



JASPER STRING QUARTET
UNBOUND



As the members of a string quartet, we are incredibly lucky. The four of us have spent the past decade playing together, learning to breathe and move as one. We're honored to play in the most intimate settings and the top concert halls. Most importantly, the music we play is the best that there is. We might be biased, but we feel that the string quartet repertoire has no equal. From the sixty-plus quartets of Haydn, to the sixteen of Beethoven and the six of Bartok, to the seven pieces on this album, the string quartet repertoire represents a triumph of humanity, of communication, and of the free exchange of ideas.

Seeking out new pieces to contribute to this conversation is as important, if not more so, as rediscovering the sublime human experience of a Beethoven quartet. The seven pieces on this album represent a collection of treasures we've discovered from this century. One of these pieces, Annie Gosfield's "The Blue Horse Walks on the Horizon" was written expressly for our quartet. The rest we unearthed as we sifted through the vibrant and varied landscape of music being created today. We sought to find a set of pieces that were both enchanting on their own and together represent a cohesive aesthetic. From the immense technical challenges of Judd Greenstein's "Four on the Floor", the meditative contemplation of David Lang's "almost all the time", to the raw emotion and vivid imagery of Missy Mazzoli's "Death Valley Junction", these pieces represent an incredible diversity of sound and style. Yet they all reside comfortably in this wonderful tradition of string quartets, of which we are lucky enough to be a part.

—Jasper String Quartet

Caroline Shaw:

Valencia (2012)

Premiere: Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts, August 2012

There is something exquisite about the construction of an ordinary orange. (Grocery stores around the country often offer the common Valencia as the standard option.) Hundreds of brilliantly colored, impossibly delicate vesicles of juice, ready to explode. It is a thing of nature so simple, yet so complex and extraordinary. In 2012, I performed at the MoMA with the musician and performance artist, Glasser — a song which she described as being about the simple beauty of fruit. Later that summer I wrote Valencia, for a concert I was playing with some good friends in Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts. I decided to channel Glasser’s brave and intuitive approach to melody and texture, such that Valencia became an untethered embrace of the architecture of the common Valencia orange, through billowing harmonics and somewhat viscous chords and melodies. It is also a kind of celebration of awareness of the natural, unadorned food that is still available to us.

—Caroline Shaw

Missy Mazzoli:

Death Valley Junction (2010)

Premiere: Santa Fe New Music, New Mexico History Museum, Santa Fe, NM, June 19, 2010

Commissioned by: Santa Fe New Music

“Death Valley Junction” is a sonic depiction of the town of the same name, a strange and isolated place on the border of California and Nevada. The “town” is home to three people and consists of a café, a hotel, and a fully functional opera house. “Death Valley Junction” is dedicated to Marta Becket, the woman who resurrected and repaired the crumbling opera house in the late 1960’s and performed one-woman shows there every week until her retirement in 2009 at age 86. The piece begins with a sparse, edgy texture — the harsh desert landscape — and collapses into a wild and buoyant dance. Marta Becket once compared herself to the single yellow flower that is able to, against all odds, flourish in the desert. This piece attempts to depict some of her exuberant energy and unstoppable optimism, and is dedicated to her.

—Missy Mazzoli



Annie Gosfield:

The Blue Horse Walks on the Horizon (2010)

Premiere: The Jasper String Quartet, Caramoor Center for Music and Arts, Katonah, New York, August 5, 2010.

Commissioned by: Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts for A String Quartet Library for the 21st Century

“The Blue Horse Walks on the Horizon” is inspired by the surreal radio broadcasts and codes used by European resistance groups in World War II. The piece begins with the rhythm of the phrase “Le cheval bleu se promène sur l’horizon” (the blue horse walks on the horizon) which was a particularly striking excerpt I heard in recordings of the “Messages Personnels” radio program. These broadcasts transmitted secret messages to resistance forces all over France and consisted of surreal phrases read out over a very odd musical background. Another source of inspiration for this work was a piece of silk imprinted with codes used by the Danish Resistance in the field. When encrypting a message, resistance members would use one line of code, tear it off, and then burn it. I was struck by the beauty of this object that somehow survived the war, and the fleeting nature of the transmission of such critical information, as well as the transformation of this information from abstract code, to a decoded message, to a specific action, such as a violent act of sabotage.

This piece was written for the Jasper String Quartet, and is dedicated to Bernard Peiffer, who was a great pianist and a

member of the French Resistance in WWII. I had the pleasure of studying piano with Bernard during my most formative years, and he continues to be a source of great inspiration.

—Annie Gosfield

Judd Greenstein:

Four on the Floor (2006)

Premiere: Tel Aviv, Israel, November 17, 2006

“Four on the Floor” is an energetic, upbeat work that pushes relentlessly forward with a non-stop motor. Usually, there are at least two patterns trying to establish themselves, with pairs of instruments working with and against each other, until they settle their differences and combine into a shared groove. Hidden underneath this frenetic surface lies a secret desire for reflection and even repose, peeking out from time to time, until it finally learns how to speak the language of perpetual motion, taking the piece to an unexpected climax that I won’t ruin for you in words.

—Judd Greenstein



David Lang:

almost all the time (2014)

Premiere: Sage Gateshead, November 18, 2014

Commissioned by: Sage Gateshead

Sometimes I like to pose little compositional questions to myself, while I write. How slowly can a line fall? How quietly can a certain instrument play? My string quartet “almost all the time” began with a similar question. Can you build a piece of music the way a person is built? In other words, can a piece begin as identical little microscopic cells that then differentiate into other functions across time? For my piece the ‘cell’ would be a little 10 note strand of musical DNA, and no matter how the functions changed or how the individual parts separated, the core of each musical gesture would be the little 10 note strand. For this to work the way it works in a person, the DNA would have to present in every gesture, in every phrase, in every instrument, all the time. To make it musical I ended up cheating a little bit, so I called it “almost all the time.”

