

LINCOLN
CENTER

presents

American Songbook

sponsored by Omnicom Group Inc.

Wednesday Evening, February 22, 2006, at 8:30

Duncan Sheik

GERRY LEONARD, *Electric Guitar*

DOUG YOWELL, *Drums*

MILO DECRUZ, *Bass*

with special guest

DAVID POE

*This evening's program is approximately 75 minutes long and
will be performed without intermission.*

Major support for *Lincoln Center's American Songbook* is provided by
Richard L. Fisher.

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Lincoln Center.***

The Allen Room, Frederick P. Rose Hall
Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center

Note on the Program

by Barry Singer

Throughout its infancy and adolescence—in fact, right on past adulthood and on into senescence—the American songbook has sung with a voice of optimism. Hope was the grace note underlying even the most woeful torch songs, and songwriters from Irving Berlin to Burt Bacharach and beyond, even that maestro of ambivalence, Stephen Sondheim, mined this note of possibility—romantic or otherwise—ferverently.

The 1960s changed almost everything about American popular song except *that*. For The Beatles, to the bitter end, “the love you take” was “equal to the love you make,” while Bob Dylan’s keening voice of protest still insisted that “the times they are a’changin’”—for the better, one assumed. Since then, the American songbook—whether sung beneath spinning disco balls, before hoards of moshing heathens, or even to the accompaniment of scratching turntable jockeys—has always promised *something*.

The songs of Duncan Sheik and many of his 21st-century contemporaries promise nothing in the way of easy optimism. Sheik is, if anything, a bard of dubiousness, whose music romanticizes skepticism often as achingly, as lyrically, or even as giddily as any of his more positive-minded forebearers.

Pessimism is not the point. Pessimism, for Sheik, is something to be skeptical about too. Is this sad? Not necessarily. Is it a more grown-up, more realistic point of view? Not necessarily, either. What it is, simply, is the sound of Duncan Sheik.

His 1996 debut album announced Sheik with the hit single, “Barely Breathing,” a bouncy pop confection that lyrically laid waste to the notion that love as a bouncy pop confection had any future at all. (Though even this certainty left Sheik skeptical. “I’m thinking it over anyway,” his lyric concluded, as “Barely Breathing” faded out.) Over the course of five albums, including the just-released *White Limousine*, Sheik has navigated his way through a song universe of increasing doubt and mistrust by deploying eloquent songwriting craftsmanship, an ear for melodic hooks and a taste for acerbic lyrics as well-shaped as they are often abstrusely poetic.

Born in New Jersey and raised mostly in South Carolina, Sheik started out as a guitarist for Lisa Loeb while still a student at Brown University. His experience with pop chart expectations and commercial record company pressure following the success of “Barely Breathing” chased him further away from the pop mainstream with each succeeding album. As his songwriting voice has grown more venturesome, the production values surrounding it have also grown more technologically intricate, but the effect has not been a techno distancing of Sheik’s message but rather a deepening of its mood.

Of late, Sheik has ventured into the more traditional world of musical theater—a world he, of course, finds suspect. His collaboration with the playwright Steven Sater on a musical version of Frank Wedekind’s notorious 1891 drama *Spring Awakening* will receive a full production this spring at the Atlantic Theater Company after being presented in concert last year by Lincoln Center’s American Songbook. Sheik is also currently working with Sater on a modern-day musical of Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Nightingale*, commissioned by Martin McCallum of Cameron Mackintosh, Inc. Is the theater a positive new direction for Duncan Sheik? Perhaps. Still, he insists on calling his shows “anti-musicals,” for obvious reasons.

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