

## OWLS

**ALEXI KENNEY**, violin  
**AYANE KOZASA**, viola  
**GABRIEL CABEZAS**, cello  
**PAUL WIANCKO**, cello

**PAUL WIANCKO**

(b. 1983)

*Vox Petra*

Molto allegro e appassionato  
Molto adagio (attacca)  
Molto allegro (come prima)

**FRANGHIZ ALI-ZADEH**

(b. 1947)

*Rəqs***FRANÇOIS COUPERIN**

(1668-1733)

*Les Barricades Mystérieuses***TROLLSTILT**

(Monica Mugan &  
Dan Trueman)

*Ricercar***ANNIKA SOCOLOFSKY**

(b. 1990)

*Three Tunes*

Dainty March  
Tuneless Tune (Polka)  
Jiggy Thing

*World Premiere**Commissioned by Denver Friends of Chamber Music***PAUL WIANCKO***When the Night***TERRY RILEY**

(b. 1935)

*Good Medicine from Salome Dances for Peace*


**ALEXI KENNEY**

violin

**AYANE KOZASA**

viola

**GABRIEL CABEZAS**

cello

**PAUL WIANCKO**

cello

## OWLS

Declared “a dream group,” by *The New York Times*, and drawing from a deep well of musical passions and backgrounds, Owls, an inverted string quartet, defies expectations and labels with original, visceral, and personal performances. Each member is an artistic force in their own right; violinist Alexi Kenney, violist Ayane Kozasa, cellist Gabriel Cabezas, and cellist-composer Paul Wiancko share an uncommonly fierce creative spirit which drives the quartet to challenge the way meaningful concert experiences are conceived.

By weaving together new compositions with collaboratively generated arrangements of music ranging from the 1600s to the present, Owls' distinctive instrumentation allows them access to beautiful and exhilarating new sound worlds—effectively guaranteeing that each performance is uniquely theirs and without limits.

The 2024/25 season saw the release of the group's debut album, *Rare Birds*, on New Amsterdam. Supporting the release are performances at the University of Chicago, 92NY, Capital Region Classical in Albany, Celebrity Series of Boston, Tippet Rise in Montana, Cal Performances in Berkeley, Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, and Cal State University Sacramento.

[owlsmusic.com](http://owlsmusic.com)

## NOTES

### SHARING JOY WITH OWLS

In the beginning, there was a Spotify playlist.

That's how violinist Alexi Kenney and violist Ayane Kozasa of Owls described the genesis of not only this evening's program but also the quartet itself. Both grew from the players' desire to share music that they loved, that inspired them, and that they thought would be fun to play with each other. “That's what it's all about: finding the fun, finding why we did this in the first place, which sometimes – not always – can get lost in the fray or the frenzy of this lifestyle and career,” Kenney said. Kozasa concurred,

“What we do is this fine line between this passion that we have, and it also has to be work to a certain extent. I have really appreciated being part of this group because it keeps reminding me how fun it is and how joyful it is to play music.”

That Spotify playlist – which ranged from Meredith Monk and Brad Mehldau to Leoš Janáček and Joe Hisaishi – also had pragmatic implications for the unique group, whose instrumentation (two cellos, a viola, and violin) has little music written explicitly for it. (The only canonical example comes from Anton Arensky, whose quartet the members were intent on not playing.) By adding music to the playlist, the members could share their interests and inspirations, and they began the comprehensive process of finding music that they could arrange. They considered technical aspects of color and voicing, but also – guided by their joy of playing together – they asked themselves what each of them individually could contribute and bring to the whole. Ultimately, for Kozasa, by releasing herself from expectations, the musical universe became wide open: “For this group, there are no precedents for how this should sound. That was so freeing for me. Starting from the mentality that anything is possible allowed us to explore not just our corner of classical music, but to go beyond that to find other commonalities in the musical Venn diagram with other styles.”

The end result is this evening’s seven works, all arranged collaboratively by the ensemble and each with deep personal meaning for all members, including the two works by cellist and composer Paul Wiancko (who recently joined the well-known Kronos Quartet). “How I envision programs is usually energetically: how things are sculpted, how energy levels dip and rise and all of that,” Kenney said. The works each ebb and flow in due course, and most contrast feeling anchored and unmoored, still and moving. But the group’s playful spirit also finds resonance with the works selected: Themes of simple joys, innocence, and curiosity appear across the program. As Kenney noted, “There is so much life, and so much vitality, and so much joy of living and joy of music making. That might also be the through line: this love for life – joie de vivre.”

