Kronos Quartet

Music For Change: The Banned Countries

WHEN:  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20
7:30 PM

VENUE:  
BING
CONCERT HALL
Program

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh / Mugam Sayagi *

Islam Chipsy (arr. Jacob Garchik) / Zaghlaَّةٌ *
Composed for Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire

Traditional (arr. Stephen Prutsman) / Wa Habibi (Beloved) +

Ramallah Underground (arr. Jacob Garchik) / Tashweesh *

Aftab Darvishi / Winds from South *

World premiere

Omar Souleyman (arr. Jacob Garchik) / La Sidounak Sayyada
(I’ll Prevent the Hunters from Hunting You) +

Izak Algazi (arr. Jacob Garchik) / Yetzav Ha-El +

Sahba Aminikia / Pareeshān (Abstracted) *

Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky / Chang-Music IV: Movement II *

Traditional (arr. Milad Yousufi) / Bia Ke Berem Ba Mazar +

World premiere

Dur-Dur Band (arr. Jacob Garchik) / Dooyo +

World premiere

Hamza El Din (realized by Tohru Ueda) / Escalay (Water Wheel) *

Interstitial music:

Bass lines by Mamadou Kouyaté *

World premiere

Sound collages by David Harrington, Joel Tarman, and Nikolás McConnie-Saad *

World premiere

The program will be performed without intermission.

* Written for Kronos       + Arranged for Kronos

Presented with support from Stanford University’s
Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program In Iranian Studies

Artists

Kronos Quartet

David Harrington, violin
John Sherba, violin
Hank Dutt, viola
Sunny Yang, cello

Brian H. Scott, Lighting Designer
Brian Mohr, Sound Designer

Kronos extends special thanks to Chris Lorway and everyone at Stanford Live, Abbas Milani and Roma Parhad of Stanford University’s Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies, Joel Tarman of Sunset Youth Services, Mira Nabulsi, and Samuel Weiser, KPAA Intern.

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Music for Change: The Banned Countries

Kronos Quartet has always looked to music as a model for how to move through the world. A creative and cohesive force that doesn't heed or recognize borders, music provides an irrefutable response to those seeking to divide and demonize peoples. Music for Change: The Banned Countries came about in direct response to the 2017 Executive Orders severely restricting access to the United States, a policy that targeted citizens from seven Muslim-majority nations, all of which are represented in this program. From its inception some 45 years ago as a vehicle for George Crumb's epochal anti-war cri-de-coeur Black Angels, through extraordinary works like Steve Reich's haunted Different Trains and the excavation of Cold War anxiety on the album Howl, USA, Kronos has embraced the imperative that music must illuminate the present moment. The Banned Countries builds on that legacy. Drawn from throughout the far-flung Muslim world, the concert features newly commissioned arrangements, such as Dooyo by Somalia's Dur-Dur Band and Winds from South by Iran's Aftab Darvishi, as well as pieces gleaned from Kronos' long-standing repertoire.

—Program note by Andy Gilbert

About the Program
Franghiz Ali-Zadeh (b. 1947)
Mugam Sayagi (1993)

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh was born in Azerbaijan, a republic of the Soviet States. She first came to prominence as a composer and performer while still a student of the celebrated composer Kara Karayev. Ali-Zadeh is highly regarded for her creativity and distinctive style. Her compositions draw from the vocabulary of modern European classical music, including the Second Viennese School, and incorporate the sounds of mugham (the main modal unit of Arabic music), music traditional to Azerbaijan. As a pianist, she performs at international festivals, playing programs that include the works of Crumb, Messiaen, and Schoenberg, composers she has popularized for Eastern audiences. She is recognized as a master interpreter of works by 20th-century European and American composers, the Soviet avant garde, and traditional Azerbaijani composers.

About Mugam Sayagi,
Franghiz Ali-Zadeh writes:

“Kronos encouraged me to use the Azeri musical tradition of Mugami—a secret language used in the 16th century to disguise emotions discouraged in Islam. Through Mugami, the ecstatic longing of a man for a woman could be expressed as the love of God.

Program Notes

“It begins as a meditation, in darkness, only the cello is lit, trying to wake the world with the call to prayer. The cello is the composer’s voice—a woman. Nothing changes, and you don’t believe it can. It goes on and on, then suddenly, it explodes, in a flash! Concealed passion breaks out in wild dancing, or in virtuosic cadenzas. The violin plays an unbounded song of love where the soul flies high into the sky. It’s a competition among them all—who can be more perfect? Then comes the finale, and an end. The cello is alone again, intoning the sunset prayer. The sound of the triangle echoes a myriad of stars.”

