



The restlessness of nostalgia

Sasha Callahan and Zenas Hsu*, violins
Stephanie Fong*, viola
Leo Eguchi, cello

Carrot Revolution

Gabriella Smith (b. 1991)

String Quartet No. 1, *Lyric*

George Walker (1922-2018)

II. Molto Adagio

String Quartet in B-flat, Op. 76, No. 4, *Sunrise*

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Allegro con spirito

Adagio

Menuetto. Allegro

Finale. Allegro, ma non-troppo

Four Dances for String Quartet (premiere)

Kareem Roustom (b. 1971)

I. *Transitions*

II. *Pursuit*

III. *Shawq* (Nostalgia)

IV. *Unity* (We dance together)

With one eye on the rearview and one foot squarely on the accelerator, this program is an exploration of how the backdrop of the past drives our futures. Each piece in this collection looks back while blazing forward — growing, striving and innovating.

Inspired by the quote from Cézanne (misattributed, she later learned, but good for the story telling), “The day will come when a single, freshly observed carrot will start a revolution,” Gabriella Smith’s look back on her musical roots is a wild ride, from Bach to ancient church music to The Who...but all Gabriella Smith. Full of new sounds and colors contrasted with the old and beautiful, *Carrot Revolution* will set you grooving along to its rock and roll swagger.

George Walker was a man of many firsts...the first Black graduate of the prestigious Curtis institute of Music in 1945; the first Black instrumentalist to appear as soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra; the first Black artist to be signed to major music management in 1950. His was a career marked by myriad similar milestones and well-earned accolades, culminating in his becoming the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1996. Despite his trailblazing, Walker should not be regarded as one of the great African American artists of the 20th Century, but simply as one of our unqualified Greats. His genius is showcased here in the slow movement from his 1946 String Quartet #1, sometimes known only as *Lyric*. Walker uses the rich sonorities of this piece to look back, dedicating the dignified and poignant work to the memory of his grandmother, Malvina King.

Franz Joseph Haydn may have basically invented our beloved string quartet form from scratch, yet by (the time of?) his writing of the Opus 76 quartets in 1797 he was reaching for something more. This piece, nicknamed *Sunrise* for the way the first violin stretches and rises as dawn from the darkness, could be a metaphor for the way that Haydn stretches and reaches out from the forms and architectures that he helped to build. Lyrical and vibrant, this work maintains a beautiful optimism throughout, as though it never casts off the warmth of the sun, right through to its ecstatic finish.

In his world premiere work, *Four Dances for String Quartet*, Syrian American composer Kareem Roustom paints a sweeping picture of the subject, Clorinda, having been driven from her Middle Eastern homeland, now struggling to survive as a refugee in the west. Using Claudio Monteverdi’s 1624 *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* as a launching point, Roustom gives a new perspective on the old drama, set in the even older frame of Jerusalem in the First Crusade. Each of the four dances swirls with movement and electricity, compelling the listener through feelings of loss, nostalgia, survival, and finally celebration of the pasts that we carry with us.

Roustom is himself no stranger to reinventions built on the foundations of our past. Born in Damascus in 1971, Roustom’s transformation from East to West and back again has taken him from his Middle Eastern roots, to working with pop stars such as Shakira, to becoming one of the world’s most sought-after classical composers with performances by the likes of the Boston Symphony and New York Philharmonic.

- Leo Eguchi

Notes from the Composer:

These *Four Dances* are taken from a recently completed dramatic work, a hybrid opera & dance theatre work currently with the working title of *Clorinda*. The name Clorinda comes from Monteverdi's opera *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, whose libretto is from the epic poem by Tasso titled, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (Jerusalem Liberated). With the exception of the third movement, all these dances are taken from the music that I composed for *Clorinda*.

The first movement marks the transition from the world of Monteverdi to re-imagining Clorinda as a modern-day refugee from the middle-east, trying to survive in the west. The second movement mirrors the energy of escape from difficulty. The third movement, titled *Shawq*, which means *nostalgia* or *yearning*, was written for *Clorinda* but was deemed to have too many quick changes for dancers. Though now this movement has a new life as a concert piece, dance and movement are still its inspiration, and the restlessness of nostalgia its soul. Movement IV. *Unity*, is based on an Iraqi line dance called *Chobi*. Though refugees often can carry very little with them when fleeing violence, they can carry knowledge and memories of song, dance, poetry and art. This movement is an homage to both the things that are left behind and those that can travel with us.

Despite having studied Monteverdi's score to *Il Combattimento* closely, I decided not to use any themes from his music in my work. However, if some textures or moods from his beautiful score have made it into my music, any similarities are purely coincidental.

Kareem Roustom, February 12, 2021.