

The Four Elements

Brooklyn Rider

Saturday, September 30
Luth Concert Hall
Prior Presents 2023–24

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome

Dear friends,

It is wonderful to welcome the string quartet Brooklyn Rider to the Prior Performing Arts Center at Holy Cross. Among the twenty-first century's most inventive interpreters of classical music, Brooklyn Rider features two musicians familiar to the College, violinist Johnny Gandelsman and violist Nicholas Cords, and two who are new to our campus, violinist Colin Jacobsen and cellist Michael Nicolas. We look forward to this evening's performance as well as to a lively set of campus- and community-based residency activities with the acclaimed quartet this coming week.

The Prior Performing Arts Center was built to serve not only as an extraordinary venue for training in and presenting the creative and performing arts—an aim I trust you'll find met by tonight's acoustic experience of these brilliant musicians—but to foster work cross-pollinated between the arts and other disciplines. It is thus a special pleasure to present tonight's program, "The Four Elements," which offers audiences a new framework for engaging the complex realities of climate change.

Last year the Prior brought together Holy Cross faculty, staff, and students from across the sciences to create "The Art of Science," an atrium exhibition of scientific research presented as visual art. (The exhibition has since traveled to the Anthony S. Fauci Integrated Science Complex, where it remains on display.) That project was inspired by an idea central to "The Four Elements": that the fields of art and science share an investment in producing ever richer ways to understand our world. Yet art, like science, can also help us imagine new worlds altogether. The need to imagine new worlds has perhaps never been more urgent than in the context of climate change. What futures do the pieces you hear tonight invite you to create?

Kyle Frisina
Interim Director
Prior Performing Arts Center

Special thanks for their engagement with and support of this visit to Robert Bellin, Michael Carney, Daniel DiCenso, Colleen Fitzgerald, Matthew Jaskot, Lynn Kremer, Sergio Muñoz Leiva, Frances Maughan-Brown, Morgan Rocks, Allison Richardson, Carolyn Richardson, Melissa Schoenberger, Aaron Seider, and Ann Sheehy.

Program

The Four Elements

A Short While To Be Here - Colin Jacobsen (based on American folk songs, as collected and transcribed by Ruth Crawford Seeger)

Undone - Conrad Tao

Aere senza stelle - Andreia Pinto Correia

Lacrimoso, quasi recitativo – the starless air: lyrical and static.

Agitato, strepitoso – a tumult of voices: dense, angular, and dissonant.

Misterioso, senza misura. Inquieto – time suspended. A whirlwind of sands, vanishing into infinity.

String Quartet No.8 in C minor, Opus 110 - Dmitri Shostakovich

Largo

Allegro molto

Allegretto

Largo

Largo

Tenebrae - Osvaldo Golijov

Tonight's program will be approximately 80 minutes with no intermission.

For the legal and physical safety of the artists and for the comfort of the audience, cameras and other recording devices are not permitted in the theater during the performance.

Booking direction by David Lieberman Artist's Representatives www.dlartists.com • info@dlartists.com

Program Notes

The Four Elements

The idea of four core elements—Earth, Air, Fire, Water—as the physical world's foundation was a shared belief across numerous ancient cultures, including those in Greece, Egypt, Persia, Babylonia, India, and beyond. In myriad combinations, these four elements were thought to be capable of both infinite creation and powerful destruction. In parallel, the unique musical ecosystem of the string quartet is a delicate balance of four unique human elements, collectively capable of voicing the profound beauties of our world as well as its potential for violent change.

In their latest project, Brooklyn Rider convenes a musical discussion trained on the future of our planet. In part a celebration of Earth's wondrous mysteries, this project is more importantly designed to raise attention to the powerful forces of climate change which, taken together, represent the single greatest challenge of our time. The Four Elements gathers music either broadly representative of or directly inspired by the classical elements of earth, air, fire, water. Some of the works on tonight's program are drawn from the last one hundred years, a century marked by unprecedented planetary change, while others are newly commissioned scores for this project penned by composers with unique global perspectives that more urgently reflect current realities and serve as a musical call to action.

