

Kronos Quartet

Sunday, September 30, 2001, 7 pm
Hertz Hall

David Harrington, violin

John Sherba, violin

Hank Dutt, viola

Jennifer Culp, cello

with special guest David Barron, vocals

PROGRAM

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| Michael Gordon | Potassium * |
| Charles Mingus (arr. Sy Johnson) | Myself When I Am Real † |
| Harry Partch (arr. Ben Johnston) | U.S. Highball: A Musical Account
of Slim's Transcontinental Hobo Trip †
David Barron, vocals |

INTERMISSION

- | | |
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| Peteris Vasks | Quartet No. 4 *
Elegy
Toccata I
Chorale
Toccata II
Meditation |
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* Written for Kronos

† Arranged for Kronos

The Kronos Quartet records exclusively for Nonesuch Records.

Kronos Quartet
P. O. Box 225340, San Francisco, CA 94122-5340
Tel: 415.731.3533; Fax: 415.664.7590
www.kronosquartet.org

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a federal agency that supports the visual, literary, and performing arts to benefit all Americans,
and by the California Arts Council, a state agency.

Michael Gordon (b. 1956)
Potassium (2000)

Michael Gordon was born in Miami Beach, Florida, and raised in Nicaragua in an Eastern European community on the outskirts of Managua. His music, which draws on the intensity and power of rock music and his formal composition studies at Yale, has been performed throughout the world. Gordon's early compositions demonstrate a deep exploration

into the possibilities and nature of rhythm, and what happens when rhythms are piled on top of each other, creating a glorious confusion.

Gordon's special interest in adding dimensionality to the concert experience has led to frequent collaborations with artists in other media. In his string orchestra piece *Weather*, a collaboration with Emmy award-winning video artist Elliot Caplan, the musicians sit on scaffolding three tiers high. Surrounded by video monitors, rear projections, and a scrim, the orchestra seems to float between a veil and a grid of constantly moving images. In Gordon's multimedia orchestra piece *Decasia*, a commission from the Basel Sinfonietta, the audience sits on swivel chairs, encircled by the orchestra and large projection scrims. In his exuberant and haunting opera *The Carbon Copy Building*, a collaboration with comic book artist Ben Katchor, Bob McGrath and the Ridge Theater, and the composers David Lang and Julia Wolfe (2000 Village Voice OBIE Award for Best New American Work), a projected comic strip accompanies the singers, interacting with them so that the frames fall away in the telling of this story. In *Lost Objects*, a staged oratorio, Gordon worked with the iconoclastic Barcelona theater company La Fura Dels Baus. And in 1997, he worked with playwright Anna Deveare Smith on *House Arrest, First Edition*, which premiered at the Arena Stage Theater in Washington, DC.

In 1983, Gordon formed the Michael Gordon Philharmonic—part string quartet, part rock band—which performed his angular tunes and driving rhythms with compelling energy and off-beat humor in concerts worldwide. The latest incarnation of this ensemble, now called the Michael Gordon Band, debuted at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in December 2000.

Gordon holds a bachelor's degree from New York University and a master's degree from the Yale School of Music. He is co-founder of the Bang On a Can Festival, a major force in the presentation of new music. His recordings include *Weather* (Nonesuch), *Trance* (Argo), and *Big Noise from Nicaragua* (CRI).

About Potassium, Gordon writes: "When I started writing this string quartet, I wanted to distance myself from everything I knew about string quartets. The word 'potassium' meant almost nothing to me, and so it helped provide a blank slate from which to begin. Potassium is an element, a substance that cannot be broken down into a simpler substance. In some part of my brain, I must have known that on the Periodic Table of the Elements, potassium is listed as the symbol K. Potassium is dedicated to the Kronos Quartet."

Potassium was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by its board of directors on the occasion of Kronos' 25th anniversary.

Charles Mingus (1922–1979)

Myself When I Am Real (1963/arr. 2000)

Arranged by Sy Johnson (b. 1930)

One of the most important figures in 20th-century American music, Charles Mingus was a virtuoso bass player, accomplished pianist, bandleader, and composer. Born on a military base in Nogales, Arizona, and raised in Watts, California, his earliest musical influences came from the church—choir and group singing—and from "hearing Duke Ellington over the radio when [Mingus] was eight years old." Mingus studied double bass and composition in a formal way while absorbing (first-hand) vernacular music from the great jazz masters. His early professional experience, in the 1940s, found him touring with the bands of Louis Armstrong, Kid Ory, and Lionel Hampton. Eventually he settled in New York, where he played and recorded with the leading musicians of the 1950s—Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Bud Powell, Art Tatum, and Duke Ellington himself. One of the few bassists to do so, Mingus quickly developed as a leader of musicians. He was also an accomplished pianist who could have made a career playing that instrument. By the mid-1950s, he had formed his own publishing and recording companies to protect and document his growing repertoire of original music. He also founded the Jazz Workshop, a group that enabled young composers to have their new works performed in concert and on recordings.

