

Guest Ensemble Concert:

2024-04-04 – Aizuri Quartet



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IOWA

School of Music



UNIVERSITY OF IOWA STRING QUARTET RESIDENCY PROGRAM

Elizabeth Oakes, *director*

Ida Cordelia Beam Distinguished Professors: Aizuri Quartet

Emma Frucht and Miho Saegusa, *violins*

Brian Hong, *viola*

Caleb van der Swaagh, *cello*

Thursday, April 4, 2024 at 7:30pm

Voxman Music Building Concert Hall

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PROGRAM

Ragamala (2018)

I. Fantasie (*Bihag*)

Reena ESMAIL

(b.1983)

Four Pieces for String Quartet, Op. 81

No. 3 Capriccio in E Minor (1843)

Felix MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

Four on the Floor (2006)

Judd GREENSTEIN

(b.1979)

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 4, *Música de Feria* (1932)

I. Allegro

II. Lento

III. Allegro giocoso

IV. Allegro tempo I

Silvestre REVUELTAS

(1899-1940)

Die stille Lotosblume from *Sechs Lieder*, Op. 13 No. 6 (1844) Clara SCHUMANN

(1819-1896)

arr. Miho SAEGUSA

String Quartet in E-flat Major (1834)

I. Adagio ma non troppo

II. Allegretto

III. Romanze

IV. Allegro molto vivace

Fanny Mendelssohn HENSEL

(1805-1847)

*The Aizuri Quartet residency is supported, in part, by funding from the
Ida Cordelia Beam Distinguished Visiting Professor Program.*

PROGRAM NOTE

Community is a two-part exploration of kinship and harmony. The first half of the program follows individual voices as they weave around one another before coalescing into a texture that is stronger than any single entity. The program opens with the first movement of **Reena Esmail's Ragamala**, a work that was conceived during a year Esmail spent in India studying Hindustani classical music. This movement, named after a raag entitled *Bihag*, begins with ever-evolving layers of drones that emerge from *niente* (from nothingness), ultimately creating a kaleidoscopic carpet of shimmering sound. From these drones, the elements of the raag emerge and one-by-one, each member of the quartet emerges from their supporting role to take a brief soloistic one, interspersing their lines with their colleagues before receding back into the continuous hum of the masses. Esmail writes of her concert experiences in India that audience members would subconsciously hum phrases, or “pakads” of the raag, under their breath - creating their own chamber music with the drones being intoned onstage:

“It had a magical feeling – as if that raag was present in the air, and tiny wisps of it were already starting to precipitate into the audible world in anticipation of the performance. It felt like a connection between the audience and the performer, as they prepared themselves to enjoy what was to come.”

We view this meditative, almost hypnotic movement as an invitation not only to ourselves, as a celebration of our soloistic and supportive voices that form our quartet, but also to the audience to join us in this celebration throughout the course of the program.

Felix Mendelssohn's Capriccio, the third piece from his *Four Pieces for String Quartet Op. 81*, intensifies the inherent power held by the individual voices within a community. These four individual pieces were written at various points in his life and were only published together after his death. Mendelssohn revered Bach and this piece feels like an homage to the preludes and fugues of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* that is filtered through Mendelssohn's Romantic sensibility. The piece opens with a brief introductory section featuring a searching melody in the violin before launching into the fugue. Throughout the fugue, the instruments coalesce and break off again in various combinations as the piece develops increasing emotional intensity before finishing with a moment of impassioned unity from all instruments. The fugue is a celebration of the interplay between individuality and unity that is an integral part of chamber music.

From Mendelssohn's churning, fiery fugue explodes a work of equal intensity except this time inspired by feelings of joy. **Judd Greenstein's Four on the Floor**, written for celebration of a friend's wedding, employs virtuosic double stop technique from all four members to transform the smaller scale string quartet into something more akin to a string octet. These double stops are played at an exhilarating pace and incorporate irresistible rhythmic grooves with dramatic dynamic shifts, sometimes dropping suddenly into a quiet, bubbling intensity or exploding into a raucous, dancing cacophony. *Four on the Floor* is written in a loose ternary form (A-B-A), with a strikingly contrasting middle section consisting of quick and fleeting individual notes that cascade in, through, and around one another, singing as individuals that gradually move towards common ground before joining hands to burst forth once more into a joyful, celebratory recapitulation to close out the first half of our program.

The second half of *Community* explores many multifaceted twists and complications born from the human experience. It begins with a dramatic offering by composer **Silvestre Revueltas**:

a violinist, conductor, and central figure in early 20th century Mexican music. He had an active career as a violinist before becoming the assistant conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico and later principal conductor of Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. During this time, he began to devote more of his energy to composition while also doing much to promote contemporary music in Mexico. As a composer, Revueltas is important both as a Mexican nationalist as well as an early modernist.

Revueltas's **String Quartet No. 4: Música de feria (Fair Music)** is a vibrant and raucous introduction to his unique voice. In this condensed single movement work, Revueltas places the listener in the position of being at the center of a plaza with the sounds of the fair all around. Snatches of brass band music and folk songs filter through and compete with the sounds of people talking and celebrating. Rather than smoothing out the cacophony of the fair, Revueltas captures it in all of its messy glory with quick changes of character and often competing strands of music. *Música de feria* is a joyous celebration of the sounds of a community coming together to make music and celebrate.

