

Aeolus Quartet

Ariel and Other Poems

Many-Sided Music

Volume II



A z i c a TM

Christopher Theofanidis – Ariel Ascending

1. I. begins with a breath; gliding effortlessly
2. II. fleeting, delicate
3. III. exuberant, brilliant

I started Ariel Ascending after reading Sylvia Plath's poem, "Ariel," which conjured in me a feeling of the beautiful mingled with the nightmarish. I was struck by the sense of motion Plath created in this work – one can almost feel the wind moving through the words and imagery as the poem progresses. The first movement of my quartet tries to pick up on this, by having each of the four players contribute to a single, ephemeral line that ebbs and flows gesturally. It is the longest of the three movements at 7 1/2 minutes, and is the most narrative in its structure. Thin lyrical strands emerge from delicate surfaces.

The second movement is a kind of transition out of the spirit world of the first movement. It is a true miniature, at 2 1/2 minutes, and starts and stops as it goes, trying to establish its own identity. Eventually a melody emerges, but it is eventually subsumed back into the more brittle environment around it.

The third movement moves into the realm of the earth, and has a very fast, folk-like quality to it. The melodic material is harmonized in a rather strident fashion, often in intervals of 2nds and 9ths. The rhythmic base rides over a very quick eighth note pulse of twos and threes, creating a locally unstable flow.

Notes by Christopher Theofanidis

Aaron Copland – Two Pieces for String Quartet

4. I. Lento molto
5. II. Rondino

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) wrote a total of three movements for string quartet over the course of his lifetime. Two of these, the Lento molto and Rondino, are performed together in a complementary pair as Two Pieces for String Quartet, while the odd one out, known simply as Movement for String Quartet, remained lost for nearly 60 years after its composition. Both Movement for String Quartet and the Rondino were written in the early 1920's during Copland's study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. The Rondino, however, is more forward-looking and indicative of a style that would come to define the composer's mature writing with its angularity and syncopation. The Lento molto was not written until 1928, and it is a perfect specimen of the other side of Copland's mature style in its expansiveness and purity. He sent a copy of the score for this latest movement to his former mentor Boulanger, who affirmed it as "a masterpiece... So moving, so deep, so simple."

The Lento molto opens with the upper three voices presenting the four note motive that is the basis of the movement. The texture is open and simple, creating a canvas for the cello's searching melody in its upper register. The first violin picks up the theme with the cello in counterpoint, then the second violin joined by the viola, until the whole ensemble builds up the highest point of tension. In the clearing, the four note motive remains and the viola sings a lonely refrain. One final declamation of the theme evaporates in a single whisper.

The Rondino begins with the violin and viola chasing one another around a whimsical melody. Copland employs techniques such as pizzicato and col legno (playing with the wood of the bow) to highlight characters and expand the sound world of this movement. Transitioning seamlessly from one abstract theme to the next, Copland infuses the Rondino with a playful buoyancy. After a pregnant pause, the quartet comes together in octaves for one final headlong scramble up their fingerboards to a grand finish.

Notes by Rachel Kitagawa Shapiro

Missy Mazzoli – Quartet for Queen Mab

6. Playful, fast

Queen Mab is an elusive creature from folklore and literature, a tiny fairy who drives her chariot into the nose of sleeping people. She enters their brains, eliciting dreams of their heart's desire. This quartet embraces the wildness of Queen Mab's journey and the dreams that result; Baroque ornaments twist around long legato lines and melodies ricochet between players. The music follows a sort of intuitive dream logic but returns again and again to the opening material, resulting in a sort of insistent, insane ritornello. The work was commissioned by ETHEL, with support from ETHEL's Foundation for the Arts and Miller Theatre. The work premiered at New York's Miller Theatre in 2014.

Notes by Missy Mazzoli

Samuel Barber – String Quartet, Op. 11

7. I. Molto allegro e appassionato
8. II. Molto adagio
9. III. Molto allegro

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) completed only one string quartet during his career, but thanks to its middle movement *Molto adagio*, the work is one of the most treasured of American 20th century music. Widely heard as the *Adagio for Strings* in its larger arrangement for string orchestra, this music has come to be accepted as an expression of national grief; it was performed at the funeral of Albert Einstein, nationally broadcast after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and included in services around the world honoring victims of 9/11. Yet for all the sweep and magnitude of a full string orchestra, this music was originally conceived on a much smaller and more intimate scale.

Barber quickly wrote out the first two movements of his string quartet in a small cabin in Austria during the summer of 1936. In perhaps a bit of an understatement, Barber wrote of the *Molto adagio* to his friend Orlando Cole, cellist of the Curtis Quartet, "I have just finished the slow movement of my quartet today - it is a knockout!" Completing the third movement would prove to be a much more difficult endeavor. Although Barber intended to have the Curtis Quartet premiere the work, it was not ready in time for their tour to Rome, and so the Pro Arte Quartet gave the premiere with the piece's original third movement. Barber was dissatisfied with this finale and set about making revisions. He eventually settled on a form in which the third movement is a brief recounting of material from the first movement, capped with a fiery coda.