Islam Chipsy (b. 1985)
Zaghlala (2017)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Islam Chipsy and his band EEK are a three-way force of nature from Cairo, Egypt described by those who’ve been caught in the eye of their storm as one of the most exciting live propositions on the planet. At the core of the group lies keyboard pioneer Islam Chipsy, whose joyous, freewheeling sonic blitz warps the standard oriental scale system into otherworldly shapes, as flanked by Mohamed Karam and Mahmoud Refat raining down a percussive maelstrom behind dual drum kits.

About Zaghlala, Andy Gilbert writes:

“If Kronos Quartet had a motto it might be something like: Taking string players to places they’ve never been before. With Jacob Garchik’s surging arrangement of Zaghlala (Blurred vision caused by strong light hitting the eyes) by Egyptian keyboardist Islam Chipsy, Kronos not only transports intrepid string quartets to the ecstatic milieu of a Cairo nightclub, but the chart also literally turns one ensemble member into a drummer, adding percussive drive to the tune’s lapidary churn. As part of Fifty for the Future, Kronos’ ongoing project to make new music works readily available to aspiring string ensembles, Garchik’s score is accessible free on the Kronos website, ‘where you can see how the piece can be played in such a way that each one of us can be the drummer,’ says David Harrington. ‘Wouldn’t it be cool if every string quartet player in the world could be this Arabic drummer? So far Hank Dutt is ours, but that’s not to say that the rest of us won’t do it at some point.’

“With his ear already drawn to the region by the Arab Spring protests, Harrington ‘kept coming back to Islam Chipsy,’ he says. Part of Egypt’s thriving underground music scene, Chipsy’s EEK trio has carved out a singular sonic niche distinct from
the electro-chaabi artists who are almost required at wedding celebrations. Raw and lo-fi, his music is both virtuosic and unabashedly hand-crafted: ‘There’s a certain way that he plays where he takes his fist and slams it into the keyboard that feels so visceral and exciting,’ Harrington says. ‘There’s also this sense of fun and abandonment. I can imagine thousands of people dancing.’

“Kronos premiered Zaghlala at NPR Music’s 10th Anniversary Concert in December 2017. For Garchik, the challenge was capturing the torrential textures generated by the drum kit tandem of Mohamed Karam and Mahmoud Refat and Chipsy’s keyboard, ‘which he plays like a percussionist,’ Garchik says, employing inexpensive, cracked software like FruityLoops on a keyboard designed for Middle Eastern scales. The instrument allows him to play huge, swooping glissandos with a finger, ‘glissing an octave or more up or down, and I wasn’t sure if Kronos would be able to handle the speed and range. The string players have to do the hard work, but it comes off really well.’

“One of them actually has to play a percussion instrument,’ he says. ‘That’s always a challenge, but Kronos is not afraid. For the other players, the parts are very rhythmic and syncopated. I simplified the drum part so that it’s playable for someone in a string quartet. The challenge is to play together and get a nice groove.”

Traditional
Wa Habibi (Beloved)
[unknown/arr. 2003]
Arranged by Stephen Prutsman (b. 1960)

Wa Habibi is a devotional hymn drawn from the Arab Christian tradition in Lebanon. Meditative and soul-searching, it is often sung on Good Friday as celebrated in the Arab Orthodox Church. On this holy day, the hymn evokes the love and sorrow of spiritual faith. This arrangement of Wa Habibi is based on an interpretation, recorded live on Easter in the early 1960s, by the legendary Lebanese singer, Fairuz (also spelled Fayrouz or Fairouz). Met with unprecedented enthusiasm, Fairuz’s early songs featured the singer’s distinct vocal timbre and lyrics expressing romantic love and nostalgia for village life. They meshed with a delicate orchestral blend, in which Arab instruments figured prominently, but which also subtly incorporated European instruments and European popular dance rhythms. She also became known for her renditions of Arab folk tunes and religious songs. By the early 1960s Fairuz was a celebrity throughout the Arab world; in her homeland, she is sometimes known as the “Ambassador to the Stars” for her emotional singing.

Ramallah Underground
Tashweesh (2008)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Ramallah Underground (RU) is a musical collective, based in Ramallah, Palestine, attempting to rejuvenate Arabic culture through their music. RU was founded by artists Boikutt, Stormtrap, and Aswatt. They produce music ranging from hip hop to trip hop to down tempo. The members started off as producers; Boikutt and Stormtrap later picked up the mic and began to MC in Arabic, which added a political layer to the music. Their work comes out of a deep sense of their local culture and imposing presence of Palestine in their lives.

