



FRIENDS OF
CHAMBER
MUSIC

DECEMBER 11, 2019

SPEKTRAL QUARTET

CLARA LYON, violin

MAEVE FEINBERG, violin

DOYLE ARMBRUST, viola

RUSSELL ROLEN, cello

**TOMÁS LUIS
DE VICTORIA**

(1548-1611)

O Magnum Mysterium

ELIZA BROWN

(b. 1985)

*String Quartet No. 1 (2013)**

**LUDWIG VAN
BEETHOVEN**

(1770-1827)

Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135

Allegretto

Vivace

Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo

Grave, ma non troppo tratto - Allegro

INTERMISSION

**ANNA
THORVALDSDOTTIR**

(b. 1977)

*Enigma (2019)**

** denotes Spektral Quartet commission*



CLARA LYON

violin

MAEVE FEINBERG

violin

DOYLE ARMBRUST

viola

RUSSELL ROLEN

cello

SPEKTRAL QUARTET

The four-time GRAMMY nominated Spektral Quartet actively pursues a vivid conversation between exhilarating works of the traditional repertoire and those written in this decade, this year, or this week. Since its founding in 2010, Spektral is known for creating seamless connections across centuries, and drawing in the listener with charismatic deliveries, interactive concert formats, an up-close atmosphere, and bold, inquisitive programming.

With a tour schedule including some of the country's most notable concert venues, such as the Kennedy Center, Miller Theater, Library of Congress, and NPR's Tiny Desk Concerts, the quartet also takes great pride in its home city of Chicago: championing the work of local composers, bridging social and aesthetic partitions, and cultivating its ongoing residency at the University of Chicago.

Named "Chicagoans of the Year" by the *Chicago Tribune* in 2017, Spektral Quartet is highly regarded for its creative and stylistic versatility; presenting seasons in which, for instance, a thematic program circling Beethoven seamlessly coexists with an improvised sonic meditation at sunrise, a talent show featuring Spektral fans, and the co-release of a jazz album traversing the folk traditions of Puerto Rico.

First attracting national attention in 2013 with *Mobile Miniatures*—a project in which over 40 composers, including David Lang, Shulamit Ran, and Nico Muhly were commissioned to write string quartet ringtones for mobile devices—Spektral has enhanced its scope and scale with each passing season to include new works

from luminaries including Anna Thorvaldsdottir, George Lewis, and Augusta Read Thomas. The quartet has also launched three unique concert series in Chicago: *Close Encounters* elevates listeners' enjoyment of non-mainstream music through gastronomy, architecture, and nature in exclusive settings; the *Dovetail Series* unites Chicago's historically segregated north and south sides by way of improvisation and devised collaborations; and *Once More, With Feeling!* approaches contemporary music's most daunting hurdle by presenting an unfamiliar work twice on the same program, with a charismatic composer interview in between.

Distinguished artistic collaborators include Claire Chase (flutist, International Contemporary Ensemble founder and MacArthur Fellow), Theaster Gates (artist and Rebuild Foundation founder), Julia Holter (critically-acclaimed songwriter and Domino Records recording artist), Nathalie Joachim (composer, Flutronix co-founder and Eighth Blackbird flutist), Mark DeChiazza (choreographer with credits including Kronos Quartet, John Luther Adams, and Steven Mackey), and Miguel Zenón (saxophonist, MacArthur Fellow and Guggenheim Fellow).

Committed not only to sustaining, but transforming the string quartet tradition, Spektral Quartet is in demand for its presentations on inclusion, progressive programming, and entrepreneurship at leading institutions around the country, including Carnegie Hall's *Ensemble Connect*, the New World Symphony, and the National Association of Schools of Music. For the 2019-20 season, the ensemble will investigate the elusive angles of identity, presenting works ranging from fascinating art objects to intimate autobiographies, feelings of other-ness to moments of unity, and the vast cosmos surrounding us to the infinite universe within.

Spektral Quartet records for Parlour Tapes+, Azica, Aparté, Nimbus, and Sono Luminus.

