

Club 750

PUBLIQuartet

APR 25 / JACKSON LOUNGE

What Is American

Run time is approximately 110 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.



View the digital program at
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PUBLIQuartet - MIND | THE | GAP: What is American?
(2016)

*improvisations on Antonin Dvorak's "American" Quartet
(Op. 96)*

I. Allegro ma non troppo

PUBLIQuartet - MIND | THE | GAP: Pavement Pounding
Rose (2019)

improvisations on Fats Waller's "Honeysuckle Rose"

Henry Threadgill - Sixfivetwo (2018)

PUBLIQuartet - MIND | THE | GAP: Wild Women (2021)

*improvisations on Tina Turner's "Black Coffee," Betty
Davis' "They Say I'm Different," Alice Coltrane's "Er Ra,"
and Ida Cox's "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues"*

INTERMISSION

Fodé Lassana Diabaté - Sunjata's Time (2015), arr. Jacob
Garchik

Rhiannon Giddens - At the Purchaser's Option (2016),
arr. PUBLIQuartet (2021)

Vijay Iyer - Dig the Say (2012)

I. carry the ball

Ila. this thing together

IIb. up from the ground
III. to live tomorrow

BIOGRAPHY

Applauded by *The Washington Post* as “a perfect encapsulation of today’s trends in chamber music,” and by *The New Yorker* as “independent-minded,” multi-Grammy-nominated PUBLIQuartet is an improvising string quartet whose repertoire blends genres and highlights American multiculturalism. PUBLIQuartet rose on the music scene as winner of the 2013 Concert Artists Guild New Music/New Places award, and in 2019 garnered Chamber Music America’s prestigious Visionary Award for outstanding and innovative approaches to contemporary classical, jazz, and world chamber music. PQ’s genre-bending programs range from newly commissioned pieces to re-imaginings of classical works featuring open form improvisations that expand the techniques and aesthetic of the traditional string quartet. PUBLIQuartet has held artist residencies at The Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Sawdust and has performed everywhere from Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center to the Montreal, Newport, and Detroit Jazz Festivals. Their 2016 appearance on *The Colbert Report*, “Requiem for a Debate” – in which they improvised a live soundtrack to the third presidential debate – not only received over a million views but prompted *The Washington Post* to declare them “the winner...indubitably.” Their 2023-2024 season includes

performances at USC and the Library of Congress; with the New York City Ballet; and with jazz artists including Hiromi, Diane Monroe, and Magos Herrera. The quartet's latest album, the Grammy nominated *What Is American*, released in June 2022 on the Bright Shiny Things label, explores resonances between contemporary, blues, jazz, freely improvised, and rock-inflected languages, all of which trace their roots back to the Black and Indigenous musical traditions that inspired Dvorak's "American" String Quartet (Op. 96). The album also includes "CARDS 11-11-2020," written by Roscoe Mitchell for PUBLIQuartet, as well as works by Ornette Coleman, Rhiannon Giddens, and Vijay Iyer. Committed to creating an inclusive performance space, supporting living composers of varying genres, and expanding the classical canon, PUBLIQuartet was the inaugural ensemble-in-residence for Carnegie Hall's PlayUSA program in 2021-2022, working with high school music classes across the country on a large-scale creative project called *Reflections on Resilience*. Their innovative PUBLIQ Access program has promoted emerging composers by presenting a wide variety of underrepresented music for string quartet – from classical, jazz, and electronic, to non-notated, world, and improvised music. Other unique projects include MIND | THE |GAP, a series of creative projects developed by PQ that weave together different styles of music via group composition, arranging, and improvisation. These unique works range from "Bird in Paris" (Claude Debussy meets Charlie Parker) to more

recent extended works including *Reflections on Beauty*, a multimedia celebration of the life and legacy of Madam C.J. Walker featuring visual projections and narration by Walker's great-great-granddaughter, A'Lelia Bundles. Founded in 2010, PUBLIQuartet is based in New York City.

PROGRAM NOTES

MIND | THE | GAP: What is American? (2016)

Improvisations on Antonin Dvorák's "American" Quartet (Op. 96)

I. Allegro ma non troppo

Antonin Dvorák wrote his "American" Quartet during the summer of 1893 in the Czech enclave of Spillville, Iowa, following his first year directing the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York City. One of Dvorák's students at the Conservatory was the baritone and composer Harry T. Burleigh, who introduced him to Black spirituals, leading Dvorák to conclude that "The future of this country must be founded upon what are called the Negro melodies. This must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States."

