

Monday Evening, May 6, 2019, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

Argus Quartet

Clara Kim and Jason Issokson, *Violins*

Dana Kelley, *Viola*

Joann Whang, *Cello*

With Astrid Schween, *Cello*

LISA ARNHOLD MEMORIAL RECITAL

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE (b. 1984) ***Can't and Won't***

TAN DUN (b. 1957) ***Eight Colors***

Peking Opera

Shadows

Pink Actress

Black Dance

Zen

Drum and Gong

Cloudiness

Red Sona

LUIGI BOCCHERINI (1743–1805) **String Quintet in D major, Op. 40, No. 2, G. 341,**

Del Fandango

Pastorale

Minuetto: Allegro—Trio

Grave—Tempo di Fandango

ASTRID SCHWEEN, *Cello*

Intermission

The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are not permitted in this auditorium.

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Alice Tully Hall

*Please make certain that all electronic devices
are turned off during the performance.*

KATHERINE BALCH (b. 1991) *drip music*

(World premiere; commissioned for the Argus Quartet by Concert Artists Guild, with support from the Adele and John Gray Endowment Fund)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918) **String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10**

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement espressif

Très modéré—Très mouvementé et avec passion

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, with an intermission

Notes on the Program

by Gavin Plumley

Reflecting on her *drip music*, which receives its premiere this evening, composer Katherine Balch alludes to a poem by E.E. Cummings. It is a text typical of the writer's illusory style, suggesting both rootlessness and longing, a sense of push and pull.

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly
beyond
any experience, your eyes have their
silence:
in your most frail gesture are things
which enclose me,
or which i cannot touch because they are
too near

All of the works in tonight's concert pine for a certain place, a sense of closure, while simultaneously admitting that such a pursuit is futile or at least perplexed. In Christopher Cerrone's *Can't and Won't* (2017), the specter of a piece not quite written, a song cycle, breathes wordlessly through the score, as the strings seek "a place of composure." And there is a similar pulling in Tan Dun's *Eight Colors* (1986–88), in which the contemporary Chinese composer both makes "contact" with native folk materials and seeks to "refresh" Western atonality; the colors derive from the tension.

Although born in Italy, composer Luigi Boccherini explores a different brand of local color in his D major string quintet, indicative of the peripatetic life of a jobbing (though highly urbane) composer during the 18th century. And then, finally, we turn to the fledgling Debussy in 1893, writing in a genre to which he would never return and at a point in his career when influences and interests were many, as he sought to fashion an idiom "beyond any experience."

Can't and Won't

CHRISTOPHER CERRONE

Born March 5, 1984, in Huntington, New York

Christopher Cerrone is a composer of opera—with three stage works to date—as well as an extensive number of vocal works, so it is unsurprising to learn that his string quartet, his only such composition so far, began life in song form. Or rather, it did not quite reach that state, as he explains:

Can't and Won't began life as a song cycle based on texts by one of my favorite authors, Lydia Davis. The idea for the project would be that I would set a few of her very short pieces into songs that use a recurring melody. In between these short songs I would compose a long and intense setting of Davis' story called—appropriately—"Story," broken into three parts. But try as I might, I could never quite make the piece I wanted to out of her words. It didn't help that so many composers I admire had already made fantastic settings of her work. Perhaps her work is just complete in and of itself. But rather than throw aside these musical ideas, I decided to make a new string quartet out of them, a series of little "songs without words" interspersed with one long violent and dramatic movement.

The quartet begins with the faintest of sounds: the violinist gently tapping on their fingerboard to elicit a quiet ringing of open strings. Little by little the musicians bow their strings, revealing a delicate texture of swirling harmonics. A long, stretched-out melody emerges from the cello. Suddenly, as the song begins to form, it is cut off sharply, and a violent round of Ds is fired like bullets from the entire quartet. These two elements make up the main drama, the "can't" and "won't" of the form. As the work progresses, the songs without words

move higher and higher, forming into a proper melody, while the violent and rhythmic music descends to the lowest range of the instruments.