The members of RU, as producers and as MCs, have collaborated and performed with artists across the globe, from Lebanon, United Kingdom, Switzerland, United States, France, The Netherlands, and other countries. RU has also performed live shows in
Ramallah, Bethlehem, Vienna, London, Cairo, Lausanne, Brussels, Amsterdam, and Washington, DC. In recent live performances, RU has incorporated a visual set, created by Palestinian visual artist Ruanne. RU’s express hope is to give a voice to Palestinians and Arabs, bringing an alternative voice from the Arab world.

About Tashweesh, David Harrington of the Kronos Quartet writes:

“I first heard Ramallah Underground on MySpace. Their sound was distinctive, and they seemed very interesting as a group. They were open to the world of music. I began an email correspondence with them, and found that one member lived in Palestine, another in Vienna, and the third in Dubai. I sent them a bunch of Kronos CDs and in exchange they sent me a lot of their music. After I had spent a lot of time with their work, I felt it would be great if they would write for Kronos. Tashweesh is the result.”

Aftab Darvishi (b. 1987)
Winds from South (2018)

Aftab Darvishi was born in Tehran, Iran. She started playing violin at age five, and as she grew older, she got in touch with other instruments like the kamancheh (Iranian string instrument) and classical piano. Darvishi has studied Music Performance at University of Tehran, Composition at Royal Conservatory of The Hague and Composing for film and Carnatic Music (South Indian music) at Conservatory of Amsterdam.

Darvishi has presented her music in various festivals in Europe and Asia working with various ensembles. She has also attended various artistic residencies, such AiEP Contemporary Dance Company (Milan), Kinitiras studio (Athens), and Akropoditi Dance center (Syros). She is a former member of KhZ ensemble; an experimental electronic ensemble with supervision of Yannis Kyriakides that has performed in various festivals such as the Holland Festival. After her graduation, she has been regularly invited as a guest lecturer at the University of Tehran.

In 2014, Darvishi was short-listed for the 20th Young Composer meeting in Apeldoorn (Netherlands) and in 2015, she won the Music Education award from Listhus Artist Residency to hold workshops for presenting Persian music to music teachers at Music School of Fjallabyggd, Iceland. In 2016, Darvishi was awarded the prestigious Tenso Young Composers Award for her piece And the world stopped Lacking you... for a cappella choir.

About Winds from South, Aftab Darvishi writes:

“In the Southeast of Iran, in the Baluchistan region, they believe that there are winds that, when going to one’s body, are able to destroy the body and mind. They believe that the only way to get rid of these winds is by holding a ceremony called ‘Govati.’ This ceremony is strongly based on music. It’s very rhythmic, repetitive, and can last for days and nights. There are similar healing ceremonies in the South of Iran that are strongly influenced by African music, but Govati is one of the few that is based on pure Baluchi music.

“In this piece, I am using the patterns that are played in the introduction of Govati. These patterns are usually played by Ghaychak (bowed string instrument) in a certain mode called ‘Zahirouk.’

“Unfortunately, we are living in a time in which, as an Iranian-Dutch Artist, I, as many of my fellows, am not allowed to enter the United States of America. But I feel so blessed that I have a voice called Music and it is probably stronger than any presence. That is how, with the great support of Kronos Quartet and Stanford University, my piece Winds from South found its way, all the way from Baluchistan, to be heard tonight.”

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Omar Souleyman (b. 1966)
La Sidounak Sayyada (2009)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Omar Souleyman is a Syrian musical legend. Since 1994, he and his musicians have been a staple of folk-pop throughout Syria, issuing more than 500 studio and live-recorded albums which are easily spotted in the shops of any Syrian city. He was born in rural Northeastern Syria, and the myriad musical traditions of the region are evident in his music. Classical Arabic mawal-style vocalization gives way to high-octane Syrian Dabke (the regional folkloric dance and party music), Iraqi Choubi and a host of Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish styles, among others. This amalgamation is truly the sound of Syria. His popularity has risen steadily and the group tirelessly performs concerts throughout Syria and has accepted invitations to perform abroad in Saudi Arabia, Dubai, and Lebanon.

