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# ONSTAGE



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CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS AT PENN STATE

presents

# Brooklyn Rider

**Johnny Gandelsman**, violin

**Colin Jacobsen**, violin

**Nicholas Cords**, viola

**Eric Jacobsen**, cello

**7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 14, 2015**  
**Schwab Auditorium**

The performance includes one intermission.



This concert is a component of the Center for the Performing Arts Classical Music Project. With support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the project provides opportunities to engage students, faculty, and the community with classical music artists and programs.

Marica Tacconi, Penn State professor of musicology, and Carrie Jackson, Penn State associate professor of German and linguistics, provide faculty leadership for the curriculum and academic components of the project.

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# PROGRAM

## **String Quartet in G minor,**

**Op. 74, No. 3, *Rider*** ..... JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

*Allegro*

*Largo assai*

*Menuetto. Allegretto and Trio*

*Finale. Allegro con brio*

Each of the selections below appears on the  
*The Brooklyn Rider Almanac* album.

**Maintenance Music** ..... DANA LYN (b. 1974)

**Five-Legged Cat** ..... GONZALO GRAU (b. 1978)

## INTERMISSION

**Dig the Say** ..... VIJAY IYER (b. 1971)

Carry the Ball

This Thing Together

Up from the Ground

To Live Tomorrow

**Tralala** ..... CHRISTINA COURTIN (b. 1984)

**Selections from John Steinbeck** .. BILL FRISELL (b. 1951)

**Ping Pong Fumble Thaw** ..... GLENN KOTCHE (b. 1970)

**Show Me** ..... AOIFE O'DONOVAN (b. 1982)

**Necessary Henry!** ..... RUBIN KODHELI (b. 1977)

*Brooklyn Rider records for Mercury Classics.*

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# PROGRAM NOTES

## String Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, No. 3, *Rider*

Inspiration has been the very life-blood of our tradition since the days of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's six "Haydn" quartets, lovingly dedicated to the progenitor of our medium. This program celebrates inspiration as creative catalyst in many different guises, and it is with "Papa" Haydn that our journey begins. Though we are named after *Der Blaue Reiter* (more on that later), the great *Rider* Quartet was certainly in our thinking while coining our name. Names themselves are often arbitrary, and Haydn's quartets are full of them; a shaving accident, for example, resulted in the moniker for the *Razor* Quartet, Op 55, No. 2. But as silly as these names sometimes are, they become handy when grappling with Haydn's vast output of eighty-plus works for our medium alone!

The *Rider*, also referred to as *The Horseman*, is so-named because of the jaunty motives found in the outer movements. But it is the easy inventiveness of Haydn that is ultimately so memorable, and his ingenious democratization of the four voices allows this inventiveness to play itself out conversationally. The first movement is a great example of Haydn's flattened hierarchy and also demonstrates this work's overall tendency from tonic minor to major. It is not long after the stern opening unison that a great thawing occurs. The eminent musical thinker Hans Keller has even gone so far as to say this quartet should be thought of

as G Major, not G minor. The stunning slow movement is surely the centerpiece of this quartet. Where we see opera played out in the slow movements of Mozart (Haydn's great admirer), Haydn's slow movements emphasize the hymn-like possibilities of four string instruments in writing of chordal perfection and beguiling harmonic shifts. The minuet and trio movement lifts off in an idyllic pastoral scene (also cast in G Major), while the central trio, looking back in musical time, suggests an almost austere quality. And it is back on the horse we go for the witty and rousing finale!

– Nicholas Cords

## ***The Brooklyn Rider Almanac***

Over a century ago, the cross-disciplinary relationship between the German composer Arnold Schoenberg and Russian-born artist Wassily Kandinsky greatly affected each of their creative psyches. The string quartet played a supporting role in their first encounter, and we look to their symbiotic friendship as a springboard for *The Brooklyn Rider Almanac*, a commissioning project and the title of our latest album.

Schoenberg's Second String Quartet, the composer's first full dip into the opaque waters of atonality, was a musical lightning rod that sharply divided audiences and critics alike. Following the riotous premiere in Vienna in 1908, the work received its Munich debut some three years later. In the audience for that performance sat Kandinsky. Transformed by Schoenberg's music, Kandinsky's style took a further step towards abstraction with his landmark painting,

*Impression III*, a visual synthesis of that very concert. A friendship ensued between these visionaries, and Schoenberg soon became associated with of a group of artists surrounding Kandinsky known as *Der Blaue Reiter* (our very namesake). This group published *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* in 1912—a highly eclectic collection of artwork, essays, and music that served as an artistic testament to their era while also offering a vision for the future.

