

A detailed painting of a waterfall cascading over rocks into a turbulent stream. The scene is set in a dark, cavernous environment with warm, golden-brown rock walls. The water is depicted with intricate brushstrokes, showing the texture of the falling water and the churning rapids below. The overall mood is dramatic and powerful.

National Gallery of Art

81st Season of
Concerts

April 21, 2024

Program

April 21, 3:00 p.m.

West Building, West Garden Court

Tesla Quartet

Ross Snyder, violin

Michelle Lie, violin

Edwin Kaplan, viola

Austin Fisher, cello

Rising Tides

Adeliia Faizullina (b. 1988)

Drops and Ripples

Alexandra Gardner (b. 1967)

Watershed

Causeway

Ceremony

Ghost Pines

Adrian B. Sims (b. 2000)

String Quartet no. 4, "Hope"

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

The Evergreen

Cover: Jean Joseph Xavier Bidauld, *View of the Waterfalls at Tivoli* (detail), 1788, oil on paper on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Fern and George Wachter, 2005.140.1

Ensemble

Tesla Quartet

Though free to think and act, we are held together, like the stars in the firmament, with ties inseparable. These ties cannot be seen, but we can feel them. — Nikola Tesla

From cutting edge contemporary works to established masterpieces, the Tesla Quartet's emotive and thoughtful interpretations reveal the musicians' deep commitment to their craft and ever-expanding repertoire. Now in its 16th season, the Quartet performs regularly across North America and Europe, including at New York's Lincoln Center and London's Wigmore Hall. They appeared at Stanford University's Bing Concert Hall as winners of the John Lad Prize. In addition to international engagements in Brazil, China, and South Korea, the Quartet has held residency at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, Canada, and a four-year community residency in Hickory, North Carolina.

The Quartet released its debut album *Haydn, Ravel, and Stravinsky* in 2018, followed by *Joy & Desolation*, with clarinetist Alexander Fiterstein (Orchid Classics). During the pandemic, the ensemble gave weekly virtual concerts to the healthcare providers of the New York Presbyterian Hospital network, commissioned 12 works by North American composers for their online series *Alternating Currents*, and helped pioneer ImmerSphere, an immersive augmented reality virtual concert experience.

Notes

Drops and Ripples

We originally commissioned Adeliia Faizullina to write Drops and Ripples as part of our Alternating Currents web series during lockdown in 2020. The aim was to get composers to write short works that the four members of the Tesla Quartet could play and record individually in our own homes and then either edit together or perform over Zoom. The work also serves as a celebration of Beethoven's 250th anniversary and uses the theme from the Andante of his String Quartet in A Major, op. 18, no. 5, as its building blocks. Each phrase begins with a single pizzicato in the first violin, a metaphorical drop that ripples throughout the ensemble, stirring up waves of sound from the pool of silence.

This work is the perfect opener to today's program. It represents the genesis of the watershed, the first tiny droplets of dew that fall from their leaves, gathering and coalescing into the rivers that flow to become the mighty Chesapeake Bay. — Ross Snyder, Tesla Quartet

Watershed

The fast-disappearing Hoopers Island in south Dorchester County, Maryland, is an inspirational stepping stone for Watershed. Once a bustling fishery (the original home of Phillips Seafood), the island and surrounding areas are being overtaken by the water that once sustained them. Watershed addresses the experience of climate change in the Chesapeake Bay region.

Each of its three movements explores a different aspect of Hoopers Island. The first movement, Causeway, is about the long, narrow road that connects the island to the mainland. The water levels have risen so close to the road that waves splash up onto the roadway even on good weather days. Ceremony, the second movement, refers to the personal and communal rituals and rhythms of life lost because of the sea level rise on the island. The music is bittersweet, with glimmers of hopefulness. The third movement, Ghost Pines, references the pine trees clustered around the island that the increasing saltwater levels have damaged. This movement is a sonic imagining of that process: saltwater sucking the nutrients from the trees, losing their needles, bark, and branches, and turning white.

Like the physical landscape, the musical world of Watershed is a combination of poignant and beautiful. Musical ideas take the form of overlapping gestures like waves — they rise and reach a crest, then pull away — and of material that begins complete and is slowly stripped out to a single line. Inspiration early in the compositional process came from sea chanteys sung by Black fishermen on the Chesapeake and from field recordings of wind and water I recorded on Hoopers Island.

Having grown up and spent a large portion of my life in Maryland, I care deeply about the impact of climate change on the Chesapeake Bay region. The rising waters are washing away the landscape and the hopes, dreams, communities, and histories of those who have lived and worked on the Chesapeake. I hope Watershed will play a role in alerting people to the situation's urgency and will inspire behavioral and policy changes to offset the effects of global warming. — Alexandra Gardner

String Quartet no. 4, “Hope”

This work begins calmly. It represents the tranquility of the bay in its optimal habitat. It is peaceful. Then, as sea levels rise, the elements disrupt the calm of the bay. This disruption is characterized by dissonance in the music and a lack of vision and clarity in the musical texture. As man-made solutions are introduced, the two contrasting musical ideas battle each other. It becomes clear that the man-made solutions to the climate issues we have caused are not enough.

In the end, nature always wins, no matter what that could mean for our man-made habitat and structures. Regardless, we can and will continue to have hope that we will ultimately work with nature to solve rising sea levels and coastal erosion. As such, the work ends with a hopeful lullaby and chords of serenity. — Adrian B. Sims

The Evergreen

One day in January 2020, I took a walk in an evergreen forest on Swiikw (Galiano Island) in British Columbia, Canada. I found myself slowing down. My steps were shorter, less frequent. I stopped trying to get to my destination with any real intention or speed. Eventually I stopped moving altogether. I looked, and listened, and felt and smelled and breathed. Like a thousand, thousand creatures before me there, some of them also human, I paused and wondered and thought: “There’s wisdom in these trees.” It’s been said before, in ways more eloquent and complex than my little story here.

This piece is my offering to one particular tree in that forest. This tree is towering, craggy, warped, and knotted, wrapped in soft green, standing silently in a small clearing where the shadows are more generous to the narrow streams of sunlight that try to speak up in late morning. To be honest, I'm not entirely sure that it's still alive or that it's not actually an ancient deciduous tree that has tacitly agreed to be covered in moss. Still, it feels like an evergreen friend, and so I wrote music for it and have called it *The Evergreen* — for the soft moss that covers it, for its strong stem that reaches up, for the gentle chaos of dripping water that surrounds it, and for the roots below, ever seeking and nourishing and building. — Caroline Shaw

General Information

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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National Gallery of Art Podcast: Sound Thoughts on Art

Sound Thoughts on Art, a podcast from the National Gallery of Art, explores the intersection of sight and sound. Hosted by musician and journalist Celeste Headlee, each episode focuses on a work of art in the National Gallery's collection and now features performers Jenny Scheinman, Dom Flemons, Sa-Roc, Delfeayo Marsalis, Daniel Ho, Maria Schneider, Peter Sheppard Skaerved, and others. Listen and dig deeper at nga.gov/music-programs/podcasts.

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