



Sunday, November 3, 2024, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Dover Quartet

Joel Link, *violin*
Bryan Lee, *violin*
Julianne Lee, *viola*
Camden Shaw, *cello*

PROGRAM

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981) *Strum*

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate (b. 1968) *Abokkoli' Taloowa' (Woodland Songs)*
(West Coast Premiere, Cal Performances
Co-commission*)
Fani' (Squirrel)
Bakbak (Woodpecker)
Issi' (Deer)
Nanni' (Fish)
Shawi' (Raccoon)

Pura Fé (b. 1959) *Rattle Songs*
(orchestrated by Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate) (West Coast Premiere, Cal Performances
Co-commission*)
Shanoojhee
Viri Kuta
Haweheemo
Grammah Easter's Lullaby
For the Pepper (In Memory of Jim Pepper)
Women's Shuffle
Great Grandpa's Banjo

INTERMISSION

Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) *Quartet in F major, Op. 96 (American)*
Allegro ma non troppo
Lento
Molto vivace
Vivace ma non troppo

* Commissioned for the Dover Quartet by Curtis Institute of Music and the following co-commissioners: Arizona Friends of Chamber Music; Cal Performances, UC Berkeley; Carnegie Hall; Chamber Music Houston; Chamber Music Northwest; Chamber Music Pittsburgh; Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth; Friends of Chamber Music Denver; Kingston Chamber Music Festival; Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music; and Shriver Hall Concert Series.

*This performance is made possible, in part, by Joe W. Laymon, Kiese Laymon,
Jeanne Laymon, Thomas Laymon, Eve Dunbar, and Cade Catherine Dunbar-Laymon.*

*The Dover Quartet is represented by
Curtis Artist Management at the Curtis Institute of Music.*

**Authentic American Narratives:
Quartets by Montgomery, Dvořák,
and Tate**

The genre of the string quartet commands an especially prestigious position in classical music tradition, both as a platform for the sophisticated development of a composer's ideas and as a vehicle for intimate, nuanced performance by an ensemble. Yet, as with other forms of art music, the vernacular idiom embodied in folk sources can serve as a limitless supply of inspiration.

Antonín Dvořák is an outstanding exemplar. He brought a new perspective to the mainstream Austro-German traditions of symphonic and chamber music by expanding their vocabulary with the rhythmic verve and melodic colors the composer knew from Czech and other Slavic cultures. At the same time, though marginalized as a Bohemian within the Habsburg Empire, he wanted to stake his claim within the mainstream tradition.

Dvořák's success in doing so led to his invitation by the visionary philanthropist Jeannette Thurber to come to the United States in 1892 to direct the fledgling National Conservatory of Music that she had founded in New York. Welcoming students regardless of their gender or race, Thurber was progressive in her inclusivity as well as in her conviction that American composers needed to become self-reliant and look to their own vernacular to create an authentically American style. Dvořák, she hoped, would help point the way.

For its new program, the Dover Quartet juxtaposes music from this period in Dvořák's career—which gave us one of the best-loved quartets in the literature—with works by two contemporary Americans who are continuing the quest to develop an authentic voice nourished by a passion for their respective vernaculars. As Dover cellist Camden Shaw puts it: “The program celebrates, illuminates, and expands the already robust connections between many American voices.”

**Nostalgia and Celebration:
Jessie Montgomery's *Strum***

Winner of the 2024 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for the piano-and-strings piece *Rounds*, Jessie Montgomery has established herself as an internationally sought-after composer. She was named *Musical America's* Composer of the Year for 2023 and recently completed a prestigious three-year residency with the Chicago Symphony—becoming the second Black female composer to have her music performed by the CSO (after Florence Price in 1933).

Montgomery's current season includes residencies at the Trondheim Chamber Music Festival in Norway and the James Madison University's Contemporary Music Festival, as well as the world premiere in April of her contribution to the New York Philharmonic's Project 19 initiative celebrating the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

Also active as a violinist, teacher, and curator, Montgomery is committed to exploring music's potential as a vehicle for social justice through her affiliation with organizations like Sphinx, a notable advocate for diversity in the arts. Beginning in 1999, Montgomery has played multiple roles in relation to Sphinx, including serving as Composer in Residence with its touring ensemble, Sphinx Virtuosi.