Exclusive management for Spektral Quartet: Alliance Artist Management, 5030 Broadway, Suite 812, New York, NY 10034

NOTES

Program Notes © Elizabeth Bergman

VICTORIA: O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM

IN BRIEF

BORN: 1548, Sanchidrián, Spain

DIED: August 20, 1611, Madrid, Spain

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 4 minutes

Born in Spain, Tomás Luis de Victoria spent most of his career in Rome, center of the Catholic musical world. His Christmas motet, *O Magnum Mysterium*, exemplifies the new style pioneered by his colleague, Giovanni Palestrina. By the 17th century, most of Germany, parts of France, and all of England had gone over to the Protestant cause. The established Roman Catholic Church was shaken to its foundation and began to clean house. The cleansing applied not only to spirituality and administration, but also to music and art. Nudity in religious paintings, musical instruments in the church, use of popular songs in polyphonic masses, and married church singers were all deemed inappropriate.

This housecleaning, the Counter-Reformation, was inaugurated by the Council of Trent, a congress of church officials held in the small town of Trent in Italy. At first, the Council considered banning music altogether from the church and returning to plainchant. They were upset at the incessant entry of voices in musical imitation and the obfuscation of the text, complaining that the composer's voice drowned out the Lord's. Palestrina took up the task of composing music that embodied the perfection of God, as opposed to the imperfection of man, and transmitted the words of sacred texts more clearly to audiences.

Victoria has some musical leeway here because the text speaks of a mystery—the mystery of God-made man. His opening entries overlap in an example of musicological onomatopoeia. Lines then accrue and wind around each other with key moments of repose when all four voices move together in unison. Especially notable are the homophonic

block chords that come after a distinct pause and set the text “O beata Virgo” (“O blessed is the Virgin”). The work ends with a jaunty passage proclaiming “Alleluia.”

IN BRIEF

BORN: 1985

PREMIERE: The Spektral Quartet premiered this work on December 5, 2011 at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

DURATION: 8 minutes

BROWN: STRING
QUARTET NO. 1
(2013)

The Spektral Quartet describes Eliza Brown’s String Quartet No. 1 as “a mesmerizing work filled with vivid sonic colors, subtle pitch bends, notes on the precipice of audibility, and a frenetic climax.” An audience favorite, the String Quartet holds a special place in Spektral’s repertoire: Spektral commissioned and debuted the piece, which also appears on their first album, *Chambers*.

Brown, a graduate of the University of Michigan and Northwestern, now serves as a professor at DePauw University. She describes her String Quartet as a study in tension between depth and surface, harmony and melody. She explores a single chord progression by refracting its elements and uses a delightfully mixed metaphor to explain the effect. It is as if, she writes, “one is hearing the progression through the constantly adjusting lens of an aural microscope.” Thus the progression of Romantic harmony—the sense of movement forward, of actual progress toward a goal—here instead becomes a more discursive exploration of sonority. While the composer has in mind a response to Romantic harmonic practices, the String Quartet also evokes the sonic blends, overlapping lines, and surface ornaments of Renaissance masterworks such as Victoria’s motet.

IN BRIEF

BORN: December 1770, Bonn, Germany

DIED: March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: May 2, 2012, Pacifica Quartet

DURATION: 25 minutes

BEETHOVEN:
QUARTET NO. 16
IN F MAJOR,
OP. 135

The years between 1812 and 1818 found Beethoven in a personal and musical crisis, while bound up in a heated custody battle for his nephew that drained his compositional energies. When the matter was resolved, in Beethoven's favor, during the summer of 1820, the composer enjoyed a renewed creativity. To this period belong the *Missa Solemnis*, Piano Sonatas Opp. 109, 110, and 111, the Ninth Symphony, and five late string quartets composed between 1824 and 1827. Again life intervened. While writing Op. 132 in the winter of 1824-25, Beethoven suffered a serious intestinal illness. By May, he had recovered enough to travel to Baden, and there wrote most of the quartet. Its third movement, the "Heiliger Dankgesang" ("Song of Thanksgiving"), seems to document his illness and recovery. Work on Op. 135 was completed in October 1826. That December, Beethoven fell ill again. He suffered through four operations and held on to life only until March 1827. He was fifty-six.

Beethoven began composing Op. 135 during an especially grim period. His nephew, Karl, was in the hospital when Beethoven began to sketch his next (and ultimately final) quartet during August and September of 1826. The Quartet seems to respond to such circumstances with a kind of melancholic whimsy that harkens back to Haydn. The balance (musical motifs are traded between instruments) and lovely, delicate melodies embrace the Classical ideals of symmetry and decorum. The overall mood of the first movement is pastoral, complete with chirping embellishments and passages of cantabile melody that soar above a graciously deferential accompaniment. The eminent Beethoven scholar Joseph Kerman muses that the movement might "not be called a major work" but concedes that "it is so very beautifully composed."