Brooklyn Rider's own Colin Jacobsen celebrates the element of Earth in "**A Short While To Be Here,**" based on American folk songs, as collected and transcribed in the 1940s by the American musical pioneer Ruth Crawford Seeger. Her life's musical journey represented something of an interesting dichotomy. Delving into composition in the 1920s and 1930's, she fearlessly and unapologetically championed a modernist aesthetic. From the late 1930's until her death in 1953, she focused her activities in the world of American folk music, working closely with John and Alan Lomax's Archive of American Folk Song at the Library of Congress. Ruth Crawford Seeger's collection of transcriptions *Animal Folk Songs for Children*, was published in 1950 and widely popularized by her daughter Peggy Seeger's 1957 Folkways Records recording of the same name.

Four thousand years ago, stick maps were devised by Micronesians to represent and codify knowledge of the ocean waves around the Marshall Islands, which are currently at risk of total eradication due to stronger ocean waves and sea level rise. In his work **Undone**** based on the element of Water, pianist and composer Conrad Tao ponders the mythological wave spirit Undine in relation to ancient Micronesian concepts, all refracted and interpreted through the contemporary world of the string quartet. What would a modern version of the Undine myth need to be today to reflect a oceanic reality so large and fearsome that it seems impossible to comprehend on a human level?

Portuguese composer Andreia Pinto Correia draws inspiration for her work based on the the element of Air from dust storms originating in the Sahara Desert. From the descriptions of these "blood rains" as bad omens in Homer's Iliad and narratives by Hesiod and Plutarch, to scientific observations by Darwin and Ehrenberg in the nineteenth century, up until today, the reporting of desert dust storms has evolved from descriptive narratives to encompassing an entire field of environmental research.

In the composer's words:

*The inspiration for **Aere senza stelle** (Air Without Stars)* was the tempestades de poeira—or dust storms—that travel from the Sahara Desert to the Iberia Peninsula, a phenomenon experienced during my youth in Portugal. Re-reading Dante Alighieri's *Inferno*, I recognized a profound poetic connection to climate change, and so I mirrored the structure of Canto III, 22-30 dividing the work into three sections. In the final measures, the string quartet creates a sonic cloud, as though carrying an infinite stream of particles from the desert to other parts of the world.*

Lacrimoso, quasi recitativo – the starless air: lyrical and static.

Agitato, strepitoso – a tumult of voices: dense, angular, and dissonant.

Misterioso, senza misura. Inquieto – time suspended. A whirlwind of sands, vanishing into infinity.

The element of Fire is brought to life by Dmitri Shostakovich's explosive **Eighth String Quartet** (1960), a work written in just three days in 1960 while visiting Dresden to write music for the film *Five Days and Five Nights* about the Allied firebombing of that city in World War II. Dedicated to "the victims of fascism and war," the extra-musical meaning of the work has long been debated. Is it an autobiographical statement about the composer's struggles against the Stalinist regime, a reference to the Holocaust, or a rebuke to totalitarianism? While we will never ultimately know, this beloved work has nevertheless secured a place as one of the most important and searingly powerful works of the 20th century. The basic building block of the five movement composition is the spelling of the composer's name DSCH (D-E-flat- C-B), heard in the fugal opening of the first movement. The second movement reveals an iconic Jewish theme also heard in the composer's famous Second Piano Trio. The composer describes his feelings on the qualitative elements of Jewish music in *Testimony*:

Jewish folk music has made a most powerful impression on me... it can appear to be happy while it is tragic. It's almost always laughter through tears. This quality... is close to my ideas of what music should be. There should always be two layers in music. Jews were tormented so long that they learned to hide their despair. They express despair in dance music.

Following the third movement's macabre waltz, the fourth movement unfolds in a series of quotations. Opening with a series of ominous knockings (said to represent gun fire), an inverted DSCH statement is juxtaposed, revealing a fragment of the *Dies Irae* from the Catholic Requiem Mass. Following this, the lower three instruments play a Russian funeral anthem (... tormented by the weight of bondage, you glorify death with honor...), followed by the two violins sounding the Russian revolutionary song "Languishing in prison." Later in the movement, a soaringly transcendent cello melody from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk* serves as an emotional crest, followed by an elegiac and contrapuntal reprise of the DSCH theme in the fifth movement.

