Stew & The Negro Problem

Saturday and Sunday, October 20 and 21, 2012

Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago

Edlis Neeson Theater
Stew & The Negro
Problem

Stew, guitar and lead vocals
Michael McGinnis, woodwinds and keyboards
Jeffrey Hermanson, trumpet
Brian Drye, trombone and keyboards
Daniel Fabricatore, acoustic bass
Vincent Sperrazza, drums

The music performed tonight features original compositions by Stew and collaborator Heidi Rodewald, including commissioned songs from their MCA residency earlier this year.

Very special thanks to Marguerite Horberg, Arnold Romeo, Robert “Baabe” L. Irving III, Adam Green, Ethan Michaeli, Ed Marszewski, and James Jankowiak
From the artists

We Wrote Some Songs “About” Chicago

An impression is a fact verifiable only by memory and emotion. We deal in impressions. We don’t trust the truth.

Tonight’s tunes are snapshots of a Chicago that exists. But only in the minds of your humble court composers, Stew and Ms. Heidi Rodewald.

We not only stand by our ignorance but find it essential to our process. We would never dream of even attempting to write a song that tried to tell you an “objective truth” about this complex colossus, because frankly that’s your job—you live here.

We musical tourists would rather share our subjective truths with you, our blurry snapshots of song, if you will, in hopes that maybe a fragment or two of our tuneful misunderstandings move you to laughter, reflection or sheer anger, all of which we find thoroughly acceptable.

You know you really love a town when you wish you had discovered it when you were twenty years younger. But it’s never too late. This show feels like the beginning of something.

It’s a privilege to be able to write about a place that gave birth to so much that is essential to our beings as artists, as politically engaged people and as plain old human beings . . . and as eaters of meat.

We’d like to thank Peter and Yolanda for being truly amazing people who went above and beyond the call of duty to open Chicago up for us in a way that was fun, extremely helpful and inspiring.

Sincerely,

Heidi and Stew, Brooklyn,
Fall 2012
Mike Daisey
American Utopias
Nov 1–11, 2012
Copresented with the Chicago Humanities Festival

“Mike Daisy is a force of nature. [He] can work a story deep into your subconscious and invite true insight.”

The Post and Courier

For tickets, visit mcachicago.org or call 312.397.4010.
Stew
lives in Brooklyn, New York, and is a native of Los Angeles, where he launched his band The Negro Problem in the early mid-1990s. He is co-creator with Heidi Rodewald of *Passing Strange*, which earned seven Tony Award nominations and the Tony Award for Best Book in 2008 as well as two Obie Awards for Best New Theater Piece and Best Ensemble. The film version of *Passing Strange*, directed by Spike Lee, was premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. Stew and Rodewald’s next collaboration, *Making It*, was premiered by St Ann’s Warehouse in Brooklyn, in February 2010, and was followed in October of the same year by *Brooklyn Omnibus*, which premiered at and was commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music.


In 2003 Lincoln Center invited Stew and Rodewald to perform in the *American Songbook* series of concerts, and in March of 2009 they performed at the United Nations. Stew and Rodewald were composers in residence at Shakespeare on the Sound under former artistic director Joanna Settle from 2009 to 2012, creating original music for productions of *A Midsummernight’s Dream*, *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. Stew and Rodewald’s compositions for television include “Gary Come Home” for the *SpongeBob SquarePants* cartoon.

Heidi Rodewald
is the Tony Award–nominated, Obie Award–winning co-composer of the musical *Passing Strange*, which transferred from the Public Theater to Broadway in 2008. She is a Sundance Institute alum and the co-writer with Stew of the screenplay *We Can See Today*. Rodewald composed music for Karen Kandel’s *Portraits: Night and Day* (2004); *Brides of the Moon* by theatrical collective The Five Lesbian Brothers (2010); and co-composed, with Stew, music for Shakespeare’s *Othello*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Romeo and Juliet* (2010–12). Rodewald joined The Negro Problem in 1997, and since then has worked alongside Stew, performing, producing, arranging, and composing. She is currently working on a new musical, *The Good Swimmer*, with librettist Donna DiNovelli. She is the co-composer of the new musical *The Total Bent*, seen in workshop performances February 2012 at the Public Theater.
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As of October 2012
As one of the nation’s largest multidisciplinary museums devoted to the art of our time, the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago offers exhibitions of the most thought-provoking art of today. The museum’s performing arts program, MCA Stage, is the most active presenter of theater, dance, and music in Chicago, featuring leading performers from around the globe in the 300-seat Edlis Neeson Theater.

MCA Stage is committed to presenting groundbreaking performances that focus on collaboration; working closely with artists; converging with the larger programming of the museum; and offering a contemporary view of the traditional roots of performance.

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Program notes compiled by Yolanda Cesta Cursach