



MIKEL ROUSE'S GRAVITY RADIO
Friday-Saturday, January 29-30, 2010, at 7:30pm
Studio Theatre

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MIKEL ROUSE'S *GRAVITY RADIO*

Mikel Rouse, vocals and guitar
Christopher Ericson, sound designer
Matthew Gandolfo, musical director
Claire Kenny, newsreader
William Knapp, production manager
The SET Quartet

Film by Mikel Rouse
Film editing by Jeff Carpenter

Mikel Rouse appears by arrangement with:
Double M Arts & Events LLC
PO Box 116
City Island, NY 10464-0116

COMPOSER'S NOTE

Gravity Radio is a song cycle of 14 songs structurally interspersed with six actual radio reports utilizing stories taken from the AP Newswire and is inspired by physicist Raymond Chiao's experiments with superconductors and gravity waves—which exist in theory but have eluded detection. The song cycle is approximately 65 minutes in duration.

Instrumentation is modular, ranging from one singer/guitarist, shortwave radio, newsreader, and string quartet to a larger ensemble of strings, brass, woodwinds, bass, drums, keyboard, and chorus. While it was necessary to create full scores for the string quartet, the recording incorporates various forms of improvisation.

Gravity Radio continues my interest in utilizing complex structures within the framework of vernacular music. Conventional tunings as well as open G and drop D tunings are used in the first half of the cycle, and the songs move through A major to arrive at B-flat major for the song *The Gravity of New Orleans*. The culmination of the song cycle reharmonizes earlier material up a whole step to A major and returns to open G for the final song. Similarly, identical metric patterns of 5, 7, and 9 are used to link songs in the cycle. The radio reports' musical function is to introduce this material in a retrograde fashion so that the reports and songs form an arc with the two parts meeting roughly in the middle (for the medley *Blue Book/Star Chamber/Rose Woods*). In a similar use of foreshadowing, key fragments of lyrics from the songs are folded into the actual radio reports, thus anticipating their arrival later in the cycle. Because the radio reports change daily with each performance, multiple meanings and inferences are created in combination with the stationary text/lyrics.

—Mikel Rouse

PROGRAM NOTES

"Anyone who grew up at a time when Bob Dylan first became popular will remember how, on first hearing, his long ballads, which Rouse's songs sometimes resemble, didn't make much sense. But they inspired repeated hearings, haunting the listener until conventional understanding was beside the point."
—*Los Angeles Times*

"Call it avant-rock for classical fans if you want, but it's the most complex tonal music around."
—*Village Voice*

"We have Rouse's works as living proof that complexity need not keep listeners at a distance, and that pop music can sustain serious interest with the right person at the helm."—*Gramophone*

Gravity Radio is a song cycle interspersed with AP Newswire reports, shortwave radio frequencies, and multichannel video representing a visual kaleidoscope of earthbound images.

"I took the elusiveness of gravity waves as a springboard for a song cycle that would float and mutate through a combination of sound and visual ether," Rouse explains. "Perhaps it is an attempt to recapture or update my first memory of radio in the late 1960s—Motown and British rock fading in from a faraway Chicago station as the local news faded out on my transistor radio, which I put between my head and the pillow late at night."

Mikel Rouse's musical and theatrical repertoire has its roots in the high art-meets-popular culture, mix-and-match aesthetic of the early 80s downtown Manhattan music and art scene from which he emerged. As the *Toronto Globe and Mail* puts it, Rouse's music has brought "comparisons to Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich and occasionally Talking Heads, though Rouse's love of complex rhythmic patterns far exceeds them all."

But music is just a part of what he does: His pieces also build a hypnotic effect through their nonnarrative approach and the use of surreal film images. The *Los Angeles Times* notes, "Indeed, what makes Rouse's music so fascinating is that it completely merges speech and song into a rich overlay of textures. The songs have a lush pop music texture (some have noticed a seeming Rouse influence on Beck). The melodies are immediate but complexly structured like poetry; his beautiful lyrics are highly musical in tone and rhythm." And after the premiere of Rouse's multimedia opera *The End of Cinematics*, *The New York Times* reported, "Sometimes built on heavy, repetitive beats, and sometimes couched in Beatle-esque psychedelia, the songs are vivid, pleasingly visceral and often engagingly harmonized, with amusingly off-kilter lyrics."

Mikel Rouse

Mikel Rouse is a New York-based composer, director, performer, and recording artist hailed as “a composer many believe to be the best of his generation” (*The New York Times*). His works include 25 records, 7 films, and a trilogy of media operas: *Failing Kansas*, *Dennis Cleveland*, and *The End of Cinematics*. His work has frequently appeared on top ten lists around the country.