Montgomery considers *Strum*, which she wrote in 2006 for the Providence, Rhode Island-based Community MusicWorks, to be her “first real commission.” It has become one of her signature pieces and appears on her debut album, which was released in 2015.

The composer initially scored *Strum* for a cello quintet but revised the score for string quartet in 2008 and then, in 2012, after receiving a commission to celebrate the 15th annual Sphinx Competition, prepared a second version that included some new material.

“The voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound,” explains Montgomery. *Strum* uses what she calls “texture motives”: “layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out.” A texture motive comprising “strumming pizzicato” provides “the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece.”

Strum draws on American folk idioms as well as “the spirit of dance and movement.” It traces “a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.”

Deep, Dramatic, Rhapsodic Expressions: Tate’s *Abokkoli’ Taloowa’*

A citizen of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma, Jerod Impichchaachaaha’ Tate was born in 1968 to a Chickasaw father and a Manx mother; his middle name, inherited from his Chickasaw clan, means “their high corncrib.” Tate is blazing a path for contemporary classical composition that expresses an authentically American Indian voice and was appointed a Cultural Ambassador for the US Department of State in 2021.

Tate’s father, who helped author the Chickasaw Constitution and gained renown as a tribal lawyer and judge, is also a passionate pianist and bass-baritone and began giving Tate piano lessons when he was eight; his mother was a professional choreographer and dancer. “So my connection to American Indian art and American theater is deep,” he says.

The piano has remained central to Tate’s musical life: he obtained degrees in performance from Northwestern University and the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he also earned a degree in composition, and he performs as a concert pianist alongside his career writing music. Tate’s compositional practice is focused on symphonic music, ballet, and opera and how these formats can express his native Chickasaw culture.

Along with the Dover Quartet’s performances on their current tour, several important premieres are bringing Tate’s musical world into the spotlight this season. Just last week saw the world premiere in Oklahoma City of *Loksi’ Shaali’ (Shell Shaker)*, the first opera composed entirely in an American Indian language. In April, *Iholba’ (The Vision)*, a work for chorus and orchestra entirely in the Chickasaw language, will be unveiled at Carnegie Hall. The Oklahoma City Philharmonic will also present the world premiere that month of *American Indian Symphony*, which calls for six different tribal languages to be sung by a chorus and two soloists—in homage to six cultural regions of tribes in Oklahoma.

Tate became acquainted with the Dover Quartet through a mutual friend, the record producer Alan Bise (who produced the ensemble’s distinguished series of the complete Beethoven string quartets (on Cedilla Records). Their bonding led to the commissioning of *Abokkoli’ Taloowa’* (“Woodland Songs”), which provides an excellent introduction to Tate’s fusion of Chickasaw cultural tradition with modern compositional techniques using the Western medium of the string quartet.

The Southeastern homelands of the Chickasaw are filled with traditional woodland animals “so revered that our family clans are named after them,” says Tate. *Abokkoli’ Taloowa’* comprises five movements, each depicting a particular woodland animal and the traditional stories associated with them. Tate also calls each independent movement (the five can be performed in any order, or as excerpts) an “epitome—a deep, dramatic, and rhapsodic expression of my feelings of being a Chickasaw man from a beautiful and robust culture. I love our animals, and I love composing works about them.”

Tate describes his approach to composition as scenic and reflective of his theatrical background—much of his work has in fact been choreographed.

“Fani¹” (“Squirrel”) focuses on “the bite of the teeth of squirrel, while “Bakbak” (“Woodpecker”) uses “very large and hyperbolic sounds” and “Olympic god-style treatment” to dramatize the sounds of a woodpecker. In “Issi¹” (“Deer”), the importance of this animal as a main food source has resulted in hunting becoming “a whole art form, as in many cultures around the world.” Tate’s music resounds with a mysterious character reflecting the deer as “a very ominous spirit.” He composed “Nanni¹” (“Fish”) to sound “very aquatic and oceanic within the lower strings—almost *Scheherazade*-ish with the undulating strings and then the belly that comes over the top.” Tate references the animal after which his own family named in “Shawi¹” (“Raccoon”). These animals “can sometimes be cute but are very unpredictable and diabolical.”

