ATTACCA QUARTET
AND CAROLINE SHAW
Sunday, September 17, 2023
7:30 p.m.

Presented in collaboration with the University of Iowa String Quartet Residency Program and Creative Matters, a program of the Office of the Vice President for Research
KCRG WELCOMES YOU BACK TO Hancher
ATTACCA QUARTET
AND CAROLINE SHAW

AMY SCHROEDER (she/her), violin
DOMENIC SALERNI (he/him), violin
NATHAN SCHRAM (he/him), viola
ANDREW YEE (she/they), cello

CAROLINE SHAW, voice

Sunday, September 17, 2023, at 7:30 p.m.
Hancher Auditorium, the University of Iowa
The Auditorium / Hadley Stage / Onstage Seating

PROGRAM

Caroline SHAW

Blueprint

“Can’t voir l’aube” (Can’t See the Dawn)

Three Essays

Nimrod
Echo
Ruby

“And So” from Is a Rose

The Evergreen

“Other Song”

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

ATTACCA QUARTET

Grammy award-winning Attacca Quartet, as described by The Nation, “lives in the present aesthetically, without rejecting the virtues of the musical past,” and it is this dexterity to glide from the music of the 18th through to the 21st century repertoire that places them as one of the most versatile and outstanding ensembles of the moment—a quartet for modern times.

Touring extensively in the United States, recent highlights include Lincoln Center’s White Lights Festival and Miller Theatre, both with Caroline Shaw, Phillips Collection where they have been re-invited this season, Chamber Music Detroit, Red Bank Chamber Music Society, Chamber Music Austin, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Banff String Quartet Festival, and other upcoming engagements at Dumbarton Oaks, Ojai Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society Summerfest, Bang on a Can Festival in Brooklyn, and The Rite of Summer at Governors Island. Attacca Quartet has also served as the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the ensemble-in-residence at the School of Music at Texas State University, and Juilliard’s graduate resident string quartet, where they will premiere their new film Plan and Elevation (featuring the music of the same name by Caroline Shaw) this year.

Outside of the U.S., recent performances include their debut in London at Kings Place and in Oslo at the Vertavo Haydn Festival as well as performances at Gothenburg Konserthuset, MITO Septembre Festival in Italy, and Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao. This season will also see them touring again in South America—including Sala São Paulo in Brazil, Fundacion Beethoven in Chile, and Teatro Mayor in Bogota and Spain as well as taking part in Norfolk and Norwich Festival in the U.K. This season Attacca Quartet has also been exploring new digital formats, taking part and also producing a number of filmed and streamed concerts for Banff Centre International String Quartet Festival, Duke Performances, Austin Chamber Music Center, as well as their upcoming digital engagement for Szczecin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Passionate advocates of contemporary repertoire, the members of the quartet are dedicated to presenting and recording new works. Their latest recording project, Orange, for which they received the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance, features string quartet works by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw.” Greatly received and praised by the critics, it has also been featured in NPR’s List of ‘25 Best Albums of 2019’ and ‘10 Classical Albums to Usher in the Next Decade’ and in The New York Times’ list of the ‘25 Best Classical Music Tracks of 2019’ for Valencia. It was also shortlisted for the 2020 BBC Music Magazine Awards and several Opus Klassik Awards.

Previous recordings include three critically acclaimed albums with Azica Records, including a disc of Michael Ippolito’s string quartets, and the complete works for string quartet by John Adams. The latter was praised by Steve Smith of The New York Times as a “vivacious, compelling set” and described the Attacca Quartet’s playing as “exuberant, funky, and… exactlying nuanced.” The album was the
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recipient of the 2013 National Federation of Music Clubs Centennial Chamber Music Award. Additional awards for their recordings include both the Arthur Foote Award from the Harvard Musical Association and Lotos Prize in the Arts from the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation.

Other accolades include First Prize at the 7th Osaka International Chamber Music Competition, the Top Prize and Listeners’ Choice award winners for the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, and Grand Prize Winners of the 60th annual Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition.

