

# MARGARET LENG TAN

## *CLANGOR!*

WOMADelaide  
6 March 2015 | Friday | 8pm  
7 March 2015 | Saturday | 2pm  
Zoo Stage, Botanic Park



Photo: Jim Standard

Supported by



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SINGAPORE

# PROGRAMME

Approximately 60 minutes without intermission

**John Kennedy** (b.1959)

*FANFARE* from \**THE WINGED ENERGY OF DELIGHT* (1997)

Toy cymbals

**Ying-an Lin** (b.1993)

+*DRUNKARD'S DANCE* (2013)

Toy piano and tin can

**Phyllis Chen** (b.1978)

*CAROUSEL* (2009)

\**COBWEBBED CAROUSEL* (2010)

Toy piano and hand-cranked music box

**James Joslin** (b.1987)

*FÜR ENOLA* (2011)

Toy piano, jack-in-the-box and spinning top

**David Wolfson** (b.1964)

+*TWINKLE, DAMMIT!* (2011)

Toy piano, toy hammer, rattle; dramatization by Margaret Leng Tan

**Monica Pearce** (b.1984)

\*+*CLANGOR* (2013)

A lament for toy piano and bicycle bells

**Jorge Torres Sáenz** (b.1968)

\**TOY SYMPHONY* (2013)

*Prelude*

*Sticks' Tics*

*Tête-à-tête*

*Night Music*

*Finale: Leng Tan Toyccatina*

Toy piano, toy instruments and toys

**Jed Distler** (b.1956)

*MINUTE RING* (2006)

Toy piano

(With apologies to R. Wagner)

\*Written for Margaret Leng Tan

+Australian premiere

# PROGRAMME NOTES

## BY MARGARET LENG TAN

### ***Fanfare* by John Kennedy**

*Fanfare* is the prelude to *The Winged Energy of Delight*, a four-movement suite written for my toy piano by my composer-friend John Kennedy. He thought it would be fun to have me stage a grand entrance crashing my toy cymbals!

Composer, conductor and percussionist John Kennedy is a dynamic and energetic figure in American music. The resident conductor of the Spoleto USA Festival, his own compositions range from operas to chamber works.

[www.johnkennedymusic.com](http://www.johnkennedymusic.com)

### ***Drunkard's Dance* by Ying-an Lin**

*Drunkard's Dance* is Ying-an Lin's first composition for toy instruments. This duet for toy piano and tin can depicts an inebriated person having fun while lost in his own world. *Drunkard's Dance* was written for the 2<sup>nd</sup> UnCaged Toy Piano Festival where it received its premiere in 2013, performed by Margaret Leng Tan.

Born in Tainan, Taiwan in 1993, Ying-An Lin started composing at the age of 16. She is now a third year student majoring in composition at Taiwan's National Chiayi University.

### ***Carousel/Cobwebbed Carousel* by Phyllis Chen**

*It seems natural to love music boxes as a toy pianist; both instruments have metal tines and rely on a resonating chamber to sound. Both Carousel and Cobwebbed Carousel are composed on the same punch tape strip but for Cobwebbed Carousel, the reverse surface of the punch tape passes through the music box mechanism. In this "counter-piece", Margaret suggested that I attempt to capture the mysterious, darker aspect of childhood. Cobwebbed Carousel is dedicated to and written for Margaret Leng Tan with great admiration.*

-Phyllis Chen

Phyllis Chen is a pianist/toy pianist/composer currently living in New York City. Her work uses unconventional instruments and sound-making devices that are integral to the visual and theatrical components of her work. She created the annual UnCaged Toy Piano Competition in 2007 and in 2011 hosted the UnCaged Toy Piano Festival, the first of its kind in New York.