—David Lang

Donnacha Dennehy:

Pushpulling (2007)

Premiere: Con Tempo String Quartet, Printing House New Music Festival

Commissioned by: Printing House New Music Festival

“Pushpulling” was commissioned by the Printing House New Music Festival for the Con Tempo String Quartet. It’s easy to hear what happens. I think there’s a certain poignancy to the ever-elongating pushes away from home, only to return, as sure as night follows day, to the same position again. A line from my teenage idol Samuel Beckett, resonates when I think of it: “Thirty thousand nights. Hard to believe so few”.

—Donnacha Dennehy

Ted Hearne:

Excerpts from the middle of something (from *Law of Mosaics*)
(2013)

Premiere: A Far Cry, The Gardner Museum, Boston, May 12, 2013

Commissioned by: A Far Cry and the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition. Arranged for string quartet by the composer.

The musical material for this piece, “Excerpts from the middle of something” is lush and climactic but it is also a fish out of water, removed from surrounding music that might help it be better contextualized. It could follow a tense build-up, or precede a climax and resolution, but instead we hear it repeated and revised. As the material circles in on itself, it begins to make sense on its own, but never really “goes” anywhere.

—Ted Hearne



Jasper String Quartet

Winner of the prestigious CMA Cleveland Quartet Award, Philadelphia's Jasper String Quartet is the Professional Quartet in Residence at Temple University's Center for Gifted Young Musicians.

The Jaspers have been hailed as "sonically delightful and expressively compelling" (*The Strad*) and "powerful" (*New York Times*). "The Jaspers... match their sounds perfectly, as if each swelling chord were coming out of a single, impossibly well-tuned organ, instead of four distinct instruments." (*New Haven Advocate*)

They record exclusively for Sono Luminus and have released three highly acclaimed albums in addition to this one - "Beethoven Op. 131", "The Kernis Project: Schubert", and "The Kernis Project: Beethoven".

Current Projects

In 2015, the Quartet commissioned Aaron Jay Kernis' 3rd String Quartet "River" with performances presented by co-commissioners Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Chamber Music Monterey Bay, Chamber Music Northwest, Classic Chamber Concerts and Chamber Music America. The New York City premiere of the work at Carnegie Hall received a glowing review in *The Strad*.

In 2016, the Quartet launched the inaugural season of Jasper Chamber Concerts, a series in their hometown of Philadelphia devoted to world-class performances of chamber music masterworks. Each concert also features a work by a composer connected to Philadelphia.

Our History

In 2008, the Jaspers swept through the competition circuit, winning the Grand Prize and the Audience Prize in the Plowman Chamber Music Competition, the Grand Prize at the Coleman Competition, First Prize at Chamber Music Yellow Springs, and the Silver Medal at the 2008 and 2009 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competitions. They were also the first ensemble honored with Yale School of Music's Horatio Parker Memorial Prize, an award established in 1945 and selected by the faculty for "best fulfilling... lofty musical ideals." In 2010, they joined the roster of Astral Artists after winning their national auditions.

The Quartet was the 2010-12 Ensemble-in-Residence at Oberlin Conservatory and, in conjunction with Astral Artists, was awarded a 2012 Chamber Music America grant through its Residency Partnership Program for work in Philadelphia schools. From 2009-2011, the Jaspers were the Ernst C. Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and Arts (Katonah, NY). They were the first ensemble to be invited for a second year as such.

Our Philosophy

The Jaspers perform pieces emotionally significant to its members, ranging from Haydn and Beethoven through Berg, Ligeti, and living composers. They have commissioned string quartets from some of today's best composers, including Aaron Jay Kernis, Andrew Norman, Nicholas Omiccioli, Conrad Tao and Annie Gosfield. Critics and audiences commend the Jasper String

Quartet's "programming savvy" (clevelandclassical.com) and they have performed throughout the United States and in Canada, England, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Panama.

The Jasper String Quartet has brought well over 100 outreach programs into schools and enjoys educational work of all types. In their Melba and Orville Roleffson Residency at the Banff Centre they embarked on "guerrilla chamber music," performing concerts in unusual settings around Alberta, Canada. Currently, the quartet works closely with Philadelphia's Astral Artists to bring outreach activities to schools.

JSQ Origin

Formed at Oberlin Conservatory, the Jaspers began pursuing a professional career in 2006 while studying with James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith as Rice University's Graduate Quartet-in-Residence. In 2008, the quartet continued its training with the Tokyo String Quartet as Yale University's Graduate Quartet-in-Residence.

The Jasper String Quartet is named after Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada. The quartet receives Career Development support from Astral Artists and is represented exclusively by Dispeker Artists.

For more information, please visit www.jasperquartet.com or www.facebook.com/jasperstringquartet.

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Thanks

We could not have made this album without the generosity and musical inspiration of the seven wonderful composers whose pieces make this album. Not only did their music excite our imaginations, but Judd, Caroline, Ted, David, Annie, Donnacha and Missy provided invaluable comments and guidance in creating the definitive recordings of each of these works.

Thank you as well to our producer Dan Merceruio, engineer Daniel Shores, and everyone at Sono Luminus. We owe a special thanks to Collin Rae (CEO of Sono Luminus) who pushed us to refine and enhance the concept for this album into what finally emerged.

We are incredibly grateful to all those who have, and continue to, support our career - our manager Emmy Tu of Dispeker Artists, Astral Artists in Philadelphia, and the many amazing presenters and patrons who present and attend our performances across the country and the globe. Finally a huge thank you to our families - our spouses, our children and our parents for their support of our dreams.

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