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The Magnetic Fields: 50 Song Memoir

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House

Dec 2 & 3 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. one hour & 40 minutes, including intermission

Written and arranged by Stephin Merritt

Produced by the Magnetic Fields

in association with Nick Schwartz-Hall

Directed by José Zayas

Set designer **Arnulfo Maldonado**

Projections designer **Alex Basco Koch**

Lighting designer **Mark O'Maley**

Sound designer **Dan Bora**

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS

Stephin Merritt voice, etc.

Sam Davol cellos, etc.

Christopher Ewen keyboards, etc.

Anthony Kaczynski guitars, etc.

Quince Marcum percussion, etc.

Shirley Simms bouzouki, etc.

Pinky Weitzman violas, etc.

Season Sponsor:

**Bloomberg
Philanthropies**

Support for the Signature Artist Series provided by
Howard Gilman Foundation.

50 Song Memoir

PROGRAM ONE—Dec 2

1. Wonder Where I'm From
2. Come Back as a Cockroach
3. A Cat Called Dionysus
4. Judy Garland
5. They're Killing Children Over There
6. I Think I'll Make Another World
7. Eye Contact
8. It Could Have Been Paradise
9. No
10. My Mama Ain't
11. Hustle 76
12. Life Ain't All Bad
13. The Blizzard of '78
14. Rock 'n' Roll Will Ruin Your Life
15. London by Jetpack
16. How to Play the Synthesizer
17. Happy Beeping
18. Foxx and I
19. Danceteria!
20. Why I Am Not a Teenager
21. How I Failed Ethics
22. At the Pyramid
23. Ethan Frome
24. The 1989 Musical Marching Zoo
25. Dreaming in Tetris

PROGRAM TWO—Dec 3

26. The Day I Finally...
27. Weird Diseases
28. Me and Fred and Dave and Ted
29. Haven't Got a Penny
30. A Serious Mistake
31. I'm Sad!
32. Eurodisco Trio
33. Lovers' Lies
34. Fathers in the Clouds
35. Ghosts of the Marathon Dancers
36. Have You Seen It in the Snow?
37. Be True to Your Bar
38. The Ex and I
39. Cold-Blooded Man
40. Never Again
41. "Quotes"
42. In the Snow White Cottages
43. Surfin'
44. Till You Come Back To Me
45. 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
46. Stupid Tears
47. You Can Never Go Back to New York
48. Big Enough for Both of Us
49. I Wish I Had Pictures
50. Somebody's Fetish

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Assistant projection designer **John Erickson**

Projection illustrators **Roger Miller, Jocelyn O'Shea, Alexander Petrowsky**

Projection editors **Stephanie Beattie, Ryan Powell**

Projection animators **John Erickson, Alex Petrowsky**

Assistant scenic designer **Anshuman Bhatia**

Monitor engineer **Mike Amacio**

Tour manager **Jason Thompson**

Management **Claudia Gonson**

Produced with commissioning support from:

BAM; Barbican Theatre, UK; Center for the Art of Performance, UCLA; Edinburgh International Festival; Melbourne Festival

Developmental residency support provided by MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA.

Rehearsals for *50 Song Memoir* provided by ArtsEmerson, Boston, MA.

The Magnetic Fields wish to thank Claudia Gonson, Robert Hurwitz, and Erik Selz.



Top left photo by Stephin Merritt. All others by Sam Davol.

STEPHIN MERRITT ON *50 SONG MEMOIR*

On Wednesday, October 22, 2014 at 1:45pm, at the Grand Central Oyster Bar, Nonesuch President Robert Hurwitz told me he had a swell idea for a new album by the Magnetic Fields: an album marking my 50th birthday with 50 autobiographical songs. I had just completed a rigorously fact-based mini-musical for the radio show *This American Life*, and it seemed like an idea I could take further, with myself as subject.

So I started recording at my 50th birthday party—which I forgot to put on the album—and meant to finish in a year; I was seven months late. Most of the recording I did at home, as usual, with the plan to use 50 instruments, but I ended up playing twice that, and involving 13 other performers (who played 40 other instruments). The record also expanded into the past as I incorporated recordings from 30 years ago, and fragments of songs I wrote as a teenager.

For the concert version I am working with some musicians I have known for decades (I met Shirley Simms when she was nine and I was 12) and some not (Quince Marcum I met a month ago; I don't even know where he lives). But I expect us all to reunite for *100 Song Memoir*, half a century from tonight. Possibly on Mars.

—Stephin Merritt

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The first image that came to my mind when I started thinking about a framework for the concert was Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*. I imagined Stephin singing into a tape recorder in an enclosed space, traveling backwards and forwards through time and calmly moving from reel to reel. I thought of it as a memory archive. But what would a Stephin Merritt memory archive look like?

His house of course. An environment full of musical instruments, books, toys, unusual portraits, tiki bars, space ships, robots, geegaws, tchotchkes, and dollhouses. Stephin collects tin dollhouses. And that's the space you find him in. He is inside one of his dollhouses as if transported there by a science experiment gone awry, surrounded by 50 years of ornaments and gadgets. Outside the dollhouse are the six musicians who play 50 assorted instruments and accompany him on the magical mystery tour through his past.

The things on the set are all from his home. Above him is a picture frame. And inside this frame you will see a shifting landscape of images and text—think of it as a speech balloon in a comic, some of the things you will see are true and some will be less true but they will all tell the story, in fragments, of Stephin Merritt's life.

—José Zayas

STEPHIN MERRITT (composer, musician) is the writer-singer-producer of the Magnetic Fields, the 6ths, and the Gothic Archies. He also has the group Future Bible Heroes, in collaboration with Christopher Ewen. To date, he has written, produced, and recorded 11 albums with the Magnetic Fields. Their 1999 album, *69 Love Songs*, garnered widespread acclaim, including "best of" year-end lists in *Spin*, *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and many other major publications. The Magnetic Fields have performed as part of Lincoln Center's American Songwriters series and at BAM's *Next Wave of Song* in the Next Wave Festival. Merritt has composed original music and lyrics for three music theater pieces directed by Chen Shi-Zheng, and mounted an off-Broadway stage musical of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. He composed the score for the Academy Award-nominated film *Pieces of April* (dir. Peter Hedges) and for the independent film *Eban and Charley*, and released soundtrack albums for each. His song *The Book of Love* was performed by Peter Dinklage on his 2010 album *Scratch My*

Back. Merritt has composed incidental music for the HarperCollins audio books of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket and for Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, and subsequently released an album *Songs from a Series of Unfortunate Events*. In 2014, Merritt released *101 Two Letter Words*, a book of poems about the tiniest words in the Scrabble dictionary, illustrated by Roy Chast. houseoftomorrow.com.

SAM DAVOL (musician) has recorded, performed, and toured as a member of the Magnetic Fields for almost 30 years. He and his wife Leslie co-founded and run a nonprofit called the Uni Project, which creates programming for public space in NYC. They live with their two children in lower Manhattan.

CHRISTOPHER EWEN (musician) is a Cambridge (MA) based electronic musician and DJ. Formerly a member of 80s/90s alternative rock band Figures on a Beach, he is now the composer and main instrumentalist for Future Bible Heroes, his ongoing electro-pop collabora-



Photo: Sam Davol







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tion with Stephin Merritt and Claudia Gonson. He appeared on the Magnetic Fields' *69 Love Songs*, and collaborated on a song with Tanya Donnelly for her recent Swan Song Series. Ewen DJs at several club nights in Cambridge, Boston, and Provincetown. He is currently recording his first solo album.

ANTHONY KACZYNSKI (musician) is a singer-songwriter-guitarist/multi-instrumentalist. He currently leads the rock band Fireking, and was a founding member of 1980's synth-pop band Figures on a Beach. In 2013, he performed live alongside former FOAB member Christopher Ewen in one of Stephin Merritt's other projects, Future Bible Heroes. Kaczynski lives in Boston with his partner and the world's largest chihuahua.

QUINCE MARCUM (musician) has performed with Greek Judas, The Hungry March Band, and Metal Flake Mother, among others. He has lived in North Carolina and Brooklyn.

SHIRLEY SIMMS (musician) met Stephin Merritt the week before her 10th birthday. Soon after, they composed their only song together, "Beach

a Boop-Boop." An accomplished songwriter, Simms has fronted several bands, including Lazy Susan, a group with long-time Magnetic Fields member Claudia Gonson, whom she met in high school. She provided vocals for an early version of the first Magnetic Fields album, *Distant Plastic Trees*, in 1988. She reappeared with the band in 1999 as a vocalist on *69 Love Songs*, providing lead vocals for six songs. In 2008, she formally joined the Magnetic Fields, singing roughly half the songs on its subsequent three albums and touring around the US and Europe, providing lead and harmony vocals and playing ukulele and autoharp. In 2013, Simms also toured with one of Merritt's other bands, Future Bible Heroes, along with Gonson and current TMF members Chris Ewen and Anthony Kaczynski.