PAUL WIANCKO:  
VOX PETRA

According to composer Paul Wiancko, *Vox Petra* (*Stone Voice*) is “a double duo inspired by Isamu Noguchi’s iconic stone sculptures, which turn heavily unmovable masses while transforming the space around them.” A journey by manipulating a sense of space. The opening is large and uncentered, as if the initial motive was undecided on its direction, searching for momentum, only to disintegrate into arid elements that return at random. Two techniques contribute to spatial disorientation: rapid, repeating notes that decrescendo give a sense of something moving away (à la the Doppler effect), while high-pitch delicate harmonics activate enharmonic resonances beyond acoustical norms. In the middle section, propulsive rhythms anchor the music, and the energy undulates, providing a sense of cogent direction before developing into a driving Shostakovich-like scherzo. The final section shifts between these two sound worlds – the open-ended curiosity and directed motivation – attempting to reconcile the dueling impulses.

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FRANGHIZ ALI-ZADEH:  
RƏQS

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh’s *Rəqs* pays homage to the composer’s homeland Azerbaijan, and the ubiquitous folk dances that accompany many facets of life there: from birthdays to funerals, weddings, farewells, and harvests. She writes, “In Azerbaijan, many different dances have existed since time immemorial.” For Owls, the music represents an “explosion of joy,” as folk dances encourage us to take pleasure in the simple life. The beginning features a 6/8 dance rhythm, whose chromatic complexity lends a sinewy and more intellectual quality which soon becomes a slow rhapsody led by the viola. After several languid slinking steps, the folk theme in 6/8 melody reappears, gentle and firm. Affable and lilting, Ali-Zadeh’s work deftly uses folk elements to counterbalance her avant-garde techniques and musical language.

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FRANÇOIS COUPERIN:  
LES BARRICADES  
MYSTÉRIEUSES

Composer, organist, and harpsichordist, François Couperin was the most prominent musician in France after Lully and prior to Rameau. His style emphasized the two most valued French traits: *douceur* (gentility) and naturalness.

His musical austerity illustrates *douceur*. *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* uses a strict repetition of a syncopated, upward leap in the treble against the simple strong beat accompaniment as the foundation to explore the new harmonic language that was experimental at the time but is now common practice. He emphasized naturalness by writing music meant to imitate nature, often giving his works descriptive titles like *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* (*Mysterious Barricades*), which may refer to literal walls or might be a metaphor for a woman's eyelashes. Because so much of his innovative style has become commonplace today, Couperin's work may seem quaint to modern ears, and yet, that compelling leap-up that runs throughout conjures an image of a composer 300 years ago eager to capture a spark of joy in his music.

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In their duo *Trollstilt*, Dan Trueman and Monica Mugan bring together influences of Norse and American folk music to create extemporaneous compositions. Their *Ricercar* uses the straightforward harmonic language of folk music, with unpretentious and unadorned melodies, as its basis. These everyday musical materials, however, develop into fugal counterpoint with voices imitating each other in a loosely Baroque fashion – the title refers to contrapuntal Baroque keyboard genre. *Trollstilt*'s work continues to grow in complexity before abruptly cutting back to the opening calm, as if things went too far and needed a re-set. The second time through, however, the thematic material is allowed to follow its own journey, leading to a gradual denouement.

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*Three Tunes* explores what it feels like to be inside a fiddle tune. A good groove can lift dancers off their feet, can pull time forward in ways that feel truly magical. A good groove can also settle us into patient places where we can relax into the space between the beat. This piece lives in those cracks and tiny details of the space-time continuum through three different types of dances (tunes), pared down to their rhythmic qualities: a march, a polka, and a jig. If you like this piece, I suggest checking out a few killer fiddlers who taught me about these things: Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh, Dan Trueman, Becky Tracy, Lori Watson,

TROLLSTILT (DAN  
TRUEMAN & MONCIA  
MUGAN): RICERCAR

ANNIKA  
SOCOLOFSKY:  
THREE TUNES

and Evan Chambers. A special thank you goes out to Evan Chambers for teaching me that polkas don't have to be dorky. This piece was commissioned by Friends of Chamber Music Denver for Owls and is being premiered by Owls on March 1, 2026. Huge shoutout to Owls for learning so many new bowing styles. They're pretty darn fabulous.  
— Annika Socolofsky

