Home
Miró Quartet

HOME

Kevin Puts (b. 1972)

Home

1	Warm, with rubato -	6. 02
2	Faster, refreshed -	3. 38
3	Dangerously fast	7. 16

George Walker (1922-2018)

Quartet No. 1

4	II. Molto adagio	6. 28

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

Microfictions [volume 1]

5	I. Under the hot sun...	3. 06
6	II. The photographs smeared...	3. 56
7	III. The summer storm laughed...	3. 06
8	III & 1/2. Between the third and fourth...	0. 16
9	IV. The complete taxonomy...	3. 12
10	V. Waking up on the early side...	1. 47
11	VI. The mountains folded in...	3. 20

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

String Quartet in B minor, Op. 11

12	I. Molto allegro e appassionato	8.16
13	II. Molto adagio	9. 37
14	III. Molto allegro (come prima) - Presto	2. 35

Harold Arlen (1905-1986)

15	**Over the Rainbow** (arr. by William Ryden)	3. 39

Total playing time: 66. 22

Miró Quartet:

Daniel Ching, violin
William Fedkenheuer, violin
John Largess, viola
Joshua Gindele, cello

HOME

All of us intimately know the concept of "Home". After all, to be alive in this world is to inhabit a place, no matter where or what that place is...every human who draws breath has a place of being, whether that place be physical, mental, or spiritual in concept, or (usually) a combination of all of these.

Our home makes each of us who we are, our home is integral to our identity. Home is both where we come from and where we return to; where we are safe and where we grow and change; the place where we truly belong as well as the place that everyone must at some point leave. And as much as needing and having a home is a universal experience, leaving a home and starting life's journey out on one's own is also a pivotal moment of growth for every one of us.

Home for many of us can be a choice: where do we want to live, what does it say about us, how do we want the background of our lives every day to shape who we become? But for many people on Earth, home is less of a choice: it is simply the shelter we need from the elements; the place where we are born and cannot leave; it can be who our family is that perhaps we cannot detach from; or an ambient state of war or poverty that has become the normal background of our life and eventually an identity that it seems we can never escape from. A "homeless" person paradoxically is not actually a person without a home, but one whose home is the harshness and danger of the streets, a damaging life context that becomes just as woven physically, mentally and spiritually into their identity as the castle and crown is woven into a king's. What happens when a home changes from a place of safety to a place of danger? Refugees too still have a home, it just is no longer the place and state they wanted it to be. Whether they flee geographically or not, their new home is the mental state of dwelling in constant uncertainty and disconnection. As without, so within. Our homes can, for better or for worse, shape and define us.

We all have a home on this planet, and yet no matter how settled and comfortable it may be, aren't all of us in a sense ever in search of our "true home", however we define that individually? Home represents stability and safety, yet human life is a journey of constant change, acquisition and loss, a journey traveling away from our origins, and hopefully onwards towards our goals, our true home.

The pieces in this album represent the Miró Quartet's artistic home in many ways. The United States has been our physical and cultural home for our entire career as a quartet, and obviously the four works included here are all by US citizens both past and present, coincidentally all Pulitzer Prize Winners. Great works such as the Barber "Adagio" have been part of the musical context of our lives since we started listening to music, while works such as the second movement of George Walker's first string quartet, more famously known as "Lyric for Strings", a piece the Miró Quartet regretfully did not know until more recently, represent the powerful but sometimes unacknowledged threads that often run deeply through our lives at home. Kevin Puts and Caroline Shaw are friends whom we know well and are both valued parts of our personal and artistic lives, and the string quartets they wrote for us certainly feel like "home" to us: their sound worlds are a familiar and beloved musical space that we feel comfortable inhabiting, a sonic structure that reflects the concerns and values that we four as people care and worry about, both as we make music together and as we go about our lives in this challenging home world that we all share.

