



Sunday, April 13, 2025, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## Owls

Alexi Kenney, *violin*  
Ayane Kozasa, *viola*  
Gabriel Cabezas, *cello*  
Paul Wiancko, *cello*

### PROGRAM

Chick Corea    *Children's Song No. 12* (1984)

Paul Wiancko    *Vox Petra* (2018)

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh    *Rāqs\** (2015)

François Couperin    *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* (1717)

Trollstilt    *Ricercar* (2000)  
(Monica Mugan and Dan Trueman)

Wiancko    *When The Night* (2018)

Terry Riley    *Good Medicine* (1986)

*\*Rāqs was commissioned for Kronos Fifty for the Future,  
a project of the Kronos Performing Arts Association.  
The score and parts are available for free at [kronosquartet.org](http://kronosquartet.org).  
Each piece on this program is arranged by Owls.*

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## Sharing Joy with Owls

*In the beginning, there was a Spotify playlist...*

That's how violinist Alexi Kenney and violist Ayane Kozasa of Owls described the genesis of not only this afternoon's program but also the quartet itself. Both grew from the players' desire to share music that they loved, that inspired them, and that they thought would be fun to play with each other. "That's what it's all about: finding the fun, finding why we did this in the first place, which sometimes—not always—can get lost in the fray or the frenzy of this life-style and career," Kenney said. Kozasa concurred, "What we do is this fine line between this passion that we have, and it also has to be work to a certain extent. I have really appreciated being part of this group because it keeps reminding me how fun it is and how joyful it is to play music."

That Spotify playlist—which ranged from Meredith Monk and Brad Mehldau to Leoš Janáček and Joe Hisaishi—also had pragmatic implications for the unique group, whose instrumentation (two cellos, a viola, and violin) has little music written explicitly for it. (The only canonical example comes from Anton Arensky, whose quartet the members were intent on *not* playing.) By adding music to the playlist, the members could share their interests and inspirations, and they began the comprehensive process of finding music that they could arrange. They considered technical aspects of color and voicing, but also—guided by their joy of playing together—they asked themselves what each of them individually could contribute and bring to the whole. Ultimately, for Kozasa, by releasing herself from expectations, the musical universe became wide open: "For this group, there are no precedents for how this should sound. That was so freeing for me. Starting from the mentality that any-

thing is possible allowed us to explore not just our corner of classical music, but to go beyond that to find other commonalities in the musical Venn diagram with other styles."

The end result is this program's seven works, all arranged collaboratively by the ensemble and each with deep personal meaning for all members, including the two works by cellist and composer Paul Wiancko (who recently joined the well-known Kronos Quartet). "How I envision programs is usually energetically: how things are sculpted, how energy levels dip and rise and all of that," Kenney said. The works each ebb and flow in due course, and most contrast feeling anchored and unmoored, still and moving. But the group's playful spirit also finds resonance with the works selected: Themes of simple joys, innocence, and curiosity appear across the program. As Kenney noted, "There is so much life, and so much vitality, and so much joy of living and joy of music making. That might also be the through line: this love for life—this *joie de vivre*."

## Chick Corea

### *Children's Song No. 12*

For Owls, Chick Corea's *Children's Song No. 12* bids a warm welcome to the concert as an opener but, for the composer, children's music offered a unique artistic challenge. Inspired by Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*, which were also written with children in mind, Corea's children's songs were a pathway to pare down musical elements to only the necessities. He has been writing "children's songs" and peppering them into albums since the early 1970s, when his own musical style shifted away from complex bebop toward melodic cool jazz. In *Children's Song No. 12*, Corea immediately establishes a slow groove with a syncopated ostinato harmony over which he lays tuneful melodies—graced with blue notes—and call-and-response phrases.

**Paul Wiancko**  
***Vox Petra***

According to composer Paul Wiancko, *Vox Petra* (*Stone Voice*) is “a double duo inspired by Isamu Noguchi’s iconic stone sculptures, which turn heavily unmovable masses while transforming the space around them.” A journey by manipulating a sense of space. The opening is large and uncentered, as if the initial motive was undecided on its direction, searching for momentum, only to disintegrate into arid elements that return at random. Two techniques contribute to spatial disorientation: rapid, repeating notes that decrescendo give a sense of something moving away (*à la* the Doppler effect), while high-pitch delicate harmonics activate enharmonic resonances beyond acoustical norms. In the middle section, propulsive rhythms anchor the music, and the energy undulates, providing a sense of cogent direction before developing into a driving Shostakovich-like scherzo. The final section shifts between these two sound worlds—the open-ended curiosity and directed motivation—attempting to reconcile the dueling impulses.