Abokkoli Taloowa, writes Tate in his program commentary, is “full of Chickasaw melodies, rhythms, and musical structure. Sometimes these elements appear very clearly, where the melody may romantically soar above the ensemble. Sometimes they are abstracted into the texture of the quartet and hidden inside the spirit of the animal. I allow myself to fluidly dance between cultural clarity and modern expressionism. I am deeply inspired by our modern Native artists, choreographers, authors and film makers—each proudly expressing their individual identity within rich ancestry. I encourage each listener to create their own emotional story of each animal and imprint these legends into their hearts.”

The Fluidity of Folk Art: Orchestrating *Rattle Songs*

When they began collaborating, Tate discovered that Dover cellist Camden Shaw (whose mother is an ethnomusicologist) had become an enthusiastic fan of Ulali, a path-breaking *a cappella* trio of Indigenous women that was founded in 1987. Ulali’s 1994

album, *Mahk Jchi (Our Hearts)*, which includes several of the *Rattle Songs*, is “a unique work of genius, where Native songs are modernized through innovative arrangements and stunningly rich harmonies,” according to Tate. “Their work had a powerfully deep impact on my personal vision as a Native composer.” He finds inspiration in his friendship with Ulali’s current members: Pura Fé Crescioni, Soni Moreno, and Jennifer Kreisberg.

The title *Rattle Songs* points to the significance in Chickasaw music of percussion made from shaking turtle shells “for stomp dancing and social songs.” Pura Fé “brilliantly couched them in traditional woodland shell shaking styles.” She gathered the sources for *Rattle Songs*, which are intended as “an homage to different tribal members that they know around North America,” during Ulali’s travels with their colleagues. “For the Pepper (In Memory of Jim Pepper)” is an original song honoring the Kaw Indian jazz saxophonist Jim Gilbert Pepper II, who used American Indian tunes in his jazz compositions.

The Dover Quartet requested Tate to orchestrate *Rattle Songs* for string quartet. The composer emphasizes that these are not arrangements. “An arrangement, as in a jazz arrangement, is when you take liberties and change the form. An orchestration—which doesn’t have to be for a full orchestra—means you have created a version for that specific ensemble.”

In other words, he has created “a new home” for the *Rattle Songs* in the string quartet. Not only does Tate dispense with shells, but he doesn’t try to imitate their sounds with the string instruments. Tate describes the result as “classically impressionistic in a post-modern style.”

For Tate, this process of transformation is “a beautiful example of how fluid the art in folk art is through time”—of the workings of “fractured history” in a way (a reference that explicitly links this performance with this

season's Cal Performances *Illuminations* series of events). "Ulali [compositions] were hyper-modernizing ancient music in a new, modern way by transforming other folk music from different tribes into rattle songs—ancient and modern, all in the same soup. That's a kind of cultural re-orchestration. And now I'm orchestrating for a string quartet. We're always in a state of modern art, no matter what we're doing. It's liberating to think that art is constantly evolving on every possible level."

Multiple American Resonances, with Memories of Bohemia

The hectic pace of New York took its toll on Antonín Dvořák, so the composer welcomed an opportunity to escape the city during his first summer in the United States (in 1893) and spent his vacation in the town of Spillville in northeast Iowa. Joined by his family, he could relax among his fellow Czech immigrants who had settled there. Dvořák also enjoyed conversing with members of the itinerant Kickapoo Medicine Show ensemble (who presented Native American dances).

The peaceful surroundings and access to nature stimulated Dvořák's drive to compose. He completed his Op. 96 in F major—the twelfth of his 14 completed string quartets and his first effort in the genre in a dozen years—within just two weeks. The nickname "American" was not the composer's but reflects not only where it was written but its evocation, for many listeners, of aspects of the American experience (even if such was not intended by Dvořák himself). In a sense, the "American" Quartet represents a chamber companion piece to the just-completed *New World* Symphony No. 9, though from a pastoral perspective.

