



Wednesday | May 3 | 8pm | Longy's Pickman Hall

Aizuri Quartet

Emma Frucht and **Miho Saegusa** violins

Ayane Kozasa viola

Karen Ouzounian cello

Clara Schumann

(arr. Karen Ouzounian)

Ich stand in dunkeln Träumen

Béla Bartók

String Quartet No. 4

Allegro

Prestissimo, con sordino

Non troppo lento

Allegretto pizzicato

Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Tanya Tagaq

Sivunittinni (2015)

Franz Joseph Haydn

String Quartet in B-flat Major,

Op. 76, no. 4 "Sunrise"

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Minuet. Allegro - Trio

Finale. Allegro ma non troppo

Today's program will run approximately 90 minutes, including intermission.

Aizuri Quartet is a winner of the Concert Artists Guild International Competition and appears by arrangement with Concert Artists Guild, New York, NY - concertartists.org

Aizuri Quartet is represented by Pink Noise Agency,
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NOTES FROM THE QUARTET ON THEIR “SUNRISE” PROGRAM

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, inward 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 *Sivunittini*, 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-caffination. The coffee kicks in by the end, as we are off and running, leaping into the brilliance and optimism of a new day.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Aizuri Quartet

The Aizuri Quartet has established a unique position within today's musical landscape, infusing its music-making with infectious energy, joy, and warmth. The ensemble cultivates curiosity in listeners and invites audiences into the concert experience through its innovative programming and the depth and fire of its 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 named the recipient of the 2022 Cleveland Quartet Award by Chamber Music America, and was awarded the Grand Prize at the 2018 M-Prize Chamber Arts Competition. 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, nominated for a 2019 Grammy Award, and named one of NPR Music's Best Classical Albums of 2018. Aizuri Quartet's follow-up to *Blueprinting* will be released in 2023 on Azica Records. The Aizuri Quartet continues its innovative approach to programming into the 2022/23 season, with programs creatively juxtaposing the old and the new: such as *Sunrise*, heard today, which pairs Tanya Tagaq's *Sivunittinni* with Haydn; or *Song Emerging*, pairing Schumann's first quartet with the Aizuri Songbook; or *The Art of Translation*, featuring art-inspired works by Paul Wiancko, Lembit Beecher and Hannah Kendall to set the stage for Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. The Aizuris believe in an integrative approach to music-making, in which teaching, performing, writing, arranging, curation, and role in the community are all connected. In 2020, the ensemble 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.

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