

Cage is most famous for *4' 33"* from 1952, in which the performers play a silent, note-less score for four minutes and 33 seconds. Some may find this work as baffling as the all-white canvases painted by his friend Robert Rauschenberg around the same time, but it was a natural extension of Cage's reassessment of the very nature of music and sound. In particular, it matched his embrace of Zen Buddhism and his recognition of divine significance in normal, everyday moments. Thus he gave us *4' 33"* and the proposition that through our attentive listening and presence, whatever we hear in that time span *is* music. It is also not as dogmatic as the exact timing may seem; Cage instructed, "The work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time." He later expressed, "No day goes by without my making use of that piece in my life and in my work. ... I realize that it's going on continuously. So, more and more, my attention, as now, is on it. More than anything else, it's the source of my enjoyment of life."

As their 10th anniversary season approached, the Catalyst Quartet had the idea to commission "ten composers from diverse backgrounds to write miniature string quartets. These pieces will exist as standalone compositions and be featured as ten individually unique music videos that will comprise a video album — better representing the way most people experience music today."

Nine of the composers selected to contribute to **CQ Minute** are established professionals at the highest level of their craft, including Pulitzer prizewinners Joan Tower, Kevin Puts, and Caroline Shaw. Also selected are master musicians who work outside of traditional models of composing concert music, like Latin jazz icon Paquito D'Rivera and the Seattle-born singer/songwriter/violinist Kishi Bashi, who tapped into Vivaldi for inspiration in his contribution, *Con Brio*. The 10th slot was reserved for one young composer to be identified through an open competition, but the quartet decided to celebrate the hopefulness and abundance of finally moving forward by choosing two winners instead.

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Tuesday, 6/7 at 7:30PM

The Final Cello-bration Don't miss Joshua Roman's final show as Town Music Artistic Director! Joshua and friends present a night of cello mastery.



Town Music Leadership Fund

TOWNMUSIC ²¹/₂₂

In The Room Joshua Roman's Final Season



Town Hall Seattle presents

Catalyst Quartet

CQ Minute: Anniversary Celebration

Part of the 2021-22 Town Music Series
Artistic Director, Joshua Roman

Tuesday, April 12, 2022, 7:30PM
The Great Hall at Town Hall Seattle



Program Notes

The Sphinx Organization, a social justice non-profit that has been an industry leader in diversifying classical music, helped launch Catalyst Quartet in 2010. The group has soared ever since, at least until its 10th anniversary festivities were ensnared in the pandemic like so much else. Better late than never, the quartet is here with a celebratory program that culminates in a commissioning venture supported by Town Hall Seattle.

Catalyst Quartet celebrates the new dawn with a cornerstone of the quartet repertoire. **Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809) elevated the ensemble of two violins, viola, and cello from an unassuming vehicle for party music into a concert mainstay, and he made good money publishing set after set of quartets for an international audience of amateur musicians hungry for printed repertoire to play at home. His last complete set of six quartets started as a commission from a Hungarian patron who was given two years of exclusive use of the quartets. When that period ended, the enterprising Haydn sold the scores to competing publishing firms in London and Vienna. They both released editions in 1799, printed as Opus 76.

The String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 76, No. 4 (“Sunrise”) takes its nickname from a gesture in the opening measures, in which the first violin rises gently over a major triad in the lower voices. The music is drawn out to sound like a slow introduction, but the material is already rooted in the movement’s *Allegro con spirito* (“fast, with spirit”) tempo. The slow movement that comes next incorporates rising arpeggios among its docile themes, forging a subtle link of “sunrise” material between the first two movements.

The Menuet barrels along with the rustic drive of an Austrian *ländler* dance, while the contrasting trio section injects a new, unexpected color with droning bass notes and modal melodies — perhaps a nod to the folk music that would have been familiar to this quartet’s Hungarian patron. The finale brings all the verve and wit we expect from Haydn, including playful swoops marked *forzando* (“forced”) to increase the sense of sonic contrast and surprise.

The old approach to composition set out by Haydn et al. held sway on both sides of the Atlantic for generations, but a counterculture scene sprung up the early 1960s, centered, unsurprisingly, in San Francisco. Using electronic techniques like tape looping and phasing, and drawing inspiration from traditional Asian and African musical practices, maverick composers honed the style now called minimalism — a term that somewhat explains the devotion to using small amounts of musical material, even if it totally misses the mark in explaining the all-encompassing, emotional impact of the music.