Izak Algazi (1889–1950)
Yetzav Ha-El (arr. 2012)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

One of the great Sephardic singers of the early 20th century, Rabbi Izak Algazi Efendi was born in Izmir, a Turkish port city on the Aegean Sea. A third-generation Jewish cantor, he was a master of Ottoman Turkish music as well as Jewish liturgical music. In his mid-30s, he moved to Istanbul, where his fame as a rabbi and a musician grew. During the decade in which he lived in Istanbul, he became a major figure in the Jewish community, and also sang Turkish music for Atatürk at Dolmabahçe Palace. He later moved to Paris and then to Montevideo, Uruguay, where a significant population of Jewish Izmir emigrants had settled. He lived in South America for the remainder of his life.

Though he was well known in Istanbul in his prime, little written documentation about him exists. However, there are a number of extant recordings of his singing, which feature his exceptional range, that were originally released on 78 rpms. A digital transfer of some of these recordings was released by Wergo Records on the album Cantor Isaac Algazi: Sweet Singer of Israel. This arrangement of the Hebrew prayer Yetzav Ha-El, with text by the 12th-century Jewish poet-philosopher Yehudah Halevy, is inspired by a recording from this album.

Sahba Aminikia (b. 1981)
Pareeshān (Abstracted) (2016)

Born in Tehran, Iran, composer and pianist Sahba Aminikia studied music composition in Russia at the St. Petersburg State Conservatory under Boris Ivanovich Tischenko, a student of Dmitri Shostakovich. In his homeland, Aminikia studied under renowned Iranian pianists Nikan Milani, Safa Shahidi, and Gagik Babayan, and was influenced greatly by the work with his first teacher composer Mehran Rouhani, a student of Sir Michael Tippett.

Aminikia received his Bachelor of Music and Master of Music with honors from San Francisco Conservatory of Music under Dan Becker, David Garner, and David Conte, where he was the proud recipient of the Phyllis Wattis Foundation scholarship. He is the recipient of commissions from theater troupes to contemporary classical ensembles, Persian traditional music groups to jazz bands, including Kronos Quartet, Symphony Parnassus, San Francisco Conservatory of Music New Music Ensemble, Mobius Trio, Delphi Trio, and The Living Earth Show.

About Pareeshān, Sahba Aminikia writes:

*Parviz Yahaghi (1936–2007) was one of the most prominent Persian violinists and a composer of many iconic melodies. He lived in Iran for the entirety of his life, despite the fact that he was banned from performing and publishing for almost 20 years after the Iranian revolution in 1979. He was
allowed to publish two albums in the late 1990s, but during his last years, he was no longer physically able to play the violin. He belonged to the generation of composers who translated Persian music for Western instruments and developed their own methods of performance and sonority, in accordance to the fine details of Persian music theory. These techniques are unique and dictate that the string instrument be processed and amplified. These portable amplifiers are manufactured in Iran, and for the purpose of this piece, four of them travelled a long way from Tehran to San Francisco to make it to the premiere. This piece is an homage to one of Parviz Yahaghi’s melodies named ‘Pareeshān’ (abstracted)."
Let us go to Mazar (Shrine) O dear
Mullah Mohammad
To see the tulips there, O sweet beloved
O generous one, O lion of God,
heal my pain
Plead on my behalf before God
Let us go to Mazar (Shrine) O dear
Mullah Mohammad
Let us weep and weep, O sweet beloved

Dur-Dur Band
Dooyo (2013)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

After Kronos’ Artistic Director David Harrington mentioned The Banned Countries initiative while chatting with a Somali woman following a performance, she spoke of the profusion of extraordinary music that surrounded her when she was growing up. “I asked if she could make a selection of music that was important to her, and I got this amazing email with all kinds of possibilities,” Harrington says. “One of the first suggestions was Dur-Dur Band. I spent the next year listening to as many of their tracks as I could find, and I keep coming back to ‘Dooyo.’ There’s something remarkable about that music. It magnetizes me every time I hear it.”

Gleaned from the album Dur-Dur Band Vol. 5 (Awesome Tapes From Africa), the incantatory piece exemplifies the roiling creativity and wide-open aesthetic that characterized Mogadishu in the 1980s. While steeped in jazz and traditional Somali forms, Dur-Dur Band was dialed into popular music from around the world, particularly funk and disco grooves reabsorbed and refracted in various permutations around the dauntingly diverse continent. “Dooyo” is a dance floor anthem with infectious call-and-response vocals, and it’s not hard to hear why the group was among Somalia’s most popular by the late 1980s. Like in neighboring Ethiopia, a
golden age of music came to a rapid and horrific end with the fall of the central government. Decades of unrelenting civil war have scattered Somali musicians around the world (Dur-Dur Band’s lead vocalist is reportedly living in Columbus, Ohio), and the band’s recordings have survived mostly via low-fi cassette tapes.

