

The Untapped Sonorities of the Saxophone

Kenari Quartet

Bob Eason – soprano saxophone
Kyle Baldwin – alto saxophone
Corey Dundee – tenor saxophone
Steven Banks – baritone saxophone

Michelangelo '70 (1986/2017)

Astor Piazzolla/
arr. Bob Eason

A Schumann Bouquet (1848/2015)

Robert Schumann/
arr. William Bolcom

Quantum Shift (2017)

Mischa Zupko

Excerpts from *Goldberg Variations* (1741/2010)

J.S. Bach/
arr. David Maslanka

—Intermission—

Short Stories (1996)

I. Splashing the Canvas

II. Lullaby

III. Chase

Jennifer Higdon

Capriccio from Op. 81 (1843/2017)

Felix Mendelssohn/
arr. Bob Eason

Mountain Roads (1997)

David Maslanka

Michelangelo '70 (1986, arr. 2017)

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)
arranged by Bob Eason (b. 1988)

Astor Piazzolla was an Argentinian composer, arranger, and virtuoso bandoneon player who is widely regarded as having been the world's foremost composer of Tango music during his lifetime. He was particularly renowned for the creation of 'nuevo tango,' a musical style that fuses elements of jazz and classical music with the traditional tango. Piazzolla originally composed *Michelangelo '70* for his own performing ensemble Quinteto Nuevo Tango—a quintet comprised of bandoneon, bass, guitar, violin, and piano—and the piece first appeared on their 1986 album *Tango: Zero Hour*, which Piazzolla himself referred to as “absolutely the greatest record I've made in my entire life.” Robert Christgau of *The Village Voice* described the music as “true semipop, dance music for the cerebellum,” and we have found this to be an aesthetic that superbly translates to the instrumentation of saxophone quartet!

- *Kenari Quartet*

A Schumann Bouquet (1848, arr. 2016)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
arranged by William Bolcom (b. 1938)

Notes from the composer...

Invented about the time the pieces in A Schumann Bouquet were composed, the saxophones were perhaps mostly intended for band use (in French the orchestre d'harmonie), would be frowned on by orchestras, and still are in some quarters. This schism may be why the saxophone literature is still so separate from the classical canon. Debussy wrote a *pièce de concours* for the Conservatoire not knowing much of anything about the instrument; Vaughan Williams and Walton used it also, but these are rare instances. It was not until the middle of the 20th-century that more composers began to take the saxophone seriously.

The PRISM Quartet is at the forefront of the current expansion of saxophone literature; I've had a wonderful experience writing for them as have so many others. I think my idea of arranging this set of short Robert Schumann piano pieces for them as a gift is an attempt to bridge the schism mentioned above, opening the gate to a wider potential expressivity for the saxophone by connecting it with the rich musical past.

I have loved Schumann's music since boyhood, not only the major piano works like *Carnaval*, *Humoreske*, and *Kreisleriana* but also the many modest short pieces. *Album for the Young*, dating from 1848, is an often-overlooked rich source. Even the technically easy opening pieces are full of poetry, and the interpretative challenges in some later ones are as profound as in Schumann's larger works (see for example *Sehr langsam*, the fifth “flower” in A Schumann Bouquet). These are not just teaching pieces without depth, and I suspect the major difference between the *Album* and most music intended for teaching is the presence of that depth.

- *William Bolcom*

Quantum Shift (2017)

Mischa Zupko (b. 1971)

Quantum Shift is an 8' virtuosic powerhouse of a piece that our quartet commissioned from the composer, through leading a consortium along with our colleagues in several fantastic saxophone quartets. The work is inspired by a component of quantum theory in physics, where electrons within an atom can quickly jump between discrete energy levels, i.e. orbits, surrounding the atom's nucleus. While the scientific details of this phenomenon might be tough for the layman to understand, the music of *Quantum Shift* takes this basic concept and translates it into a high-velocity work for saxophone quartet, characterized by sprightly oscillating motifs that constantly transition between varying states of texture, dynamic, tempo, and gesture. Put simply, the piece can be thought of as a window into the sporadic lives of four electrons—in this case, the 'Kenari Electrons'—interacting ceaselessly amongst one another in their subatomic world.

- *Kenari Quartet*

Excerpts from Goldberg Variations (1741/2010)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Arr. David Maslanka (1943-2017)

Notes from the composer...