PINKY WEITZMAN (musician), one of NYC's few but proud rock violists, has performed with Belle and Sebastian, Moby, Crash Test Dummies, and the Hold Steady. She toured with Tony Award-winning rock musical *Spring Awakening* and has played theater runs including *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* and *Araby*. She sings and plays viola, Stroh violin, musical

saw, and bass in various bands, and gleefully fronts the junkyard quartet Not Waving But Drowning.

JOSÉ ZAYAS (director) has directed more than 90 productions in New York, regionally, and internationally. Credits include: *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, *Burundanga*, *The House of the Spirits*, *Your Name Will Follow You Home*, *Barcelo con Hielo*, *La Nena Se Casa*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Madre (el drama padre)*, *Besame Mucho*, *Nowhere on the Border*, *Letters to a Mother* (Repertorio Español); *Cancun*, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Gala Theatre); *Pinkolandia* (INTAR and Two River Theatre); *Father of Lies and Vengeance Can Wait* (PS122); *PS Jones and the Frozen City*, *Feeder: A Love Story* (TerraNOVA Collective); *Okay* and *Mrs. Jones and the Man From Dixieland* (EST); *The Idea of Me* (Cherry Lane Mentor Project); *La Isla de Los Hombres Solos* (Teatro Espressivo, Costa Rica); and *Corazon Eterno* (Mixed Blood). He is a Drama League Fellow, and has been part of Lincoln

Center Director's Lab, Soho Rep W/D Lab, and the 2009—11 NEA/TCG Career Development Program for Directors. He received a BA from Harvard University and an MFA from Carnegie Mellon University.

ARNULFO MALDONADO (scenic designer) is a New York City-based set and costume designer. Recent credits include: *Kingdom Come* (Roundabout), *Caught* (Play Co), *Men on Boats* (Playwrights Horizons), *Hillary and Clinton* (Philadelphia Theatre Company), *Macbeth* (Old Globe), *As You Like It* (Center Stage), *Iphigenia in Aulis* (CSC), and *Iowa* (Playwrights Horizons). Maldonado is a Clubbed Thumb Affiliated Artist, a recipient of a Princess Grace Fabergé Theater Award, and the resident scenic designer at the National Playwrights Conference. He earned an MFA at NYU Tisch. arnulfomaldonado.com

ALEX BASCO KOCH (projections designer) designs projections for theater, live events, and film. Notable designs include *Irena's Vow* on Broadway; *Marley*, a world-premiere musical





Photo: Sam Davol

directed by Kwame Kwei-Armah; *Goodbar* at The Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival; and the world premiere stage adaptation of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* with openings in Chicago, Boston, and Washington, DC. Koch's works as a film producer and editor have been seen at the Tribeca Film Festival among others. alexbascokoch.com

MARK O'MALEY (lighting designer) is an instigator of space, bodies, and ideas. He wears his heart on his sleeve and the sky on his arm while working predominantly in lighting design for dance. His work has been produced throughout the US, Europe, and South America, including off-Broadway and London's West End, for such folks as Yvonne Rainer, Jessica Lang, New Paradise Laboratories, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Michelle Ellsworth, and Rennie Harris. O'Maley received his MFA-IA from Goddard College. markomaley.com

DAN BORA (sound designer, audio engineer), as producer, engineer, and sound designer of

albums, film scores, and live sound, has worked with Marina Abramović, Antony, Philip Glass, Howard Shore, Nico Muhly, and many others. His credits include Academy Award-winning *Fog of War*, the Academy Award-nominated *The Illusionist*, as well as the revival of Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach*, and *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*. Bora's live work has been praised as "deft," "provocative and even poignant..." (*The New York Times*).

NICK SCHWARTZ-HALL (associate producer) has produced music projects for BAM including *Nonesuch Records 50th Anniversary Celebration*; Paul Simon's residency; Dr. John's residency, Questlove's *Shuffle Culture* and *Electronium*; *Red Hot + Rio*, *Red Hot + New Orleans*, *Red Hot + Cuba*, and *Red Hot + Arthur Russell* concerts; Marisa Monte's *Samba Noise with Seu Jorge*, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Arto Lindsay; Si Cuba! Festival; Muslim Voices: Arts and Ideas festival; *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* (year two); and *Shelter* and *Lost Objects* with Bang on a Can.