

Clarice Presents

**TESLA QUARTET:
MUSICA UNIVERSALIS**



Sunday, May 5, 2024 • 3PM

GILDENHORN RECITAL HALL

AT THE CLARICE SMITH PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF
MARYLAND

Engagement on Campus and the Community

Tomorrow, the Tesla Quartet will be performing and recording original works by UMD School of Music composers after a coaching session about each work. The public reading takes place in Ulrich Recital Hall (Tawes Building) at 5:30PM.

SAFETY FIRST!

Your safety is paramount! For your own safety, look for your nearest exit. In case of an emergency, walk, do not run, to that exit. Please follow all instructions provided by Clarice staff and emergency first responders.

PHOTO & VIDEO

Please note, photo and video recording of this performance is strictly prohibited.

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**TESLA QUARTET:
MUSICA UNIVERSALIS**

Ross Synder & Michelle Lie, *violins*
Edwin Kaplan, *viola*
Austin Fisher, *cello*

Alistair Coleman

(b. 1998)

Moonshot

July 16, 1969

July 20, 1969

July 21, 1969

Kevin Lau

(b. 1982)

String Quartet No. 6...*like stars in the firmament*
The Triumph
Till the Sun is in the Sky

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)

Molto adagio from String Quartet in E minor,
Op. 59, No. 2, “Razumovsky”

Bobby Ge

(b. 1996)

Celeste Forma

Nebula

Protostar

Infall

T-Tauri

Hymn to the Stars

This performance is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council and The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

Moonshot

Alistair Coleman (b. 1998)

“In 2018, I was introduced to the Glenstone Museum in Potomac, MD. It was a magical experience and it was here that I encountered On Kawara’s “Moon Landing” triptych. The juxtaposing colors, precise gestures, powerful historical context and placement of the pieces encapsulated me in the space. I have only seen photos and historical artifacts from the Apollo 11 mission, but experiencing Kawara’s pieces, each completed on the day of each event, made me feel frozen in a moment in time—almost as if the works themselves were artifacts from the mission, or more broadly, living relics from a watershed moment in human history.

“Experiencing Kawara’s “Moon Landing” Triptych led me to envision a three-movement work for string quartet which is now titled *Moonshot*. Each movement is titled with a date painted on each canvas: I. July 16, 1969, launch; II. July 20, 1969, the lunar landing; and III. July 21, 1969, the day people on Earth celebrated and reflected on this historic moment. I wanted to illustrate the feeling of each point in time, using the paintings as a direct connection to those events, and capturing the wonder of art and space exploration that Kawara’s work evoked in me.

“The piece was commissioned by the Glenstone Museum and premiered in 2019 by the Abeo Quartet. The world-premiere recording was filmed in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and produced for the 2019 Smithsonian “Year of Music.”

—Alistair Coleman

String Quartet No. 6 (2023)*...like the stars in the firmament*

Kevin Lau (b. 1982)

“My sixth quartet was composed on the heels of several highly programmatic works—including my fifth quartet (*The Train to Improbable Places*). In this particular instance, I felt compelled to produce something that was more abstract and formal in conception, though certainly not without meaning. I challenged myself to compose a piece of music that could be experienced and understood on a largely emotional level, beyond the comfort of any concrete associations.

“The first movement, entitled “The Triumph,” offers something akin to the skeleton of a sonata, complete with a fiery, dance-like ‘first’ theme and a more lyrical second subject (itself a transformation of the first). But, the structure of the sonata is beset by external forces that threaten to dismantle its foundation—whether in the form of creeping dissonances and microtonal sighs that clash with the movement’s otherwise robust tonality, or the emergence of a heroic, Baroque fugue in the development that steers us into another world. The title is meant to suggest a narrative of “overcoming” that is prevalent in much of the historical repertoire. But, what is being overcome, and what the price of this ‘triumph’ is, I have left for the listener to interpret.

“After my initial conversation with the members of the Tesla Quartet prior to the creation of the quartet, I decided to name the piece after a quotation by Nikola Tesla: ‘Though free to think and act, we are held together, like the stars in the firmament, with ties inseparable.’ For me, this profound observation offers a vision of harmony that is both transcendent and (all too often) heartrendingly out of reach.

