

JASPER
STRING
QUARTET

THE KERNIS PROJECT: DEBUSSY

Aaron Jay Kernis
String Quartet #3 (“River”)
2015

- 1 1. Source 8:29
- 2 2. Flow/Surge 4:06
- 3 3. Mirrored Surface Flux Reflections 10:55
- 4 4. Cavatina 4:39
- 5 5. Mouth/Estuary 9:11

Claude Debussy
String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10
1893

- 6 1. Animé et très décidé 6:40
- 7 2. Assez vif et bien rythmé 3:57
- 8 3. Andantino, doucement expressif 7:11
- 9 4. Très modéré En animant peu à peu
Très mouvementé et avec passion 7:25

total time 62:33

The Kernis Project: Debussy marks the culmination of our decade-long journey with Aaron Jay Kernis' music for string quartet. From the moment we put bow to string for Aaron's Second Quartet, we realized his special voice and our connection to his music's ability to capture both the complexity of the world and the simplicity of a moment. This depth fascinated us, inspired our playing and prompted us to dream of commissioning Aaron's 3rd Quartet.

Six years later, after performing and recording his first two Quartets and organizing the commission, we received the first movement of his Third Quartet "River". As the movements accumulated in our inbox, so did our sense of excitement and dread. It was clear that this piece surpassed its two preceding quartets in complexity and difficulty. The route forward was clear enough, but still daunting. Practice, rehearse, repeat. Through the spring and into the summer the piece started to take shape. Coalescing first a little at a time — glimmers of cleverness, brilliance, atmosphere amid the musical and technical challenges. As those moments grew to sections and then movements that began to make sense, we started to build them into the larger arc. The quartet is subtitled "River", an analogy for the constancy of change in our lives. The music too is constantly evolving, from

moment to moment never predictable, never repeating itself. The flow of ideas isn't one but four-dimensional, swirling constantly backward and forward in time and space. Yet there is a calculation of purpose, a consideration of form and care to structure that keeps the music grounded and allows a story to build out of the organic chaos.

The parallels between this music and Debussy's iconic quartet are both coincidental and foreseeable. Programmed together before we knew anything of what Kernis' quartet would be, the Debussy was nevertheless a perfect fit. Perhaps any quartet so carefully crafted and so imaginative would have illuminated parallels with Aaron's new piece, yet it seems the two works share a specific ethos in their style and execution — both sharply bold and thoughtfully humble.

The use of harmony as color is striking in both pieces and the use of rhythm and articulation as texture and pattern both distinct. They each present self-contained viewpoints — sonic landscapes that are as expansive as they are specific. So whether by happy accident or lucky prescience, these two remarkable quartets fit together — two giants of the string quartet repertoire paired in a testament to the boundlessness and fluidity of human imagination.

Sam Quintal

STRING QUARTET IN G MINOR, OP. 10

Claude Debussy

Claude Debussy's *String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10* represents a singular achievement both in the world of chamber music and in the composer's oeuvre. Debussy wrote the piece in 1893 at 31 years of age and the piece occupies a rarified echelon of works that achieve intellectual profundity while remaining dynamic, musical works of art.

The quartet begins with the motivic theme that underpins the entire piece. The rhythmic and melodic motive both inspires musical ideas to come and runs as a sometimes subtle, sometimes overt current that transforms to suit the particular moment. Also apparent in the opening movement is Debussy's imaginative use of harmony, which uniquely colors the sound and timbre of the quartet throughout. Constantly shifting, the harmonic structure builds its own world as the work progresses.

The first movement's swirling energy and color gives way to pointillistic rhythm and texture in the second movement. The opening motive is now transformed to rhythmic ostinato in the viola, while the other instruments play pizzicato. Inspired by the sounds of the Javanese gamelan Debussy experienced at the 1889

World's Fair, this movement's pizzicato texture fascinates and would inspire Ravel to follow suit in his Quartet 10 years later.

The third movement showcases the versatility of the opening motive, this time with a glow shrouded as if by early morning mist. Muted instruments in the opening bars, along with lush harmony and a remote key, give the music an otherworldly color. Finally breaking through, an unmuted viola line leads the quartet to a sublime climax before the movement returns once again to the evening shadows.

The final movement emerges from the memories of the third, at first thoughtful and brooding, but soon crescendoing to the energetic return of, yes, the opening motive. This movement serves both as summary and as accelerant, striving to tie the work together into a cohesive story all the while exciting our exuberance and adrenaline.

It is somewhat unsurprising that Debussy never revisited the string quartet. His first entry into the form was so well-constructed, imaginative and musically compelling that it would seem difficult, or perhaps even unnecessary, for Debussy to write any more.