[www.phyllischen.net](http://www.phyllischen.net)

## ***Für Enola* by James Joslin**

*Für Enola for toy piano and jack-in-the-box was conceived as an attempt to bridge the gap between the inherent childlike nature of the toy piano and its more recent status as a 'serious' instrument. Chance operations were used to construct the piece in a manner mimicking that of a child playing the toy piano - seemingly random strikes just happening spontaneously. The score notates the part of the toy piano and also when the jack-in-the-box handle should be turned. Für Enola is also visual theatre, intended as a nod to the man who first saw the potential of the toy piano as a concert instrument: John Cage.*

-James Joslin

James Joslin (b.1987) is a composer and performer based in England where he is currently completing a degree in Music, Technology and Innovation at De Montfort University. His compositions cover a wide field from toy piano compositions, pieces for instruments with electronics, and sound installations. Most notably James' composition, *Für Enola* (for toy piano and jack-in-the-box), won the 2011 UnCaged Toy Piano Competition's 'Most Ingenious Combo' award.

[jamesjoslin.weebly.com](http://jamesjoslin.weebly.com)

## ***Twinkle Dammit!* by David Wolfson**

*Twinkle, Dammit! (an obsessive variation on a well-known children's song) was written as a submission for the 1st International Toy Piano Festival in 2011, which had requested scores for toy piano and toys. Ms. Tan selected it personally for its resonance with her memories of childhood piano practice sessions and premiered it at the festival; the dramatization (and choice of toys) is hers.*

-David Wolfson

David Wolfson is an eclectic, versatile composer of songs, concert music and music for theatre. *Seventeen Windows*, a CD of his music, was released by Albany Records last year. Please visit his website: [www.davidwolfsonmusic.net](http://www.davidwolfsonmusic.net).

I have chosen to play *Twinkle, Dammit!* because I like its humour and theatrical potential. The piece brings back memories of those interminable scales and Czerny drills of my Singapore childhood. Knuckle rapping was common practice for piano teachers in those days.

Originally scored for toy piano, rubber duck and train whistle, the composer gave me permission to use, instead, a plastic hammer and my "jeeba jeeba" rattle which sounds almost human in a cartoonish way.

I can also relate to the stuck-in-a-groove nature of *Twinkle, Dammit!* because it strikes a chord with my Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

-Margaret Leng Tan

## **Clangor by Monica Pearce**

*The toy piano has been intertwined in many of my creative projects for the past several years, as I am continually inspired by its bright, percussive tone, its slightly fringe tuning, and its playful connotations as a concert instrument. For this project, I paired the toy piano with three pitched bicycle bells. What attracted me to the bicycle bells, in addition to the vibrant timbral possibilities, was the “everyday” aspect: for many people, including myself as a biker, the sound of bicycle bells is part of their everyday sound world.*

*Clangor, for toy piano and bicycle bells, was written for Margaret Leng Tan for the 2013 UnCaged Toy Piano Festival.*

*-Monica Pearce*

Monica Pearce, originally from Prince Edward Island, Canada, is a composer of new classical/contemporary music with a particular affinity for solo and chamber music, opera, and musical theatre. Inspired by a special interest in writing for toy pianos, she founded the Toronto-based emerging composer collective the Toy Piano Composers in 2008 with Chris Thornborrow, where she is the Artistic Director. Monica is also the Executive Director of The Music Gallery, Toronto's Centre for Creative Music.

## **Toy Symphony by Jorge Torres Sáenz**

In 2013 Eduardo Soto Millán, music director at the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, commissioned Jorge Torres Sáenz to create a new work for me to premiere at the International Forum of New Music "Manuel Enríquez". I asked him to choose a composer who did not write academic style music, who could create something playful and joyful, using only humble toys. In making me my very own *Toy Symphony*, Saenz has surpassed my expectations...he is a welcome addition to my international family of toy composers! His five-movement *Toy Symphony* consists of a *Prelude* for bells; *Sticks' Tics*, a highly original exploration of different timbres possible on a toy xylophone; *Tête-à-tête*, an exchange between two rubber ducks; *Night Music*, enhanced with toy noisemakers evoking nocturnal sounds, and the *Finale: Leng Tan Toyccatina*, a virtuosic tour-de-force and proof that the toy piano *is* a real instrument!

