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BILL FRISELL'S *DISFARMER PROJECT* DEBUTS AT WEXNER CENTER

WEXNER CENTER COMMISSION INSPIRED BY WORK OF PHOTOGRAPHER MIKE DISFARMER

Guitarist **Bill Frisell**, along with violinist **Jenny Scheinman** and lap steel guitar player **Greg Leisz**, perform the world premiere of ***Musical Portraits from Heber Spring: Bill Frisell's Disfarmer Project*** on **Saturday March 3** at 7:30 pm and 9:30 pm at the Wexner Center. Inspired by the life, work, and subjects of eccentric photographer Mike Disfarmer, this production was commissioned by the Wexner Center. The haunting and stark photographs taken by Disfarmer in a small



Bill Frisell / Photo: Jimmy Katz

Arkansas town in the 1940s and 1950s are now widely admired works of outsider art. Using these as a starting point, Frisell will echo their timeless, captivating quality by balancing evocative atmospherics and traditional American musical forms to create his suite inspired by Disfarmer. Along with violinist Scheinman and lap steel guitar player Leisz, these compositions draw in part on traditional Ozark fiddle music (Disfarmer was an avid fiddler himself). During the performance, projected images of Disfarmer's portraits will further illuminate Frisell's musical perspectives on this fascinating character.

The *New York Times* described Frisell's music in this way: "It's hard to find a more fruitful meditation on American music than in the compositions of guitarist Bill Frisell. Mixing rock and country with jazz and blues, he's found what connects them: improvisation and a sense of play. Unlike other pastichists, who tend to duck passion, Mr. Frisell plays up the pleasure in the music and also takes on another often-avoided subject, tenderness."

Says Wexner Center Director of Performing Arts Charles Helm, who introduced Frisell to the work of Disfarmer, and suggested he collaborate with Leisz and Scheinman for this Wexner Center-commissioned project: "To me, Bill Frisell is a uniquely American artist with a distinctive and singular musical voice like that of Thelonious Monk or Aaron Copland. In his probing yet atmospheric evocations of American vistas I could hear parallels to the emotional truths of Disfarmer's compelling photographs. I'm pleased that Disfarmer's work resonated with Bill and that our audience will also have the opportunity to discover Disfarmer and this music inspired by these captivating and timeless photographic portraits." For more information on Helm's and Frisell's work in bring this project to fruition, listen to a podcast at wexarts.org/wexcasting.

Tickets are \$20 for the general public and \$17 for Wexner Center members and students and are available now at the Wexner Center (614 292-3535) and Ticketmaster (614 431-3600). \$5 High 5 tickets are also available for middle and high school students in advance (vouchers should be picked up at the Wexner Center at least a day before the show).

ABOUT THE BAND

Bill Frisell's career has spanned more than 25 years and over 200 recordings, including 25 albums of his own as a guitarist, composer, and bandleader. He has established himself as a visionary presence in American music. He has collaborated with a wide range of artists, filmmakers, and legendary musicians, but it is his work as a leader that has garnered increasing attention and accolades.

His catalogue, includes 20 recordings for Nonesuch, original Buster Keaton film scores to arrangements of music for extended ensemble with horns (*This Land, Blues Dream*), adaptations of his compositions originally written as soundtracks to Gary Larson cartoons (*Quartet*), interpretations of work by other classic and contemporary American composers (*Have a Little Faith*), and collaborations with the acclaimed rhythm section of bassist Viktor Krauss and drummer Jim Keltner (*Gone, Just Like a Train, Good Dog, Happy Man*). His work has been cited by *Downbeat* as "the best recorded output of the decade." Other releases include an album with Nashville musicians (*Nashville*), the solo album *Ghost Town*, an album of his arrangements of songs by Elvis Costello and Burt Bacharach (*The Sweetest Punch*), a trio album with jazz legends Dave Holland and Elvin Jones, and a collection of American traditional songs and original compositions inspired by them entitled *The Willies*.

In December 2006, Frisell was named a USA Rasumson Fellow and became a recipient of a grant offered by United States Artists, a privately funded organization dedicated to the support of America's finest living artists.

Greg Leisz has been in demand for playing country, folk, pop and rock music with artists such as Joni Mitchell, Emmylou Harris, Willie Nelson, Linda Ronstadt, Beck, KD Lang, Randy Newman, Dave Alvin, Gillian Welch, Lucinda Williams, Sheryl Crow, Paula Cole, Fiona Apple, Brian Wilson, Jackson Browne, John Mayer, Matthew Sweet, and Joe Cocker.

Jenny Scheinman was a member of Frisell's Unspeakable Orchestra and his 858 Quartet, and was also in The Intercontinentals, appearing on the Grammy-nominated album of the same name and has performed in Frisell's trios with Ron Miles and Greg Leisz and leads a number of her own groups with constantly fluctuating guests. She has also played with Aretha Franklin, Norah Jones, Lucinda Williams, Nels Cline, John Zorn, and Scott Amendola (who appeared at the Wexner Center earlier this year).

ABOUT MIKE DISFARMER

Despite his eccentricities and antisocial attitude, Disfarmer made his living shooting commercial portraits of the citizens of Heber Springs, Arkansas. During the WWII era, his customers often came to have their pictures taken as a kind of Saturday night going-to-town entertainment. They routinely met with lengthy ordeals as the cranky Disfarmer fussed until he felt it was the right moment to capture their likenesses with his antique glass negative camera, framing them as timeless specimens against a ratty, masking tape-patched backdrop.



Photo by Mike Disfarmer
copyright Michael Disfarmer/Peter Miller

Following his death in 1959, hundreds of his glass negatives were discovered in his dilapidated studio. New prints were struck from these negatives in the early 1970s and sent to the editor of *Modern Photography* magazine. They were subsequently published and exhibited at the International Center of Photography in New York, causing a sensation for their hauntingly penetrating qualities, formal elegance, and stark observational poetry. Since then interest in Disfarmer's work has grown and has included the recent exhibitions of a newly assembled body of original Disfarmer photographs at Edwynn Houk Gallery and Steven Kasher Gallery in New York.

EVENT SUPPORT

Musical Portraits from Heber Spring: Bill Frisell's Disfarmer Project is co-commissioned by the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University and the Walker Art Center through funds provided by the William and Nadine McGuire Commissioning Fund and the Doris Duke Performing Arts Endowment Fund.

Additional commissioning and residency support for this project at the Wexner Center is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Major support for the Wexner Center's 2006–07 performing arts season is generously provided by Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, The Columbus Foundation, and Huntington Bank.

Significant contributions are also made by Altria Group, Inc., Morgan Stanley, and Nationwide Foundation.

Additional funding is provided by the Ohio Arts Council, the Corporate Annual Fund of the Wexner Center Foundation, and Wexner Center members.

Accommodations are provided by The Blackwell Inn.

CALENDAR INFORMATION:

Description: World premiere of Bill Frisell's Disfarmer Project, a work inspired by the photographs of Mike Disfarmer.

Date and time: Saturday, March 3 at 7:30 pm and 9:30 pm.

Location: Wexner Center Performance Space, 1871 North High Street.

Tickets: \$20 general public, \$17 Wexner Center members and students. \$5 High 5 tickets for middle- and high-school students available at Wexner Center at least a day before the show.

Ticket outlets: Wexner Center Ticket Office (614 292-3535) and Ticketmaster (614 431-3600) or Ticketmaster.com.

Public information: 614 292-3535 and wexarts.org

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