



Aizuri Quartet

Ariana Kim and Miho Saegusa / *Violins*

Ayane Kozasa / *Viola*

Karen Ouzounian / *Cello*

Friday Evening, October 26, 2018 at 8:00

Rackham Auditorium

Ann Arbor

11th Performance of the 140th Annual Season
56th Annual Chamber Arts Series

UMS is proud to partner with M-Prize to present the grand prize winner of its international competition.

M-Prize is an international chamber arts competition based in Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance which aims to:

- Identify and showcase the highest caliber of international chamber arts ensembles;
- Provide a professional performance and adjudication platform for the chamber arts;
- Help launch and advance the careers of chamber ensembles through prizes and professional development opportunities;
- Evolve the breadth and depth of the chamber arts landscape and associated professional opportunities for exceptional ensembles.

The Aizuri Quartet is the third M-Prize grand prize winner, an honor which was awarded in May 2018 in Hill Auditorium.

This evening's performance is supported by the Charles A. Sink Endowment Fund and by Joel Howell and Linda Samuelson.

Media partnership provided by WGTE 91.3 FM and WRCJ 90.9 FM.

The Aizuri Quartet appears by arrangement with Concert Artists Guild.

In consideration for the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

PROGRAM

Locally Sourced

Komitas Vartabed, Arr. Sergei Aslamazian

Armenian Folk Songs

Yergink Ampel A (It's Cloudy)
Haprapan (Festive Song)
Shoushigi (For Shoushig)
Echmiadzni Bar (Dance from Echmiadzin)
Kaqavik (The Partridge)

Béla Bartók

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 17, Sz. 67

Moderato
Allegro molto capriccioso
Lento

Intermission

Caroline Shaw

Blueprint

Paul Wiancko

LIFT

Part I
Part II
Part III [Glacial — Maniacal — Lift]

LOCALLY SOURCED

We are thrilled to be back in Ann Arbor, five short months after the 2018 M-Prize Competition. One fascinating aspect of the competition was the repertoire requirement: each participating ensemble was asked to prepare 75 minutes of music that showed variety and best represented them. We brought nine works (some of them selected movements) spanning over four centuries: Gesualdo madrigals, Haydn, middle- and late-period Beethoven, an early work by Webern, and four pieces written for us by composers Yevgeniy Sharlat, Caroline Shaw, Gabriella Smith, and Paul Wiancko. We spent a lot of time discussing how to program each round of the competition so that we could express who we are as a quartet, musically and curatorially. We love the idea of creating a program that takes listeners through an experience from beginning to end. We find inspiration in uncovering the personal and expressive story in each work, in portraying different and vivid sound worlds, and sharing these discoveries with audiences.

During our interview round for the M-Prize competition, we shared with the panel our desire and commitment to approaching the string quartet as living art. Our hope is that in fostering a dialogue between all eras and styles of music, players and listeners alike can draw new observations and connections in music.

—*Aizuri Quartet*

ARMENIAN FOLK SONGS (ARR. 1934/1950)

Komitas Vartabed

*Born September 26, 1869 in Kütahya, Hüdavendigâr (Bursa) Vilayet,
Ottoman Empire*

Died October 22, 1935 in Paris

Arr. Sergei Aslamazian

Born January 27, 1897 in Mozdok, Russia

Died September 27, 1978 in Moscow

UMS premiere: Chilingirian String Quartet; October 1990 in
Rackham Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1934:

- Hitler becomes *Führer* of Germany
- The Japanese company Fuji Photo Film is established
- Georgia Tech refuses to play football against U-M unless the team benches Willis Ward, an African American player; Ward's teammate and friend, Gerald Ford, nearly quits the team in protest

The first half of our program features two composers who collected folk music from rural villages in their homelands, at a time when music and art was infused with a spirit of nationalism. Treasured as the father of Armenian classical music, Komitas Vartabed was an ethnomusicologist, composer, priest, choir master, and survivor of the Armenian genocide. His passion and gift for hearing nuances in villagers' songs led him to collect and transcribe over 3,000 pieces of Armenian folk music.

Life was not easy for Komitas. Orphaned at a young age but scouted for his musical talent, he was taken in by priests in Echmiadzin, home of the Echmiadzin Cathedral, the mother church of the Armenian Apostolic Church. For a time he studied and traveled in Europe, and while he was gaining recognition abroad for sharing

Armenian music, he also struggled with the conservative faction of his Church back at home. While he was trying to gain a wider audience for Armenian music in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), he, along with many other intellectual and cultural leaders, was deported as the Armenian genocide began in 1915. He was eventually released but suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, living in asylums until his death nearly 20 years later.