The second movement scherzo is likewise full of raucous humor. Off-kilter rhythms obscure the basic beat, and the music moves in fits and starts at lightning speed. Here Beethoven reverses the usual relationship between scherzo and trio: the scherzo is soft, the trio loud. The climax in the trio is altogether shocking both in its placement and its odd intensity (trios are generally genial affairs). The cello, viola, and second violin seem suddenly caught in a gyre, repeating a turning motif some fifty times, with the first

violin skittering wildly above. As the German historian Walter Riezler noted, Beethoven “knows no fear of chaos, out of which matter is made form, because he is aware of his power to give form to all his eyes have seen.”

The chaos of creation, of matter finding form, concludes in the third movement—a hymn of complete serenity in the form of a theme with four variations. Part of its warmth owes to its key, D-flat major, which has an altogether different effect than F major, the key of the other movements.

The finale begins with an inscription that has captivated and bedeviled musicologists since its first publication, “The Difficult Resolution.” The slow introduction to the finale poses the problem: “Muss es sein?” (Must it be?) is written in the score. The main Allegro, back in the major key, insists “Es muss sein!” (It must be!) Critics have long read deep philosophical and metaphysical, as well as musical, meanings into the movement, but scholar K.M. Knittel insists that we should hear the music for what it is—not a weighty discourse, but a happy prattle. “What if Beethoven’s last ‘late’ quartet were simply his last?” she asks. That this would be his final quartet of course remained unknown to the composer himself.

IN BRIEF

BORN: Thorvaldsdottir was born July 11, 1977, Reykjavík, Iceland

WORLD PREMIERE: Commissioned by the Spektral Quartet, Enigma received its world premiere by the quartet on October 29, 2019, Kennedy Center Terrace Theater.

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series.

THORVALDSDOTTIR

(COMPOSER)

GUDJÓNSSON

(VIDEO ARTIST):

ENIGMA

A work for string quartet and video art

Program note courtesy of the composer and artists

Spektral Quartet brings light and darkness—and the mysterious space in between—into orbit through *Enigma*, a new multimedia work by composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir and video artist Sigurdur Gudjónsson. Inspired by the 2017 solar eclipse and created for an immersive, full-dome theater experience, Thorvaldsdottir’s enchanting and

beautifully disorienting sounds take on an even more vivid hue through Guðjónsson's evocative imagery, promising an absolutely unforgettable live experience.

Enigma marks a major milestone for the string quartet repertoire, written by one of the most distinctive composers of her generation. Winner of the New York Philharmonic's prestigious Kravis Emerging Composer award, Anna Thorvaldsdóttir is heralded for music that "conjures unseen worlds" and creates "shimmering, harmonically ambiguous, thoroughly enveloping texture" (*New York Times*). Elemental power and an expansive scope are signatures of her music—soundscapes in which the natural world collides with colossal, fantastical forces. In *Enigma*, Thorvaldsdóttir maneuvers through the dualities of friction and flow, expansion and contraction, and tenderness and tension to unmask the universality of these vital alliances.

A longtime artistic partner of Thorvaldsdóttir, Sigurdur Guðjónsson is deep in the process of developing video art that immerses the audience in a synesthetic experience, linking—or deliberately deviating from—visual and aural elements to enhance the concertgoer's perceptual field and produce new sensations in both body and mind.

A piece of profound artistic collaboration, *Enigma* encompasses both blinding light and inky dark—and the fascinating vistas that lie in between.



WINTER WEATHER IS HERE!



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MUSIC WITH FRIENDS

TUE, JAN 28, 2020

6:00 – 7:00 PM

Ensemble Fauchaux

Broadway Roxy

554 S. Broadway, Denver

“Music with Friends” returns for the new year on Tuesday, January 28 featuring Ensemble Fauchaux and host, Catherine Beeson, viola. Ensemble Fauchaux, a dynamic group of Denver-area professional musicians, will present a program for solo viola, string quartet, and electronics featuring one of the most monumental and moving string quartets of the 20th century, Steve Reich's *Different Trains*.

Steve Reich: *Different Trains*

Missy Mazzoli: *Harp and Altar*

Marcos Balter: *Ut*

Concert is free to the public. Enjoy live music, 1920's ambience, classic cocktails, and small plates. Questions? Call 303-388-9839 or email info@friendsofchambermusic.com.

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6:30 – 7:00 PM

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