“The sentiment expressed within this quote forms the spiritual basis of the second movement, which has a subtitle (“Till the Sun is in the Sky”) that references a verse from the nursery rhyme, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.” The famous repeated notes and opening leap of the “Twinkle” lullaby forms a substantial thread throughout, appearing first as a lyrical foil to the Mahlerian chorale that opens the movement, before transforming into something darker as the movement unfolds. Composed during one of the most difficult periods of my life, the music is meant to offer solace and catharsis for those experiencing hardship—while also reflecting somberly on the gap between our reality and our aspirations.

“I am grateful to the Women’s Musical Club of Toronto for making this commission possible, and to the Tesla Quartet for championing this piece so beautifully.”

–Kevin Lau

Molto adagio from String Quartet No. 8 in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2, “Razumovsky”

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

The music of Beethoven’s middle period, to which his set of three “Razumovsky” quartets can be ascribed, is often characterized by a single descriptor: heroic. Indeed, his symphonies, piano sonatas and chamber music of this period are grander in scale than his earlier works, and there is a palpable sense of struggle, transformation and triumph. No doubt these sentiments were mirrored in Beethoven’s lived experience, fighting against near total hearing loss, bouts of poor health, and the social and political turmoil in Europe in the early years of the 19th century. But, looking past these sweeping generalizations, we can also find a completely different side of Beethoven—one of introspection, solemnity and wonder.

According to Beethoven’s student, Carl Czerny, the great composer was contemplating the starry night sky and the music of the spheres when he was inspired to write the *Molto adagio* of his String Quartet in E minor, Op. 59, No. 2. The movement opens with a hymn, each voice entering individually in turn, like the first few stars appearing in the early evening sky. The music unfolds deliberately, with the feeling of a grand celestial clock patiently ticking away time. Even as the theme develops and new ideas are introduced, as the character shifts from stoic to proud to passionate, the music never loses its sense of architecture, of a greater plan. With all the chaos in his life, perhaps Beethoven was creating for himself a refuge, where the beauty and vastness of the heavens could provide a sense of order and simplicity.

—Program Note By Ross Snyder

Celeste Forma

Bobby Ge (b. 1996)

“I’d put off writing a string quartet for some time after deciding to be a composer. An infamously intimidating ensemble to write for, one full of astonishing repertoire, the string quartet also carried a certain connotation to me of needing to be a composer’s ‘purest’ work: that somehow, a string quartet ought to represent one’s entire artistic credo. This apparent contradiction of needing to force an entire universe into the intimate confines of four strings proved a considerable obstacle to contend with.

“This paradox, however, would unexpectedly serve as a point of inspiration: what if one were to try and convey the scale and beauty of the literal universe through the conduit of a string quartet? The idea would gradually evolve into a multimedia collaboration with the extraordinary Bergamot Quartet and the Space Telescope Science Institute (STScI).

“The resulting piece, *Celeste Forma*, is about the process by which stars form. The music begins nebulous and hazy, depicting the floating emptiness of the void. Slowly, as dust particles gravitate toward one another, the music increases in activity and introduces a three note, rising stepwise ostinato. Eventually, these swirling dust clouds collapse into protostars and the viola introduces a hymn-like melody to herald the event. The music continues to intensify as infalling matter increases the protostar’s size, evolving into a rapid series of sequential modulations. The hymn reappears, threadlike and inchoate. As the protostar reaches T-Tauri phase and becomes increasingly unstable, the music disintegrates into violent slashes and scratchy effects. Finally, once enough mass has been cast off, the star stabilizes into its main sequence. The viola’s hymn recurs once more, this time in numinous grandeur. Stars begin to emerge throughout the universe—they are as terrifying as they are beautiful. The piece culminates in a grandiose, incandescent C major chord to celebrate the birth of the stars.

“This piece would not have been possible without the work of the Bergamot Quartet and STScI. Both brought a collaborative generosity that was as humbling as it was invigorating, remaining constantly communicative and supportive even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. For that I am incredibly grateful.”