Finally, Water is again depicted, this time by Osvaldo Golijov's searingly beautiful and flowing work **Tenebrae** (2003). In a sense, this culminating work of flowing melodies and undulating textures depicting a peaceful sensation of seeing Earth from the heavens can also be considered to encompass all four elements; an ode to our beautiful planet. However, zooming in closer to the surface, a world of strife and pain is revealed. In Golijov's words,

*I wrote Tenebrae as a consequence of witnessing two contrasting realities in a short period of time in September 2000. I was in Israel at the start of the new wave of violence that is still continuing today, and a week later I took my son to the new planetarium in New York, where we could see the Earth as a beautiful blue dot in space. I borrowed some of the haunting melismas from Couperin's *Troisième Leçon de Tenebrae*, using them as sources for loops, and wrote new interludes between them, always within a pulsating, vibrating, aerial texture. The compositional challenge was to write music that would sound as an orbiting spaceship that never touches ground. After finishing the composition, I realized that *Tenebrae* could be heard as the slow, quiet reading of an illuminated medieval manuscript in which the appearances of the voice singing the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet (from Yod to Nun, as in Couperin) signal the beginning of new chapters, leading to the ending section, built around a single, repeated word: Jerusalem.*

Notes by Nicholas Cords

*Commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by the 2022 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel - Artistic Director

Aere senza stelle is dedicated in admiration to António Guterres, for his life dedication to climate change issues, and to Catarina Vaz Pinto.

**Commissioned for Brooklyn Rider by the 2022 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel - Artistic Director

Prior Performing Arts Center

A catalyst for creativity and learning, the Prior Performing Arts Center amplifies the arts at Holy Cross and provides the College, the greater Worcester community, and visiting creative thinkers with an inspiring environment to pursue diverse questions of the human experience.

For more information, visit www.priorperformingartscenter.org.

Prior Presents

Brooklyn Rider's "Four Elements" is the second event of this year's **Prior Presents** series, The Prior's signature visiting artist program, which complements the innovation and creativity of work produced throughout the year by Holy Cross students, faculty, and staff. Building on the foundation laid by Arts Transcending Borders (2014-2023), Prior Presents is the keystone of The Prior Performing Arts Center's public-facing programming, merging thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe. Short- and long-term visiting artist residencies include performances, artist talks, installations, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities for Holy Cross students and the greater Worcester community. Creative residencies, which provide artists with time and space to develop new work, make an essential contribution to the broader arts ecosystem and provide on- and off-campus community members with a window into intimate aspects of the creative process.

Upcoming Prior Presents events include:

LaToya Ruby Frazier

November 1, 2023 | 6:00 pm | Luth Concert Hall

One of the country's most acclaimed contemporary photographers, LaToya Ruby Frazier not only captures our cultural blind spots but shows how art can be a powerful tool for social transformation.

Compagnie Hervé Koubi

January 29-30, 2024 | 7:30 pm | Boroughs Theatre

French dance company Hervé Koubi returns its stunning classic to Holy Cross, allowing audiences to experience its gravity-defying style in the thrilling proximity of our black box theater.

Reginald Dwayne Betts

February 26, 2024 | 6:00 pm | Luth Concert Hall

A critically acclaimed poet, scholar, and graduate of Yale Law School, Reginald Dwayne Betts draws on his personal experience with incarceration to work across diverse literary forms and advocacy projects for reform of the criminal justice system.

Cultural Exchange Rate

Tania El Khoury

March 11-16, 2024 | Boroughs Theatre

In this interactive multimedia experience by Lebanese live artist Tania El Khoury, audiences are invited to engage with an astonishing collection of sensory artifacts that collectively trace more than a century of border crossings.

Rhiannon Giddens

March 14, 2024 | 7:30 pm | Luth Concert Hall

The iconic folk artist Rhiannon Giddens, who has stretched her inimitable brand of folk music into nearly every field imaginable, performs from her first album of entirely original songs, "You're the One."

Boston Lyric Opera

The Wanderer's Tethering

April 6, 2024 | 3:00 pm | Luth Concert Hall

With poetry by Boston Poet Laureate Porsha Olayiwola and music by composer Mason Bynes, "The Wanderer's Tethering" reconsiders the 1803 Igbo revolt on the shores of Georgia through the eyes of one of their descendants.

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