Jasper String Quartet

STRING QUARTET #3 (“RIVER”)

Aaron Jay Kernis

My 3rd string quartet (“River”) is a significant departure from my earlier two quartets, which looked to the distant past for form and inspiration. Instead, this new work dispenses with classical structure and influences almost completely, touching continually on processes of change and flux.

Far more at issue here are literary influences which helped shape and color the emotional tone of its five movements and prompted countless reflections on compositional process at this time in my life.

Before beginning to write, I went back to a novel of the early 20th century, beloved of my mother and seemingly influential to me, *Jean Christophe* (1902-1912) by French author Romain Rolland.

“The central character, Jean-Christophe Kraft, is a German musician of Belgian extraction, a composer whose life is depicted from cradle to grave. He undergoes great hardships and spiritual struggles, balancing his pride in his own talents with the necessity of earning a living and taking care of those around him.” (from a Wikipedia article on the book).

I continue to be mystified why she gave this book to me as a young child. It seems to have inculcated in me the desire to be a composer myself, but I can only say that in hindsight it is still a mystery, as at least 3/4ths of the book would’ve been nearly incomprehensible to me at that age. But even when I was very young, its trajectory was fascinating and moving, and the idealism and drive of the composer at its center must’ve deeply struck a chord. Central as a returning metaphor in this book is the Rhine River; as much change as occurs in the life of Jean-Christophe and the history of the countries the Rhine touches, the river continues its inexorable flow. While the Romanticism of the book does not have any parallel in the music at all, its intense emotions do, and the River and its continual movement became central to the conceptualization of my work.

Even more vitally influential for my musical processes was a vigorous reading of the first few volumes of the compelling autobiography, “My Struggle” of the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgaard. This book sets forward the trajectory of one man’s life, the flow of the quotidian along with meditations on the psychological underpinnings at the center of existence. Knausgaard is a sort of contemporary Proust for the Everyman. None of the specific episodes in these volumes had any direct

relationship to the musical narrative, but their examination of life at its most shattering and mundane shaped my view of composing this work overall.

This new quartet looks at change, flow and flux of musical materials and information rather than the constancy of harmony, rhythmic and formal structures that my earlier quartets embrace. The five movements create a roughly symmetrical form, with the first and last movements being roughly equal length, the second and fourth being shorter, with the longest movement in the middle. The outer movements are the most related to each other, each opening with a cello solo, but otherwise have highly contrasting characters: the first dramatic and the last more tranquil. The inner ones are also highly contrasting yet more single-minded in speed (Mvmt. 2) and lyricism (Mvmt. 4), and the middle Mvmt. 3 is the most wildly varied and tough-minded, influenced by mirror-like flecks of light reflecting on water, and drastic and subtle changes of speed and character. Some touchstone works important to its conception were the Beethoven Op. 131 String Quartet, the Bartok 4th Quartet. Originally “River” was to have reflected Op. 131 by using a seven- movement form, but gradually it became reduced to a symmetrical five, like the

Bartok. The inclusion of my lyrical Cavatina (Mvmt. 4) most directly refers to the Beethoven.

String Quartet #3 (“River”) is dedicated in loving memory of singer and Astral Foundation artistic director Julian Rodescu, who touched countless lives with his artistry, generosity and friendship, and who laid the cornerstone for this collaboration with the Jasper String Quartet. It was written for and is dedicated to the members of the Jasper String Quartet who give its first recording here, and was generously commissioned by Caramoor, Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Classic Chamber Concerts (Naples, FL), Chamber Music Monterey Bay (CA), Chamber Music Northwest (OR) and Chamber Music America’s Classical Commissioning program funded by a generous grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Aaron Jay Kernis



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 and the Founder and Artistic Director of Jasper Chamber Concerts. The Jaspers have been hailed as "sonically delightful and expressively compelling" (The Strad) and the New York Times named their latest album, *Unbound*, as one of the 25 Best Classical Recordings of 2017.

"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)

Current Projects

The Quartet launched their inaugural season of Jasper Chamber Concerts in 2016, a series in Philadelphia devoted to world class performances of masterworks from around the world and Philadelphia, featuring Philadelphia-connected composers and performers on each concert. The Quartet continues with the third season in 2018-19.

The Jasper String Quartet also looks forward to their 2019 commission of Lera Auerbach, Akira Nishimura, Chris Theofanidis and Joan Tower for 4 Seasons | 4 Composers, a work bringing the brilliant muse of the seasons to the string quartet genre.

The Quartet completed their commission tour of Aaron Jay Kernis' 3rd String Quartet "River" in 2017 at Wigmore Hall. Their Carnegie Hall Recital with the work received a glowing review in The Strad.