Daniel Ching

William Fedkenheuer

John Largess

Joshua Gindele

Kevin Puts, Home

The Miró first met Kevin more than 20 years ago when we all were young professors together at the University of Texas in our home city of Austin, and since that time he has become a great friend and has written several works for us: the first was the string quartet "Credo", and then later a concerto for string quartet and orchestra entitled "How Wild the Sea". The inspiration for both pieces came from Kevin's deep reaction to challenging events in the world at the time: for "Credo" that was the campus shootings at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg in 2007, and for "How Wild the Sea" it was the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami near Sendai Japan in 2011. In both cases Kevin's pieces engaged deeply in both the struggle and pain of these situations as well as the human strength and resilience that emerged from these tragedies.

It was a similar path with his next work for us, "Home". In 2017 Kevin was struck by images of Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe from their country torn apart by the civil war there which began in 2011. By 2016 the United Nations had identified 13.5 million Syrian Nationals as requiring humanitarian assistance, whether internally displaced within their country, seeking foreign asylum or placed in refugee camps worldwide, with almost one million applicants for asylum in Europe. This vast number of people flowing into Europe in 2017 precipitated the European Migrant Crisis. Overall, this tremendous human displacement has been described as one of the largest refugee crises in history, and yet its dark echoes continue to resonate into our present, in more recent situations such as the US border crisis, the refugee crisis during the war in Ukraine, and many such continuing situations around the world where people are not safe in their homes.

In this quartet, Kevin's music confronts the idea of what being forcibly driven from your home by violence might mean

and feel like. The opening movement of the work seeks to embody the warmth, safety and familiarity that we all hope to feel while safe at home. However, as the piece continues, we are driven further and further away from that musical space into unfamiliar and even threatening feeling territory. The end of our musical journey is a return to our "home" material of the opening, but both it and we have been irrevocably changed by our journey. Just as finding a new home in a foreign land is never truly a return, there is no real return home after any life changing journey. In life there is no going back, only forward. Sometimes the best we can hope for is to move through our turmoil towards a future home, perhaps one rebuilt and renewed, in whatever unknown place that may be.

The work was completed in 2019 with several premieres planned for 2020...when suddenly the title "Home" took on a whole new meaning for the Miró Quartet. The Covid-19 crisis trapped millions of us in our homes for indefinite periods of uncertainty. Yes, home could be a place of safety from the virus, but it could also be a prison keeping us from connecting with others and fully living our lives. With all concerts cancelled and airline travel dangerous and limited, suddenly in order for the world premieres of this string quartet to occur we needed to live stream performances of the piece over the internet across from our literal homes in Austin, Texas.

For us this piece will always be very personal, embodying both the universal crises of migration and pandemic, and the very personal challenges each of us individually experienced during Covid. There is a hope and positivity in the face of adversity in this music that continues to inspire us every time we play it, and we hope that its message can bring each of us closer to home, to a place where we feel we truly belong.

George Walker, Quartet No. 1, Molto adagio ("Lyric for Strings")

George Theophilus Walker was one of the most important and influential African-American Composers during the 20th century in the US, and held a large number of awards and honors, perhaps most notably being the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music, in 1996. He was admitted to the Oberlin Conservatory at age 14, and received two degrees in piano and composition from the Curtis Institute of Music, and eventually his Doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. His music was influenced by a wide variety of styles: everything from folk songs, jazz, and American church rhythms, to twelve-tone serial techniques. Unwilling to conform to a single style, Walker used his wide-ranging musical knowledge and fluency to create a diverse and distinct voice all his own.

Like Barber's "Adagio for Strings", this movement began its life as the slow movement of the String Quartet No.1 written in 1946, but was subsequently arranged for string orchestra and retitled "Lyric for Strings", in which form it became one of Walker's most emblematic and often played works...but it is in the original intimate string quartet form that we chose to record it for this album. The movement (originally titled "Lament" in early versions of the quartet) was written in memory of his grandmother Malvina King, who was born a slave in the American South and whose life story was an inspiration to George with whom she was very close. For those of us lucky enough to have them, our families are our emotional home in a very real way. The loss of a dearly loved one changes our lives forever, sometimes making it very difficult to find our footing again. George always referred to this work as "my grandma's piece"; we all can relate to the deep emotions of family loss, love and memory that are so beautifully captured in this movement. It is a powerful work, whose hushed opening leads into lush music full of reminiscence and love...a consolation to every one of us who has someone in our heart whom we miss dearly.