Mingus soon found himself at the forefront of the avant-garde. He recorded over 100 albums and wrote over 300 scores. Although he wrote his first concert piece, *Half-Mast Inhibition*, when he was 17 years old, it was not recorded until 20 years later by a 22-piece orchestra with Gunther Schuller conducting. It was the presentation of *Revelations*, which combined jazz and classical idioms, at the 1955 Brandeis Festival of the Creative Arts, that established him as one of the foremost jazz composers of his day. Mingus toured extensively throughout the world until the end of 1977, when he was diagnosed as having a rare nerve disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. He was soon confined to a wheelchair, and although he was no longer able to write music on paper or compose at the piano, his last works were sung into a tape recorder. In 1971, his autobiography, *Beneath the Underdog*, was published by Knopf.

Composer Sy Johnson's extensive credits include film and theater. His songs have been recorded by Joe Williams and Sarah Vaughan, and he has arranged for and played piano for many of the 20th century's

best-known performers, including Benny Goodman, Joe Williams, Count Basie, Frank Sinatra, Chet Baker, Ruth Brown, and Mel Torme. Johnson's association with Charles Mingus began in 1960, when he played piano with Mingus at the Showplace a few weeks after arriving in New York from California. In 1971, Mingus came to Johnson to arrange, orchestrate, and conduct his classic album *Let My Children Hear Music*, which began a musical collaboration and friendship that lasted until Mingus' death. Johnson and Mingus' wife, Susan, have continued the collaboration to the present, with the Mingus Dynasty Band, the award-winning Mingus Big Band, and the new Mingus Orchestra, in which Johnson serves as the principal arranger and consultant.

About *Myself When I Am Real*, Johnson writes: "Myself When I Am Real was first recorded as a seven-and-a-half minute, largely spontaneous performance, in 1963's *Mingus Plays Piano*. A fan, Hub Miller, sent Mingus a transcription of the piece that triggered its subsequent history. It was then orchestrated by Alan Raph for Mingus Dances, retitled for the occasion as *Adagio Ma Non Troppo*, with choreography by Alvin Ailey for the Joffrey Ballet. Shortly after, it was reorchestrated by Raph, still as *Adagio Ma Non Troppo*, for Mingus' *Let My Children Hear Music* album in 1971. It then languished until 1999, when Susan Mingus asked me to arrange it for the new Mingus Orchestra. It had its premiere on the Orchestra's Millennium 2000 New Year's Eve broadcast on National Public Radio, from its weekly venue, City Hall, a restaurant in TriBeCa, New York. Next, Andy Summers asked me to arrange the piece for guitar and Kronos Quartet, for his Mingus album, *Peggy's Blue Skylight*, which led to this new arrangement for Kronos Quartet—a happy sequence."

Sy Johnson's arrangement of Charles Mingus' *Myself When I Am Real* was written for the Kronos Quartet.

Harry Partch (1901–1974)

U.S. Highball: A Musical Account
of Slim's Transcontinental Hobo Trip
(1943/arr. 1998)

Arranged by Ben Johnston (b. 1926)

Self-taught as a theorist, living on the margins of society, and ignored by most musical institutions, Harry Partch sought musical inspiration and materials outside the European tradition and came to be recognized as one of the most innovative, iconoclastic, and genuinely American composers of our century. Partch's lifelong effort—begun in the 1920s—was to create a monophonic music that returned to what he believed was the primal, ritualistic, corporeal state that music had long ago abandoned: a music arising from human speech and the natural acoustic musical intervals generated by sounding bodies.

Partch grew up hearing music from many cultures. Born in 1901 in Oakland, his childhood was spent in California, New Mexico, and Arizona. Along with his early introduction to the local Mexican and Yaqui Indian music in southeastern Arizona, Partch's parents, former Presbyterian missionaries in China, shared with him Chinese folksongs and lullabies. Partch learned to play mail-order musical instruments, and by age 14, he was composing prolifically for piano.

In 1920, Partch briefly enrolled in the University of Southern California's School of Music. After a couple of years, not feeling that he was learning from his teachers, Partch left USC and moved to San Francisco, where he frequented Mandarin theaters. Giving up on both private music teachers and music schools, Partch began to read more about music in public libraries and to compose without academic restrictions. Around 1923, he began his rejection of European concert music and its system of 12-tone equal temperament. Partch's rejection of the 12-tone system and adoption of the principles of just intonation led him to use a scale with 43 tones to the octave, which in turn forced him to invent new musical instruments. Partch's decisive break with European musical tradition came in 1930, when he burned 14 years worth of his own music.

