

ENSEMBLE PARALLÈLE PRESENTS *THE GREAT GATSBY* BY JOHN HARBISON
FEBRUARY 10, 11 AND 12, 2012
AT SAN FRANCISCO'S YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

WORLD PREMIERE OF CHAMBER ORCHESTRATION
BY JACQUES DESJARDINS FEATURES
MARCO PANUCCIO, JASON DETWILER AND SUSANNAH BILLER

San Francisco, September 19, 2011 -- Ensemble Parallèle will present the world premiere of Jacques Desjardins' chamber orchestration of **John Harbison's** *The Great Gatsby* on February 10, 11 and 12, 2012 at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Novellus Theater. Artistic Director Nicole Paiement again collaborates with Stage Director and Production Designer Brian Staufenbiel to create their most ambitious project to date. Jacques Desjardins, a well-known Bay Area composer and orchestrator retains the rich sound of Harbison's score while enhancing the story and providing the audience a more intimate and intense experience with this American literary classic. Based on the famed novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, composer John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* was originally commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera and premiered in 1999 with subsequent performances at the Lyric Opera in Chicago. Ensemble Parallèle's world premiere presentation of the chamber orchestration of *The Great Gatsby* marks the first time in ten years that this literary masterpiece will be given a musical life onstage.

Lyric tenor **Marco Panuccio**, who portrayed Des Grieux in Massenet's *Manon* for Lyric Opera of Chicago, heads the eleven member cast in the role of Jay Gatsby. Baritone **Jason Detwiler**, St. Plan in Ensemble Parallèle's summer 2011 production of *Four Saints in Three Acts*, is Nick Carraway and soprano **Susannah Biller**, who portrayed Eurydice in Ensemble Parallèle's spring 2011 production of Philip Glass' *Orphée*, is featured as Daisy Buchanan. Casting also includes tenor **Dan Snyder**, who portrayed Dexter in the world premiere of *Heart of a Soldier* at San Francisco Opera, as Tom Buchanan; baritone **Bojan Knezevic**, who sang the title role of *Wozzeck* in the 2010 Ensemble Parallèle production of Alban Berg's masterwork, as George Wilson; mezzo soprano **Erin Neff**, who portrayed Margret in Ensemble Parallèle's *Wozzeck*, as Myrtle Wilson and **Julienne Walker**, a graduate student at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, as Jordan Baker. Susannah Biller and Bojan Knezevic are both graduates of the Merola Opera Program and San Francisco Opera's prestigious Adler Fellow Program. Staufenbiel again draws a stellar artistic team including scenic and lighting designer **Matthew Antaky**, video artist **Austin Forbord**, costume designer **Christine Crook** and wig and make-up designer **Jeanna Parham**.

San Francisco composer Jacques Desjardins has received commissions and performances from ensembles in the United States, Canada and Europe. John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* is his first commission to re-orchestrate a major opera. He says of the experience: "I found myself reading the mind of Harbison and trying to re-create as faithfully as possible his original intention. I imagined the process to be akin to the work of a translator, trying to stay as close as possible to

the spirit of a novel in its original form. It was humbling and exhilarating to serve such a great work by such a great master Desjardins is also on faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he teaches Music Theory and Musicianship and serves as General Manager of the New Music Ensemble.

The Great Gatsby, Fitzgerald's magnificent portrait of the Jazz Age in all its idealism, hopes, excesses, nostalgia and decadence, remains one of the most widely read American novels. Harbison's original adaptation of the literary masterpiece created an opera that exposes deeply flawed but fascinating characters woven together in an intricate web of destructive relationships and class conflict. His score features a lush compositional sound that shifts from sweeping symphonic flourishes to the music of jazz bands from the "Roaring Twenties"—elements that Desjardins has maintained in the chamber orchestration. The result is an atmosphere that strongly resonates with the social and economic complexities of society today. Gatsby, who pretends to great wealth and social status, is actually a bootlegger who comes from a background of poverty. He loves Daisy Buchanan, a callous upper-class sophisticate, married to brutish Wall Street stockbroker Tom. Myrtle, Tom's unhappy mistress, is married to garage mechanic George and lives in the "Valley of the Ashes," the dumping site which is located just below a dilapidated billboard with the eyes of Dr. T.J. Eckleburg—symbolizing the contrast between the decadence of the upper class and the dreary environment of the lower class. Daisy's cousin Nick Carraway, who acts as the story's omnipresent narrator, is a young stockbroker and confidant of both Gatsby and Daisy, but without their wealth or status. He witnesses Gatsby and Daisy's corruption and tragic downfall, which mirrors the disintegration of the American Dream after World War I and foreshadows the collapse into warring classes soon to come in the Great Depression.

