York, NY
American Composers Orchestra in Wall to Wall Steve Reich
   Alan Pierson, Guest Conductor
Steve Reich: The Desert Music
Information: www.symphonyspace.org/event/9383/Music/wall-to-wall-steve-reich

Tuesday, May 23, 2017 at 8pm – Peter Jay Sharp Theatre at Symphony Space
2537 Broadway at 95th Street, New York, NY
American Composers Orchestra: ACO Parables
   Rossen Milanov, Guest Conductor
   Sharon Isbin, guitar
   David Tinervia, baritone
   Luke DuBois, video
BRIGHT SHENG: Postcards (New York Premiere)
JOHN CORIGLIANO: Troubadours: Variations for Guitar and Orchestra
CARLOS SIMON: Portraits of a Queen (World Premiere, ACO/Underwood commission)
NINA C. YOUNG: Out of whose womb came the ice for baritone, orchestra, & electronics (World Premiere, ACO/Jerome Foundation commission)
Information: www.symphonyspace.org/event/9396/Music/american-composers-orchestra-parables

Wednesday & Thursday, June 22 & 23, 2017 – Cary Hall at The DiMenna Center
450 West 37th Street, New York, NY

Underwood New Music Readings & Commission
- George Manahan, Music Director and Conductor
- Derek Bermel, Artistic Director
- Libby Larsen, David Rakowski, Trevor Weston, Mentor Composers

ACO’s annual roundup of the country’s brightest young and emerging composers. Participating composers TBA.
Information: www.americancomposers.org/2016/08/15/orchestra-underwood-26th-anniversary

Artists and repertoire subject to change.

American Composers Orchestra
Derek Bermel, Artistic Director | George Manahan, Music Director
Dennis Russell Davies, Conductor Laureate | Robert Beaser, Artistic Director Laureate
244 West 54th Street, Suite 805 | New York, NY 10019-5515
Phone: 212.977.8495 | Fax: 212.977.8995 | Web: www.americancomposers.org