Partch's works from the 1930s and 1940s used his own instruments in small-scale, intimate bardic settings of Chinese poems, biblical verses, scenes and songs from Shakespeare, and American hobo texts. As he invented original percussion and string instruments, Partch turned in the 1950s and 1960s to large-scale theatrical and dramatic compositions that extended his concept of corporeality. Though Partch was met with enthusiasm from audiences and support from university faculty and students during his various associations with academic institutions, music departments generally remained hostile and unsupportive. As such, Partch's composing, writing, instrument building, and music promotion happened in conjunction with, or relied upon, sales of subscriptions for his recordings, various temporary employments, transience, and the assistance of friends and supporters.

Ben Johnston was born in Macon, Georgia, in 1926, and attended the College of William and Mary in Richmond, Virginia. After Navy service in World War II, he received his masters degree in music from Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. His self-professed

“fascination with sound from a scientific point of view” was manifested in accelerating interest in acoustics. After reading a book by Partch, Johnston struck up a correspondence and eventually moved to California to study with him. Johnston worked with Partch for six months in 1950 and performed for Partch’s recordings. Through Partch, Johnston met Darius Milhaud at Mills College in Oakland and received a second masters degree there. Johnston went on to a position in the dance program at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, and for five years he also acted as chairman of the University’s Festival of Contemporary Arts. While there, Johnston helped to obtain sponsorship for some of Partch’s later productions at the University.

This arrangement of U.S. Highball: A Musical Account of Slim’s Transcontinental Hobo Trip was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Madison Civic Center, the South Bank Centre, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Peteris Vasks (b. 1946)

Quartet No. 4 (1999)

Peteris Vasks lives in the Latvian capital of Riga, and was born in 1946 in Aizpute, the son of a Baptist minister. He composed his first piece when he was eight years old, and pursued his musical studies by attending the E. Darzins High School of Music in Riga. By Soviet standards, his religious background was a liability that precluded the opportunity to study in Latvia. In 1964, he moved to Vilnius to study double bass with V. Sereika at the Lithuanian Academy of Music, where he became familiar with the music of the Polish avant-garde. After two years of military service in the Soviet Army in the early 1970s, he studied composition with Valentius Utkins at the Latvian Academy of Music. Vasks was a member of various symphonic and chamber orchestras from 1963–74. Since then, he has concentrated on composing. In 1996, he received the Johann Herder Prize from the University of Vienna for contributions in the field of culture demonstrating integrity of conscience. Vasks’ work has been widely performed, recorded, and broadcast in Latvia and throughout the former Soviet Union, as well as Europe.

Vasks’ music combines both traditional styles and recent musical thoughts, often using motifs from Latvian folk music. The titles of his works frequently relate to events in nature, but this is not merely for the purpose of elevating nature to an aesthetic ideal: it is the reciprocal relationship between nature and man, the beauty of life, and the threat of ecological and moral destruction that concern him. “When I think about contemporary life, it’s impossible not to realize that we are balanced on the edge of time’s end. It’s frighteningly close. But is there any point to composing a piece that only mirrors our being one step away from extinction? To my mind, every honest composer searches for a way out of his time’s crises. Towards affirmation, towards faith. He shows how humanity can overcome this passion for self-annihilation that flares up in a column of black smoke from time to time. And if I can find this way out, a reason for hope, the outline of a perspective, then I offer it as my model.”

About Quartet No. 4, Vasks writes: “I composed my fourth string quartet in 1999. While working on the score, I often reflected upon the passing century. My reflections were somber ones. There has been so much bloodshed and destruction, and yet love’s power and idealism have helped to keep the world in balance. I wanted to speak of these things in my new quartet; not from the sidelines, but with direct emotion and sensitivity.

