

THE WEIMARBAND / BLUE FLOWER PROJECT

THE WEIMARBAND
[www.weimARBAND.com]

Kurt Weill going TÊTE-à-TÊTE with Hank Williams

STURM 'n TWANG

“The most exciting new thing to come around in a long time.”
-- Rick DesRochers, Literary Director, The Goodman Theatre, Chicago

“The melodies of Tori Amos, Sweeney Todd, and Southern rock meet a country/classical chamber band to create music in what is self-described as ‘Kurt Weill going tete-a-tete w/Hank Williams’. Throw in some accordions and Dada lyrics and you have the ultimate postmodern sound.”
-- New Music Box (www.newmusicbox.com)

Made up of some of New York’s finest musicians, including three members of the Grammy-nominated Absolute Ensemble (www.absoluteensemble.com), the eclectic 10-piece ensemble blends the restless mood and dark hues of 1920’s Berlin cabaret music with the insouciant charm and lyricism of American country & western.

The kaleidoscopic music, written by composer, lyricist and performer Jim Bauer, drives with broad dynamics from bright to brooding, grim to glistening. The Weimarband’s instrumentation is in a class by itself: PEDAL STEEL GUITAR (John Widgren), BASSOON (Martin Kuuskmann), CELLO (Ann Kim), ACCORDION (Mark Rubinstein), PIANO (Jim Bauer, Mark Rubinstein and David Rozenblatt), GUITAR (Jim Bauer), FLUTE (Susan McGeary & Jen Chapin), BASS (Stephan Crump), DRUMS (Patrick Carmichael) and PERCUSSION (David Rozenblatt). Featured vocalists are Jim Bauer, the immensely talented singer/songwriter Jen Chapin, who carries on the proud tradition of her famous musical family, and the electrifyingly theatrical Susan McGeary.

Originally conceived as the “house band” for the alternative theater project *The Blue Flower* (see below), The Weimarband also gives separate concert appearances, playing other original music by Mr. Bauer as well as “Weimar-ized” covers of a peculiarly thematic assortment of songs, from Radiohead’s “Fake Plastic Trees” to Little Feat’s “Easy to Slip”.

THE BLUE FLOWER

*We have always lived between two wars,
whichever the last one was, and whatever the next one will be.*

*We are in the middle, perhaps just now the end, of a new Belle Epoque.
The last one ended in the carnage of two world wars.
The end of this one is history we are just beginning to write.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Part history lesson, part emotional catharsis, *The Blue Flower* is a new form of "Gesamtkunstwerk" that highlights the narrative force of music while weaving together many elements of both the performing and visual arts. Set at the end of World War I and the beginning of the Weimar Republic, *The Blue Flower* is a Dada-inspired "collage poem" assembled around a narrative song cycle that rides along two parallel rails: an abstraction of history from 1889 to the present, and the personal story of four Germans, based loosely on the historical figures Max Beckmann, Franz Marc, Hannah Höch and, tangentially, Marie Curie. The emotional and narrative content is conveyed almost entirely through visual, aural and physical means alone, minimizing the use of spoken word. Sliding between Paris, the battlefield trenches, the Dada cabarets of Zurich and the rattled streets of post-war Berlin, the story is told through the mind and haunting memories of Max, the narrator and main character.

Initial inspiration for the project came from the jagged contours of the music, culture and political life of the Weimar period. As a theatrical work that developed directly out of music, it encourages audiences to respond first on an intuitive, "musical" level, while having an opportunity to explore on a more conscious level rich subtexts of social, political, historical and cultural themes that draw striking and often chilling parallels between the beginning of the last century and the beginning of the present. Influenced by the irreverent spirit of Dada performance art, the broad aesthetics of the program carry forward the concept of "Gebrauchsmusik" ("useful music") developed by composers of the 1920's in an attempt to blur the distinctions between "serious" and "popular" entertainment, "high" and "low" art.