Pulitzer Prize winning composer John Harbison, whose music is distinguished by its invention and range, cites his most important influences as the Bach Cantatas, Stravinsky and jazz. Harbison has written for every type of concert genre, ranging from the grand opera to the most intimate chamber music, in addition to pieces that embrace jazz along with classical forms. His music written for voice encompasses a catalogue of over 70 works including opera, choral and voice with orchestra and chamber/solo works. Among his principal works are four string quartets, three symphonies, the cantata *The Flight Into Egypt*, which earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1987 and three operas including *The Great Gatsby*, *Winter's Tale* and *Full Moon in March*. Harbison has been composer-in-residence with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, American Academy in Rome and the Tanglewood, Marlboro and Santa Fe Chamber Festivals.

Ensemble Parallèle is a professional ensemble-in-residence at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the only professional non-profit performing arts organization in the Bay Area focused on presenting contemporary chamber opera to a wide audience at affordable prices. Most recently, Ensemble Parallèle presented a critically acclaimed production of the rarely performed *Four Saints in Three Acts* by composer Virgil Thomson and librettist Gertrude Stein. Last spring the group produced the Bay Area premiere of Philip Glass' *Orphée* and in 2010, the chamber version of Alban Berg's 20th century masterpiece *Wozzeck*. In February 2007, Ensemble Parallèle presented the world premiere of Lou Harrison's opera *Young Caesar* in conjunction with what would have been the late composer's 90th birthday. In prior years, with its mission more

broadly focused on contemporary music, Ensemble Parallèle presented 125 performances including 28 world premieres, released 12 recordings and commissioned 19 new works.

As in past productions, previews of the work with Nicole Paiement and Brian Staufenbiel will be presented closer to the performance dates. At these events, creative team leaders will discuss the works in a question and answer format and cast members will provide musical excerpts. In addition, during the rehearsal period of the opera, Ensemble Parallèle will hold a number of open rehearsals followed by Q & A sessions with the artists. More detailed information on these events will be announced at a later date.

As a non-profit 501(c)(3) arts institution, Ensemble Parallèle must raise support and funds throughout the year to support its mission of presenting contemporary chamber opera. This year, for the first time, Ensemble Parallèle joins more than 200 other arts institutions as a recipient of funding from San Francisco's Grants for the Arts. A special fundraising initiative, also new for the first time this year, is a raffle that will be sold until the matinee of *The Great Gatsby* final performance on February 12, with the grand prize of a trip for two to New York City.

Don't miss this opportunity to experience Ensemble Parallèle's next presentation – the world premiere of Jacques Desjardins' chamber orchestration of **John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*** on February 10, 11 and 12, 2012 at San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Novellus Theater. Tickets will go on sale September XXXXX and can be purchased by doing **WHAT**.

Media contact: Karen Ames Communications

Cassandra McCook: Cassandra@karenames.com

Anne Suda: Anne@karenames.com

Karen Ames: Karen@karenames.com

(415) 641-7474

Calendar Editors, please note:

What: *The Great Gatsby*

Music and Libretto by John Harbison, adapted from the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Where: Yerba Buena Center for the Performing Arts Novellus Theater, San Francisco

When: 8:00 p.m. on February 10th and 11th; 2:00 p.m. on February 12th, 2012

Tickets:

For further information: www.ensembleparallele.com

Full biographies of the artists and production team can be found on Ensemble Parallèle's website at

www.ensembleparallele.com

The Cast

Jay Gatsby, Marco Panuccio
Nick Carraway, Jason Detwiler
Daisy Buchanan, Susannah Biller
Tom Buchanan, Dan Snyder
George Wilson, Bojan Knezevic
Myrtle Wilson, Erin Neff
Jordan Baker, Julianne Walker
John Minagro, Henry Gatsby
ynthesizer, Keisuke Nakagoshi

Artistic and Production Team

Conductor, Nicole Paiement
Director of Productions, Frédéric O. Boulay
Director/Production Designer, Brian Staufenbiel
Video Artist, Austin Forbord
Props Artisan, TBD
Set/Lighting Designer, Matthew Antaky
Costumer, Christine Crook
Wig and Makeup, Jeanna Parham
Choreographer, Tom Segal