The Attacca Quartet has engaged in extensive educational and community outreach projects, serving as guest artists and teaching fellows at the Lincoln Center Institute, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and Bravo! Vail Valley among others.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

CAROLINE SHAW

Caroline Shaw is a musician who moves among roles, genres, and mediums, trying to imagine a world of sound that has never been heard before but has always existed. She works often in collaboration with others, as producer, composer, violinist, and vocalist.

Caroline is the recipient of the 2013 Pulitzer Prize in Music, several Grammy awards, an honorary doctorate from Yale, and a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship. This year’s projects include the score to Fleishman is in Trouble (FX/Hulu), vocal work with Rosalía (MOTOMAMI), the score to Josephine Decker’s The Sky Is Everywhere (A24/Apple), music for the National Theatre’s production of The Crucible (dir. Lyndsey Turner), Justin Peck’s Partita with NY City Ballet, a new stage work LIFE (Gandini Juggling/Merce Cunningham Trust), the premiere of Microfictions Vol. 3 for NY Philharmonic and Roomful of Teeth, a live orchestral score for Wu Tsang’s silent film Moby Dick co-composed with Andrew Yee, two albums on Nonesuch (Evergreen and The Blue Hour), the score for Hélène Simoneau’s dance work Delicate Power, tours of Graveyards & Gardens (co-created immersive theatrical work with Vanessa Goodman), and tours with Sō Percussion featuring songs from Let The Soil Play Its Simple Part (Nonesuch), amid occasional chamber music appearances as violist (Chamber Music Society of Minnesota, La Jolla Music Society).

Caroline has written over 100 works in the last decade, for Anne Sofie von Otter, Davóne Tines, Yo-Yo Ma, Renée Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, LA Phil, Philharmonia Baroque, Seattle Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Aizuri Quartet, The Crossing, Dover Quartet, Calidore Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, Miró Quartet, I Giardini, Ars Nova Copenhagen, Ariadne Greif, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Britt Festival, and the Vail Dance Festival. She has contributed production to albums by Rosalia, Woodkid, and Nas. Her work as vocalist or composer has appeared in several films, television series, and podcasts including The Humans, Bombshell, Yellowjackets, Maid, Dark, Beyoncé’s Homecoming, Tár, Dolly Parton’s America, and More Perfect. Her favorite color is yellow, and her favorite smell is rosemary.
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2023-2024
PROGRAM NOTES

By Elizabeth Schwartz

CAROLINE SHAW
Born August 1, 1982; Greenville, NC

Blueprint

WORK COMPOSED: 2016
Commissioned by the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts for the Aizuri Quartet

WORLD PREMIERE: The Aizuri Quartet performed at Wolf Trap on April 8, 2016, in Vienna, VA

INSTRUMENTATION: String quartet

ESTIMATED DURATION: 7.5 minutes

“The Aizuri Quartet’s name comes from ‘aizuri-e,’ a style of Japanese woodblock printing that primarily uses a blue ink,” writes Shaw. “In the 1820s, artists in Japan began to import a particular blue pigment known as ‘Prussian blue,’ which was first synthesized by German paint producers in the early 18th century and later modified by others as an alternative to indigo. The story of aizuri-e is one of innovation, migration, transformation, craft, and beauty. Blueprint, composed for the incredible Aizuri Quartet, takes its title from this beautiful blue woodblock printing tradition as well as from that familiar standard architectural representation of a proposed structure: the blueprint. This piece began its life as a harmonic reduction—a kind of floor plan—of Beethoven’s string quartet, op. 18, no. 6. As a violinist and violist, I have played this piece many times, in performance and in joyous late-night reading sessions with musician friends. (One such memorable session included Aizuri’s marvelous cellist, Karen Ouzounian.) Chamber music is ultimately about conversation without words. We talk to each other with our dynamics and articulations, and we try to give voice to the composers whose music has inspired us to gather in the same room and play music. Blueprint is also a conversation—with Beethoven, with Haydn (his teacher and the ‘father’ of the string quartet), and with the joys and malinconia of his op. 18, no. 6.”
“Cant voi l’aube” (Can’t See the Dawn)