Commissioned to create an arrangement of “Dooyo,” go-to Kronos confederate Jacob Garchik keyed into the mysterious details that make the piece distinctive. “If you transcribe the song it doesn’t look that different from any American funk tune, but something about the low-fi recording and the sound of the guitar is very African, a rhythmic nuance or the way it’s tuned,” he said. More than anything he sought to tap into the song’s celebratory feel. “It’s going to be funky and fun and danceable,” he said. “The challenge is trying to make it groove. I’d like to do a little sound design too. There’s a delay effect when the vocal comes in, and that’s something that would be cool to do on the violin. We’re creating something new of course, but hopefully this arrangement can let people know about music that they otherwise might not hear.”

Like a sandcastle on the beach, barriers dividing peoples aren’t destined to last long. Kronos Quartet’s The Banned Countries is part of the tide sweeping the walls away.

—Program note by Andy Gilbert

Hamza El Din (1929–2006)
Escalay (Water Wheel) (1989)
Realized by Tohru Ueda

In the society of what once was Nubia, the waterwheel was the oldest mechanical device used for farmland irrigation. When Nubian musician Hamza El Din was commissioned by Lincoln Center to compose his first piece for the Kronos Quartet, he sought to recreate both the sounds and the images of that ancient culture. “My country was flooded after the construction of the Aswan dam,” El Din explained, “and we lost it after a recorded history of 9,000 years, so I have a nostalgia for that place. Escalay is a representation of how to start the waterwheel and let it run.”

Born in Nubia in 1929, and educated at the Fouad Institute of Music in Cairo and the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, El Din was living and teaching in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time of his death in 2006. For Escalay, he drew upon both the musical and the cultural traditions of his homeland. “Our music system is Afro-Arab—we are a bridge, musically and culturally, between Africa and the Middle East,” he said. “I wanted the Quartet to represent the sound of my instrument, the oud. The challenge was to make audible the overtones that only the musician can hear from a solo instrument—the ‘unheard’ voice. Amazingly, Kronos performs it as if they are from that place.

“I was in New York when the Aswan Dam was finished. I lost my village. When I went back and saw my village and my people in a different place, I saw in their eyes the loss. I saw my people were lost. They had moved to an almost semi-desert place. When I came back I was lost myself. I was playing my oud, doing nothing except repeating a phrase. I was on the water wheel, the oldest surviving machine in our land. Whoever sits on that machine will become hypnotized by that noise.

“Terry Riley introduced me to Kronos, who asked me to write a piece for them. They liked the idea of the water wheel. Everyone who sits behind the oxen, which help the water wheel go round, will express himself according to his age. If it’s a child, he’ll sing a children’s song. If it’s a woman or a man, they’ll sing a love song. If it’s an older man, he’ll sing a religious song. I wrote this as the sound of the older man, so with Kronos it becomes a religious song.”

—Program note by Derk Richardson
Kronos Quartet

For more than 40 years, San Francisco’s Kronos Quartet—David Harrington (violin), John Sherba (violin), Hank Dutt (viola), and Sunny Yang (cello)—has pursued a singular artistic vision, combining a spirit of fearless exploration with a commitment to continually reimagine the string quartet experience. In the process, Kronos has become one of the most celebrated and influential groups of our time, performing thousands of concerts worldwide, releasing more than 60 recordings of extraordinary breadth and creativity, collaborating with many of the world’s most intriguing and accomplished composers and performers, and commissioning more than 950 works and arrangements for string quartet. Kronos has received over 40 awards, including both the Polar Music and Avery Fisher Prize, two of the most prestigious awards given to musicians, a Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance (2004) and “Musicians of the Year” (2003) from Musical America.

Kronos’ adventurous approach dates back to the ensemble’s origins. In 1973, David Harrington was inspired to form Kronos after hearing George Crumb’s Black Angels, a highly unorthodox, Vietnam War–inspired work featuring bowed water glasses, spoken word passages, and electronic effects. Kronos then began building a compellingly eclectic repertoire for string quartet, performing and recording works by 20th-century masters (Bartók, Webern, Schnittke), contemporary composers (Vladimir

About the Artists

Jay Blakesberg
Martynov, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Sahba Aminikia), jazz legends (Charles Mingus, Maria Schneider, Thelonious Monk), rock artists (Jimi Hendrix, The Who’s Pete Townshend, Sigur Rós), and artists who truly defy genre (performance artist Laurie Anderson, visual artist Trevor Paglen, spoken-word poets from Youth Speaks).

