

Festival 09

USA



Black Angels

PACIFICA QUARTET

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Simin Ganatra violin
Sibbi Bernhardsson violin
Masumi Per Rostad viola
Brandon Vamos cello

Elliot Carter String Quartet No. 5

George Crumb *Black Angels: Thirteen Images from the Dark Land* for amplified string quartet

Interval

György Ligeti String Quartet No. 1 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'

WHERE

Winthrop Hall, UWA

WHEN

Sunday 22 February

The performance lasts 1 hour and 45 minutes including interval

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PACIFICA QUARTET

Simin Ganatra violin **Sibbi Bernhardsson** violin
Masumi Per Rostad viola **Brandon Vamos** cello

Recognised for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style and often daring repertory choices, the Pacifica Quartet has carved out a compelling musical path. Capping a remarkable 2009, *Musical America* named the group its 'Ensemble of the Year' and the Quartet received the music industry's most coveted recognition, a Grammy Award nomination for 'Best Chamber Music Performance' for their recording of Elliott Carter's String Quartets Nos. 1 & 5 (Naxos). Since forming in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet has swept top awards in the US and abroad, including the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant – only the second chamber music ensemble ever selected.

The Pacifica Quartet tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia and Australia, performing in the world's major concert halls in cities such as Paris, London, Amsterdam, Vienna, Tokyo and Perth. Each season the ensemble can be heard on many prominent radio broadcasts, including Chicago's WFMT, Boston's WGBH, National Public Radio's *Performance Today* and Minnesota Public Radio's *St. Paul Sunday*.

Prolific in the recording studio, the Pacifica Quartet's CD *Declarations: Music Between the Wars* showcases music composed during the turbulent decades between WWI and WWII. In January 2008 the Quartet released the first in a two-disc set of the complete string quartets of Elliott Carter on the Naxos label, in celebration of the composer's 100th birthday. Their recent recordings of the complete string quartets of Felix Mendelssohn have also attracted effusive praise from critics in the US and abroad. On the heels of the release, the ensemble was featured on the cover of *Gramophone* magazine.

Over the course of the 2008/09 season, in celebration of Felix Mendelssohn's 200th birthday, the Pacifica Quartet will present the cycle of his complete string quartets in New York City during a series of hour-long lunchtime concerts at Columbia University. These performances will include commentary by the members of the Quartet. This series is an encore of the successful and widely publicized Beethoven Cycle at Columbia in 2007/08. The Quartet will also perform the complete Mendelssohn cycle in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Hall. Continuing its sell-out season performing Beethoven Cycles around the world, they will participate in cycles in Portland and Seattle as well as at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Unique in the chamber music world, the Pacifica Quartet will also present cycles of Elliott Carter's groundbreaking quartets in San Francisco, at London's Wigmore Hall and at Lisbon's Gulbenkian Foundation. These arduous concerts – true labours of love – will complement the release of the second Naxos disc of the Carter quartets. Previous Carter cycles elicited fabulous reviews.

The New York Times wrote glowingly of the 'astounding performances' and the *Chicago Tribune* praised the Quartet's 'astonishing talent, energy and dedication'.

The Pacifica was appointed a member of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Two program for gifted young musicians in 2002. The position involved the Quartet in a full range of activities organised by The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, from performances in Alice Tully Hall to community partnerships and leading roles in the Society's educational activities. In January 2008 the Quartet performed the Carter Cycle at Lincoln Center and in November 2008 participated in the Chamber Music Society's festival honouring Klaus Lauer.

The Pacifica Quartet is an ardent advocate of contemporary music, commissioning and performing as many as eight new works a year. As resident string quartet for Contempo, a leading contemporary music organisation, the Quartet presents a series of concerts each year devoted exclusively to new music.

