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Frank Proto

Frank Proto was born in Brooklyn, New York. He began piano studies at the age of 7 and the double bass at the age of 16 while a student at the High School of Performing Arts in New York City. After graduating he attended the Manhattan School of Music where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees. As a student of David Walter, Frank performed the first solo double bass recital in the history of the school. As a composer he is self-taught. For his graduation recital in 1963, Proto confronted the typical bass player's problem - there was very little literature for the instrument. He programmed a baroque work, a romantic piece, and an avant-garde composition using electronic tape, but he wanted a contemporary composition in a more American style. Unable to find one he liked, he decided to write his own. The resulting piece – *Sonata 1963 for Double Bass and Piano* – was his first composition. It has subsequently been performed hundreds of times, worldwide by scores of bassists, and has entered the standard double bass repertoire.

During the early 1960s Frank earned his living as a free-lance bassist in New York City, performing with such organizations as the Symphony of the Air, American Symphony, the Robert Shaw Chorale, and – as one of the original members – the Princeton Chamber Orchestra. He also played with various Broadway and Off-Broadway show bands and in many of the jazz clubs that were a mainstay of New York nightlife at the time.

In 1966 he joined the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra where, with the help and encouragement of CSO Music Directors Max Rudolf and Thomas Schippers, he began to bloom as a composer. The early opportunities given him by the CSO to compose and arrange for the orchestra resulted in a 30 year stay in which the orchestra premiered over 20 large works and countless smaller pieces and arrangements composed for Young People's concerts, Pop's concerts, tours and special occasions.

During his tenure every music director commissioned him to compose works to feature various guest artists or the orchestra itself on its subscription concerts, including Max Rudolf (*Concerto No. 1 for Double Bass and Orchestra*), Thomas Schippers (*Concerto in One Movement for Violin, Double Bass and Orchestra*), Walter Suskind (*Concerto for Cello and Orchestra*), Michael Gielen (*Dialogue for Synclavier and Orchestra*), Jesus Lopes-Cobos (*The New Seasons for Tuba, Percussion and Orchestra*, *Hamabe No Arashi* and the Music Drama *Ghost In Machine - an American Music Drama for Vocalist, Narrator and Orchestra*).

Writing for the Pops, his *Casey at the Bat*, *Fantasy on the Saints* and *Carmen Fantasy for Trumpet and Orchestra* have been performed over 500 times and have become standards in the Orchestral Pops repertoire.

Proto's *Doodles - an Introduction to the Orchestra* is widely used in Young People's Concerts to introduce grade school children to the orchestra.

Working in such an all-encompassing musical atmosphere, both as a player and a composer, has resulted in Proto being able to become as comfortable with the large orchestra as he is with a jazz rhythm section. The result is as exhilarating as it is natural.

Frank has composed and/or arranged for many of the 20th and 21st century's finest artists including Max Rudolf, Doc Severinsen, Thomas Schippers, Cleo Laine, Michael Gielen, Duke Ellington, Jesús López-Cobos, Dave Brubeck, Sherill Milnes, Eddie Daniels, Benjamin Luxon, Gerry Mulligan, Paul Winfield, Roberta Peters, François Rabbath, Ruggerio Ricci, Richard Stoltzman, Keith Lockhart, Peter Wiley, Alexander Kerr, and Lucero Tena. This list of collaborators is extraordinary for its length and diversity as well as for its high level of artistry.

Since leaving the Cincinnati Symphony in 1997 Proto has continued to work in a wide variety of styles and sizes including the Violin Concerto, *Can This Be Man? - A Music Drama for Violin and Orchestra* for Alexander Kerr, Concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in Amsterdam, *Yesterday's News - a Satire for Jazz Band and Actors* for the Jazz Band at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music, *The Creatures in Room 642* for the Dayton Symphony Orchestra's Young People's programs, *Four Scenes after Picasso - Concerto No. 3 for Double Bass and Orchestra* and *Nine Variants on Paganini for Double Bass and Orchestra* for François Rabbath, *Sketches of Gershwin for Clarinet and Chamber Orchestra*, *Paganini in Metropolis for Clarinet and Orchestra* and *Sextet for Clarinet and Strings* for Eddie Daniels, a set of *Five Divertimenti for Solo Violin* for the young virtuoso Eric Bates, *Soundscapes for Solo Viola* for another young virtuoso, Scott Slapin and *Little Suite for the Big Bassoon* for the Contrabassoon soloist, Susan Nigro.