Terry Riley (b. 1935), a key figure in the anti-establishment scene, made history in 1964 with an enormous composition for ensemble notated on a single page, *In C*. In the 1970s, while on the faculty of Mills College in Oakland, he drifted away from notated music to instead focus on keyboard improvisations and a deep study of North Indian Hindustani music. It was an invitation in 1980 from the young ensemble-in-residence at Mills, the Kronos Quartet, that led Riley to rework

the material he drafted in 1968 into his first work for string quartet, launching one of the most fruitful partnerships between a composer and ensemble in American history.

Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector, with its open form consisting of 24 modules (each 14 beats long) that can be arranged in any order, brought the radical openness of early minimalism into dialogue with Riley’s increasing fascination with Indian ragas — a direction he has continued to explore ever since in a series of scores for Kronos and other classical ensembles. The encounter with Riley set Kronos on a path to become a vessel for a world of music beyond the classical quartet repertoire, paving the way for the Catalyst Quartet and other exploratory ensembles that emerged in recent decades.

Before minimalism took root, it truly seemed that the atonal innovations of Arnold Schoenberg and company — the so-called “Second Viennese School” — might be the lasting answer to the efforts of the “First Viennese School” surrounding Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. As the ideas outlived their founders, it became clear that the real hero of the movement was not Schoenberg, but rather his first student and most loyal lieutenant, **Anton Webern** (1883-1945).

Webern composed the ***Langsamer Satz*** (“Slow Movement”) for string quartet in 1905, early in his studies with Schoenberg and long before either composer embraced free atonality or the structured approach of twelve-tone composition. Webern took inspiration for the movement from a hiking trip that summer with Wilhelmine Mörtl, the woman who would later become his wife. Basing the work on the image of two lovers walking together, Webern was also following the template of Schoenberg’s *Transfigured Night* for string sextet, which made a lasting impression when the younger composer heard it performed in Vienna during the 1903-04 season. Webern suppressed his quartet movement before it was ever performed; the world premiere did not take place until 1962 at a festival in Seattle, which was organized by a German expatriate and Webern scholar.

Much like *Transfigured Night*, the *Langsamer Satz* dwells in a late-Romantic tonal spectrum with echoes of Brahms. The music demonstrates that the 21-year-old Webern already possessed a keen sense of transparency and independence of voices, qualities that came to define his increasingly sparse and aphoristic style. It was also, significantly, the first work that the Catalyst Quartet played to begin their auspicious career.

A generation before the minimalists upended American concert music, **John Cage** (1912-1992) was the high priest of mirthful disruption. At first, he used everyday items as percussion instruments and doctored pianos with foreign objects to create exotic new sonorities — experiments he first conducted while working in Seattle as a dance accompanist at Cornish College. He went on to redefine the very structure and sound of composed music, introducing silence and random operations of chance and creating music that merged Asian philosophy with the Western canon.

Performers

Karla Donehew Perez, *violin*
Abi Fayette, *violin*
Paul Laraia, *viola*
Karlos Rodriguez, *cello*

Program

String Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 76, No. 4 (The Sunrise)
Allegro con spirito
Adagio
Menuetto (Allegro)
Finale (Allegro ma non troppo)

Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector (1981)

Intermission

Langsamer Satz (1905)

4'33" (1952)
I. 33"
II. 2'40"
III. 1'20"

CQ Minute

Presidio

Con Brio

The Face of Past Regret

But, Just a Minute?!

Build

Joseph Haydn
(1895 – 1978)

Terry Riley
(1935 -)

Anton Webern
(1883-1992)

John Cage
(1912-1992)

Andy Akiho
(1979 -)

Kishi Bashi
(1975 -)

Billy Childs
(1957 -)

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Lo infinito

Angelica Negrón
(1981 -)

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(1981 -)

Emerge

Kevin Puts
(1972 -)

Emerge

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(1972 -)

Bittersweet synonym

Caroline Shaw
(1982 -)

Bittersweet synonym

Caroline Shaw
(1982 -)

A short flight

Joan Tower
(1938 -)

A short flight

Joan Tower
(1938 -)

CQ Minute Competition Winners

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A future in process

Paul Mekailian
(1998 -)

A future in process

Paul Mekailian
(1998 -)

Time Capsule

Nick Revel
(1986 -)

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(1986 -)

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