

Healing Modes

Brooklyn Rider String Quartet

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

Colin Jacobsen, violin

Nicholas Cords, viola

Michael Nicolas, cello

Guest Artist Series

Katzin Concert Hall | November 2, 2018 | 7:30 pm

Program

Schisma

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

Kanto Kechua #2

Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972)

Zehar (Poison)

World Premiere

Reena Esmail (b. 1983)

borderlands...

World Premiere

Matana Roberts (b. 1975)

Intermission

Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132

Assai sostenuto - Allegro

Allegro ma non tanto

Adagio molto - Andante

Alla Marcia, assai vivace - Più allegro - Presto

Allegro appassionato

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

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Schisma

Caroline Shaw

Schisma is a reference to the phrase "in the cleft of the rock," which appears in many scriptures including the *Song of Solomon* and *Isaiah*. In the *Book of Exodus* (33:22), there is a beautiful line which reads: "I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by." It is essentially a promise of safety, of a makeshift refuge within a crack in something as hard and unforgiving as mountain rock, until the danger has passed. It is a kind of nest, a home. I have always felt that Beethoven's *Heiliger Dankgesang* (third movement of Opus 132) uses a nest-like architecture in a unique and profound way. The return of the dance-like *Neue Kraft fühlend* section always feels like a warm homecoming, a place of hope and shelter and deep comfort. The choice to title this piece with the modern Greek word *schisma* (a translation of the Hebrew נִקְרָת, or "cleft") is a reference to the islands in today's Greece which have become harsh refugee camps for Syrians seeking asylum from the war. It also points to the nature of war, of the break between peoples, and of the search for hope and new growth within the breaks and crevices.

—Caroline Shaw

Schisma commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by Madeline Island Chamber Music in honor of Caroline Marshall.

First performance, June 29, 2018 - Madeline Island, Wisconsin

Kanto Kechua #2

Gabriela Lena Frank

In my early thirties, after receiving a devastating diagnosis of a life-threatening autoimmune disease, I paradoxically entered the most uniquely creative period of my life. Looking back, I believe I might have been grasping at what was most life-affirming to me, terrified of impending surgeries, radiation, drugs, and pain. Over several months, I composed hours of chamber music, wrote bilingual poetry and a fantasy novel of time-travel back to my ancestral homeland of pre-Conquest Perú, knitted and sewed, mastered the tarot and intricate origami, dove into the alchemy of homemade soaps and face creams, interned in bee-keeping, cultivated sourdoughs, and learned to make cheese.

This was quite the prelude, bright and desperate both, to several years of treatment when most of my creative endeavors were muted. Now, a number of years later, scarred but healthy and working actively as a composer, I still carry around melodies born from that time; and in 2017, fashioned a quartet from this oddly luminescent wellspring into the first movement of *Walkabout: Concerto for Orchestra*, somewhat simplified for its symphonic weight. When I was approached by the brilliant string quartet Brooklyn Rider for a work on the theme of healing, I found my chance to hear these ideas for the nimbler string quartet, my original conception. The result is Kanto Kechua #2 ("Quechua Song" with Quechua being the dominant language of post-Inca Perú) now with all of its ornamental intricacies and string-crossing whirls under an achingly high if brief violin line. Throughout, motifs from native Andean folk music proliferate.

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I'm exceedingly grateful to be able to, at long last, bring this music to life as I step now in wellness and creative abundance.

—Gabriela Lena Frank

Kanto Kechua #2 commissioned by the Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel, Artistic Director, for Brooklyn Rider and Ballet Hispánico, choreographed by Claudia Schreier.
First performance, August 6, 2018 - Vail, Colorado

Zehher (Poison)

Reena Esmail

In September 2018, I developed an infection in my throat that wouldn't subside. For two weeks, it became increasingly difficult to swallow, to breathe and especially to speak. During this time of intense, painful silence, I thought about what this loss of voice represented for me. Of how many times in my life I had been rendered voiceless—either by others or by my own doing. Healing, in this case, was not about enduring the pain, but about releasing the poison I have always swallowed—that didn't belong to me. It was only when I felt myself begin to release that poisonous energy that I felt the physical infection begin to subside.

This piece was conceived during those dark weeks, and is simply about that release. It uses two incredibly beautiful Hindustani raags: the dark and mysterious Todi and the mournful Bhimpalās. While working on this piece, I was also working on a setting of a beautiful Hafiz poem which ends “When the violin can forgive / every hurt caused by others / the heart starts singing.” That is very much the spirit of this piece, too.

Zehher (Poison) generously commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by Judy Evnin. This evening's performance is the World Premiere.

borderlands...

Mantana Roberts

borderlands... is built around historical data about the US-Mexico border crisis and the problems that have ensued with the more recent archaic American immigration policies. I decided to focus on a type healing that is about healing cultural rifts, healing ideas of difference, healing through remembering history, healing by highlighting the protection of rights that should be afforded to every human, regardless of where they may come from. This used to be in the spirit of what it means to be American (to me). What is going on right now is not American. It's a sham and a shame. We can do better....