**Franghiz Ali-Zadeh**  
***Rəqs***

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh’s *Rəqs* pays homage to the composer’s homeland Azerbaijan, and the ubiquitous folk dances that accompany many facets of life there: from birthdays to funerals, weddings, farewells, and harvests. She writes, “In Azerbaijan, many different dances have existed since time immemorial.” For Owls, the music represents an “explosion of joy,” as folk dances allow us to take pleasure in the simple life. The beginning features a 6/8 dance rhythm, whose chromatic complexity lends a sinewy and more intellectual quality that soon becomes a slow rhapsody led by the viola. After several languid slinking steps, the folk theme in 6/8 melody reappears, gentle and firm. Affable and lilting, Ali-Zadeh’s work deftly uses folk elements to

counterbalance her avant-garde techniques and musical language.

**François Couperin**  
***Les Barricades Mystérieuses***

Composer, organist, and harpsichordist, François Couperin was the most prominent musician in France after Lully and prior to Rameau. His style emphasized the two most valued French traits: *douceur* (gentility) and naturalness. His musical austerity illustrates *douceur*. *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* uses a strict repetition of a syncopated, upward leap in the treble against the simple strong beat accompaniment as the foundation to explore the new harmonic language that was experimental at the time but is now common practice. He emphasized naturalness by writing music meant to imitate nature, often giving his works descriptive titles like *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* (*Mysterious Barricades*), which may refer to literal walls or might be a metaphor for a woman’s eyelashes. Because so much of his innovative style has become commonplace today, Couperin’s work may seem quaint to modern ears, and yet, that compelling leap-up that runs throughout conjures an image of a composer 300 years ago eager to capture a spark of joy in his music.

**Trollstilt**  
**(Monica Mugan and Dan Trueman)**  
***Ricercar***

In their duo *Trollstilt*, Dan Trueman and Monica Mugan bring together influences of Norse and American folk music to create extemporaneous compositions. Their *Ricercar* uses the straightforward harmonic language of folk music, with unpretentious and unadorned melodies, as its basis. These everyday musical materials, however, develop into fugal counterpoint with voices imitating each other in a loosely Baroque fashion—the title refers to the contrapuntal Baroque keyboard genre. *Trollstilt*’s work continues to grow in complexity before



abruptly cutting back to the opening calm, as if things went too far and needed a restart. The second time through, however, the thematic material is allowed to follow its own journey leading to a gradual denouement on its own terms.

### **Wiancko**

#### ***When The Night***

Paul Wiancko's second work on this afternoon's program, *When the Night*, borrows from Ben E. King's ubiquitous 1960s R & B song "Stand by Me." Wiancko uses the first three notes of the song ("When the night," or mi, sol, la) to write a "harmonically rich and texturally innovative celebration of all things cello." From these most simple of means, Wiancko spins out an array of styles in rapid succession, like a set of variations on a theme. The opening statement offers a homophonic melody against a drone to help establish the basic musical materials, before moving on to arpeggiation and gradual deconstruction of the melody, dispersing it among the instruments. The shifting moods and styles continue leading to an explosive passionate climax.

### **Terry Riley**

#### ***Good Medicine***

Terry Riley's *Good Medicine* shows all of the hallmarks of the composer's groundbreaking minimalist style: bright consonant harmonies, driving pulses with devilishly hard rhythms, and repetitive motives that create a contemplative sound object. Yet by the 1980s, as composers turned toward a more personal neoromanticism, the minimalists introduced tonal harmonic progressions and melodies with a greater emotional

depth. *Good Medicine* takes the language and techniques of minimalism—the deep meditative music that emerges from radically cutting down musical elements—and pairs it with bold melodies that are joyful and soaring. By oscillating between these styles, the work offers a transcendental experience where contemplative meditation awakens a joyful euphoria.

In the end, the program that Owls has crafted invites us into a world of deeply moving music. But the group's collaborative curatorial process—coming together as four individuals with different points of view openly offer their individual perspectives—may also serve as a reminder that true joy is found in sharing that which connects us with others. As Kozasa said, "I have one moment in every piece where I tear up, because it feels so beautiful, or sentimental, or as if you are seeing the world from above and the epic-ness of it; you are reflecting on humanity. There is something in every piece that makes me feel teary-eyed, which is a really nice feeling—a really, really nice human emotion to feel. And hopefully, at some point in the program, the audience can feel it too."

—Eric Lubarsky

*Eric Lubarsky works at Carnegie Hall as a managing editor, where he oversees publishing projects for the hall's educational and social impact programs and creates program books for main stage presentations and free concerts around New York City. He holds a PhD in musicology from the Eastman School of Music and his research is focused on concert life, performance revivals, and the early-music movement of the 20th century.*

**D**eclared “a dream group,” by *The New York Times*, and drawing from a deep well of musical passions and backgrounds, Owls, an inverted string quartet, defies expectations and labels with original, visceral, and personal performances. Each member is an artistic force in their own right; violinist Alexi Kenney, violist Ayane Kozasa, cellist Gabriel Cabezas, and cellist-composer Paul Wiancko share an uncommonly fierce creative spirit that drives the quartet to challenge the ways meaningful concert experiences are conceived.