The unquenchable drive for artistic exploration and open embrace of the collective spirit displayed by *Der Blaue Reiter* is similarly a hallmark of today's artistic zeitgeist, and *The Brooklyn Rider Almanac* attempts to honor the present. Using music as our project's touchstone, we asked a select group of composers to create short works for us inspired by a creative muse from relatively recent memory. Not only did the composers readily accept the challenge, but the varied sources of inspiration—from David Byrne to Keith Haring to William Faulkner—were consistently a surprise and a delight to us.

Additionally, this project afforded us the opportunity to seek fresh perspectives on string quartet writing. On the surface, these composers come mostly from the other side of the classical fence—the worlds of jazz, rock, and folk. But more significantly they represent some of our favorite musical thinkers, and we were deeply confident they would have much to offer our medium. Our newly assembled cadre is inclusive of old friends and certain “musical crushes”—those we have long wished to approach but lacked proper courage or circumstance. Recalling the

eclecticism of *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach*, we have embraced the varied results and feel that our boundaries have been expanded in the process.

We are reminded at every turn of this project that music is a deeply immersive art form, something that cannot be understood divorced from its broader cultural context. By magnifying the creative force of inspiration, we hope that you will endeavor, as we do, to hear the music as only the tip of an iceberg.

– Brooklyn Rider

## **Maintenance Music by Dana Lyn, inspired by Mierle Laderman Ukeles**

I first read about New York-based artist-activist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in *Dialogues in Public Art*, a compilation of interviews edited by Tom Finkelpearl. Over forty years ago, as an effort to synthesize her roles as a mother and a creative artist in an art world that would not accept her as both, Ukeles coded her philosophy in the *Maintenance Art Manifesto 1969! Proposal for an exhibition, CARE*. The proposal sought to bring attention to the importance and cultural value of all acts of domestic, public, and environmental maintenance. What also greatly impressed me about Ukeles was her commitment to the city of New York and to the welfare of its public and domestic maintenance workers. For the past forty years, she has been artist in residence at the Department of Sanitation (an unsalaried position) and has staged countless actions and performances dedicated to the maintenance of the city itself and to the workers that carry out that task.

“Maintenance Music” is inspired by Ukeles’ belief in the power of naming day-to-day acts of maintenance as art. The piece is based on two themes. The first is simply the open strings of a string quartet (E, A, D, G, C) played to sound as if tuning, which is the string player’s first task in maintenance each day. It is played with, pulled apart, and re-assembled as a motif: G–A–E–C–D. The second is a mantra-like theme, meant to convey the sort of repetitious action that one feels ambivalent about; it is re-harmonized throughout the piece and later intertwined with the initial motif.

– Dana Lyn

### **Five-Legged Cat by Gonzalo Grau, inspired by Chick Corea**

When asked to write a piece for Brooklyn Rider, I immediately thought about doing a Venezuelan merengue. I was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, and this is one of the styles of music I love the most. The Venezuelan merengue has a five-eighth meter, perhaps one of the only odd-metered rhythms in the Americas. Very contagious and beautiful but hard to feel naturally. This rhythm comes from the capital, Caracas, and it has an urban evolution. Influenced by contra dances and polkas, it was played originally in open squares. Venezuelan merengue has evolved in many directions, sometimes a little more cool and jazzy, sometimes very traditional with a touch of early 1900s.

Brooklyn Rider is definitely the ensemble to open Venezuelan merengue to the world’s ears. I began my music studies at age 3 studying cello,

so I love to explore different kinds of effects, borrowing techniques “a la Piazzola” or even asking Brooklyn Rider to expand and create their own. I also grew up playing many different types of percussion, so I push the players to use their instruments and their whole bodies to complement the rhythms of merengue and to give life to this piece.

This piece is overall inspired by Chick Corea. Its colors, textures, and accents come from his enduring example. And what about the title, “Five-Legged Cat”? Venezuela is famous for its idioms, lessons, and street sayings. When someone is about to get in trouble, people say: “*No le busques la quinta pata al gato* (don’t look for the cat’s fifth leg).” This piece was born with a fifth leg, so I think we don’t even have to look for the cat any longer. The Rider has it.