PROJECT HISTORY

Composer/lyricist Jim Bauer started writing music that combined the vocabulary of 1920's Berlin cabaret music with the lyrical nuances of American country-and-western in a style he describes as "sturm n' twang." He chose an eccentric ensemble of instruments to articulate the desired range of mood and color: bassoon, pedal steel guitar, cello, accordion, piano, clarinet, english horn, electric guitar, bass, drums and percussion. The music developed into a series of songs that became the framework for a story by Mr. Bauer and his wife Ruth Bauer, a visual artist and co-author of the project.

As a way of launching the project and providing a catalyst for further development, Mr. Bauer assembled The Weimarband, a carefully selected group of some of New York's finest musicians, to begin performing music from *The Blue Flower* at various venues in New York City: HERE ARTS CENTER, JOE'S PUB, GALAPAGOS ART SPACE, THE PYRAMID CLUB, MAKOR, THE BITTER END, and THE BOTTOM LINE. Invited by Associate Producer Bonnie Metzgar to be the only music theater piece presented at THE PUBLIC THEATER'S "NEW WORK NOW" FESTIVAL in May 2001, *The Blue Flower* has also been presented in workshop performances to sold-out audiences at JOE'S PUB in August 2001 under the direction of Rick DesRochers, and at THE BOTTOM LINE in March 2002. As members of the HERE Artist's Residency Program 2002-03, Jim and Ruth Bauer were able to work for the first time in a theatrical environment to develop the multi-media collage elements originally envisioned when the project was conceived. Work-in-progress performances of excerpts from *The Blue Flower* were presented at HERE in July 2002, November 2002 and as part of HERE's Culturemart Festival in January 2003.

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In March/April 2003 *The Blue Flower* was one of five projects selected out of over a hundred submitted to participate in the **ASCAP FOUNDATION MUSICAL THEATRE WORKSHOP** in New York City. The workshop, directed by award-winning composer/lyricist **STEPHEN SCHWARTZ** gave the project the opportunity to give two readings before a distinguished panel who then provided critique. Panelists in addition to Stephen Schwartz included: MARK HOLLMANN (music/lyrics, *Urinetown*), STUART ROSS (book, *Radiant Baby*, *Forever Plaid*), STEVEN SPIEGEL (musical theater agent, William Morris Agency, former Pres., MTI), SUE FROST (Ass. Prod, *Goodspeed Musicals*, and Pres., National Alliance for Musical Theatre), and GREG (book/lyrics, *Urinetown*).

Building on the success of the workshop presentations, *The Blue Flower* was the one project chosen by ASCAP out of the eight projects showcased in both the Los Angeles/Disney and New York 2003 workshops to be the musical theater work presented at the "**New Noises**" **FESTIVAL FOR NEW STAGE WORKS** in Steamboat Springs, Colorado in June 2003. After working for two weeks to develop the full program under the guidance of STEPHEN SCHWARTZ, two reading performances of the full program will be given to a local and invited audience.

THE BLUE FLOWER

music, lyrics & book JIM BAUER art/art direction & book RUTH BAUER
director WILL POMERANTZ assistant director ERIK SNIEDZE
lighting designer ALLEN HAHN technical artist JEFF SUGG
video artist MATT STONE videographer JAMIE MOORE
video editor JESSICA STONE

CAST

max JIM BAUER hannah SUSAN McGEARY
franz BEN SCHRADER maria ALICE MOORE
typewriter man MARC GELLER sewing machine man ANDREW DAWSON

THE WEIMARBAND

music director MARK RUBINSTEIN

JIM BAUER	vocals, piano, guitar
SUSAN McGEARY	vocals, flute
JEN CHAPIN	vocals, flute
MARTIN KUUSKMANN	bassoon
JOHN WIDGREN	pedal steel guitar, dobro
MARK RUBINSTEIN	piano, accordion, mandolin
ANN KIM	cello
STEPHAN CRUMP	bass
PATRICK CARMICHAEL	drums
DAVID ROZENBLATT	percussion, piano

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NEW YORK FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS (NYFA)
www.nyfa.org for more information

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DUPLICATION CENTER (IDC), and individual sponsors.

THE BLUE FLOWER BOARD OF ADVISORS

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