“The work is composed of five movements. Movement I, Elegy: As with many of my other compositions, this one originates in silence, through which a motive from the Latvian folk song ‘Who were they who sang?’ (Kas tie tadi, kas dziedaja?) is gradually heard. The introductory passage was inspired by distant, half-forgotten memories, tinged occasionally by the painful realization of time’s relentless passing. Stringent chords introduce the second movement, Toccata I. My musical portrayal of this movement is in spirit close to that of Shostakovich’s style; it is aggressive and, at times, also ironic. The third movement, Chorale, follows without interruption. It is filled by spiritually intense and concentrated passages of extended singing, with its expressive nature remaining constant throughout dynamic and textural changes. This movement’s culmination provides only a momentary respite from the searching, restless quality characteristic of it, and that of the fourth movement, Toccata II, in which the musical material of the second movement returns. The ‘fugato’ episode of the fourth movement introduces not only this particular movement’s, but the whole quartet’s main culmination, as the violins, playing in octaves of the high register, intone motives from the Latvian folk song ‘Return, dear Sun, to God’ (Ej saulite, driz pie Dieva). (In moments of deepest feeling or doubt, I am able to find a certain consolation and strength in the roots of my native country.) The fifth movement, Meditation, is a subdued, endless song played by muted strings, created by two complementary musical renderings. The coda reiterates the folk song motive heard in the first movement, until the music vanishes into silence and infinity.

“I have dedicated Quartet No. 4 to my mother—in love, gratitude, and admiration.” (Translation by Dace Aperane)
Quartet No. 4 was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Mrs. Ralph I. Dorfman.

Kronos Quartet is known for its unique artistic vision and fearless dedication to experimentation. Since its inception in 1973, Kronos has assembled a body of work unparalleled in its range and scope of expression, and in the process, has captured the attention of audiences worldwide.

Kronos has been commissioning new work since its earliest days, and more than 450 pieces have been written or arranged for the group. The Quartet’s extensive repertoire ranges from Alban Berg, Alfred Schnittke, George Crumb, Sofia Gubaidulina, and Morton Feldman to Hildegard von Bingen, Charles Mingus, Astor Piazzolla, Harry Partch, and Carlos Paredes. In addition to ongoing creative relationships with composers such as Terry Riley, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, and Osvaldo Golijov, Kronos has collaborated with countless artists, including Dawn Upshaw, Foday Musa Suso, Wu Man, Café Tacuba, Zakir Hussain, Allen Ginsberg, the Throat Singers of Tuva, Burhan Öçal, Eiko and Koma, Pandit Pran Nath, Don Walser, Hamza El Din, and the Taraf de Haïdouks. Kronos has recently premiered, or will soon premiere, works written for the group by Ellen Fullman, Philip Glass, Michael Gordon, Guo Wenjing, Melissa Hui, Willem Jeths, John King, David Lang, Matmos, Helmut Oehring, Gabriela Ortiz, P.Q. Phan, Stephen Prutsman, Steve Reich, Peteris Vasks, Aleksandra Vrebalov, and Julia Wolfe.

Kronos performs annually in many cities and tours extensively with more than 100 concerts each year in concert halls, clubs, and at jazz festivals throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, Mexico, South America, Russia, Asia, and Australia. Recent tours have included appearances at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Kennedy Center, the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival, Moscow’s Conservatory of Music, the Prague Spring International Music Festival, Sydney Opera House, London’s Royal Festival Hall, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Théâtre de la Ville in Paris, and Vancouver’s Chan Centre.

Kronos has won numerous international awards, including three Edison Prizes (the Netherlands), the Jahrespreis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik (Germany), the Rolf Schock Prize in Music (Sweden), eight ASCAP/ Chamber Music America Awards (United States), the Australian Broadcasting Company Classic FM Best International Recording of the Year, Les Diapason d’Or de Mai (France), and others.

Kronos records exclusively for Nonesuch Records, and the group’s recorded performances have been heard throughout the world on radio and television, in films, and in live dance and theater performances. The ensemble’s recent recordings include *Requiem for a Dream: Soundtrack* by Clint Mansell (2000) and *Kronos Caravan* (2000).

David Barron (vocals) was born and raised in Texas. He began singing in a Baptist church and his first music lessons were on the accordion. He graduated from Baylor University and received his master’s degree in composition at Yale University, where he studied with Elliott Carter. While on the opera and music theory faculty at the University of Illinois, he earned a doctorate in music theory, specializing in experimental music, and was active in performances at their Festivals of Contemporary Arts. Since 1974, he has resided in Brooklyn, New York, performing in opera and in musical and legitimate theater. He performed an all-Ives song recital at the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music and has sung over 30 operatic roles and numerous premieres of contemporary works. His performances include premieres of operas by Richard Wargo, the role of Judge Turpin in the Broadway revival of *Sweeney Todd*, the title role in the premiere of *William Blake in Hell* by Huib Emmer with Theatergroep Hollandia, and numerous performances of the John Cage Songbooks.

For the Kronos Quartet:

Larry Neff, lighting designer

Mark Grey, audio engineer

Janet Cowperthwaite, managing director

Laird Rodet, associate director

Sidney Chen, project manager

Leslie Dean Mainer, office manager

Larry Neff, production director

Barbara Whipperman, business operations manager