– Gonzalo Grau

### **Dig the Say by Vijay Iyer, inspired by James Brown**

When I was asked by Brooklyn Rider to choose an artist who had inspired me, James Brown instantly came to mind. His groove-based music features complex polyphony, expressive virtuosity, and a ritual-like intensity. His vocals were electrifying, his lyrics pointedly political, his dance moves revolutionary, his sense of style larger than life, his cultural impact immeasurably huge. Like many, I have studied his music. 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. Each song has its own vivid and distinct identity, beginning with

the intricacies in the rhythm section. The groove underlying “Super Bad” is different from the beat for “Pay-back,” neither of which is the same as the rhythms of “Give it up or Turn it Loose.”

So I humbly offer this small tribute to this musical giant. The title “Dig the Say” and section subtitles come from the lyrics to his song, “I Don’t Want Nobody to Give Me Nothin’ (Just Open Up the Door, I’ll Get it Myself).” I am very grateful to Brooklyn Rider for offering me this opportunity and for truly rising to the challenge themselves.

– Vijay Iyer

### **Tralala by Christina Courtin, *inspired by Igor Stravinsky***

Impulsively, I blurted out “Stravinsky” as my influence for “Tralala” before I even had a concept. I was listening to *The Firebird* a lot at the time, wondering so many different things about how it came to be musically. Listening to “Tralala” reminds me little of the wonderful Igor, but I was hoping to perhaps capture some of the simpler melodic ideas that Stravinsky crafts so well (without all the harmonic what have you). A simpler Stravinsky—for children? “Tralala” is no masterpiece, but perhaps it offers a light, humorous destination for the listener’s ear and mind.

– Christina Courtin

### **John Steinbeck by Bill Frisell, *inspired by John Steinbeck***

I first met Brooklyn Rider when we played together on Jenny Schein-

man’s album *Crossing the Field* (Koch, 2008). I became a fan. I was thrilled when they asked me to be a part of this project. Back in 2012, I had the good fortune to be commissioned by the Monterey Jazz Festival to write a piece of music to be performed at the festival. Thanks to the Monterey festival and the Big Sur Land Trust, I was given the amazing opportunity to stay in Big Sur, California, at the beautiful Glen Deven Ranch. It was there that I had the luxury of being alone in an extraordinary place with nothing to do but write music and be with my own thoughts. There was time and space enough to follow through with musical ideas. The music I wrote there was first performed at the jazz festival and soon after recorded on an album titled *Big Sur* for Okeh records. But, that wasn’t the end if it. There was much more music—pages and pages. So, I was very happy when Brooklyn Rider approached me. The timing was perfect. John Steinbeck has long been an inspiration. Glen Deven Ranch is not far from Monterey, Salinas, and the settings for many of Steinbeck’s stories. I had recently read *East of Eden*. Naturally, he was on my mind, and the environment was stirring my imagination. It seemed fitting to dedicate the piece to John Steinbeck.

– Bill Frisell

### **Ping Pong Fumble Thaw by Glenn Kotche, *inspired by Jens Massel***

Several years ago, I heard a refreshing track of minimal electronic music from Cologne. The artist was Kandis, one of the monikers used by German artist Jens Massel. I then found other



releases of his under the monikers Senking and Fumble. I began to listen to this music obsessively. It's highly rhythmic, yet sparse, with minimal grooves ebbing and flowing over evocative sound environments. Being a drummer, I am, of course, drawn to the grooves but also love the sounds Massel uses and combines to create these ambient electronic percussion songs. This is electronic music that somehow feels very human and organic.

I decided to write a solo drum kit piece inspired by some of these more high-energy recordings and then used that as the blueprint for this string quartet for Brooklyn Rider. The title is comprised of words taken from Massel's record titles that also work as descriptors for the four distinct sections of the piece.

The opening section, "Ping," is exclusively pizzicato and full of rhythmic interplay. "Thaw" is comprised of long arco swells that directly contrast the preceding material. "Pong" features woody battuto rhythms with the quartet acting more as drummers than string players. "Fumble" is the transition back into the hands of the main pizzicato theme and ultimate resolution of the piece.