In 1977 he began collaboration with the Syrian-French double bass virtuoso François Rabbath. He has written Rabbath five major compositions with orchestra that span a musical landscape from the most contemporary and serious - *Four Scenes after Picasso* - to the most unusual *Carmen Fantasy* that anyone is likely to encounter. Rabbath, whose musical appetite is as wide-ranging as Proto's has recorded all of the pieces and continues to perform them worldwide.

In 1993 Proto began collaborating with poet, playwright and author John Chenault. To date they have written eight works together, the most notable being *Ghost in Machine - an American Music Drama for Vocalist, Narrator and Orchestra*. Commissioned by the Cincinnati Symphony, the work brought Proto and Chenault together with vocalist Cleo Laine and actor Paul Winfield for the first time. *Ghost* is a seventy-minute, large-scale orchestral work that uses elements from a wide spectrum of the musical landscape woven around an equally wide-ranging text that explores contemporary society's problems with racism, religious intolerance and gender warfare. The work received 14 nominations for the 1995 *Pulitzer Prize* in Music.

The success of *Ghost* resulted in two new commissions for the pair. The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. commissioned a work for Cleo Laine to celebrate the new millennium. The result - *The Fools of Time* - is a jazz-based work and was premiered in February 2000. At the other end of the musical spectrum is *My Name is Citizen Soldier*, commissioned by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra to celebrate the orchestra's 10th anniversary and the opening of the National D-day Museum in New Orleans. The work, a tribute to the veterans of World War II, was premiered in September 2000 with actor Paul Winfield as the soloist.

Working with Chenault has brought an added dimension to Proto's music – the visual. Their pieces bring a more all-encompassing, quasi-theatrical experience to audiences. Utilizing the orchestra in ways beyond the traditional, their techniques have enabled them to bond in new ways with audiences, resulting in spectacularly successful performances. Proto and Chenault are currently at work on *Shadowboxer – An Opera based on the life of Joe Louis*. The full-length opera, commissioned by the University of Maryland is scheduled for a week of performances in April 2010.

Proto believes strongly in maintaining the connection between composing and performing – a tradition that once was the norm but is now the exception outside of the jazz and pop fields. He does not hesitate to pick up his bass to play with a jazz or chamber music group or travel near or far to play a solo recital. “It helps a great deal to experience what a soloist feels when under the lights,” he says. Currently in a long-term project to record all of his chamber music for the Red Mark label – seven CDs have been released to date, with three more in various stages of production – he continues to maintain his double life as both a composer and performer.

In November 2006 Proto was awarded the Grand Prize in the First New Orleans International Composer Competition for his *Fiesta Bayou and Kismet*. The prize included a commission for a major orchestra work. *The Dalí Gallery*, a 6-movement, 30-minute orchestral suite based on the paintings of Salvadore Dalí will be premiered by the Louisiana Philharmonic, conducted by Klauspeter Seibel on May 7, 2009.

Proto is also passionate in his belief that performing artists and composers should not hesitate to tackle the pressing issues that confront society today – the controversial social and political issues that most artists in this supposedly free society of ours are loathe to confront with their art. Examples of his work in this area include; *Afro-American Fragments* (poetry by Langston Hughes), *Mingus - Live in the Underworld* (Text by John Chenault), *Four Rogues – a Mystery for Double Bass and Piano*, *The Games of October for Oboe and Double Bass* and *Ghost in Machine for Vocalist, Narrator and Orchestra* (Text and lyrics by John Chenault). In 2003 Proto composed *The Profanation of Hubert J. Fort – an Allegory in Four Scenes* for Voice, Clarinet/Saxophone and Double Bass, writing both the music and libretto for this theatre piece. His most recent work in this genre, *The Tuner – A Musical Prophecy in Seven Scenes for Vocalist, Actors and Musicians*, with text and lyrics by John Chenault was premiered at the 2005 International Society of Bassists Convention at Western Michigan University.

Proto’s recent collaboration with clarinet virtuoso Eddie Daniels resulted in the DVD/CD *Bridges – Eddie Daniels plays the Music of Frank Proto*. The DVD was rewarded with a 2008 *Grammy Nomination*.

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