THE FRY STREET QUARTET

Jessica Guideri, *Violin* Rebecca McFaul, *Violin* Russell Fallstad, *Viola* Anne Francis, *Cello*

DISC 1

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, no. 5 (1800)

26:26

1	I.	Allegro	6:42
2	II.	Menuetto	4:39
3	III.	Andante cantabile	9:43
4	IV.	Allegro	6:02

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132 (1825)

42:35

5	I.	Assai sostenuto–Allegro	9:17
6	II.	Allegro ma non tanto	8:42
7	III.	Molto adagio	16:44
8	IV.	Alla Marcia	2:10
9	V.	Allegro appassionato	6:22

NED ROREM (b. 1923)

String Quartet no. 4 (1994)

25:29

4	I.	**Minotaur:** Very fast, ugly and relentless–Insistent–Cajoling–Pleading–Frantic	2:46
5	II.	**Child Holding a Dove:** Infinitely tender	1:29
6	III.	**Acrobat on a Ball:** Very Fast	2:17
7	IV.	**Still Life:** Absolutely Strict	3:37
8	V.	**Seated Harlequin:** Wistful	1:31
9	VI.	**Head of a Boy:** Massive, very legato	1:52
10	VII.	**Basket of Flowers:** Very fast	4:07
11	VIII.	**Self Portrait:** Always frantic and coarse (cello)/motionless, cold, removed (others)–Horror and indifference–A bit faster–Tempo I	5:15
12	IX.	**Three Nudes:** Like the wind, whispered and slippery	1:26
13	X.	**Death of Harlequin:** Infinitely tender	3:29

DISC 2

IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Three Pieces for String Quartet (1914)

5:37

1	I.	0:57
2	II.	2:03
3	III.	3:37

J. MARK SCEARCE (b. 1960)

String Quartet 1° (Y2K) (2000)

22:30

14	I.	4:44
15	II.	6:52
16	III.	4:28
17	IV.	7:06

About the FSQ

Winners of the Millennium Grand Prize at the Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition, the First Prize at the Yellow Springs Competition, and prizewinners at the prestigious Banff International String Quartet Competition, the FSQ performs nationally and internationally. At Isaac Stern's invitation the quartet made its Carnegie Hall debut in a performance that "spoke of precision, preparation, excitement, profound heritage, and ultimate satisfaction" (*New York Concert Review*). A performance at the 92nd Street Y in New York was hailed by the *New York Times* as "a triumph of ensemble playing." The quartet made its European debut with a concert tour of the Balkans sponsored by Carnegie Hall and the U.S. State Department. The FSQ is currently the Faculty Quartet in Residence at Utah State University's School of the Arts.

www.frystreetquartet.com

The Fry Street Quartet's representation is:

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The Fry Street Quartet would like to thank Ray Kimber, Graemme Brown, Zachary Hall, J. Mark Scearce, Eric Smigel, Terril Neely, Sergio Bernal, and Bruce Saperston for all their help in making this project possible.

About this recording

RECORDING and MASTERING EQUIPMENT:

Microphones-Neumann M150

Preamp-Millennia Media HV-3D custom

A/D converters-EMM Labs ADC8 MkIV

Recorders-Tascam DS-D98HR

Recorders-Genex GX9000

DAW-Pyramix DSD

D/A converters-EMM Labs DAC8MkIV

Monitor speakers-Lipinski Sound L707

Monitor speakers-Magnapan 20.1

Monitor controller-Grace Design M906

Monitor amps-Bryston 7BSST

Monitor amps-The Gryphon Antileon

Monitor headphones-Sennheiser HD-650

Cables-KIMBER KABLE Select Series

Recording Engineer-Ray Kimber

Assistant Engineer-Brett Terry

Mastering-Zen Mastering

Mastering Engineer-Graemme Brown

Recorded in the Austad Auditorium, Val A. Browning Center for the Performing Arts, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah.