In 2004 the Pacifica Quartet was appointed Faculty Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. The Quartet members also serve as resident performing artists at the University of Chicago and at the Longy School of Music in Boston. Reflecting its dedication to musicians and music lovers of the next generation, the Pacifica Quartet was instrumental in creating the Music Integration Project, an innovative program that provides musical performances and teacher training to inner-city elementary schools. In addition the Quartet regularly teaches and performs at summer festivals, including Maverick Concerts, Caramoor International Music Festival, Fontana Chamber Arts, Music in the Vineyards, Interlochen Arts Camp and the Madeline Island Music Festival and is also frequently invited for visiting residencies at universities and schools.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet share a unique history of personal and musical friendship. First violinist Simin Ganatra, born and raised in Southern California, initially played with cellist Brandon Vamos and violinist Sibbi Bernhardsson while they were all teenagers. Sibbi later introduced violist Masumi Per Rostad to the group. Originating on the West Coast, where it played many of its earliest concerts together, the Quartet takes its name from the awe-inspiring Pacific Ocean. Throughout their journey as a string quartet, its members continually strive to be 'Distinct as the billows/yet one as the sea' (James Montgomery).

For more information about the Pacifica Quartet, please visit:
www.pacificaquartet.com

Elliott Carter (born 1908) String Quartet No. 5 (1995)

Introduction
 Giocoso
 Interlude I
 Lento espressivo
 Interlude II
 Presto scorrevole
 Interlude III
 Allegro energico
 Interlude IV
 Adagio sereno
 Interlude V
 Capriccioso

One of the fascinations of attending rehearsals of chamber music, when excellent players try out fragments of what they later will play in the ensemble, then play it and then stop abruptly to discuss how to improve, is that this pattern is so similar to our inner experience of forming, ordering, focussing and bringing to fruition — and then dismissing — our feelings and ideas. These patterns of human behaviour form the basis of the 5th String Quartet. Its introduction presents the players, one by one, trying out fragments of later passages from one of the six short, contrasting ensemble movements, at the same time maintaining a dialogue with each other. Between each of the movements the players discuss in different ways what has been played and what will be played.

In this score the matter of human cooperation with its many aspects of feeling and thought was a very important consideration.

String Quartet No. 5 was composed during the winter and spring of 1995 in New York and Southbury, Connecticut, and was commissioned for the Arditti Quartet by Antwerp, City of Culture, 1993; Wittener Tage für Neue Musik; Festival d'Automne à Paris; and Lincoln Center, New York.

Note by Elliott Carter (1995). Used with permission

George Crumb (born 1929)

Black Angels: Thirteen Images from the Dark Land (1970)

I. Departure

Threnody I: Night of the Electric Insects
Sounds of Bones and Flutes
Lost Bells
Devil-music
Danse Macabre

II. Absence

Pavana Lachrymae
Threnody II: Black Angels!
Sarabanda de la Muerte Oscura
Lost Bells (Echo)

III. Return

God-music
Ancient Voices
Ancient Voices (Echo)
Threnody III: Night of the Electric Insects

Less than 20 minutes long, George Crumb's *Black Angels* uses unconventional performance techniques and electronic amplification to create a musical landscape that is at once savage and delicate. Crumb has made it clear through inscriptions on the score and later writings that the work was inspired by the era of war and social upheaval in the late 1960s. Recalling his state of mind when *Black Angels* was composed, Crumb later wrote, 'There were terrifying things in the air ... they found their way into *Black Angels*.' The score is inscribed 'in tempore belli' (in time of war). That Crumb's musical imagery is also animated by unseen forces of darkness is made clear by the score's second inscription: 'Finished on Friday the Thirteenth, March, 1970.'

The work is divided into three separate sections, each with four or five short movements played without pause. Crumb wrote, '*Black Angels* was conceived as a kind of parable on our troubled contemporary world. The work portrays a voyage of the soul. The three stages of this voyage are Departure (fall from grace), Absence (spiritual annihilation) and Return (redemption).'

The work opens with an explosion of intense anguish that wrenches the listener into an atmosphere of war and destruction. Most of the movements following this opening outburst are quieter, although the music retains a character of continuous underlying tension. A shimmering surface drifts up and down through the movements, sometimes in long, luminous tones, at other times trance-like or skittering, and is briefly punctuated by rhythmic passages and lesser outbursts.