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PAUL WIANCKO:  
*WHEN THE NIGHT*

Paul Wiancko's second work on the program, *When the Night*, borrows from Ben E. King's ubiquitous 1960s R & B song "Stand by Me." Wiancko uses the first three notes of the song ("When the night," or mi, sol, la) to write a "harmonically rich and texturally innovative celebration of all things cello." From this simple framework, Wiancko spins out an array of styles in rapid succession, like a set of variations on a theme. The opening statement offers a homophonic melody against a drone to help establish the basic musical materials, before moving on to arpeggiation and gradual deconstruction of the melody dispersing it among the instruments. The shifting moods and styles continue leading to an explosive passionate climax.

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TERRY RILEY:  
*GOOD MEDICINE*

Terry Riley's *Good Medicine* shows all the hallmarks of the composer's groundbreaking minimalist style: bright consonant harmonies, driving pulses with devilishly hard rhythms, and repetitive motives that create a contemplative sound object. Yet by the 1980s, as composers turned toward a more personal neoromanticism, the minimalists introduced tonal harmonic progressions and melodies with a greater emotional depth. *Good Medicine* takes the language and techniques of minimalism — the deep meditative music that emerges from radically cutting down musical elements — and pairs it with bold melodies that are joyful and soaring. By oscillating between these styles, the work offers a transcendental experience where contemplative meditation awakens a joyful euphoria. In the end, the program that Owls has crafted invites audiences into a world of music that deeply moves them. But the group's collaborative curatorial process — coming

together as four individuals with different points of view and openly offering their individual perspectives — may also serve as a reminder that true joy is found in sharing that which moves us with others. As Kozasa said, “I have one moment in every piece where I tear up, because it feels so beautiful or sentimental or you are seeing the world from above, and in the epic-ness of it you are reflecting on humanity. There is something in every piece that makes me feel teary-eyed, which is a really nice feeling — a really, really nice human emotion to feel. And hopefully at some point in the program the audience can feel it too.”

—Program notes by Eric Lubarsky

*Eric Lubarsky works at Carnegie Hall as a managing editor, where he oversees publishing projects for the Hall’s educational and social impact programs and creates program books for main stage presentations and free concerts around New York City. He holds a PhD in musicology from the Eastman School of Music where his research focused on performance revivals, concert life, and the 20th-century early music movement.*

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## COMING SOON

### LE CONSORT

**THU, MAR 19, 2026 | 7:30 PM | AUGUSTANA LUTHERAN CHURCH  
5000 E. ALAMEDA AVE., DENVER**

*Co-presented with Augustana Arts*



Formed in Paris in 2015, Le Consort is a dynamic chamber music ensemble that breathes new life into Baroque music with a special devotion to the trio sonata. These four exceptional musicians bring their energy and artistry to “A Trio Sonata Soiree,” featuring works by Albinoni, Bach, Telemann, and Vivaldi.

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# UPCOMING CONCERTS

## CHAMBER SERIES

**Brentano Quartet**

Mon, Apr 6, 2026 | 7:30 pm

## FRIENDS IN NEW PLACES

**Le Consort**

Thu, Mar 19, 2026 | 7:30 pm

Augustana Lutheran Church

Co-presented with Augustana Arts

**AUGUSTANAARTS**

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Sponsored by CPR Classical



*NOTE: The Le Consort concert is not included in any season ticket packages. Tickets available at [friendsofchambermusic.com](http://friendsofchambermusic.com).*

## PIANO SERIES

**Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano**

Thu, May 7, 2026 | 7:30 pm

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

**MUSIC IN THE GALLERIES**

**Masakazu Ito, classical guitar**

Sun, Mar 8, 2026 | 12:00 & 1:00 pm

**Karen & John Kinzie & Friends**

Sun, May 10, 2026 | 12:00 & 1:00 pm

*Clyfford Still Museum*

1250 Bannock Street, Denver

## FREE FAMILY EVENT

**Playground Ensemble**

Family music-making workshops

Sat, Mar 21, 2026 | 1:00 PM

Stanley Marketplace

2501 N. Dallas St., Aurora

## SPECIAL THANKS

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