WORK COMPOSED: 2016
Commissioned by Carnegie Hall for Anne Sofie von Otter and Brooklyn Rider

WORLD PREMIERE: Anne Sofie von Otter and Brooklyn Rider gave the premiere at Carnegie Hall on October 13, 2016

INSTRUMENTATION: Mezzo-soprano and string quartet

ESTIMATED DURATION: 4.25 minutes

Shaw writes, “‘Cant voi l’aube’ sets lyrics from a 12th century manuscript from France, of uncertain origin but attributed to the trouvère Gace Brulé. It is a typical aubade, or morning song, in which lovers resent the dawn’s light, since it means they must discreetly separate for fear of being found out. (I thought about calling this song ‘Pillow Talk’ or ‘Walk of Shame.’) The original music for the text is lost, and rather than trying to recreate a troubadour style song, I decided to carve out a new song with a more modern contour. My thanks to Dr. Eliza Zingesser for pointing me to ‘Cant voi l’aube’ and other texts from medieval French and Occitan literature.”

Three Essays
Nimrod
Echo
Ruby

WORK COMPOSED: Nimrod was commissioned in 2015 by Coretet for the Calidore String Quartet, and composed in 2016; Echo and Ruby were written in 2018, co-commissioned by Coretet and several other organizations.

WORLD PREMIERE: Calidore String Quartet premiered Nimrod on November 6, 2016, at the SOKA Performing Arts Center in Aliso Viejo, CA. Two years later, on July 16, 2018, Calidore performed Echo and Ruby at Cadogan Hall, London, for the BBC Proms.

INSTRUMENTATION: String quartet

ESTIMATED DURATION: 22 minutes

“Nimrod began as a simple exercise in translating the lilt and rhythm of one of my favorite authors, Marilynne Robinson, into music,” Shaw explains in her notes. “She writes beautifully and bravely on notions of the human soul, weaving delicately in and out various subjects (politics, religion, science) in each of her rich, methodical essays. Usually my music is inspired by visual art, or food, or some odd physics quirk, but this time I wanted to lunge into language, with all its complex splintering and welding of units and patterns. The piece begins with a gentle lilt, like Robinson herself speaking, but soon begins to fray as the familiar harmony unravels into tumbling fragments and unexpected repetitive tunnels. These musical trap doors
lead to various worlds that are built from the materials of the beginning, like the odd way dreams can transform one thing into another.

“I started writing ... while listening to the calm optimism of an audio recording of Robinson reading from her book *The Givenness of Things*, but I completed it during the turmoil of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. The title of the first essay refers to the legendary biblical figure Nimrod, who oversaw the construction of the Tower of Babel—a city designed to be tall enough to reach heaven but which resulted in the confusion and scattering of language. This image of chaos and fragmentation, but also of extraordinary creative energy, may serve as a framework for listening to these three musical essays. *Echo* is a stylistic contrast to the first and third, in the spirit of a typical ‘slow movement’ nested between two quick ones. The title touches on a number of references: the concept of the ‘echo chamber’ that social media fosters in our political discourse; the ‘echo’ function in the Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP) programming language; and of course the effect of an echo. *Ruby* returns to the fragmentation and angularity that was introduced in the first essay but attempts to tame it into some kind of logical structure. The title refers both to the programming language Ruby (developed in Japan in the mid-1990s) as well the simple beauty of the gemstone for which the language was named. It’s more a point of inspiration than a strict system of generating material.”

**“And So” from *Is a Rose***

**WORK COMPOSED:** 2019

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Anne Sofie von Otter and Philharmonia Baroque performed at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center, New York City, on March 12, 2019

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Mezzo-soprano and baroque orchestra; also arranged for voice and string quartet

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 5.5 minutes

Caroline Shaw loves writing for musicians she has long admired. She met mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter in 2015, when she wrote “Cant voi l’aube” for von Otter and the string quartet Brooklyn Rider. “We hit it off,” Shaw remembers. “I like writing for an artist whose recordings I’ve listened to for a long time ... When I’m writing music, I think about the person, the real personality of the person I’m writing for, if I can, and I often imagine someone or something holding my hand while writing the piece. It helps with decision-making. Getting to write for Anne Sofie von Otter is a gift for a composer.”