As I was writing this quartet it became clear that something else was occupying my subconscious. A lot of this past year [2017] has been about trying to find some sense of repose in a deeply chaotic time, amid constant and often terrifying distractions. *Can't and Won't* seems both to acknowledge this sense of disturbance yet also optimistically point toward the hope for a place of composure, even if it's a temporary one

Eight Colors

TAN DUN

Born August 18, 1957, in Changsha, China

While Christopher Cerrone searches for sanctuary, Tan Dun, raised during China's Cultural Revolution, with its proscription of Western music, describes himself as a composer "swinging and swimming freely among different cultures." The roots or rootlessness of this tactic surely derive in part from his musical education. Having worked as a violinist and arranger at the local opera theatre in Beijing (Peking), Tan Dun discovered formerly suppressed 20th-century Western composers, including Bartók, Schoenberg, and Boulez, while studying at the newly resurrected Central Conservatory of Music. But when Tan Dun moved to New York in 1986, his Chinese background continued to manifest itself in his compositions of the late 1980s, as he explains:

Eight Colors for String Quartet (together with *In Distance* and *Silk Road*) marks the first contact in my music between folk materials and the concentrated, lyrical language of atonality. In these works I draw on Chinese colors and the

techniques of Peking Opera. The quartet consists of eight very short sections—almost like a set of paintings—that share and develop materials. The subjects are described by the eight interrelated titles and form a drama: a kind of ritual performance structure. Both the timbre and string techniques are developed from Peking Opera (the vocalization of Opera actresses and Buddhist chanting can be heard). Although a shadow of atonal pitch organization remains in some sections of this piece, I began to find a way to mingle old material with new to contribute something to the Western idea of atonality and to refresh it. I find a danger in later atonal writing that it is too easy to leave oneself out of the music. I want to find ways to remain open to my culture and open to myself.

String Quintet in D major, Op. 40, No. 2, G. 341, *Del Fandango*

LUIGI BOCCHERINI

Born February 19, 1743, in Lucca, Italy

Died May 28, 1805, in Madrid, Spain

Today, when such openness and freedom of movement—both literally and metaphorically—have again become hot topics of debate, the biography of Luigi Boccherini makes for dizzying reading. Like the later Lucchesi composer Puccini, whose great-great-grandfather supported Boccherini's education, the cellist-composer travelled far and wide. His elder brother, a dancer, had done likewise, paving the way to Vienna, where Boccherini and his father appeared in concert for the first time in 1758, returning several times over the course of the next decade. But the life of a nomadic musician, even a highly proficient one, often proved tiresome during the 18th century, as Mozart would soon discover, and neither Vienna nor the Italian cities Boccherini visited could offer the virtuoso cellist permanent employ.

He therefore turned to composition, capitalizing on the expansion of music publishing while exploiting local patronage. Having stayed in Genoa and Paris, a particularly prominent publishing center in the mid-18th century, Boccherini planned to travel to London. But, in 1768, Spain beckoned, with a post in the orchestra at Aranjuez and, eventually, the patronage of Infante Luis Antonio Jaime of Bourbon, younger brother of King Carlos III. Significantly, Don Luis employed a string quartet, which Boccherini would often join, thereby forming the line-up for which he was to become most famous.

The string quintet we hear this evening, however, with its finale's Spanish color, was written in 1788, three years after Don Luis had died. It was likely composed as part of Boccherini's contract of 1786 to be Crown Prince (later King) Friedrich Wilhelm (II) of Prussia's "compositeur de notre chambre." Wilhelm was a keen amateur cellist—Mozart and Beethoven were similarly commissioned by the Prussian monarch—so Boccherini's favored form suited Potsdam and Berlin as well as it had Las Arenas, though there is little proof that he ever travelled to Prussia.

drip music

KATHERINE BALCH

Born in 1991 in San Diego, California

Moving from 18th-century courtly life to the present, we encounter Katherine Balch's new work. It marks a return to a form she last approached in 2015, in *with each breathing*. In that piece there was a noticeable dichotomy of stasis and kinesis, equanimity and more restive passages—or what Balch describes as "the intimacy of existence through sound." And the pursuit of tangibility through possibly intangible means links that work to one of Balch's acknowledged literary touchstones, quoted at the front of the score, just as it does the second of her quartets:

drip music plays with a variety of tiny dripping sounds, starting with the first few minutes in which the string quartet plays on the string only with metallic sewing thimbles, a sound I've been kind of obsessed with for a while. Like my first string quartet, *with each breathing*, which feels like it was written a few different composers ago, it tries to capture the "intense fragility" that E.E. Cummings chronicles in his love poem *somewhere i have never travelled*.

String Quartet in G minor, Op. 10

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Died March 25, 1918, in Paris, France

Points of departure and arrival, from the past to the "other," are likewise central to the work of Debussy at the turn of the last century. At the time he wrote his sole string quartet, in 1893, trips to Wagner's Bayreuth, experiences of Indonesian gamelan music at the Exposition Universelle, and an increasing devotion to the polyphony of Palestrina were dominating the composer's thoughts. The sublimation of these influences emerged in works such as the cantata *La Damoiselle élue* (1893) and *Prélude de l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894). While ostensibly the most modest of these projects, his string quartet nonetheless had a similarly major impact when first heard at the Salle Pleyel on December 29, 1893.