What is remarkable about these five short pieces which start our program tonight, arranged for string quartet by Sergei Aslamazian, is their sense of innocence. They range from contemplative ("Yergink Ampel A"), to boisterous ("Echmiadzni Bar"), and charming ("Kaçavik"). It's as if Komitas found solace in his devotion to capture the purity of the rural

songs of peasants. For us it was special to explore these folk songs with our cellist Karen Ouzounian, to discover more about her Armenian roots and the music which has become an enduring symbol of home and identity for a people separated from their homeland.

STRING QUARTET NO. 2, OP. 17, SZ. 67 (1917)

Béla Bartók

Born March 25, 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Sinnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died September 26, 1945 in New York

UMS premiere: Budapest String Quartet; February 1951 in Rackham Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1917:

- The US declares war on Germany
- The first Pulitzer Prizes are awarded
- The University of Michigan celebrates its centennial

Béla Bartók also spent a considerable number of years collecting, recording, and transcribing folk melodies from villages in Central Europe (he even made a trip to Northern Africa). How his research manifested in his music, however, is very different from Komitas. Bartók wrote his Second String Quartet during the First World War, a painful and frustrating period for him when Hungary closed its borders and he therefore could not continue his expeditions. In this quartet, Bartók's unique sound world comes into focus: as he contemplated his research and how to incorporate it into his own works, he made the choice not to quote any folk song directly, or to invent tunes "in the style of" the folk music he collected. Instead, the elements that characterize the folk idiom become fully integrated with Bartók's own language, resulting in distinctive music that bears the unmistakable stamp of those flavors. There are passages that sound improvised, as if the music is being created on the spot even though Bartók wrote everything out. He also achieves

stunning sonic effects with four players, notably the *prestissimo* at the end of the second movement when the barest of murmurs in the night explode into a force that engulfs the whole quartet, or the bleak landscape of the third movement, juxtaposing the quartet's texture with duets using different pairs of instruments.

In the history of the quartet literature up to this point, few quartets strayed from the traditional four-movement format. Bartók varied the movement structure of each of his six quartets to serve a specific purpose in dramatic flow. Bartók's compatriot and colleague Zoltán Kodály described the three movements of this quartet as episodes, "peaceful life — joy — sorrow." It is, in a way, cyclical because the last movement uses the same motivic material as the first, though it is not a happy homecoming — there is deep sadness in the way the material has transformed, like a struggle to breathe. Perhaps this is reflective of the broken spirit of a world at war, in addition to Bartók's personal battles.

BLUEPRINT (2016)

Caroline Shaw

Born 1982 in Greenville, North Carolina

UMS premiere: This piece has never been performed on a UMS concert.

Snapshots of History...In 2016:

- Clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani military in Nagorno-Karabakh kill at least 193 people, which becomes the heaviest breach of the 1994 ceasefire
- The World Health Organization announces an outbreak of the Zika virus
- Two paintings by Vincent Van Gogh are recovered after having been stolen in 2002 from the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam

In the second half of our program, we are excited to share two works from our debut album *Blueprinting*, the culmination of a journey of several years. The five works on the album, written for us by American composers, have become core staples in our repertoire and have brought us much joy. In many instances, the collaboration started with friendship and developed through many hours of rehearsals and workshops. Each piece was an opportunity to discover new approaches to sound and expression as a string quartet. Like the Bartók quartets a hundred years before them, we want to celebrate works like these for what they offer in new discoveries and possibilities for the string quartet genre.

Caroline Shaw's *Blueprint* captures the beauty of wit and conversation. The title itself comes from wordplay inspired by the origin of our quartet's name, *aizuri-e*, a style of Japanese woodblock printing that primarily uses shades of blue. In the 1820s, artists in Japan started to import Prussian blue, a synthesized form

of long-lasting blue pigment that became an alternative to natural indigo dyes. Ms. Shaw writes:

The story of aizuri-e is one of innovation, migration, transformation, craft, and beauty. Blueprint...takes its title from this beautiful blue woodblock printing tradition as well as from that familiar standard architectural representation of a proposed structure: the blueprint. This piece began its life as a harmonic reduction — a kind of floor plan — of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 18, No. 6. As a violinist and violist, I have played this piece many times, in performance and in joyous late-night reading sessions with musician friends...Chamber music is ultimately about conversation without words. We talk to each other with our dynamics and articulations, and we try to give voice to the composers whose music has inspired us to gather in the same room and play music. Blueprint is also a conversation — with Beethoven, with Haydn (his teacher and the "father" of the string quartet), and with the joys and malinconia (melancholy, gloom) of his Op. 18, No. 6.