Integral to Kronos’ work is a series of long-running, in-depth collaborations with many of the world’s foremost composers. One of the quartet’s most frequent composer-collaborators is “Father of Minimalism” Terry Riley, whose work with Kronos includes Salome Dances for Peace (1985–86); Sun Rings (2002), a NASA-commissioned multimedia ode to the earth and its people that features celestial sounds and images from space; and The Serquent Risadome, premiered during Kronos’ 40th Anniversary Celebration at Carnegie Hall in 2014. In 2015, Nonesuch Records released One Earth, One People, One Love: Kronos Plays Terry Riley, a five-disc, four album box set dedicated to Riley that included the new release Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector: Music of Terry Riley. Kronos commissioned and recorded the three string quartets of Polish composer Henryk Górecki, with whom the group worked for more than 25 years. The quartet has also collaborated...
extensively with composers such as Philip Glass, recording an album of his string quartets in 1995 and premiering String Quartets No. 6 in 2013 and No. 7 in 2014; Azerbaijan’s Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, whose works are featured on the full-length 2005 release Mugam Sayagi; Steve Reich, whom Kronos has worked with on recordings of the Grammy-winning composition Different Trains (1989), Triple Quartet (2001), and WTC 9/11 (2011); among many other composers and arrangers.

In addition to composers, Kronos counts numerous performers from around the world among its collaborators, including the Chinese pipa virtuoso Wu Man; Azeri master vocalist Alim Qasimov; legendary Bollywood “playback singer” Asha Bhosle, featured on Kronos’ 2005 Grammy-nominated CD You’ve Stolen My Heart: Songs from R.D. Burman’s Bollywood; Inuit throat singer Tanya Tagaq; Mexican rockers Café Tacvba; the Romanian gypsy band Taraf de Haidouks; the Malian griot musicians Trio Da Kali; and Iranian vocalist Mahsa Vahdat. Kronos has performed live with the likes of Paul McCartney, David Bowie, Patti Smith, Allen Ginsberg, Jarvis Cocker, Zakir Hussain, Modern Jazz Quartet, Noam Chomsky, Rokia Traoré, Tom Waits, Rhiannon Giddens, Howard Zinn, Betty Carter, Van Dyke Parks, Caetano Veloso, k.d. lang, Amanda Palmer, Jherek Bischoff, The National, mûm, and Lau’s Martin Green, and has appeared on recordings by artists such as Nine Inch Nails, Dan Zanes, Glenn Kotche, Dave Matthews Band, Nelly Furtado, Joan Armatrading, Don Walser, Angelique Kidjo, and Dan Wilson. In dance, the famed choreographers Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, Twyla Tharp, Eiko & Koma, and Paul Lightfoot and Sol León (Nederlands Dans Theater) have created pieces with Kronos’ music.

Kronos’ work has been featured prominently in a number of films, including the Academy Award-nominated documentaries How to Survive a Plague (2012) and Dirty Wars (2013), for which Kronos’ David Harrington served as Music Supervisor. Kronos also performed scores by Philip Glass for the films Mishima and Dracula (a 1999 restored edition of the 1931 Tod Browning-directed Bela Lugosi classic), by Clint Mansell for the Darren Aronofsky films Noah (2014), The Fountain (2006), and Requiem for a Dream (2000), by Terry Riley for François Girard’s Hocelaga terre des âmes (2017), and by Jacob Garchik for Guy Maddin’s The Green Fog — A San Francisco Fantasia (2017). Additional films featuring Kronos’ music include La grande bellezza (The Great Beauty, 2013), 21 Grams (2003), Heat (1995), and True Stories (1986), among others. A Thousand Thoughts, a live documentary co-directed and written by filmmakers Sam Green and Joe Bini that features live narration by Green and live music Kronos Quartet, premiered in 2018 at the Sundance Film Festival and Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University and begins touring the world later this year.

The quartet spends five months of each year on tour, appearing in concert halls, clubs, and festivals around the world including Carnegie Hall, Disney Hall, Barbican in London, BAM Next Wave Festival, Big Ears, Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, WOMAD, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, Shanghai Concert Hall, Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Sydney Opera House, Victoria Hall in Geneva, Switzerland, and Haydn Hall in Schloss Esterhazy.