The *Molto allegro e appassionato* opens with the energetic theme presented in octaves across the four instruments. Barber expands this theme harmonically throughout the quartet, even turning it on its head at the climax, and he seamlessly integrates it with more tender material in his distinctly lyrical style. Because the revised finale *Molto allegro* is a fleeting reminder of the first movement, the quartet can be imagined as only two movements, with the *Molto adagio* existing in a pause within one larger outer movement. The *Molto adagio* rises from nothing with the first violin alone, the other three instruments intoning chords beneath a searching line in B flat minor. Gorgeous in its sparseness and simplicity, this movement elevates silence to profundity; it is truly the spaces between the notes that make the music. Moving directly into the echo of the first movement, the quartet is finished in cyclic fashion as each theme is briefly revisited and a wild coda brings the piece to a frantic close.

Notes by Rachel Kitagawa Shapiro

Aeolus Quartet

The Quartet is honored to have recorded this album on a matched set of instruments by Samuel Zygmuntowicz, thanks to the generosity of the Five Partners Foundation.

Praised by the Baltimore Sun for combining “smoothly meshed technique with a sense of spontaneity and discovery,” the Aeolus Quartet is committed to presenting both time-seasoned masterworks and new cutting-edge works to widely diverse audiences with equal freshness, dedication, and fervor. Formed in 2008, the Quartet is comprised of violinists Nicholas Tavani and Rachel Kitagawa Shapiro, violist *Caitlin Lynch, and cellist Alan Richardson. The Aeolus Quartet has been awarded prizes at nearly every major competition in the United States and performed across the globe with showings “worthy of a major-league quartet” (Scott Cantrell, Dallas Morning News). Mark Satola of the Cleveland Plain Dealer writes, “The quartet has a rich and warm tone combined with precise ensemble playing (that managed also to come across as fluid and natural), and an impressive musical intelligence guided every technical and dramatic turn.” They were the 2013-2015 Graduate Resident String Quartet at the Juilliard School, and they currently make their home in New York City.

The Aeolus Quartet’s numerous honors include Grand Prize at both the Plowman Chamber Music Competition and the Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition, as well as First Prize at the Coleman International Chamber Ensemble Competition. They were also prizewinners at the Fischhoff International Chamber Music Competition and the International Chamber Music Ensemble Competition in New England. The Austin Critics’ Table named the Aeolus Quartet their 2016-17 “Best Touring Performance” for Rambunctious, a collaboration with Spectrum Dance Theater.

Ariel and Other Poems is the second album in the Quartet’s Many-Sided Music project, in which Aeolus explores the masterful contributions to the string quartet repertoire by American composers, both old and new. The first album in the series was released in 2011 under the Naxos/Longhorn labels and features works by William Bolcom, Alexandra T Bryant, Steven Snowden, and Dan Visconti.

The Quartet has performed across North America, Europe, and Asia in venues such as Alice Tully Hall, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Reinberger Recital Hall at Severance Hall, The Library of Congress, Renwick Gallery, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Shanghai Oriental Arts Center. In addition, the Quartet was featured on the hit Netflix miniseries, The Defenders.

Dedicated to sharing the joy of chamber music with new audiences, the Aeolus Quartet has been widely recognized for their highly creative and engaging educational programs. The Quartet was honored to receive a Chamber Music America Residency Partnership Grant, and in recognition of their artistic achievement, CMA named this project its “Guarneri Quartet Residency” for the year. This residency promoted engagement with multiple interactive performances at Duke Ellington School for the Arts, the Sitar Arts Center, and George Washington University. The Aeolus Quartet received the Educator Award presented by the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Association in acknowledgment of the positive impact of their educational efforts in underserved communities. Additionally, the Quartet was awarded the John Lad Prize, which culminated in a residency involving large-scale community engagement work, masterclasses, and performances at Stanford University. The Aeolus Quartet has served as teaching faculty at Stanford University’s Education Program for Gifted Youth, the Austin Chamber Music Workshop, Point CounterPoint, and the Chloe Trevor Music Academy. Working in collaboration with the University of Texas through the Rural Chamber Music Outreach Initiative, the Quartet has presented educational programs and performances in communities throughout the state of Texas. Through their multiple residencies with the Chamber Music Society of Detroit alone, the Aeolus Quartet has reached over 18,000 students in the greater Detroit metro area.

The Aeolus Quartet has been fortunate to collaborate with many of today’s leading artists, including Renee Fleming, Ida Kavafian, Joel Krosnick, Paul Neubauer, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. They studied extensively with the Cavani, Cleveland, Guarneri, Juilliard, Miró, and St. Lawrence Quartets. Members of the Quartet hold degrees from the Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the University of Maryland, and the University of Texas at Austin.

The Aeolus Quartet is the ensemble-in-residence at Musica Viva NY. The Quartet is named for the Greek god Aeolus, who governed the four winds. This idea of a single spirit uniting four individual forces serves as an inspiration to the members of the Aeolus Quartet as they pursue their craft.

**Ariel and Other Poems was recorded in its entirety with the former violist of the Aeolus Quartet, Gregory Luce.*

The name of this album, Ariel and Other Poems, is a reference to the name given by Sylvia Plath to her last completed manuscript. This collection of poems would later be expanded and published under the name Ariel after her death. The artwork featured on this album cover is by Sylvia Plath, titled Triple-Face Portrait c. 1950-1951.

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Engineer: Bruce Egge

Editing and Mastering: Alan Bise

Cover image: Triple-Face Portrait
(Sylvia Plath, artist)

Graphic Design: Monica Mussulin

Recorded February 16-18, 2017

Sauder Concert Hall, Goshen College
Goshen, IN

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