By weaving together new compositions with collaboratively generated arrangements of music from the 1600s to the present, Owls’ distinctive instrumentation allows the musicians access to beautiful and exhilarating new sound worlds—effectively guaranteeing that each performance is uniquely theirs and without limits.

The 2024–25 season sees the release of the group’s debut album, *Rare Birds*, out now on New Amsterdam Records. Supporting the release are performances at the University of Chicago, 92NY, Capital Region Classical in Albany, Celebrity Series of Boston, Tippet Rise in Montana, Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, and Cal State University Sacramento. [owlsmusic.com](http://owlsmusic.com)

#### **Alexi Kenney, violin**

Violinist Alexi Kenney, the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, is forging a career that defies categorization, following his interests, intuition, and heart. He is equally at home creating experimental programs and commissioning new works, soloing with major orchestras around the world, and collaborating with some of the most celebrated musicians of our time.

Kenney has soloed with the Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Detroit Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, Louisville

Orchestra, Gulbenkian Orchestra, l’Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, and l’Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, as well as in a play-conduct role as a guest leader of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

Chamber music continues to be a major part of his life, and he regularly performs at festivals including Caramoor, ChamberFest Cleveland, Chamber Music Northwest, Kronberg, La Jolla, Ojai, Marlboro, Music@Menlo, Ravinia, Seattle, and Spoleto. He is a founding member of Owls and an graduate of the Bowers Program (formerly CMS 2) at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Kenney is a graduate of the New England Conservatory, where he was a student of Miriam Fried and Donald Weilerstein. [www.alexikenney.com](http://www.alexikenney.com).

#### **Ayane Kozasa, viola**

Praised for her “magnetic, wide-ranging tone” and “rock solid technique” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), violist Ayane Kozasa is a chamber musician, collaborator, and educator. Winner of the 2011 Primrose International Viola Competition, she is the violist of Kronos Quartet as of 2024; she succeeds Hank Dutt, the ensemble’s violist of 45 years.

Kozasa is a founding member of the Aizuri Quartet, which was the 2018 quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the grand prize winner of both the Osaka International String Quartet Competition and the MPrize Chamber Arts Competition. The Aizuri Quartet’s debut album, *Blueprinting* (New Amsterdam), was nominated for a Grammy Award and named one of NPR’s top 10 classical albums of 2018.

In 2022, Kozasa joined the viola faculty at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She previously taught at Adelphi University in Long Island and has been a guest professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Kozasa is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, Kronberg Academy, and Cleveland Institute

of Music, where she studied viola with Misha Amory, Roberto Díaz, Nobuko Imai, and Kirsten Docter. [www.ayanekozasa.com](http://www.ayanekozasa.com).

### **Gabriel Cabezas, cello**

Cellist Gabriel Cabezas is a true 21st-century musician. A prolific and sought-after soloist and collaborator, he is as comfortable interpreting new works as he is with the pillar scores of the cello repertoire. Cabezas has appeared with America's finest symphony orchestras and has premiered dozens of new works by some of the most brilliant composers of our time.

Having premiered Gabriella Smith's cello concerto, entitled *Lost Coast*, with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cabezas performs the work this season with the New York Philharmonic and Cabrillo Festival Orchestra, under the batons of John Adams and Cristian Macelaru, respectively. A longtime collaborator with Smith, in 2021 the duo released *Lost Coast* on the Bedroom Community label. The album was named a favorite of 2021 by NPR and the *New York Times*.

Cabezas is also a member of the acclaimed chamber sextet yMusic and a co-founder of Duende, a new-music and contemporary dance collective. In 2016, he received the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, a career grant awarded to extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians. Cabezas studied at the Curtis Institute of Music under Carter Brey. [www.gabrielcabezas.com](http://www.gabrielcabezas.com).

### **Paul Wiancko, cello**

Paul Wiancko is a composer, cellist, and serial collaborator. A member of Kronos Quartet since 2023, he succeeded the late Geoff Nutall as Artistic Director for Chamber Music at Spoleto USA. Wiancko is the first composer to hold either position. Praised as a "multifaceted talent" with a "singular voice" by the *Washington Post*, Wiancko has composed, arranged, and performed in a dramatically large range of genres, collaborating with artists including Max Richter, Chick Corea, Norah Jones, Dirty Projectors, The National, Wye Oak, and the Aizuri, Guarneri, JACK, St. Lawrence, and Kronos Quartets. [www.paulwiancko.com](http://www.paulwiancko.com).