Crumb intended *Black Angels* to be presented as a work of surrealist musical theater 'by the use of certain musical effects, e.g., pedal tones (the intensely obscene sounds of the Devil-music); bowing on the 'wrong' side of the strings (to produce a viol-consort effect); trilling on the strings with thimble-capped fingers. The performers also play maracas, tam-tams, and water-tuned crystal glasses, the latter played with the bow for the 'glass-harmonica' effect in God-music.' At various points the musicians ritualistically shout, chant and count in different languages. The surrealism is heightened by frequent quotation from classical works such as Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* quartet, *Dies Irae* (*Day of Wrath*), and the 'Devil's Trill'. Crumb also employs what he terms 'magical' numeric relationships between phrase-lengths, groupings of single tones and patterns of repetition.

Note by Robert Strong. Used with permission

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

String Quartet No. 1 'Métamorphoses nocturnes' (1953–54)

Allegro grazioso
Vivace, capriccioso
Adagio, mesto
Presto
Andante tranquillo
Tempo di Valse, moderato, con eleganza, un poco capriccioso
Allegretto, un poco gioviale
Prestissimo

When György Ligeti composed his Quartet no. 1 during the years 1953–54, both the performance and publication of the work were out of the question in his native Hungary. Although he held a prestigious teaching position at the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest, the political and ideological climate of the country was opposed to the artistic avant-garde. As one writer has commented: 'Musical innovation was as unthinkable as political dissent.' Ligeti felt compelled by his artistic integrity to write such pieces, but he kept them hidden in his desk drawer until circumstances proved more favourable. The quartet's premiere came two years after the composer had fled from Hungary during the anti-communist uprising of 1956, and took place in Vienna.

The major musical challenge faced by Ligeti in writing the work was how to progress beyond Bartók's great quartets. While several of these works were on the index of compositions banned from public performance in Hungary, Ligeti knew them in score and admired them. To address the challenge, Ligeti paid homage to the outstanding achievement of his predecessor, but did so in his own voice and manner. One of the clearest signs of his explicit transformation of the Bartók tradition is in the title of the work itself. The adjective 'nocturnes' is reminiscent of the older composer's celebrated 'night music' style, while the use of the noun 'métamorphoses', indicates Ligeti's intention to transform the Bartók inheritance. In terms of the musical material, the quartet contains several deliberate reminiscences of passages in Bartók's quartets, but Ligeti adopts a freer approach both to musical form and thematic structure than is typical of the Bartók works.

Ligeti commented that the structure of the quartet could be interpreted as either a single-movement or as a number of shorter, linked sections. Each of these sections is contrasted to each other with regard to expression, tempo, texture, timbre and internal structure, though there are also connections between the various subsections as well as abrupt discontinuities. The work begins with a melodic cell made up of two major seconds a semitone apart (repeated literally three times during the course of the quartet). This cell is accompanied by a type of rhythmic neutrality in which no strong sense of metre is projected. As the work proceeds, the interval of a major second gradually expands to a major seventh and minor ninth and is often combined with changes in both tempo and texture.

Ligeti makes use of more unusual tonal colourings, such as a quarter-tone trill-like figure in the cello part in one subsection and enharmonic unison octaves played simultaneously in another (two of the instruments playing an A sharp, for example, while the other two play its enharmonic equivalent, B flat). Other striking gestures are the mechanical reiteration of a single note, most noticeably in the strong pizzicatos in the cello part near the end of the quartet, as well as Ligeti's own direction at the beginning of the Prestissimo to play 'very evenly, like a precision mechanism'. There is also a brief fugal section and the use of other contrapuntal devices, such as the layering of four different textures. At the very conclusion of the quartet Ligeti writes the direction 'senza misura' (unmeasured), so that the work ends, in a finely balanced, symmetrical way, with the same sense of rhythmic freedom with which it began.

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