In a 2020 interview on the podcast *New Classical Tracks*, Shaw discussed the text she wrote for “And So,” one of three songs she composed for von Otter. All three songs feature imagery and metaphors of the rose, a classic trope from literature. The two outer songs feature poetry by Scottish poet Robert Burns, and contemporary British poet Jacob Polley. For “And So,” says Shaw, “I wrote the text myself, riffing on Burns, and there’s a little hint of Shakespeare, and there’s a nod to Billy Joel and certainly Gertrude Stein’s ‘A rose is a rose is a rose...’ Ultimately the song asks the question, ‘Will there still be music when we’re gone, and why do we
make music?’ And there’s a little wordplay in the title, “And So,” for Anne Sofie von Otter—I thought that was funny.”

Shaw has a true affinity for setting texts; the elliptical nature of her wordplay and use of interior rhymes gives multidimensional meaning to her words. The accompaniment is spare, even subdued, until the end of the song, when a surge of pizzicatos drives to an abrupt conclusion.

The Evergreen

WORK COMPOSED: 2020
Commissioned by Third Angle New Music

WORLD PREMIERE: Third Angle New Music gave the premiere on March 5, 2020, in Portland, OR

INSTRUMENTATION: String quartet

ESTIMATED DURATION: 21 minutes

Shaw writes, “One day in January 2020, I took a walk in an evergreen forest on Swiikw (Galiano Island), British Columbia, Canada.

“I found myself slowing down. My steps were shorter, less frequent. I stopped trying to get to my destination with any real intention or speed. Eventually I stopped moving altogether. I looked, and listened, and felt and smelled and breathed. Like a thousand thousand creatures before me there, some of them also human, I paused and wondered and thought, ‘There’s wisdom in these trees.’ It’s been said before, in ways more eloquent and complex than my little story here. Still.

“This piece, The Evergreen, is my offering to one particular tree in that forest. I started writing music years ago as gifts for people (whether they knew it or not), or as companions to a piece of art or food or idea. It was a way of having someone hold my hand through the writing process, a kind of invisible friend to guide me through. This tree is towering, craggy, warped, and knotted wrapped in soft green, standing silently in a small clearing where the shadows are more generous to the narrow streams of sunlight that try to speak up in late morning. To be honest, I’m not entirely sure that it’s still alive, or that it’s not actually an ancient deciduous tree that has tacitly agreed to be covered in moss. But still, it feels like an evergreen friend, and so I wrote some music for it and have called it The Evergreen. For the soft moss that covers it, for its strong stem that reaches up, for the gentle chaos of dripping water that surrounds it, and for the roots below, ever seeking and nourishing and building.”
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“Other Song”

WORK COMPOSED: 2019
WORLD PREMIERE: Spring 2022
INSTRUMENTATION: Voice and percussion ensemble; also arranged for voice and string quartet
ESTIMATED DURATION: 5 minutes

This song and the other nine tracks on the 2021 collaborative album by Shaw and Sō Percussion, *Let The Soil Play Its Simple Part*, came about almost by accident. The musicians had booked three days in a studio to record *Narrow Sea*, but finished in just two. Shaw and Sō decided to use their third day of studio time to improvise. “I had these bits of ‘Other Song,’ so I made this abstract reduction, with a verse-chorus structure and a wild build in the middle,” says Shaw. “The prompt for all of us was: what would we make in the room together if there were no single person in charge, the way a band writes in the studio?”

The version on tonight’s concert features rich sustained accompaniments for the strings, rather than Sō Percussion’s propulsive drive. Shaw’s lyrics, as they do in “And So,” play with the sound and feel of the words, lending them an intriguing ambiguity while her voice soars over the instruments.

© Elizabeth Schwartz

Elizabeth Schwartz is a musician, writer, and music historian based in Portland, OR. She has been a program annotator for more than 25 years, and writes for ensembles and festivals across the United States, as well as internationally. Ms. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR’s *Performance Today*, (now heard on American Public Media). www.classicalmusicprogramnotes.com
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