

78TH SEASON OF

CONCERTS

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART | DECEMBER 8, 2019



FROM A WALL STENCIL
GRAY MAINE 1800

PROGRAM

JACK Quartet

Christopher Otto, violin

Austin Wulliman, violin

John Pickford Richards, viola

Jay Campbell, cello

Modern Medieval

December 8, 2019 | 3:30 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

Rodericus (fl. 1400)

Arr. Christopher Otto

Angelorum Psalat (c. 1390)

Sky Macklay (b. 1988)

Many, Many Cadences (2015)

Luca Francesconi (b. 1956)

String Quartet no. 4 (*I voli di Niccolò*) (2004)

Intermission

Thomas Morley (1557/1558–1602)

Arr. Christopher Otto

Christes Crosse (c. 1597)

Solage (c. 1350–1403)

Arr. Christopher Otto

Fumeux fume par fumée (n.d.)

Helmut Lachenmann (b. 1936)

String Quartet no. 3 (*Grido*) (2001)

THE MUSICIANS

Hailed by the *New York Times* as the “nation’s most important quartet,” the JACK Quartet is one of the most acclaimed, renowned, and respected groups performing today. JACK has maintained an unwavering commitment to their mission of performing and commissioning new works, giving voice to under-heard composers, and cultivating an ever-greater sense of openness toward contemporary classical music. Most recently, they have been selected as *Musical America’s* 2018 “Ensemble of the Year,” named to New York radio WQXR’s “19 for 19 Artists to Watch,” and awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Through intimate relationships with today’s most creative voices, JACK embraces close collaboration with the composers they perform, leading to a radical embodiment of the technical, musical, and emotional aspects of their work. The quartet has collaborated with artists such as Philip Glass, Steve Reich, Julia Wolfe, George Lewis, Chaya Czernowin, and Simon Steen-Andersen, and with upcoming and recent premieres, including works by Tyshawn Sorey, Georg Friedrich Haas, Clara Iannotta, John Luther Adams, Catherine Lamb, and John Zorn. JACK also recently announced their new Fulcrum Project, an all-access initiative to commission six artists each year, who receive funding, workshop time, mentorship, and resources to develop new work to be performed and recorded by the quartet.

Committed to education, JACK is the quartet-in-residence at the Mannes School of Music, which will host JACK’s new Frontiers Festival, a multifaceted festival of contemporary music for string quartet. The musicians also teach each summer at New Music on the Point and at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. JACK has presented educational programs at the University of Iowa String Quartet Residency Program, the Lucerne Festival Academy, Harvard University, New York University, Princeton University, and Stanford University.

Comprising violinists Christopher Otto and Austin Wulliman, violist John Pickford Richards, and cellist Jay Campbell, JACK operates as a nonprofit organization dedicated to the performance, commissioning, and appreciation of new string quartet music.

PROGRAM NOTES

Angelorum Psalat

Angelorum Psalat is a strikingly original two-part Latin ballad from the *Chantilly Codex*, a collection of music from the *ars subtilior* style (more subtle art style). It is the only surviving work of Rodericus, known in the *Codex* as “S. Uciredor.” Many works of the *ars subtilior* experiment with rhythmic and notational complexity, and *Angelorum Psalat* is one of the most extreme examples, using no fewer than twenty different varicolored note shapes. For my arrangement, I have relied on the transcription of Nors S. Josephson, in whose interpretation the note shapes signify a radical expansion of rhythmic possibility, specifying a much richer variety of speeds and durations than most Western music before the twentieth century. I have given the first violin and viola the original two parts and added the second violin and cello parts to clarify the underlying grid of these complex rhythms. *Program note by Christopher Otto*

Many, Many Cadences

In this piece, I stretch the listeners’ perception of cadences by recontextualizing these predictable chord progressions in very fast cells that are constantly changing key and register. These lonely, disjunct ends-of-phrases eventually congeal and transform into new kinds of phrases and sound objects. *Program note by the composer, Sky Macklay*

String Quartet no. 4 (I voli di Niccolò)

About this work, the composer Luca Francesconi says, “It is unpredictable, like Paganini himself. Because it is acrobatic, yet at the same time very serious. Soaring, but complex. Rooted in the quartet tradition (and violinistic in particular), but also embedded in the Dionysian energy of folk music. Harsh at times, to be sure, but always with a story to tell. Also with a hint of irony (the second movement is subtitled Folk Dance, the last movement Dyonisian).” It is based on certain fragments of Paganini and built on intervals of a perfect fifth. Just one other curious detail: it is the first time Francesconi is presenting a work divided into movements. *Program note by Roberta Milanacci and translated by Hugh Ward-Perkins*

Christes Crosse

Thomas Morley was a widely influential composer, publisher, theorist, and performer of music in late sixteenth-century England, living in London at the same time as Shakespeare. As both a publisher and a composer, he is often seen as a leading voice in the introduction of Italian contrapuntal style into the native style of British vocal music, leading to a flowering of the madrigal in English composition of the time.

In 1597, Morley published his guide to novice musicians, *A Plain and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke*, which contains instruction in music theory and composition. Included in this collection is his composition *Christes Crosse*, an exploration to the edge of the practical limits of the potentially infinite rhythmic proportions.

A steady, repeated vocal line (with text that mostly consists of the alphabet) supplies the constant pulse against which two florid lines (without text) articulate increasingly complex rhythmic subdivisions, creating an impression of changing tempos. The piece starts with familiar divisions of the beat into 2, 4, or 8 parts, and proceeds to introduce subdivisions of 3, 5, 7, and 9 parts, as well as various simultaneous combinations of them, which are known as polyrhythms. Many of these polyrhythms would not be seen in Western classical music again for nearly three hundred years.