– Glenn Kotche

### **Show Me by Aoife O'Donovan, *inspired by William Faulkner***

The first part of this tune started dancing around in my head during a train ride in Germany. I was in the middle of *The Sound and the Fury*, reading the classic for the first time,

and something about the lonesomeness of Quentin in Cambridge spilled out in the melody. As the tune progresses and the strings swell, I imagine Quentin Compson's adventure on the Charles River, and his nostalgia for the American South, resulting in the fiddle tune. Faulkner has such an intricate way with words. He's able to create such depth of feeling with sometimes coarse and simple language, and I find that inspiring across all art.

– Aoife O'Donovan

### **Necessary Henry! by Rubin Kodheli, *inspired by Henry Threadgill***

My idea was to write a piece inspired by the great composer and saxophonist Henry Threadgill because I worked with him for years. I felt like I got a doctorate working with Henry, and I wanted to give him tribute because he transformed my musical life. In particular, his unique approach to improvisations—twisting intervallic shapes, long meter, retrograde motion, and spontaneous chaos. My understanding of Henry's music came together even more through the process of writing, which became a presentation of my knowledge of the Threadgillian universe. From funk to metal to twenty-first-century, we all identify sonorities differently. The name of the work comes from his tune "Necessary Illusion." I'm very thankful to Brooklyn Rider for initiating the sparks of this piece.

– Rubin Kodheli



## BROOKLYN RIDER

**“They are four classical musicians performing with the energy of young rock stars jamming on their guitars, a Beethoven-goes-indie foray into making classical music accessible but also celebrating why it was good in the first place.”**

– *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

Hailed as “the future of chamber music” (*Strings*), the game-changing string quartet Brooklyn Rider presents eclectic repertoire in gripping performances that continue to draw rave reviews from classical, world, and rock critics alike. NPR credits Brooklyn Rider with “recreating the 300-year-old form of string quartet as a vital and creative twenty-first-century ensemble”; the *Los Angeles Times* dubs the group “one of the wonders of contemporary music”; and *Vice* likens its members to “moto-cross daredevils who never screw up a stunt.”

Equally at home in clubs and in concert halls, the quartet has played venues as varied as Carnegie’s Zankel Hall, the San Francisco Jazz Festival, Le Poisson Rouge, Japan’s Todai-ji, Lincoln Center, Brooklyn’s Littlefield, the Library of Congress, the Telluride Bluegrass Festival, and South by Southwest. Through visionary programming and global collaborations, Brooklyn Rider’s “down-to-earth demeanor ... demystifies contemporary classical music and invites everyone into the tent,” writes a *Time Out New York* reviewer.

Celebrating its tenth anniversary with its most ambitious venture to date, Brooklyn Rider launched the 2014-15 season with the release of *The Brooklyn Rider Almanac*, on Mercury Classics, accompanied by a U.S. tour. The album forms the centerpiece of a groundbreaking multidisciplinary project for which the quartet commissioned fifteen new works, each inspired by a respective artistic muse, from composers ranging from

Wilco's Glenn Kotche of indie rock fame to jazz icon Bill Frisell. Like the quartet's name, the project was inspired in equal parts by the cross-disciplinary vision of *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), the pre-World War I Munich-based artistic collective, and the exploding array of cultures and artistic energy found in the group's Brooklyn home.

Season highlights include a residency at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, crowned by the world premiere of *Veils and Vespers* by Pulitzer Prize winner John Luther Adams; the New York City premiere of *Chalk and Soot*, a collaboration between quartet violinist Colin Jacobsen and choreographer John Heginbotham, at Lincoln Center's White Light Festival; and continued touring with banjo legend Béla Fleck, with whom Brooklyn Rider recently released *The Impostor* on Deutsche Grammophon/Mercury Classics. Summer brings the tenth anniversary season of the Stillwater Music Festival, a weeklong Minnesota chamber festival founded by the group in 2006 as a place to unveil new repertoire and collaborations.

Following the 2013 release of *A Walking Fire* on Mercury Classics, Brooklyn Rider showcased repertoire from the album for its Wigmore Hall debut and elsewhere on tour in the United States and in northern Europe. Superstar soprano Dawn Upshaw joined the quartet for performances at the University of Texas at Austin and the University of North Carolina. Recent seasons also saw performances at the Ojai Music Festival, the U.S. Open tennis tournament, the Cologne Philharmonic, Rome's American Academy, Sweden's Malmö Festival, the Lincoln Center Festival, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center, and Texas' South by Southwest, where the quartet was the only classical group with an official invitation to play.