—Bobby Ge

The Tesla Quartet is known the world over for their “superb capacity to find the inner heart of everything they play, regardless of era, style, or technical demand” (The International Review of Music). From cutting edge contemporary works to established masterpieces, the Tesla Quartet’s emotive and thoughtful interpretations reveal the ensemble’s deep commitment to the craft and to their ever expanding repertoire. The quartet recognizes the power of their platform to amplify underrepresented voices and to encourage the proliferation of an equitable and just future for society as well as a hospitable climate for posterity.

Now in its 16th season, the quartet performs regularly across North America and Europe, with recent highlights including their debut at New York’s Lincoln Center, a return to London’s Wigmore Hall and performances at Stanford University’s Bing Concert Hall as winners of the prestigious John Lad Prize. Other recent international engagements include tours of Brazil, China and South Korea. Notable festival appearances include the Banff Centre International String Quartet Festival; the Joseph Haydn String Quartet Festival at the Esterházy Palace in Fertőd, Hungary; the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany; and the Festival Sesc de Música de Câmara in São Paulo, Brazil. Having served as the Marjorie Young Bell String Quartet-in-Residence at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Canada from 2016 to 2017, the Tesla Quartet also recently completed a four-year community residency in Hickory, North Carolina that included performances and workshops at local colleges, universities and in the public school system, as well as a dedicated chamber music series.

Remaining true to their ethos, the Tesla Quartet has proved unwavering and resilient in the face of recent global issues. From the safety of their own homes, they overcame technological hurdles in order to cheer on the healthcare heroes of the New York Presbyterian Hospital network with weekly virtual concerts throughout the darkest hours of the pandemic. Addressing the needs of those within the music community, the Quartet commissioned 12 works by composers from across North America in 2020 for their online series *Alternating Currents*, an homage to Beethoven and a celebration of diverse voices. Tesla Quartet has also helped pioneer ImmerSphere, an immersive augmented reality virtual concert experience, bringing familiar community stages directly into the homes of concert-starved audiences. With renewed hope for a brighter future, the Tesla Quartet is focusing its efforts in the coming seasons on inspiring climate action with the commissions of several works for string quartet that touch on different aspects of the climate crisis and recovery, in addition to premiering Jeff Nytch’s multidisciplinary work decrying deforestation, *For the Trees*.

In 2018, the Tesla Quartet released its debut album of Haydn, Ravel and Stravinsky quartets on the Orchid Classics label to critical acclaim. BBC Music Magazine awarded the disc a double 5-star rating and featured it as the “Chamber Choice” for the month of December and Gramophone praised the quartet for its “tautness of focus and refinement of detail.” They released their second disc on the Orchid Classics label in October 2019, “Joy & Desolation,” a collaboration with clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein featuring quintets by Mozart, Finzi, John Corigliano and Carolina Heredia. The *Classic Review* raved, “From the outset, the quartet plays as a single instrument. Their sound is balanced across registers, their timbres and articulations matched” and *The ArtsFuse* called it “a compelling, diverse album from one of the best chamber ensembles (and clarinetists) out there.”

The Tesla Quartet builds upon years of early success at numerous competitions including multiple top prizes at the prestigious 2016 Banff International String Quartet Competition, 2015 International Joseph Haydn Chamber Music Competition, and 2012 Wigmore Hall London International String Quartet Competition. The group originally formed at The Juilliard School in 2008 and quickly established itself as one of the most promising young ensembles in New York, winning Second Prize at the J.C. Arriaga Chamber Music Competition only a few months after its inception. From 2009 to 2012, the quartet held a fellowship as the Graduate String Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado-Boulder, where they studied with the world-renowned Takács Quartet. They have also held fellowships at the Aspen Music Festival’s Center for Advanced Quartet Studies, the Britten-Pears Young Artist Program and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival.

The Tesla Quartet is Ross Snyder (violin), Michelle Lie (violin), Edwin Kaplan (viola) and Austin Fisher (cello).

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