In learning this piece, we enjoyed discovering the clever and sometimes cheeky ways in which Shaw references Beethoven. In addition, she gives us colorful instructions in many passages. The piece begins with this instruction:

*like a marble bust
stoic & grand & still
but with a little wink or some
side-eye*

Later, she introduces pitch-bending: “Tim Burtonesque warped technicolor Western.” “Goopy, like wearing heavy wool” accompanies a *rallentando*, and the end of the piece takes us very quickly from “Quaker meeting vibe” to “gangbusters” and “fabulously flailing.” While navigating all of these twists, Shaw’s music has a crystalline beauty that reminds us of the experience of playing Mozart quartets. We often find Mozart quartets tricky because of what they demand of a quartet: the balance of detail and effortlessness, with nowhere to hide.

Blueprint was commissioned by the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts and premiered in 2016.

Blueprint is published by Caroline Shaw Editions.

LIFT (2016)

Paul Wiancko

Born 1983 in San Clemente, California

UMS premiere: This piece has never been performed on a UMS concert.

Paul Wiancko writes:

LIFT is an investigation of elation in its musical form...I joyously explored the capacity for harmony, color, and rhythm itself to evoke and inspire. Though I drew heavily from my experience as a chamber musician to articulate its many interlocking parts, the piece ultimately represents the journey of a soul — laid out in fervent, celebratory detail.

LIFT is a virtuosic tour-de-force for the string quartet. In addition to his experience as a chamber musician, Mr. Wiancko channels his love of jazz, improvisation, hip-hop, and folk music to create a rich sonic palette. This piece had us thinking about how we could sound like more than just a string quartet made up of two violins, a viola, and a cello.

In addition to pacing the drama, we needed to create and embody chaos, clockwork, a surprise attack, a stream of consciousness. We needed to find the intimacy of a lullaby or to create the sense of being shot out of our chairs, and feel all the changes viscerally. The idea of expressing pure joy through our sounds was a great project in itself. The beauty of Mr. Wiancko's piece is that all of these elements are seamlessly woven into the epic journey.

LIFT was commissioned by the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts and premiered in 2016.

LIFT is published by Wiancko Editions.

Program notes by the Aizuri Quartet.

ARTISTS

Praised by the Washington Post for “captivating” performances that draw from its notable “meld of intellect, technique, and emotions,” the **Aizuri Quartet** was awarded the grand prize and the CAG Management Prize at the 2018 M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition, along with top prizes at the 2017 Osaka International Chamber Music Competition in Japan, and the 2015 Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition in London. Through its engaging and thought-provoking programs, branded by the *New York Times* as “genuinely exciting” and “imaginative,” the Quartet has garnered critical acclaim for bringing “a technical bravado and emotional power” to bold new commissions, and for its “flawless” (*San Diego Union-Tribune*) performances of the great masterpieces of the past.

Based in New York City, the Aizuri Quartet was the 2017–18 MetLiveArts String Quartet-in-Residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where they presented five unique programs throughout the season. Previous residency engagements include the 2015–16 Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts; resident ensemble of the 2014 Ravinia Festival’s Steans Music Institute; and, from 2014–16, the string quartet-in-residence at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

The Quartet has performed extensively throughout North America, as well as in Europe, Japan, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, and Abu Dhabi, and has commissioned and premiered new works by Pulitzer Prize-winner Caroline Shaw, Lembit Beecher, Paul Wiancko, Yevgeniy Sharlat, Gabriella Smith, Rene Orth, and Alyssa Weinberg. Its debut album, showcasing many of

these new works, will be released by New Amsterdam Records this fall.

Formed in 2012 and combining four distinctive musical personalities into a unique collective, the Aizuri Quartet draws its name from “aizuri-e,” a style of predominantly blue Japanese woodblock printing that is noted for its vibrancy and incredible detail.

UMS welcomes the Aizuri Quartet as the ensemble makes its UMS debut tonight.

TONIGHT'S VICTORS FOR UMS:



Charles A. Sink Endowment Fund

—
Joel Howell and Linda Samuelson

Supporters of this evening's performance by the Aizuri Quartet.

MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

- 11/1 Czech Philharmonic Orchestra
- 11/7 Jake Shimabukuro
- 1/25 Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Tickets available at www.ums.org.

ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...

- 10/31 Master Class: Alisa Weilerstein
(Stamps Auditorium, Walgreen Drama Center, 1226 Murfin Avenue,
5:00 pm)
- 11/2 Pre-Show Lobby Performance: Ballet Folklorico
(Hill Auditorium Lower Lobby, 7:00 and 7:30 pm)
Must have a ticket to the Aida Cuevas performance to attend.
- 11/7 UMS 101: Jake Shimabukuro and the Ukulele
(Hill Auditorium Mezzanine Lobby, 5:30 pm)
*Paid registration is required for this event;
please visit bit.ly/UMSClasses (case-sensitive) to register.
In partnership with Ann Arbor Public Schools Rec & Ed.*

Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.