Kronos is equally prolific and wide-ranging on recordings. The ensemble’s expansive discography on Nonesuch Records includes collections like Pieces of Africa (1992), a showcase of African-born composers, which simultaneously topped Billboard’s Classical and World Music lists; 1998’s ten-disc anthology, Kronos Quartet: 25 Years; Nuevo (2002), a Grammy- and Latin Grammy-nominated celebration of Mexican culture; and the 2004 Grammy-winner, Alban Berg’s Lyric Suite, featuring renowned soprano Dawn Upshaw. In celebration of the quartet’s 40th anniversary season in 2014, Nonesuch
released both Kronos Explorer Series, a five-CD retrospective boxed set, and the single-disc A Thousand Thoughts, featuring mostly unreleased recordings from throughout Kronos’ career. Kronos’ most recent releases include Folk Songs, which features Sam Amidon, Olivia Chaney, Rhiannon Giddens, and Natalie Merchant singing traditional folk songs with arrangements by Jacob Garchik, Nico Muhly, Donnacha Dennehy, and Gabe Witcher; the collaborative album Ladilikan with Trio Da Kali, an ensemble of Malian griot musicians assembled by Aga Khan Music Initiative; the collaborative album Landfall with the venerable multi-disciplinary artist Laurie Anderson; Clouded Yellow, a collection of work written for Kronos by Bang on the Can founding composer Michael Gordon; and vinyl re-releases of Pieces of Africa, Dracula, Requiem for a Dream, and The Fountain. Music publishers Boosey & Hawkes and Kronos have released two volumes of Kronos Collection sheet music, featuring works by Terry Riley, Hamza el Din, Aleksandra Vrebalov, and Osvaldo Golijov.

In addition to its role as a performing and recording ensemble, the quartet is committed to mentoring emerging performers and composers and has led workshops, master classes, and other education programs with Carnegie Hall’s Weill Music Institute, Kaufman Music Center’s Face the Music, Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and through the Embassy Adoption Program (a program of Washington Performing Arts and District of Columbia Public Schools), among other institutions in the U.S. and overseas. Kronos has recently undertaken extended educational residencies at UC Berkeley’s Cal Performances, Holland Festival, Texas Performing Arts Association at the University of Texas at Austin, New York University Abu Dhabi, and Mount Royal University Conservatory.

With a staff of 11, the nonprofit Kronos Performing Arts Association (KPAA) manages all aspects of Kronos’ work, including commissioning, concert tours and local performances, education programs, and a self-produced Kronos Festival in San Francisco. In 2015, KPAA launched Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire, an education and legacy project that is commissioning—and distributing for free—the first learning library of contemporary repertoire for string quartet. Designed expressly for the training of students and emerging professionals, ten new works (five by women and five by men) are being composed each year over the next five years. Scores and parts, as well as supplemental learning materials that include recordings, videos, performance notes, and composer interviews, are available on kronosquartet.org. Lead partner Carnegie Hall and an adventurous group of project partners, including presenters, academic institutions, foundations, and individuals, have joined forces with KPAA to support this exciting program.

Arranger Biographies

Jacob Garchik
Jacob Garchik, multi-instrumentalist and composer, was born in San Francisco in 1976 and has lived in New York since 1994. At home in a wide variety of styles and musical roles, he is a vital part of the Downtown and Brooklyn scene, playing trombone with the Lee Konitz Nonet, Ohad Talmor/Steve Swallow Sextet, Mary Halvorson Octet, and the John Hollenbeck Large Ensemble. He has released four albums as a leader including The Heavens: the Atheist Gospel Trombone Album. He co-leads Brooklyn’s premiere Mexican brass band, Banda de los Muertos. Since 2006 Garchik has contributed dozens of arrangements and transcriptions for Kronos Quartet of music from all over the world.

Stephen Prutsman
Born in Los Angeles in 1960, Stephen Prutsman began playing the piano by
ear before moving on to more formal music studies. In his early teens, he was the keyboard player for several rock groups, including Cerberus and Vysion. In the early '90s he was a medal winner at the Tchaikovsky and Queen Elisabeth piano competitions, which led to performances in various prestigious music centers and with leading orchestras in the U.S. and Europe. In 2004, Prutsman was appointed to a three-year term to the position of Artistic Partner with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, where he acts as composer, arranger, conductor, program host, and pianist. Prutsman’s long collaboration with Kronos has resulted in over 40 arrangements of distinctive and varying musical languages.