I have done a straight transcription of the entire *Goldberg Variations* following the keyboard edition of Hans Bischoff (Kalmus). All ornamentation has been carefully written out, and I have raised the key to A-flat from the original G to make more congenial fingerings for saxophones. The effect of "opening up" the original keyboard texture to four saxophone voices is startling and quite good. *Goldberg Variations* is a lot of music, and the requirement to learn it all, and then shape a performance, is daunting. However, this is some of the best music by a great composer, and every bit of effort toward mastering it will be repaid a thousand-fold.

- *David Maslanka*

Short Stories (1996)

Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

Notes from the composer...

"Short Stories" is a collection of 6 movements for saxophone quartet, which are flexible in both the order and number in which they can be performed. The piece was written with the idea that a group could tailor their performance according to their venue and the duration they might like to fill on a concert. While being composer-in-residence with the Prism Saxophone Quartet, I had the chance to see how the demands for repertoire change greatly from concert to concert: through school programs with young students, to college-age classical musicians, to formal recitals. So, when I sat down to write a work for the Anicia, Black Swamp, Resounding Winds, and Sax 4th Avenue quartets, I wanted a work with as much diversity in the characters of the movements as possible and I wanted the groups to have freedom in their choices of movements. As a result, there are 6 movements, 3 of which are slow and 3 of which are fast, each telling a different story:

"Splashing the Canvas" – Inspired by Jackson Pollock, an artist who splashes paint upon a canvas in a wild and uncontrolled manner, building up layers and constantly changing the resulting structure. Through this piece, many ideas are presented and are thrown about and layered. At the beginning of the movement it takes longer for the ideas to be stated, but as the piece progresses, the themes come back quicker and quicker as if the canvas were building into thick layers of overlapping ideas and becoming more complex.

"Lullaby" - This movement was originally written as a work for mezzo, flute, and piano, but I kept hearing it as a saxophone quartet in my head. It is a lullaby whose lyrical qualities seem to lend to the saxophone very well.

"Chase" - A fast movement with much energy and tension, this is a running game that could be through any street, anywhere; where pursuers and prey sometimes come very close to catching up with each other, and when they do, they rough and tumble before sprinting off again.

- Jennifer Higdon

Capriccio from Op. 81

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Arr. Bob Eason (b. 1988)

Following his death in 1847, four separate string quartets written by Mendelssohn in the preceding years were published together as a set titled Op. 81. The Capriccio in E minor, the third piece from this set, exists as a pair of two starkly contrasting sections. The first is an *Andante con moto* with drawn-out lyrical melodies floating

atop undulating accompanying figures, and the second is a fiery fugue that reflects Mendelssohn's affinity for composing virtuosic, *perpetuum mobile* textures.

- *Kenari Quartet*

Mountain Roads

David Maslanka (1943-2017)

Notes from the composer

The music of *Mountain Roads* is a very personal statement. I feel very deeply about every bit of it. The musical plan of it follows the model of a Baroque cantata, and style and content reflect my years of study of the Bach chorales, and of Bach in general. Obviously there are no words in my "cantata" but the music revolves entirely around two chorale melodies. The main one is "Alle menschen müssen sterben" (All men must die) and the second is "Wo soll ich fliehen" (Where shall I run to?).

Movements I, III, IV, V, and VI are all a large evolutionary process on "Alle menschen müssen sterben". "Wo soll ich fliehen" appears in part in the first movement, and is given its full exposition in II. The actual melody of "Alle menschen müssen sterben" does not appear until the four variations of the chorale that end the sixth movement.

The title *Mountain Roads* comes from a dream that I had while writing this piece. In it I was part of a work crew making new roads in a high mountain country. It was springtime, the weather was clear, sunny and comfortable, although there was still snow on the ground. The effect of the place was exhilarating as only mountain wilderness can be. It seemed to me that the dream was a beautiful metaphor for new life and new spiritual opening.

The paradox embodied in this exuberant and uplifting music lies in the title of the main chorale "All men must die", and further reinforced by the second chorale "Where shall I run to?". The first title suggests the inevitability of death, but is neither morbid nor about mass destruction. The idea of death is not so much about final end as about change. The process of growth is constantly about "dying" to one way of thinking or feeling, and opening to another. After all is said and done, there is the fact of physical death. The awareness of that fact points up our deep attachment to all the forms of this life. It makes experience of all things both deeply sweet and deeply sad. It also suggests the inevitable release of all the forms that we know, and the movement toward whatever exists beyond form.

- *David Maslanka*