Brooklyn Rider often appears under the umbrella of outside initiatives started by members of the group. In 2003, violinist Johnny Gandelman created In a Circle, a series of New York performance events exploring connections between music and the visual arts. He launched In a Circle Records in 2008 with the release of Brooklyn Rider's eclectic debut recording, *Passport*, followed by *Dominant Curve* in 2010 and *Seven Steps* in 2012. The first two albums made NPR's year-end round-ups, while the third was named an NPR listener favorite. In 2013, In a Circle released violinist Nicholas Cords' solo recording, *Recursions*. Colin and Eric Jacobsen are co-founders of the acclaimed New York City-based orchestral collective The Knights. All four members of the quartet enjoy longstanding participation in Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, with which they have performed worldwide and recorded three albums for Sony Classical.

A public radio favorite, Brooklyn Rider has been featured on NPR's *Tiny Desk Concerts*, *On Point*, *All Songs Considered*, *Deceptive Cadence*, and *All Things Considered*; WNYC's *Soundcheck*; and American Public Media's *Performance Today*. The quartet has also appeared on NY1 television in New York City. The ensemble's recordings are played across North America on stations ranging in focus from classical to world, jazz, pop, and new music.

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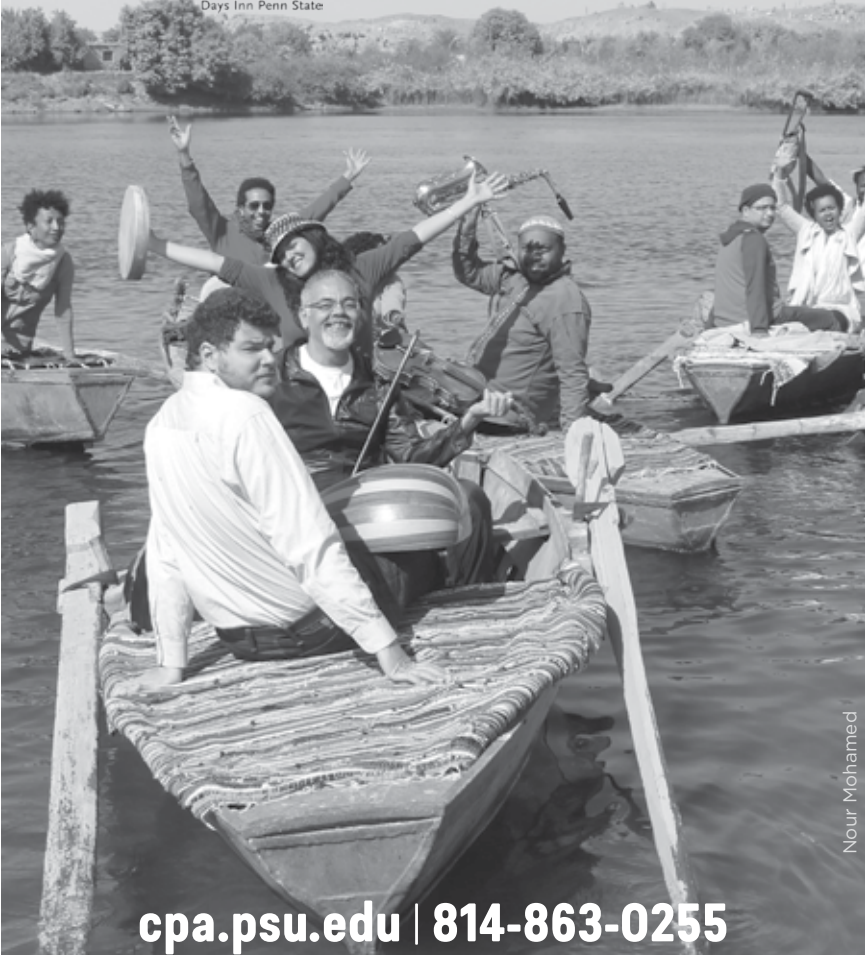
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Enriching lives through inspiring experiences

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1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12
13	14	15

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