

## “Blueprint”

Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)

Caroline Shaw is a New York-based musician—vocalist, violinist, composer, and producer—who performs in solo and collaborative projects. She was the youngest recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2013 for *Partita for 8 Voices*, written for the Grammy-winning *Roomful of Teeth*, of which she is a member. Recent commissions include new works for Renée Fleming with Inon Barnatan, Dawn Upshaw with Sō Percussion and Gil Kalish, Seattle Symphony, Anne Sofie von Otter with



Photo by Kyle Dorosz

Philharmonia Baroque, the LA Philharmonic, Juilliard 415, the Orchestra of St. Luke's with John Lithgow, the Dover Quartet, TENET, The Crossing, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, the Calidore Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, the Baltimore Symphony, and *Roomful of Teeth with A Far Cry*. Caroline's film scores include Erica Fae's *To Keep the Light* and Josephine Decker's *Madeline's Madeline* as well as the upcoming short *8th Year of the Emergency* by Maureen Towey. She has produced for Kanye West (*The Life of Pablo; Ye*) and Nas (NASIR), and has contributed to records by The National, and by Arcade Fire's Richard Reed Parry. Once she got to sing in three-part harmony with Sara Bareilles and Ben Folds at the Kennedy Center. Caroline has studied at Rice, Yale, and Princeton, currently teaches at NYU, and is a Creative Associate at the Juilliard School. She has held residencies at Dumbarton Oaks, the Banff Centre, Music on Main, and the Vail Dance Festival. Caroline loves the color yellow, otters, Beethoven opus 74, Mozart opera, Kinhaven, the smell of rosemary, and the sound of a janky mandolin.

The Aizuri Quartet's name comes from "aizuri-e," a style of Japanese woodblock printing that primarily uses a blue ink. 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. Shaw writes, “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.”

(program note by Caroline Shaw, March 2016)

## String Quartet No. 19 in C Major. K. 465 “Dissonance”

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

In 1781, Haydn published his six revolutionary quartets—the “Russian” Quartets—dedicated to Grand Duke Paul of Russia. The interplays of the melodies changed the genre forever, as is evident in Mozart’s “Haydn” Quartets, six quartets dedicated to Haydn during the years 1782 to 1785.

This timing could not be more perfect, for Haydn and Mozart met for the first time in December 1783. Their friendship grew quickly as well as their admiration for each other. When Mozart completed all six quartets, he sent them to his dear friend Haydn, along with the dedication: *“Behold here, famous man and dearest friend, my six children. They are, to be sure, the fruit of long and arduous work, yet some friends have encouraged me to assume that I shall see this work rewarded to some extent at least, and this flatters me into believing that these children shall one day offer me some comfort. You yourself, dearest friend, have shown me your approval of them during your last sojourn in this capital.”* Of course, Haydn did not hold back when he first heard the quartets in person. He told Mozart’s father, Leopold: *“Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name; he has taste, and, furthermore, the most profound knowledge of composition.”*

The sixth quartet, “Dissonance,” is arguably the most remarkable due to its haunting Adagio introduction. Fret not! Mozart turns the distortion into a blossoming C Major allegro soon enough. He tips his hat off to Haydn throughout each moment, especially during the Finale.



Mozart and Haydn, postcard design by V Janscheik (1756–1791) [left]; Mozart's manuscript of the String Quartet [right]

## String Quartet No. 1 in B minor, op. 50

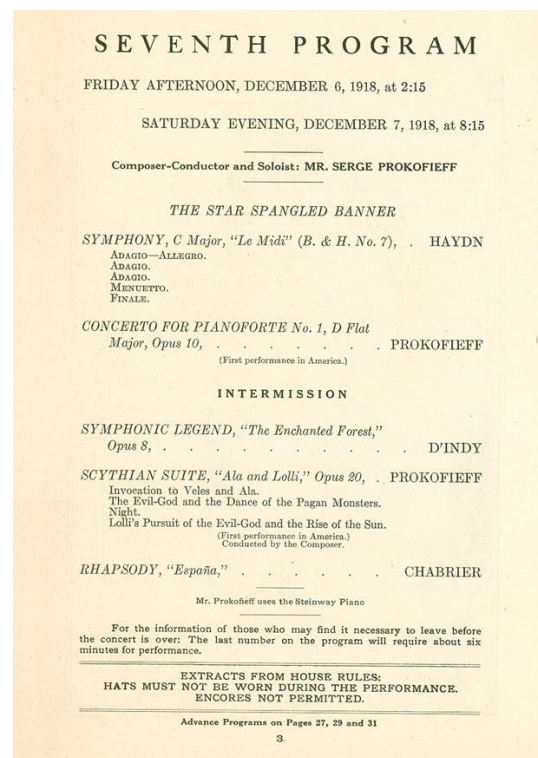
Sergei Sergeyevich Prokofiev (1891–1953)