Milad Yousufi

Milad Yousufi is a pianist, composer, conductor, poet, singer, painter, and calligrapher of Afghan culture and heritage. Born in 1995 during the civil war and Taliban rule in Afghanistan, when music was completely banned, Yousufi began painting at the age of two—he painted piano keys on paper and pretended to play. For five years, when the Taliban rule was lifted, the arts flourished in Afghanistan, and after only three years of formal piano training, Yousufi was accepted into a music program in Denmark. Upon his return to Afghanistan, Yousufi began teaching at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, and when The Afghan Youth Orchestra was formed in 2011, Yousufi became the first Afghan Conductor. Yousufi has since moved to the United States, after being awarded a full scholarship to attend Mannes School of Music in New York. He has composed for The New York Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, The Refugee Orchestra Project, among others. He hopes to make a difference in the future of music and culture in Afghanistan and be the bridge between east and west.

Commission Credits

Aftab Darvishi’s Winds from South; Milad Yousufi’s arrangement of Bia Ke Berem Ba Mazar (Traditional); Jacob Garchik’s arrangement of Dur-Dur Band’s Dooyo; Mamadou Koyate’s bass lines; and David Harrington, Joel Tarman, and Nikolás McConnie-Saad’s sound collages were commissioned by the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies at Stanford University for the Kronos Quartet’s Music for Change: The Banned Countries.

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh’s Mugam Sayagi was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Nora Norden and appears on Kronos’ recordings Mugam Sayagi: Music of Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, Night Prayers, and Kronos’ 10-CD box set Kronos Quartet: 25 Years, all released on Nonesuch Records. She has written four works for Kronos, including a piece for Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire.

Islam Chipsy’s Zaghlala was commissioned as part of the Kronos Performing Arts Association’s Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire, which is made possible by a group of adventurous partners, including Stanford Live, Carnegie Hall, and many others. Launched in the 2015/16 season, Kronos’ Fifty for the Future is commissioning 50 new works—by 25 women and 25 men—devoted to contemporary approaches to the string quartet and designed expressly for the training of students and emerging professionals. Kronos premieres each piece and creates companion digital materials, including scores, recordings, and performance notes, which can be accessed online for free.

Stephen Prutsman’s arrangement of Wa Habibi (Beloved) was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Simon Collier.

Ramallah Underground’s Tashweesh, arranged by Jacob Garchik, was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the Columbia Foundation and the David Harrington Research and Development Fund. Kronos’ recording is available on Floodplain, released on Nonesuch Records.
Jacob Garchik’s arrangement of Omar Souleyman’s La Sidounak Sayyada was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund.

Jacob Garchik’s arrangement of Izak Algazi’s Yetzav Ha-El was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund, and is part of a five-song cycle dedicated to the memory of Harold Goldberg.

Sahba Aminikia’s Pareeshān (Abstracted) was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the Kronos Performing Arts Association.

Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky’s Chang-Music IV was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Hamza El Din’s Escalay was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and is included on the Quartet’s Nonesuch recording Pieces of Africa. Sheet music for Escalay is available in Volume 1 of the Kronos Collection, a performing edition published by Boosey & Hawkes.

For the Kronos Quartet/Kronos Performing Arts Association:
Janet Cowperthwaite, Managing Director
Mason Dille, Development Manager
Dana Dizon, Business Operations Manager
Sarah Donahue, Production Operations Manager
Lauren Frankel, Development Associate
Scott Fraser, Senior Sound Designer
Sasha Hnatkovich, Communications Manager
Sara Langlands, Community Engagement & Festival Manager

Reshena Liao, Creative Projects Manager
Nikolás McConnie-Saad, Office Manager
Brian Mohr, Sound Designer, Technical Manager
Kären Nagy, Strategic Initiatives Director
Brian H. Scott, Lighting Designer

Contact:
Kronos Quartet/Kronos Performing Arts Association
P. O. Box 225340
San Francisco, CA 94122-5340 USA
kronosquartet.org
facebook.com/kronosquartet
instagram.com/kronos_quartet
twitter.com/kronosquartet

The Kronos Quartet records for Nonesuch Records.

Upcoming Events

Beethoven Meets Frankenstein
Nov 3 • 7:30 PM
Bing Studio

The Routes of Slavery
Jordi Savall
Nov 4 • 4:00 PM
Bing Concert Hall

Tickets and information:
live.stanford.edu