From the sounds of the fair we move to **Clara Schumann's "Die stille Lotosblume"** ("The Silent Lotus Blossom") from *Sechs Lieder*, Op. 13 No. 6 in an arrangement by Aizuri Quartet violinist Miho Saegusa. In this lieder by Clara Schumann, one of the leading composers and performers of her time, the listener is an observer of a peaceful and melancholy nighttime scene. The lyrics speak of a solitary lotus blossom floating in a lake at night while a swan circles round it singing "sweetly and quietly." After the energy and cacophony of the Revueltas, this lieder is a space for contemplation and repose.

Closing our program is an offering by **Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel**, a gifted and imaginative musician and composer whose music is rightfully experiencing a rebirth in popularity. While she never attained the immense popularity of her brother Felix during her lifetime, she was nevertheless a woman of profound musical knowledge and creativity, to the point that she was Felix's primary musical counsel for the majority of his output as well as a trusted source of performance practice for his music among musicians of her time. Her limited oeuvre consists mainly of lieder and solo piano works, but we are lucky to have three surviving major chamber works: a piano trio, a piano quartet, and her **String Quartet in E-flat Major**, the last of which closes our program.

Mendelssohn-Hensel's string quartet is a testament to her uniquely musical voice which often eschews traditional form in favor of ambiguity and exploration. The first movement replaces the traditional lively Allegro with a slower Adagio that feathers the line between melancholy and hope. The movement begins with a falling line from the first violin that resembles a sigh, harmonized by a minor VI chord that defies the home key of E-flat Major. Only three bars later, Mendelssohn-Hensel completes her descent into darkness, taking the quartet into the somber key of C minor. This tonal ambiguity serves as a defining feature for the four movements of her quartet, which takes the quartet and the audience through a journey of the unexpected and often raises more questions than answers. Sighing resignation is often followed by outcries of defiance, scurrying scherzo textures exist alongside explosive, unbridled joy, and bright, shining sunlight is interrupted by dark, surging storms. And yet, through it all shines the voice of a composer whose commitment to her own musical explorations garnered unwavering trust from her musical community in spite of the social norms that fought to push her to the sidelines.

Notes by Caleb van der Swaagh and Brian Hong

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



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 sophomore album, *Earthdrawn Skies*, was released in 2023. Featuring music of Hildegard of Bingen, Komitas Vartapet, Eleanor Alberga, and Jean Sibelius, *Earthdrawn Skies* was praised by NPR Music as an album that “convincingly connects the dots in wildly diverse music stretching over eight centuries...arousing solemn contemplation, cosmic curiosity, folksy delight and introspective scrutiny.”

The Quartet’s debut album, *Blueprinting*, featuring 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 Aizuri Quartet continues its innovative approach to programming into the 2023-24 season, with programs creatively juxtaposing the canon and the contemporary: *Community* emphasizes the communal atmosphere of chamber music around the world, placing works by Clara Wieck Schumann, Silvestre Revueltas, and Felix and Fanny Mendelssohn among pieces by living composers Judd Greenstein and Reena Esmail. Another signature Aizuri program, *Sunrise*, represents a journey from darkness into light, opening with a Clara Wieck Schumann

song and Bartok's ferocious and folk-inspired *Fourth Quartet*, and closing with Inuk composer-performer Tanya Tagaq's *Sivunittinni* and Haydn's Opus 76 No. 4 Quartet "Sunrise."

In recognition of the Cleveland Quartet Award, Aizuri Quartet performs during the 2023-24 season at Chamber Music Detroit, Market Square Concerts, Friends of Chamber Music Kansas City, the Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, and Buffalo Chamber Music Society, where Aizuri will perform the world premiere of Jennifer Higdon's *Azure Waves*, written for the Quartet in celebration of the series' 100th anniversary season. Last season the Quartet performed at Carnegie Hall, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and Texas Performing Arts in Austin.

This season, Aizuri Quartet welcomes new members: violist Brian Hong and cellist Caleb van der Swaagh. The Quartet will perform with several notable collaborators including Seth Parker Woods and Kirsten Docter at Chamber Music Detroit, Kim Kashkashian and Marcy Rosen at Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and clarinetist Kinan Azmeh at Chamber Music Concerts in Ashland, Oregon. Aizuri Quartet will be the inaugural Ensemble-in-Residence with the GRAMMY-winning New York Youth Symphony's Crescendo, a new program for teenage New York City residents.

The Aizuri believes 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, featuring themes such as astronomy, American history, and cooking. These vibrant, whimsical, and interactive videos are lovingly produced by the Aizuri and paired with activity sheets to inspire further exploration.

After signing with the prestigious artist-development management agency Concert Artists Guild, the quartet joined the roster of Pink Noise Agency. 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. www.aizuriquartet.com

UPCOMING EVENTS




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APRIL

5	5:30pm	Horn Studio Recital	VOX 2301
6	8:00am	Midwest Graduate Music Consortium Conference 2024	VOX 5 & 2301
6	3:00pm	Iowa Percussion Spectacular 	Concert Hall
7	8:00am	Midwest Graduate Music Consortium Conference 2024	VOX 5 & 2301
7	1:30pm	Piano Sundays at the Old Capitol: Réne Lecuona and Studio	Old Capitol Museum
7	3:00pm	Faculty Recital: Swansongs - The Last Recital 	Concert Hall
9	7:30pm	Guest Artist and Clinician Recital: Brittany Lasch, <i>trombone</i>	Recital Hall
11	7:30pm	Iowa Steel Bands Spring Concert 	Concert Hall

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