This MIND | THE | GAP project weaves together excerpts of Dvorák's original score with improvisation in various styles, with the aim of connecting the Black and

Indigenous musics that inspired Dvorák to the blues, jazz, rock, and hip hop styles that these traditions would ultimately inform. Incorporating various extended techniques, the work's opening also evokes the prairie soundscape that might have surrounded Dvorak as he composed.

MIND | THE | GAP: Pavement Pounding Rose (2019)

Improvisations on "Honeysuckle Rose" by Fats Waller

This piece is an excerpt from PUBLIQuartet's larger project *Reflections on Beauty*, which celebrates the life of Madam C.J. Walker, the pioneering Black entrepreneur, self-made millionaire, and activist. Inspired by Fats Waller's "Honeysuckle Rose," these improvisations evoke Madam Walker's entrepreneurial hustle in Harlem in the early years of the 20th Century.

Henry Threadgill - Sixfivetwo (2018)

Commissioned by Kronos Quartet as part of their *50 for the Future* project, Henry Threadgill's *Sixfivetwo*, a fifteen-minute work for string quartet, includes ample opportunities for players to improvise. "The improvisational component is very important," he said in an interview while describing his philosophy which guided the creation of this piece, "Kronos knows it's important and I know it's important. It's a shame that the classical concert world doesn't understand how important it is... Everything is about exploration. We get to where we are because of exploration. That's why improvisation is so

important... We won't improve anything unless we have an improvisational approach to life." (excerpted from 50ftf.kronosquartet.org)

MIND | THE | GAP: Wild Women (2021)

Improvisations on music by Tina Turner, Betty Davis, Alice Coltrane, and Ida Cox

Inspired by Ida Cox's 1924 feminist blues anthem "Wild Women Don't Have the Blues," this MIND | THE | GAP also spotlights the work of Tina Turner ("Black Coffee"), Betty Davis ("They Say I'm Different"), and Alice Coltrane ("Er Ra"). In the spirit of Ida's lyrics, this set celebrates the legacy of independent women who hold their own.

Fodé Lassana Diabaté - Sunjata's Time (2015), arr. Jacob Garchik

Also commissioned by Kronos Quartet as part of their *50 for the Future* project, *Sunjata's Time* is dedicated to Sunjata Keita, the warrior prince who founded the great Mali Empire in 1235, which at its height stretched across the West African savannah to the Atlantic shores.

Sunjata's legacy continues to be felt in many ways. During his time as emperor, he established many of the cultural norms that remain in practice today, including the close relationship between patron and musician that is the hallmark of so much music in Mali. The word "time" is meant to denote both "rhythm," an important element in balafon performance, and "epoch," since the composition sets out to evoke the kinds of musical

sounds that might have been heard in Sunjata's time, drawing on older styles of balafon playing which Lassana Diabaté has learned while studying with elder masters of the instrument in Guinea. (excerpted from 50ftf.kronosquartet.org)

Rhiannon Giddens - At the Purchaser's Option (2016), arr. PUBLIQuartet (2021)

Inspired by an 1830s advertisement announcing the sale of a Black woman and her child, Rhiannon Giddens' "At the Purchaser's Option" is a meditation on the hard truths of American history; the song is reimagined here in an original arrangement by PQ that includes whispers, sung excerpts of Giddens' original lyrics, and various extended techniques.

Vijay Iyer - Dig The Say (2012)

I. carry the ball
IIa. this thing together
IIb. up from the ground
III. to live tomorrow

Commissioned by Brooklyn Rider in 2012, Vijay Iyer's *Dig The Say* is an homage to the "Godfather of Soul," James Brown. Describing his inspiration by Brown's music, Iyer says: "[...] of course it's best to enjoy it with your body and soul, but there is also much to learn from analyzing his music's interlocking bass, drums, guitar, horn, and vocal parts. As a composer and bandleader, I have

strived for years to put some of his tactics into practice. He brought a lot of ideas to the table about groove, communication, form, and space. Each song has its own vivid and distinct identity, beginning with the intricacies in the rhythm section."

Much of the excitement and challenge of Iyer's quartet lies in his distribution of such intricate, driving rhythmic textures among multiple players; there are even moments where the score asks a single player to stomp or tap one rhythm while playing another. The titles of the work's four continuous movements refer to lyrics delivered emphatically by Brown in his 1969 song "I Don't Want Nobody to Give Me Nothing (Open Up the Door I'll Get It Myself)."