About the IsoMike

IsoMike™ ("Isolated Microphones") is an experimental acoustic baffle system, designed to remedy the interference of intrachannel sounds that results in compromised fidelity recordings. For this 4-channel recording, the microphones were suspended on four arms and separated by IsoMike baffles. The largest heart-shaped baffle separated the right/left acoustic of the front microphones, the egg-shaped baffles separated the front/back channels, and the smaller heart-shaped baffle separated the right/left rear microphones. Under the fabric shell of each baffle is a complex mechanical design that takes over 100 hours to construct. Most baffles absorb sound from mid- to high-range frequencies; lower frequencies are more difficult to absorb. Here, the unique shapes of the IsoMike baffles are advantageous. As lower frequencies flow around the heart- or egg-shaped baffles, they are scattered, effectively dissipating their energy. As a result, the microphones are much more sensitive—they will pick up extreme acoustic detail. We took great care, therefore, to reduce the noise level within the auditorium during the recordings. —Ray Kimber

It was fortunate that the FSQ drove south to Ogden to hear a recital by David Finckel and Wu Han the winter of 2003. After the recital, Finckel, one of the FSQ's mentors, introduced us to Ray Kimber and suggested that we work with him. This introduction led to our collaboration with one of the most creative and brilliant sound engineers in the business. Kimber's results are astonishing, and we look forward to many future projects. The FSQ would like to thank Ray Kimber for including us in his journey to capture live sound.—Rebecca McFaul

BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 18, no. 5

String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 132

STRAVINSKY

Three Pieces for String Quartet

ROREM

String Quartet no. 4

SCEARCE

String Quartet 1° (Y2K)

THE FRY STREET QUARTET

Voices of Modernism and the String Quartet

Modernism is a perpetual reinvention of culture, where traditional values and new modes of thought are in a constant state of imbalance. The voice of the modern artist, then, is essentially an expression of conflict. Many composers of the modern era have addressed this conflict by way of the string quartet: the homogenous sound creates a classically satisfying unity, and the melodic independence of the parts—each with the inexhaustible shades of timbre reminiscent of the human voice, but without the semantic limitations of a spoken language—is ideal for the contrapuntal elaboration of musical ideas. Realizing its potential, Haydn elevated the string quartet from a genre of casual entertainment to one of sophisticated artistry, prompting Goethe to compare the medium to a "stimulating conversation between four intelligent people." In the five works recorded here, the members of the Fry Street Quartet engage in animated discussions scripted by four progressive composers, each of which was at a point of personal confrontation.

In the well-known Heiligenstadt Testament of 1802, Beethoven dramatically confronts the irrevocable loss of his hearing. "I was not far from ending my own life," the distraught composer writes, "only Art, only art held me back. Ah, it seemed impossible to me that I should leave the world before I had produced all that I felt I might, and so I spared this wretched life." This harrowing statement marks the beginning of Beethoven's "heroic" period, when his music, bustling with Revolutionary fervor, tore at the confines of the high classical style. It also reveals the modern perspective of the struggling artist who feels a responsibility to create music, not merely to please his contemporaries, but to enrich posterity. The six quartets of Op. 18, Beethoven's first works in the genre, show the composer at a crossroads: the first three reflect his assimilation of the formal and stylistic conventions of his classical predecessors, and the last three reveal his desire to break from these conventions. In the fifth quartet of the set, in other words, he was searching for a unique compositional voice.

Although Beethoven did write vocal music, he is celebrated primarily for his instrumental compositions. Nevertheless, a salient feature of his late instrumental works is their intense lyricism, a quality that is evident in his five late quartets, his final works. At its surface, Op. 132 is riddled with abrupt shifts in texture and mood—the schizophrenic outbursts that are indicative of the plight of the modern artist. In the third movement, the breathtaking centerpiece of the quartet, Beethoven achieves an unprecedented calm, a peaceful respite from the contentious struggle. He calls the movement a song, "Heiliger Dankgesang" ("Holy Song of Thanksgiving"), and we can presume that we are hearing the composer's "voice," a personalized expression of an enigmatic program.

Beethoven paved the way for program music, or instrumental music with extra-musical connotations, which became a major preoccupation of many Romantic composers of the 19th century, and a crucial ingredient of early twentieth-century Expressionism. But in the years leading up to the First World War, the expressionist aesthetic was viewed with increasing suspicion: there was a strong anti-Teutonic sentiment that associated the cultural decadence of Expressionist art with the abandonment of human propriety. This sentiment was most prominent in France in the years between the World Wars, and was made manifest in the objective style of Neo-classicism. Stravinsky, who became the figurehead of the neoclassical movement in music, issued the polemical statement that "Music is not capable of expressing anything." At the onset of the war Stravinsky was in Switzerland, where he was suspended not only between the aristocratic old world and new along with the rest of Europe, but also between his native Russia and France, where he would remain until his emigration to the United States at the beginning of the Second World War.

Three Pieces for String Quartet was Stravinsky's first venture into the medium, and it remains one of his most eccentric works. Chronologically and stylistically, it lays between the bustling energy of his early ballet scores and the constructivist precision of the neoclassical works of the following decade. Essential to the under-standing of this peculiar work is Stravinsky's Russian heritage. Especially during this time of exile, the composer was captivated by Slavic folk poetry and music, and his works from this period feature simple materials, economic means, rhythmic asymmetry, and generally, an amateuristic idiom. Unlike Beethoven's late quartets, the Three Pieces does not employ a lyrical voice, laden with Romantic conventions of expression; instead, Stravinsky adopts the primitive voice of an ancient culture. The severe juxtaposition and dislocation of splintered musical ideas lend the Three Pieces its fiercely modern profile, and make it analogous to the pictorial fragments that comprise the cubist style of painting. (To be sure, Stravinsky and Picasso were aware of each other's work, although they did not meet until 1917.)

The American composer Ned Rorem, who lived in Paris for the decade following the Second World War, is sympathetic to the French sensibility, and rejects what he perceives as the undue complexity of the German tradition. Celebrated largely for his hundreds of songs, Rorem has an intimate familiarity with the voice, which informs all of his instrumental music. "I conceive of all music vocally," the composer explains. "Whatever my music is written for—tuba, tambourine, tubular bells—it is always the singer within me crying to get out."

Rorem's String Quartet no. 4 is a suite of ten movements, each of which bears the title of a painting by Picasso. The episodic construction of the work—a succession of disparate musical portraits—recalls the art of collage, and reinforces the composer's affinity for the Spanish artist. Rorem admits that Picasso's works inspired the quartet, but he warns the listener not to make explicit connections between the titles and the musical content. "No music," he insists, "irrefutably depicts other than itself." But the fact that the titles exist, just as they do in many abstract paintings, initiates a magical and inexpressible dialogue between language, image, and sound.

The composer identifies the movement titled Self Portrait as the focus of the work. The movement features the cello in an impassioned recitative, a decisively vocal idiom. In the score, Rorem suggests that the movement should be interpreted "with horror and indifference." According to the composer, his intent was "to portray the schizoid temper of any artist—or, indeed, any human—whose urge for self-expression is met by the cold self-protection of his alter ego." In effect, Beethoven's awareness of his role as a modern artist has become, with Rorem, the self-consciousness of a postmodern artist.

If the voice of the modern artist is an expression of conflict, then the voice of the postmodern artist is the self-consciousness of this expression. Technological developments in communication have deeply affected the self-consciousness of postmodern artists. For the contemporary composer, the immediate access to an unprecedented variety of historical and cultural styles via sound recordings has both advantages and disadvantages: one could either be inspired into great song many times over or intimidated into silence by an infinitude of existing music.

For J. Mark Scearce, the Classical, Romantic, Expressionist, and Primitivist repertoires of the string quartet have enriched the timbre of his compositional voice. His First String Quartet is subtitled "Y2K," the popular and occasionally foreboding shorthand for the year 2000. The turn of the millennium signaled distress not only to some private and corporate factions, who were concerned with the potential economic and organizational disasters resulting from computer systems inadvertently reverting to the year 1900, but also to a handful of religious fanatics, who anticipated the arrival of either eternal salvation or everlasting doom. "These fears," the composer says, "may be found in the music." For Scearce, the year also marked a milestone in his own life, as the prolific composer had just reached his fortieth year, and he had not yet composed a string quartet—a fact of which he was painfully aware. Just as Brahms, who felt the formidable presence of Beethoven, could not bring himself to complete his First Symphony until he was past forty, Scearce was similarly held under the spell of Bartók's string quartets. With both composers, intimidation gave way to respectful homage, and symbolically, Scearce reflects on what turned out to be the futility of the world's apprehension of the Triple Oh set at naught." The computers did not crash, the apocalyptic vision was not realized, and Scearce, no longer intimidated, has in the meantime completed his Second String Quartet.

No composer would concede that a text might explain the music, just as no artist would allow a description of a painting to stand for the work itself. In these five string quartets, the composers sought to resolve conflicts of the human condition, and in the process they found an artistic voice, a viable means to address the unknown. Their speechless voices, skillfully fashioned into stimulating conversations between four intelligent performers, are all heroic expressions of the modern and postmodern spirit.—Eric Smigel

BEETHOVEN *1770–1827* STRAVINSKY *1882–1971* ROREM *b. 1923* SCEARCE *b. 1960*