Its boldness is announced immediately, with a Gallic, swaggering motto. Equally unflinching is its sweeping harmonic language, quickly breaking free of diatonic shackles. The playful pizzicato of the second movement returns to the thematic thrust. Offering contrast, its singing second section is accompanied by shimmers, albeit delivered with a familiar strut. The sense of buoyancy soon becomes overwrought,

however, as the harmonic palette darkens and the viola delivers a series of petulant cross-rhythms in this gutsy-cum-gossamer version of a minuet and trio.

The lush Andantino that follows is less fixated on the central idée, similarly distancing itself from the chromaticism of what has gone before. Duly soothed, the finale begins drowsily, but souvenirs of the troubled second movement soon clash with the modality

Meet the Artists



Violinists Clara Kim and Jason Issokson, violist Dana Kelley, and cellist Joann Whang are the Argus Quartet, one of today's most dynamic and versatile young ensembles. The quartet won first prize at the 2017 Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition and 2017 M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition. A busy 2018–19 season featured debut concerts in New York at Weill Recital Hall and Merkin Concert Hall. Additional highlights include Chicago's Dame Myra Hess Concert series, Washington Performing Arts, UCLA's Clark Memorial Library, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (Ill.), Purdue Convocations (Ind.), Kravis Center for the Performing Arts (Fla.), Chamber Music Society of Detroit, Amherst College, and Juneau Jazz and Classics.

of the third. Eventually pizzicato snaps and tremolandos build to a final statement of the motto, bringing us full circle.

Gavin Plumley specializes in the music and culture of Central Europe and appears frequently on BBC radio as well as writing for newspapers, magazines, opera houses, and concert halls around the world. He is the commissioning editor of English-language program notes for the Salzburg Festival.

Argus' core mission is to connect with and build up a community of engaged listeners with the strong belief that today's ensembles can honor the storied chamber music traditions of our past while forging a new path forward. Its repertoire includes not just masterworks of the chamber music canon but also a wide range of pieces by living composers. In fall 2017 Argus began a two-year appointment as graduate quartet in residence at Juilliard, working closely with the Juilliard String Quartet and making its Lincoln Center recital debut at Alice Tully Hall in May 2018. In 2015–17 Argus served as fellowship quartet in residence at the Yale School of Music (the first ensemble mentored by the Brentano String Quartet in that capacity) and, during the 2016–17 season Argus was the Ernst Stiefel quartet in residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts. Passionate advocates for the music of our time, Argus was quartet in residence at New Music on the Point under the guidance of the JACK Quartet and was one of three ensembles to perform works from Kronos Quartet's Fifty for the Future commissioning project at Carnegie Hall. Recent commissions include new quartets by Donald Crockett, Grammy nominee Eric Guivan, 2014 Hermitage Prize winner Thomas Kotcheff, and Guggenheim Fellowship recipient Juri Seo. Argus has received grants from Chamber Music America and Caramoor in support of its commissioning efforts and has performed works by some of today's most important composers, in-

Juilliard

cluding Augusta Read Thomas, Garth Knox, Jason Eckardt, Christopher Theofanidis, Martin Bresnick, and Andrew Norman.

Founded in Los Angeles in 2013 the Argus Quartet has performed at the Ravinia Steans Music Institute, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Birdfoot Festival, Albany Symphony's American Music Festival, Cello Biennale Amsterdam, Bang on a Can at the Noguchi Museum, Hear Now Music



Astrid Schween

In 2016 New York-born cellist Astrid Schween (Pre-College '80; B.M. '84, M.M. '85, cello) joined the Juilliard String Quartet, succeeding Joel Krosnick and became a member of Juilliard's cello faculty. She made her debut as soloist with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta and her teachers included Harvey Shapiro, Leonard Rose, H.T. Ma, Bernard Greenhouse, and Jacqueline Du Pre, with whom she studied in London. She has participated in

Festival, and Music Academy of the West. Education and outreach are an important part of the quartet's mission: It has worked with students through residencies and masterclasses at Yale, James Madison University, Rockport Music, Milken School, Young Musicians Foundation, California State University Long Beach, Los Angeles City College, and Princeton.

Marlboro Music Festival and William Pleeth master classes and was on the faculty of UMass Amherst, Hartt School of Music, Mount Holyoke College, and Interlochen. As a member of the Boston Trio and Lark Quartet Schween performed at major venues around the world and received many honors including the Naumburg Chamber Music Award with the Lark, which, during her tenure, produced critically acclaimed recordings for the Arabesque, Decca/Argo, New World, CRI, and Point labels, and commissioned numerous works. Recent faculty appointments include the Sphinx Performance Academy, Tanglewood, and the Perlman Music Program, where she succeeds cellist Ronald Leonard.

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