Jorge Torres Sáenz is a Mexican artist and philosopher. A graduate of the Paris Conservatory, he is, in addition to being one of his country's most original and adventurous composers, an essayist and professor of fine arts and philosophy at several of the major universities in Mexico City.

[www.jts.mx/indexIng.html](http://www.jts.mx/indexIng.html)

## ***Minute Ring* (with apologies to R. Wagner) by Jed Distler**

*Minute Ring* was originally written for pianist Guy Livingston's series of one-minute composer commissions. I have since appropriated this monumental miniature because it fits nicely with my sit-down comic aspirations. I dedicate my performance to Anna Russell (1911-2006), the singer and comedienne famous for her Wagnerian opera parodies.

As Composers Collaborative's co-founder and Artistic Director, Jed Distler has created and programmed such innovative festivals as Solo Flights, Non Sequitur, Serial Underground at the Cornelia Street Café.

On June 21<sup>st</sup> 2013 his *Broken Record*, for 175 battery-powered keyboards and grand piano, set a new Guinness Book record for the world's largest keyboard ensemble. He has received grants from ASCAP, Meet the Composer, American Composers Forum, and a MacDowell Colony residency. His latest CD release is *Meditate with the Masters* (Musical Concepts).

[www.composerscollab.org](http://www.composerscollab.org)

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# BIOGRAPHY

## MARGARET LENG TAN

Margaret Leng Tan has established herself as a major force in the American avant-garde. Ms. Tan, whose work embraces theatre, choreography, performance, has been called “the diva of avant-garde pianism” by *The New Yorker*. She is renowned as a pre-eminent John Cage interpreter (her mentor of eleven years) and for her performances of American and Asian music that transcend the piano’s conventional boundaries.

Margaret Leng Tan has been hailed as “the queen of the toy piano” (*The New York Times*) and “the toy piano’s Rubenstein” (*The Independent*, UK). This year she celebrates her 20th anniversary as a pioneer of the toy piano. After discovering Cage’s *Suite for Toy Piano* in 1993, Ms. Tan became fascinated with the artistic potential of the toy piano and more recently, with other toy instruments as well. In her groundbreaking 1997 CD, *The Art of the Toy Piano* (Philips/Universal), she elevated a humble toy to the status of a real instrument. Critics acknowledge her as the world’s first toy piano virtuoso who has inspired composers to create a unique repertoire for a new instrument. Ms. Tan’s diminutive music-theatre of nostalgia and humour has delighted audiences at festivals around the world. Her last toy album, *She Herself Alone: The Art of the Toy Piano 2*, was released as a Mode Records CD and DVD (mode 221) to critical acclaim. It was awarded the *Diapason d’Or* from the French *Diapason* magazine in 2011. Cablevision’s Tan toy piano feature won the 2011 Bronze Telly Award.

Evans Chan’s 2004 documentary, *Sorceress of the New Piano: The Artistry of Margaret Leng Tan*, was nominated for “Best Music Documentary” at the American Film Institute/Discovery Channel’s *SilverDocs*. *Sorceress* was named "Best Contemporary Music Film" by Spain's *CD Compact* magazine in 2010. *Sorceress* and Chan’s *The Maverick Piano* which features live performances by Tan, are available as a Mode Records DVD (mode 194).

In 2011 Tan was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts by the State University of New York. She was inducted into the inaugural Singapore Women’s Hall of Fame in 2014 ([www.swhf.sg](http://www.swhf.sg)).

The Singapore International Festival of Arts has commissioned *Cabinet of Curiosities*, a solo music-theatre work created by Phyllis Chen for Tan as Singapore celebrates a half-century of independence in 2015.

[www.margaretlengtan.com](http://www.margaretlengtan.com)