Despite the extreme complexity of the rhythms relative to the norms of the time, Morley evidently considered the piece to have pedagogical value, as he recommends, “Take this song, peruse it, and sing it perfectly; and I doubt not but you may sing any reasonable hard pricke-song that may come to your sight.” But far from a mere rhythmic exercise, the song is delightfully mercurial, by turns elegant and mischievous.

Christes crosse be my speede,
in all vertue to proceede,
A, b, c, d, e, f, g,
h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s & t,
double w, v, x, with y,
ezod & per se, con per se,
title, title, est Amen,
When you have done begin againe begin againe.

Program note by JACK Quartet

Fumeux fume par fumée

Solage lived in the late fourteenth century in France, but this is little more than a name we have to put to a number of pieces retained in the *Chantilly Codex*—as mentioned previously in the program note for *Angelorum Psalat*, a collection of works that exemplify the style called *ars subtilior*. Solage is likely a nom-de-plume, a variant spelling of *solace* meaning joy, entertainment, or consolation.

In *Fumeux fume par fumée* (approximately translated as “The smoker smokes through smoke”), Solage offers what seems to be a lampoon of an ostentatious group of poets who named their clique after the poet Jean Fumeux. They are known for their outrageous dress and bohemian lifestyle. Interpreting their name and work is up for debate: is the smoke of the fumeux simply the “smoke in the brain” (referring to a mental confusion or “vapors” that might be broken up by the morning drink), or are they referring to the literal smoking of hashish or opium, as tobacco was not known in Europe at that time?

Solage takes this haziness to the brink in this rondeau, using some of the most outré chromaticism and lowest vocal range of the period. Christopher Otto has adapted this piece to highlight its extremes. He has taken the major and minor thirds that run through the harmonies of the work and retuned them, widening and compressing them by the “septimal” interval or seventh partial of the harmonic series. By the end of his microtonal adaptation, after winding through some perception-altering modulations, the refrain is presented in its original low range in the viola and cello. By now, the smoke has clouded our usual grasp of pitches and harmonies we imagined familiar. Where are we, exactly? Or when?

Fumeux fume par <i>fumée</i> ,	The smoker smokes through smoke,
Fumeuse speculation.	A smoky speculation.
Qu’antre fummet sa pensee,	While others smoke in thought,
Fumeux fume par <i>fumée</i> ,	The smoker smokes through smoke,
Quar fumer molt li agree’	Because smoke pleases him greatly
Tant qu’il ait son entencion’.	As he meditates.
Fumeux fume par <i>fumée</i> ,	The smoker smokes through smoke,
Fumeuse speculation.	A smoky speculation.

Program note by JACK Quartet

String Quartet no. 3 (*Grido*)

Introducing his Third Quartet, Lachenmann recalled how he had at the start, like Robinson Crusoe, come upon a raw world (of instrumental noises in *Gran Torso*) and cultivated it. What should the castaway do next? Find another desert island? The question is left in the air. Yes, Lachenmann seems to suggest, every composition is a fresh start. And no, previous achievements cannot be gainsaid.

Lachenmann’s Third Quartet by no means denies the achievements—precarious achievements—of its predecessors. Sounds are still being discovered at the limits, in muted whisperings, in harmonics, in eighth-tones, and in other small intervals used to generate acoustic beats, in grating sonorities and even, on a couple of occasions (including the very end), in spoken phonemes. The music is still fine-spun and fragile, and yet also solidly compelling. (The paradoxical title, meaning “I shout” in Italian, is a homage to the members of the Arditti Quartet at the time of the first performance: Graeme Jennings, Rohan de Saram, Irvine Arditti, and Dov Scheindlin).

More particular to this work is the sense of hearing an immensely slow melody, which begins from a high E-flat that shines through the scurrying texture of the opening, sustained by one or more of the players, and ends on a middle-register D-flat, having passed through many other points where the music tentatively and impermanently stabilizes around a single note or, more rarely, a consonant chord. The slow progress—not essentially changed in the central part of the work, where movement is almost continuous in jittery fast notes—suggests the music is proceeding with great difficulty, against almost insuperable odds. We are, again, traversing a cliff-face. Danger—the danger, in particular, of repeating what has already been achieved and also the danger of incoherence—is everywhere. But that, of course, is what makes the moment-to-moment continuity of this quartet, as of its predecessors, so gripping. *Program note by JACK Quartet*

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Eighth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin Concerts

Unless otherwise noted, concerts are held in the West Building, West Garden Court.

Xaverian High School Choir

Joseph Loposky, Director

Caroling in the Rotunda

December 14, 1:30 p.m., 2:30 p.m.

West Building Rotunda

Calmus Vocal Ensemble

Carols from around the World

December 15, 3:30 p.m.

East of the River

Solstice: Darkness Is Your Candle

Music of the Mediterranean, Balkans, Armenia, and the Middle East.

December 21, 3:30 p.m.

Inscape Chamber Orchestra

DC Youth Orchestra

Music by Beethoven, Respighi, and Stravinsky.

December 22, 3:30 p.m.

Eunice Kim, violin

Xavier Foley, bass

The program includes baroque, Irish, Latin, and contemporary music, with works by Bach, O'Carolan, Piazzolla, and Foley himself.

January 5, 3:30 p.m.

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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