The Jasper String Quartet's 5th album on Sono Luminus features Kernis Quartet No. 3 and Debussy Quartet, completing the Kernis Quartet Cycle and adding to their recordings of Beethoven Op. 59, No. 3, Beethoven Op. 131 and Schubert Death and the Maiden. Their 2017 album, *Unbound*, features the first recordings of

quartets by Donnacha Dennehy, Annie Gosfield, Judd Greenstein, Ted Hearne, David Lang, Missy Mazzoli and Caroline Shaw.

Community Engagement

The Quartet has performed hundreds of outreach programs in schools and enjoys educational work of all types. In 2019, the Quartet received their third Picasso Project Grant from Public Citizens for Children and Youth. This grant supports the Quartet's work with a South Philadelphia Public Elementary School throughout the spring, culminating in a performance together.

In addition, Fischhoff National Chamber Music Association recognized the Quartet's "outstanding and imaginative programming for children and youth in the United States" with their 2016 Educator Award.

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.

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.

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 and is represented exclusively by Dispeker Artists.

jasperquartet.com

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J Freivogel, violin
Sae Chonabayashi, violin
Sam Quintal, viola
Rachel Henderson Freivogel, cello



AARON JAY KERNIS

Winner of two 2019 Grammy Awards—including Best Contemporary Classical Composition (for his *Violin Concerto* for James Ehnes)—a Pulitzer Prize, the Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, and Nemmers Award, Aaron Jay Kernis is one of America's most performed and honored composers. His music appears prominently on concert programs worldwide, and he has been commissioned by America's preeminent performing organizations and artists, including the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, San Francisco, Toronto, and Melbourne (AU) Symphonies, Los Angeles and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestras, Walt Disney Company, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Renee Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, Joshua Bell and Sharon Isbin. Recent and upcoming commissions include his *Fourth Symphony* ("Chromelodeon") for the New England Conservatory (for its 150th anniversary) and Nashville Symphony; concerti for cellist Joshua Roman, violist Paul Neubauer, and flutist Marina Piccinini; a horn concerto for the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Grant Park Music Festival; his *4th String Quartet* ("Oasis") for the Borromeo String Quartet, part of a series of works for Tippet Rise Art Center; and a piece for the San Francisco Girls and Brooklyn Youth Choruses with The Knights for the New York Philharmonic Biennial.

His works have been recorded on Virgin, Onyx, Dorian, Arabesque, Phoenix, Argo, Signum, Cedille and many other labels. Newly released on Signum are his *Dreamsongs* for Joshua Roman and *Viola Concerto* for Paul Neubauer with the Royal Northern Sinfonia under conductor Rebecca Miller. Other recent recordings include *Simple Songs*, three song cycles with soprano Talise Trevigne and Albany Symphony with conductor David Alan Miller (Albany), *Three Flavors*, featuring pianist Andrew Russo, violinist James Ehnes and the Albany Symphony (Naxos); and a disc of his solo and chamber music, *On Distant Shores* (Phoenix). The Jasper Quartet has recorded Kernis' 1st and 2nd quartets on previous releases on Sono Luminus—*The Kernis Project*—in pairings with Schubert and Beethoven Quartets.

He is the Workshop Director of the Nashville Symphony Composer Lab and, for 15 years, served as New Music Adviser to the Minnesota Orchestra, with which he co-founded and directed its Composer Institute for 11 years. Kernis teaches composition at Yale School of Music, and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Classical Music Hall of Fame. Leta Miller's book-length portrait of Kernis and his work was published in 2014 by University of Illinois Press as part of its American Composer series.

THANK YOU

Commissioning Aaron's 3rd Quartet and recording these two masterpieces together is a great honor. We had significant support through this process and we extend our sincerest thanks to the following people and organizations.-

Aaron Jay Kernis for writing this piece and attending to the music with such care.

Emmy Tu for supporting this project and our career in so many ways, not least of which includes spearheading this commissioning consortium.

The Commissioning Consortium: Caramoor Center for Music and Arts, Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music America, Chamber Music Northwest,

Chamber Music Monterey Bay, Classic Chamber Concerts, Wigmore Hall.

Julian Rodescu of Astral Artists for introducing us to Aaron's music.

Bonnie Slobodien of Allegro Music Consultants for creating opportunities for us to bring Aaron's music to schools.

Dan Merceruio for his keen ears and considered guidance throughout the recording.

Daniel Shores for tremendous sound on the album.

Collin Rae for supporting and encouraging the completion of the Kernis Project

Our families.

Jasper String Quartet The Kernis Project: Debussy

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sonoluminusstudios.com

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