The melody-rich piece opens with a theme entrusted to the viola (Dvořák's own instrument as a young musician). The "American" aspect has been linked to the use

of pentatonicism (which can awaken associations with Native American music) as well as to the rhythmic vigor of the writing. But these traits are likewise found in the folk music of Dvořák's native Bohemia. In any case, the work synthesizes apparent simplicity with sophisticated compositional techniques. The composer said that he had "Papa Haydn in mind" when composing it.

The Lento's melancholy main theme is a classic instance of how malleable are perceptions of Dvořák's "American" influences. Some have tried to identify the melody with the African American spirituals that Dvořák had come to know and, to great controversy, championed as the necessary "real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States." Others have suggested a Native American source.

Dvořák plays with expectations of where the beat will fall in the third movement, which alternates between major and minor. The violin's chirping phrase has been identified as the call of the scarlet tanager, which the composer notated when he encountered such a bird persisting in its song while he was at work.

The chugging rhythms of the finale might be heard to inscribe the great American railway into the piece as well. The propulsive energy of the rondo theme is counterposed with a slow, hymn-like episode at the center of the movement that recalls Dvořák's morning ritual of attending Mass and then playing the local church organ.

Thomas May is a writer, critic, educator, and translator. Along with essays regularly commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony, the Juilliard School, the Ojai Festival, and other leading institutions, he contributes to the New York Times and Musical America and blogs about the arts at www.memeteria.com.

Named one of the greatest string quartets of the last 100 years by *BBC Music Magazine* and “the next Guarneri Quartet” by the *Chicago Tribune*, the two-time Grammy-nominated Dover Quartet is one of the world’s most in-demand chamber ensembles. The group’s awards include a stunning sweep of all prizes at the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, and prizes at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. Its honors also include the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award. The Dover Quartet is the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music and Quartet in Residence at Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music.

The Dover Quartet’s 2024–25 season includes premiere performances throughout North America of newly commissioned works by Jerod Impichchachaaha’ Tate, a citizen of the Chickasaw Nation and a leading composer of American Indian classical music; collaborative performances with pre-eminent artists that include pianists Michelle Cann, Marc-André Hamelin, and Haochen Zhang; and tours to Europe and Asia. Recent collaborators include Leif Ove Andsnes, Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnaton, Ray Chen, Anthony McGill, Edgar Meyer, the Pavel Haas Quartet, Roomful of Teeth, and Davón Tines. The quartet has also recently premiered works by Mason Bates, Steven Mackey, Marc Neikrug, and Chris Rogerson.

The Dover Quartet’s highly acclaimed three-volume recording, *Beethoven Complete String Quartets* (Cedille Records), was hailed as “meticulously balanced, technically clean-as-a-whistle and intonationally immaculate” (*The Strad*). The group’s discography also includes *Encores* (Brooklyn Classical), a recording of 10 popular movements from the string quartet repertoire; *The Schumann*

Quartets (Azica Records), which was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance; *Voices of Defiance: 1943, 1944, 1945* (Cedille Records); and an all-Mozart debut recording (Cedille Records), featuring Michael Tree, the late, longtime violist of the Guarneri Quartet. The quartet’s recording of Steven Mackey’s theatrical-musical work *Memoir*, recorded with the percussion group arx duo and narrator Natalie Christa Rakes, was released on Bridge Records in August 2024. A recording of the Tate commissions and Dvořák’s String Quartet in F major, Op. 96 (“American”) will be released in 2025 on Curtis Studio, the record label of the Curtis Institute of Music.

The Dover Quartet draws from the lineage of the distinguished Guarneri, Cleveland, and Vermeer quartets. Its members studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, the New England Conservatory, and the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. They were mentored extensively by Shmuel Ashkenasi, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. The Dover Quartet was formed at Curtis in 2008; its name pays tribute to *Dover Beach* by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber.

The Dover Quartet plays on the following instruments and proudly endorses Thomastik-Infeld strings:

Joel Link: a very fine Peter Guarneri of Mantua, 1710–15, on generous loan from Irene R. Miller through the Beare’s International Violin Society

Bryan Lee: Nicolas Lupot, Paris, 1810; Samuel Zygmuntowicz, Brooklyn, 2020

Julianne Lee: Robert Brode, 2005

Camden Shaw: Joseph Hill, London, 1770

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