Caroline Shaw, Microfictions [vol. 1]

During the pandemic, like so many of us, Caroline was trapped in her home for weeks on end, in this case her rather small apartment in Manhattan. She always has found her greatest inspiration in composing to come from the experience of live creative collaboration in person with other musicians, for example writing her Pulitzer Prize winning composition "Partita for 8 Voices" in a experimental collaborative environment while singing the nascent work herself as part of the vocal ensemble "Room Full of Teeth". Working on this new string quartet for us, and feeling more than a bit stifled stuck at home, she turned as so many of us did to the online world of social media for both her emotional escape and even some artistic inspiration. On Twitter, she discovered the so called "Microfictions" written by author T.R. Darling, a daily series of short science fiction pieces each falling within the character limit of a single Twitter post. Caroline was fascinated by how brief yet evocative these prose pieces were and was inspired to try her hand at both creating the same effect in musical language as well as writing her own prose "Microfictions".

As she worked, the piece grew into a set of 6 short prose poems each paired with a musical story, very much in the tradition of imagist poetry and surrealist painting, with a little splash of visual inspiration from Joan Miró (our namesake) thrown in. Again using the internet to connect while at home, she and the quartet had several workshop sessions on the piece over Zoom, where we played early versions of the movements for her in Austin, asked questions and made suggestions, and asked her in New York to take out her violin and demonstrate for us some of the unique string techniques she was inventing to enhance the colors and textures of the piece. The finished product is a work of humor and pathos, transparent beauty and surprising textures, and has become one of the most unique pieces in our repertoire.

As Caroline herself says, "each movement is brief but vivid, with a distinct sonic profile… one's interpretation of the stories and of the music can be varied—there is no one right way to connect the sounds or images or ideas. Rather I hope that the words create an environment for curious listening, and an invitation to imagination."

Samuel Barber, Quartet in B Minor

Samuel Barber's shadow looms large over the last century of American music: accomplished pianist, conductor, baritone and music educator, he was one of the most celebrated American composers of the mid-20th century, and his String Quartet in B minor is a staple of our core repertory today. His romantic personality fused elements of modernism and dissonance into a language of powerful lyricism and emotional expression, and this work has become a favorite with audiences everywhere.

Begun while living with his partner Gian Carlo Menotti in Austria following his Prix de Rome, the piece was premiered by two great American string quartets: in its first form by the Pro Arte Quartet in 1936 in Rome, and in its final form with the revised finale movement by the Budapest Quartet in 1943 at the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

As he worked on the piece, Barber wrote to his friend cellist Orlando Cole at Curtis, "I have just finished the slow movement of my quartet today — it is a knockout!" And indeed it was…only two years later, the slow movement, in its arranged form for string orchestra as the "Adagio for Strings" was performed by the NBC Symphony orchestra under the baton of conducting legend Arturo Toscanini (the young Barber was only 28 at the time), and in this form it became one of Barber's most popular, beloved and enduring works. At once tragic, mournful and comforting, having moments both of calm and of ecstasy, this is extremely powerful, even life changing, music.

It was famously played a second time by the NBC Radio Symphony in 1941 after the tragic events of Pearl Harbor, and ever since then the "Adagio" movement has stood as a musical "In Memoriam" in the times of our country's greatest tragedies. This movement has also become one of the best-known works of classical music today among the general public, and is familiar to many listeners from several Hollywood movie soundtracks that have appeared throughout the last five decades.

This string quartet as a totality is a dramatic, powerful and intense piece, uniquely American but also universal in its message. Equally impactful to today's ears and hearts as it was more than 8 decades ago, this quartet symbolizes for us the enduring power of music to speak directly from the heart.

This album was recorded at KMFA 89.5, Austin's Classical Music Radio Station, Austin, between January (Puts tracks 1-3, Shaw tracks 5-11, Arlen track 15) and April (Walker track 4, Barber tracks 12-14), 2023.

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