A hundred years have passed since Mozart died in 1791; the soundscape of the classical music world has been getting larger and fuller with every generation. Prokofiev was born in Sontsivka (now in Ukraine) in 1891. Just like Mozart, he was a child prodigy. Prokofiev wrote his first piano pieces at the age of five and did not wait too long until he wrote a complete opera within the next three years. At twelve, he began studying with Rimsky-Korsakov, Liadov, and Tcherepnin at St. Petersburg Conservatory.



*Prokofiev, circa 1930*

Prokofiev left the Soviet Union in 1918 and made his way over to the United States for the first time. When he returned in 1930 for a concert tour, the Library of Congress commissioned Prokofiev to write a string quartet. Chamber music was not his first genre of choice. This quartet would become the first of his two string quartets (c.f. Mozart wrote 23 string quartets, Haydn, 68). Be that as it may, it does not mean he was any less competent. From the outset, the intensity draws the audience instantly. Prokofiev continues to place the rich and lavish soundscape into the string quartet until its somber yet sweet ending.



*Program from his first year in the States, December 1918*

## **“Strum”**

Jessie Montgomery (b. 1981)

Jessie Montgomery is a violinist, composer and music educator from New York City. She performs and gives workshops in the US and abroad and her compositions are being performed by orchestras and chamber groups throughout the country.

Jessie was born and raised in Manhattan’s Lower East Side in the 1980s during a time when the neighborhood was at a major turning point in its history. Artists gravitated there and it was a hotbed of cultural activity and community development. Her parents (father, a musician, her mother, an actress) were engaged in the activities of the neighborhood and regularly brought Jessie to rallies, performances and parties where neighbors, activists and artists gathered to celebrate and support the movements of the time. It is from this unique experience that Jessie has created a life in which performance, creativity, education and advocacy merge.



*Photo by Jiyang Chen*

Jessie began her violin studies, at the Third Street Music School Settlement, one of the oldest community organizations in the country. Upon graduating with her Bachelor’s degree from the Juilliard School in Violin Performance in 2003, she joined forces with Community MusicWorks in Providence, Rhode Island, a nationally recognized leader in community development and music education. With this appointment came her first experience as a professional chamber musician as a member of the Providence String Quartet. She continued her chamber music endeavors as a founding member of PUBLIQuartet, a string quartet made up of composers and arrangers, featuring their own music as well as that of emerging and established contemporary composers. Since 2012 she has held post as a member of the highly acclaimed Catalyst Quartet, raved by the New York Times as “invariably energetic and finely burnished...performing with earthly vigor”, touring regularly in the United States and abroad. Most recently she became a collaborator with Yo-Yo Ma’s *Silkroad Ensemble* and toured with them in the 2018-19 season.

(Please visit <https://www.jessiemontgomery.com/biography> for the full biography)

**Strum** is the culminating result of several versions of a string quintet I wrote in 2006. It was originally written for the Providence String Quartet and guests of Community MusicWorks Players, then arranged for string quartet in 2008 with several small revisions. In 2012 the piece underwent its final revisions with a rewrite of both the introduction and the ending for the Catalyst Quartet in a performance celebrating the 15th annual Sphinx Competition. Originally conceived for the formation of a cello quintet, the voicing is often spread wide over the ensemble, giving the music an expansive quality of sound. Within *Strum* I utilized texture motives, layers of rhythmic or harmonic ostinati that string together to form a bed of sound for melodies to weave in and out. The strumming pizzicato serves as a texture motive and the primary driving rhythmic underpinning of the piece.

Drawing on American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement, the piece has a kind of narrative that begins with fleeting nostalgia and transforms into ecstatic celebration.

*(program note by Jessie Montgomery)*

From her website:

**Strum (2006; revised 2012)**

Commissioned by: Community MusicWorks; revision by the Sphinx Organization  
Instrumentation: string quartet or string quintet (also available for string orchestra)  
Premiere: April 2006; revision in February 2012, The Providence String Quartet;  
The Catalyst Quartet; Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI