

AMHERST COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC  
PRESENTS

# Aizuri Quartet

Emma Frucht and Miho Saegusa, Violins  
Ayane Kozasa, Viola  
Karen Ouzounian, Cello

Friday, September 30, 2022 • Buckley Recital Hall • 8 PM

MUSIC AT **AMHERST** SERIES

# PROGRAM

“Sunrise”

*Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen* (1844)

Clara W. Schumann  
(1819-1896)  
arr. Karen Ouzounian

String Quartet No. 4, Sz. 91 (1928)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Allegro  
Prestissimo, con sordino  
Non troppo lento  
Allegretto pizzicato  
Allegro molto

—Intermission—

*Sivunittinni* (2015)

Tanya Tagaq (b. 1975)  
arr. Jacob Garchik

*Commissioned for Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire, a project of the Kronos Performing Arts Association. The score and parts are available for free online. <https://50ft.kronosquartet.org>*

String Quartet in B-flat Major,  
Op. 76 No. 4, “Sunrise” (1797)

Joseph Haydn  
(1732-1809)

Allegro con spirito  
Adagio  
Menuetto  
Allegro ma non troppo

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*Please silence your mobile phone, pager, watch, or any other electronic noise-makers during the concert. Please refrain from using electronic devices with light-producing screens, as they are distracting to your fellow audience members.*

***Cameras and recording devices are strictly prohibited.***

## PROGRAM NOTES

From the moment darkness envelops the sky to the first shades of pink at dawn, night is fascinating and mysterious. For some of us, the mind and body wind down, giving way to delicious rest and sleep. For others, the mind activates and creativity blooms. We contemplate and question in different ways than during the day, with a different perspective. No wonder night has served as inspiration for many artists, writers, poets, composers, and thinkers!

Clara Wieck Schumann had already established an impressive career as a touring pianist and composer by the time she married Robert Schumann in 1840. Buoyed by Robert's encouragement to "Write a song!", Clara gifted him three songs for their first Christmas together. *Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen (I stand darkly dreaming)*, which eventually became part of *Sechs Lieder, Op. 13*, was a setting of a Heinrich Heine poem.

The two and a half minutes of this song, arranged for the quartet by our cellist Karen Ouzounian, are filled with tenderness and yearning. It was written after a period of separation for the newlywed couple, during which they may have shared the intimate act of looking at each other's portraits with longing, like in the opening lines of this song. The pulsing texture in the accompaniment provides a sense of constancy, even as chromaticism betrays anxious thoughts and emotions. Like the Schumanns, our desire to seek connection—to other people, to our world, inwards to our minds and dreams—can be heightened at night, whether we are with others or find ourselves alone.

We love Béla Bartók's Fourth Quartet for its vitality and abandon. He skillfully uses effects such as mutes, slides, and pizzicato to create new sounds and textures out of this combination of instruments. Throughout, we are players on high alert to navigate the intricate interactions between our four parts, which at times mirror each other, face off in pairs, and come together before immediately splitting off in separate directions. Bartók drew inspiration from the folk music he collected and studied, from years of field work in his native Hungary and beyond (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Serbia, northern Africa). He internalized the tunes, rhythms, textures, and emotions, infusing his own musical voice with elements of the folk music he heard.

The five movements of this quartet are structured like an arc: the first and last movements are a pair, the second and fourth movements share scherzo-like features, and Bartók called the third movement the "kernel" of the work.

Ideas of great adventure are often born at night, and the first movement launches like the beginning of a bold quest. Bartók plays with mirror images in the main motive of the first movement (three rising notes followed by three quickly falling notes), which appears once again near the end of the last movement. The Finale caps off the journey with spirited and visceral rhythms.

The second movement goes by in a flash, like watching a faded and sped-up time lapse of a village dance as bodies twirl and leap and feet stomp, before everyone goes home and the square empties. The equally brief fourth movement, entirely pizzicato, is a dance on unpredictable ground that requires nimble feet. At times charming, cheeky, and off-kilter, it is the first time Bartók uses the technique of snap pizzicato which became known as the “Bartók pizzicato.”

The central third movement features Bartók’s night music, used primarily in his slow movements. The cello introduces a soul deep in contemplation, enveloped by the sounds of the shimmering night. Nocturnal creatures from all corners awaken and fill the air with sounds of activity. It is as if we find ourselves in a darkened space, and we become more keenly aware of our surroundings as other senses come alive.

Composers today continue to stretch the string quartet’s sound palette in expressive and powerful ways. For Tanya Tagaq, an Inuk singer, songwriter, novelist, and multi-disciplinary artist, her musical expression is rooted in traditional Inuit throat singing and culture while also incorporating electronica, industrial, and metal influences. She developed a distinctive solo form of throat singing, unique because many forms of Inuit throat singing are performed by two women. The process of creating this piece involved translating the sounds that live in her body into the body of stringed instruments.

Our voyage continues with Tagaq’s *Sivunittinni*, which means “the future ones.” She says, “My hope is to bring a little bit of the land to future musicians through this piece. There’s a disconnect in the human condition, a disconnect from nature, and it has caused a great deal of social anxiety and fear, as well as a lack of true meaning of health, and a lack of a relationship with what life is, so maybe this piece can be a little bit of a wake-up.” The things we learn from processing our waking lives and thoughts at night become catalysts to move us forward. Through our dreams, we can nurture hope and grapple with anxiety.

Our quartet loves the idea of pairing Bartók with Haydn in the same program, as both composers revolutionized the string quartet and

have inspired us to approach both older and newer music with fresh eyes and ears. After journeying through the magical hours of the night, sunrise fills us with awe. With the first lines of Haydn's Op. 76 No. 4 quartet, the sky is transformed as warm colors gradually spread across the horizon and climb. The music unfurls in an improvisatory way before the rays of the sun emerge at last, assured and bright. Haydn plays with mirrored responses in the first movement as Bartók did, having the cello respond to the opening violin material by descending instead of rising. The second movement brings us a memory of the tenderness of night, with pulsing eighth notes reminiscent of Clara Schumann's song. Whimsical country dances bring us out of the dream, with a hurdy-gurdy making a special appearance in the trio. The Finale starts with a charming stumble and a mischievous nature, perhaps pre-caffeination. The coffee kicks in by the end, as we are off and running, leaping into the brilliance and optimism of a new day.

*Note by Miho Saegusa*

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

### **AIZURI QUARTET**

*Emma Frucht and Miho Saegusa, Violins*

*Ayane Kozasa, Viola*

*Karen Ouzounian, Cello*

The Aizuri Quartet has established a unique position within today's musical landscape, infusing all of their music-making with infectious energy, joy and warmth, cultivating curiosity in listeners, and inviting audiences into the concert experience through their innovative programming, and the depth and fire of their performances.

Praised by *The Washington Post* for "astounding" and "captivating" performances that draw from its notable "meld of intellect, technique and emotions," the Aizuri Quartet was awarded the Grand 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. The Quartet's debut album, *Blueprinting*, featuring new works written for the Aizuri Quartet by five American composers, was released by New Amsterdam Records to critical acclaim ("In a word, stunning" - *I Care If You Listen*), nominated for a 2019 GRAMMY Award, and named one of *NPR Music's Best Classical Albums of 2018*.

The Aizuris view the string quartet as a living art and springboard for community, collaboration, curiosity and experimentation. At the core of their music-making is a virtuosic ability to illuminate a vast range of

musical styles through their eclectic, engaging and thought-provoking programs. The Quartet has drawn praise both for bringing “a technical bravado and emotional power” to bold new commissions, and for its “flawless” (San Diego Union-Tribune) performances of the great works of the past. Exemplifying this intrepid spirit, the Aizuri Quartet curated and performed five adventurous programs as the 2017-2018 MetLiveArts String Quartet-in-Residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, leading The New York Times to applaud them as “genuinely exciting,” “imaginative,” and “a quartet of expert collaborators.” For this series, they collaborated with spoken word artist Denice Frohman and shakuhachi player Kojiro Umezaki, commissioned new works by Kinan Azmeh, Michi Wiancko and Wang Lu, as well as commissioned new arrangements of vocal music by Hildegard von Bingen and Carlo Gesualdo, which they paired with the music of Conlon Nancarrow, Haydn and Beethoven in a program focused on music created in periods of isolation.

The 21-22 concert season, featuring the Aizuri Quartet’s *Expanse*, *What’s Past is Prologue*, and *Song Emerging* recital programs, showcased the breadth of the Quartet’s musical appetite. Notable highlights include the Quartet’s major concerto debut with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra in performances of John Adams’s *Absolute Jest*, its debut at the 92Y, a collaborative program with Anthony McGill and Demarre McGill at the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and the premieres of new string quartets by Lembit Beecher and Paul Wiancko presented by the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C.

The 20-21 concert season illustrated the Aizuri Quartet’s ingenuity and creativity, as they offered presenters and audiences beautifully filmed performances along with spoken program notes for virtual concerts during the course of the pandemic. The Quartet appeared in virtual and hybrid concerts presented by Baryshnikov Arts Center, Tippet Rise, Friends of Chamber Music Denver, Kaufmann Music Center, Ohio Performing Arts, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, New Orleans Friends of Chamber Music, Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Pittsburgh and Shriver Hall Concert Series, among others. Special projects included collaborations with Celtic harpist Maeve Gilchrist, as well as guitarist Nels Cline, with whom they recorded Douglas Cuomo’s *Seven Limbs*. Released on Sunnyside Records, the work was presented by the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Center for the Art of Performance UCLA, Moss Arts Center and Aperio, Music of the Americas. Additionally, the Quartet designed virtual residencies in collaboration with the composition departments of Princeton University, University of Southern California and the NEXT Festival of Emerging Artists, workshoping and filming the works of emerging composers.

The Aizuris believe in an integrative approach to music-making, in which their teaching, performing, writing, arranging, curation and

role in the community are all connected. In Fall 2020 they launched AizuriKids, a free, online series of educational videos for children that uses the string quartet as a catalyst for creative learning and features themes such as astronomy, American history and cooking. These vibrant, whimsical and interactive videos are lovingly produced by the Aizuris and are paired with activity sheets to inspire further exploration.

The Aizuri Quartet is passionate about nurturing the next generation of artists, and is deeply grateful to have held several residencies that were instrumental in its development: from 2014-2016, the String Quartet-in-Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, the 2015-2016 Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, and the resident ensemble of the 2014 Ravinia Festival's Steans Music Institute.

Formed in 2012 and combining four distinctive musical personalities into a powerful 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.



## Amherst College Music Department Upcoming Events

**10/1 Aizuri Side-by-Side** at the Drake (44 North Pleasant Street, Amherst). Members of the Aizuri play Brahms with Amherst High School musicians. 12 PM

**ASO Concert:** "Come Sunday: Building Community" 4 PM  
The ASO welcomes President Elliott and the Class of 2026 with music by Still, Price and Ellington (Suite from *Black Brown Beige*).

**10/6,13,20,27 Jazz@Friedmann Room** Keefe Campus Center 9 PM

**10/14 M@A Blue Heron Vocal Ensemble:** Ockeghem *Requiem* 8 PM  
Tickets required and FREE.

**10/22 M@A Imani Winds** with Corey Smythe, piano 8 PM  
"Revolutionary aka The Civil Rights Project" Tickets required. \$

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**M@A Tickets are available at [amherst.universitytickets.com](https://amherst.universitytickets.com)**  
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Associate Professor of Writing at Columbia University, staff writer and theater critic for *The New Yorker* magazine, Guggenheim Fellow and 2017 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism.



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Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, with a focus on African American and American literature and cultural history.

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**Amherst College**

*All events are FREE and held in Buckley Recital Hall unless otherwise noted*  
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