In 1995, Rouse premiered and directed the first opera in his trilogy, *Failing Kansas*, inspired by Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*. This led to an emerging art form he calls “counterpoetry,” which involves the use of multiple unpitched voices in counterpoint. In 1996, Rouse premiered and directed the modern talk show opera *Dennis Cleveland*, hailed by the *Village Voice* as “the most exciting and innovative new opera since *Einstein on the Beach*.”

The third opera in his trilogy, *The End of Cinematics*, premiered at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts in fall 2005. In fall 2006, Rouse embarked on a major tour of *The End of Cinematics*. Stops included Carolina Performing Arts, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the University of Florida at Gainesville, Liverpool, and the Carnival Center in Miami.

Rouse has also operated on a more intimate scale as a solo live performer, traversing the globe like a 21st-century Mark Twain with a surreally beautiful song-and-video storytelling piece called *Music for Minorities*.

A new piece for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company premiered in New York City in October 2006. The piece was scored for multiple iPods set to “shuffle” so that each audience member had a different realization of the score. The music for the

piece, *International Cloud Atlas*, was released on iTunes and was available for download prior to the premiere.

He has received commissions from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, and the Meet the Composer/Reader’s Digest Commissioning Program. Rouse’s compositions have been performed at Lincoln Center, at the New York State Theater, at Alice Tully Hall, and throughout the United States and Europe. More information is available at www.mikelrouse.com.

Mikel Rouse’s music is available on iTunes.

Christopher Ericson, sound designer

Christopher is the production manager for Carolina Performing Arts at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. He has mounted hundreds of productions from around the globe and also tours with Mikel Rouse and 1349 as their sound engineer. Christopher is a head recording engineer at Knight Sound Studios in Durham, North Carolina. In his spare time, he enjoys being an active musician and taking vacations.

Matthew Gandolfo, musical director

A singer and songwriter, Matthew wrote the off-Broadway musical *Dressingroom*, which led to a position as resident composer with Castle Shakespeare Repertory, where he scored over two dozen productions (most recently *Oedipus* at the Players Theatre, New York City). In association with Veritas Musicals, a production company dedicated to the creation of fairy tale operas and educational theatre, Matthew’s work has been seen by tens of thousands of schoolchildren from New York to North

Dakota. Having toured as vocal director for *The End of Cinematics* and *Dennis Cleveland*, Matthew is honored to again be a part of Mikel’s work.

Claire Kenny, newsreader

Claire Kenny is a New York-based actor and writer. As a member of Dog Run Rep, she appeared in *Twelfth Night* and as Peaseblossom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and also workshopped its world premiere of Hilary Bettis’ *American Girls*. Other favorite ventures include Ophelia in York Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*; Deborah in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*; *A Christmas Carol* and *The Secret Garden* with the Hampstead Players; and the short films *Circle* and *Pretzel Time*.

William Knapp, production manager

William Knapp is a production manager and light director for the performing arts. He has facilitated the work of MacArthur Fellows Martha Clarke, Merce Cunningham, Richard Foreman, Liz Lerman, Susan Marshall, Meredith Monk, Michael Moschen, Elizabeth Streb, and Shen Wei. He stage manages tours for Mikhail Baryshnikov and this fall will be touring the Abbey Theater’s *Terminus*. In 2007, he production managed the tour of Mikel Rouse’s *End of Cinematics* and is excited to be working on *Gravity Radio*.

The SET Quartet

The SET Quartet, founded by violinists Gillian Rivers and Patrick Doane, violist Kenny Wang, and cellist Isabel Fairbanks, is a resident New York City quartet that attaches itself to many different music scenes. From performing and recording with many of the world’s leading rock bands to premiering works by modern composers, the quartet can be seen in venues varying from John Zorn’s The Stone to Radio City Music Hall.

The members recently recorded on and arranged for the Yeah Yeah Yeahs’ latest record, the Grammy-nominated *It’s Blitz*, and also for MGMT’s upcoming second release, *Congratulations*. The SET Quartet continues to be the go-to quartet for arranging, recording, and performing live with these artists, as well as with TV on the Radio, Karen O’s Native Korean Rock, Harper Simon, Beirut, Nicole Atkins, The Silversun Pickups, The Pierces, and many others.

The group has appeared several times on MTV and on such shows as *Late Show with David Letterman*, *Late Night with Conan O’Brien*, *Later with Jools Holland* (England), and *The Today Show* with various artists. Active in New York City’s experimental and new music scene, both individually and collectively, SET quartet members have performed at modern art/music venues such as Psi, MOMA, Le Poisson Rouge, Roulette, and The Issue Project Room, working alongside composers such as Pierre Boulez, Radiohead’s Jonny Greenwood, John Adams, Arvo Pärt, John King, Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe, and others. They are graduates of Juilliard, the Oberlin Conservatory, and the Manhattan School of Music.