—Matana Roberts

borderlands... commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by The Visiting Quartet Residency Program at Arizona State University. This evening's performance is the World Premiere.

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Quartet No. 15 in A minor, Op. 132

Ludwig van Beethoven

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.
- (I Samuel 16.23)

The power of music to heal body, mind and spirit was a belief held from the ancient Greeks up through the ages. The topic is just as relevant today, where the synergy between music and healing is being passionately explored in the field of modern brain science (with some astounding findings). Whether the music itself is directly restorative or if it serves as a powerful and guiding metaphor has been long debated, but nevertheless, Beethoven's inherent belief in music's healing power is well illustrated by a visit he paid in 1804 to his former student, pianist Dorothea von Ertmann, following the death of her three-year-old son. Offering music, he prefaced an hour-long improvisation with the sparsely chosen words: "We will now speak to each other in tones." Beethoven's intimate friend Antonie Brentano also recalled that "...he visited me often, almost daily, and then he plays spontaneously because he has an urgent need to alleviate suffering, and he feels he is able to do so with his heavenly sounds..." The Quartet in A minor, Opus 132 is the second in a series of five quartets written at the request the Russian Prince Galitzin. These so-called late quartets represent an exquisite culmination of Beethoven's output as a composer. Evidence of the deaf composer's own suffering and search for higher meaning is found scattered throughout his notebooks during his final years and Opus 132 powerfully embodies the musical essence of late Beethoven; an autobiographical world that wrestles with questions surrounding life, death, and spirituality.

A harbinger of music to come, an almost obsessive drive towards overarching motivic and thematic unity permeates this quartet. A pair of semitones separated by an expressive leap is introduced in the opening bars of the first movement, these tones (in a great multitude of pitch values, inversions, and durations) serving as fodder for all that follows across the five-movement structure. Even with the sweetness of the memorable second theme, the opening movement is generally characterized by a brooding and highly combustible tendency. In contrast, Beethoven often relied on pastoral settings across his output to explore a sense of repose and spiritual renewal, here reflected in the amiable second movement. Flowing over a gentle topography, the material is still informed here by the general motif, though with stormy tendencies much subdued. Notable is the hurdy-gurdy trio section on an A drone, filling the listener with the restorative powers of the fresh air.

In the early spring of 1825, Beethoven found himself in the throes of an infected bowel—far more serious an affliction in the day—pausing his ability to continue work on the quartet. This episode is reflected in the sublime center of this five-movement quartet, the *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lidischen Tonart* (Song of Thanksgiving from a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode). Beethoven at this time in his life often

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looked back in the musical tradition for inspiration and as a way to imagine the future. Borrowing from the ancient church modes with his use of the Lydian scale (F major with a raised 4th scale degree), Beethoven's choice was most certainly not random; sixteenth century Italian theorist Gioseffe Zarlino observed that "the Lydian mode is a remedy for fatigue of the soul, and similarly for that of the body." Three serene and prayerful Lydian chorale prelude episodes, each occurrence increasingly intermingling the pure tones of the half note chorale with embellished prelude material, gradually create a sense of heavenly ascension across the movement. Modulating with the simple hinge of a C-sharp, two D major sections (*Neue Kraft fühlend*) break these reveries with joyous expressions of new strength and convalescence. My beloved chamber music coach while in school, Felix Galamir (then approaching 90) vividly demonstrated this by stepping from his chair one leg at a time and standing tall. In his case, he was not much taller standing than seated, but the point was nevertheless well received! But the *Heiliger Dankgesang* is not only a celebration of feeling new physical strength, but it is essentially an expression on the renewal of the soul. For Beethoven, the return of his physical health likely ran of secondary importance to a return of his creative powers. Touchingly written in the margin of a sketch for this movement is a note surely not meant for his doctor: "Thank you for giving me back the strength to enjoy life."

Beethoven seems to scorn those of us moved to tears by the sublime conclusion of the third movement with the interjection a raucous march, bringing us back to earth with bold force. This very brief movement leads into a heroic violin recitativo recalling the choral finale of his ninth symphony (Op 125), catapulting us into the highly turbulent world of the finale. Searching in various guises for resolution amidst strains found across all of the preceding movements, the virtuosic writing shows Beethoven very much writing for the future; how foreign the interlocking rhythms and gnarly contrapuntal figurations must have felt at the time (they still do)! And at the end of this monumental musical journey, one which invites the listener to confront and transcend his/her own fragilities, the music is drawn to conclusion with an effervescent coda, almost Mozart-like in its exuberance. Here is Beethoven once again playing with our emotions; it's either a joyful summation of our human ability to rise above life's challenges or a rebuke for taking ourselves too seriously. Or perhaps both?

—Nicholas Cords

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