

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
Dover Quartet: The Tate Commission
Saturday 19 October, 2024 - Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2024

***Strum* for string quartet (2006, rev. 2012)**
Jessie Montgomery (b.1982)

Music is my connection to the world. It guides me to understand my place in relation to others and challenges me to make clear the things I do not understand. I imagine that music is a meeting place at which all people can converse about their unique differences and common stories.

– Jessie Montgomery

So reads the home page on Jessie Montgomery's web site. A violinist and educator as well as a composer, she grew up in a musical household on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Her parents worked in music and theater and were active in neighborhood arts initiatives. Montgomery earned her undergraduate degree from the Juilliard School in violin performance, and subsequently completed a master's in Film Composition and Multimedia in NYU. She is currently a Graduate Fellow in Music Composition at Princeton.

As its title suggests, *Strum* alludes to plucked strings, specifically those of the guitar family. Montgomery describes this piece as a celebration of American folk idioms and the spirit of dance and movement. In her seven minute score, she evokes multiple styles, freely migrating between traditional techniques and popular elements.

The movement opens with upper strings playing pizzicato. Cello introduces a mournful theme, presently joined by first violin. The mood shifts to a more upbeat tempo, introducing jazzy syncopations and flights of fancy. In some passages all four players use their bows,

including in chorale-like rhythmic unison; however, Montgomery's layered, pulsating rhythms are never far off. Diverse in textures and rhythmically complex, *Strum* is a joyous paean to string colors.

***Woodland Songs* (2024)**

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate (b.1968)

SOUTHWEST PREMIERE

Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate is a classical composer and citizen of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma, dedicated to the development of American Indian classical composition. He is a 2022 Chickasaw Hall of Fame inductee and a 2022 Distinguished Alumni Award recipient from The Cleveland Institute of Music. In 2021, he was appointed a Cultural Ambassador for the U. S. Department of State. Though his music has been performed on the other side of the Metroplex by the new music ensemble Voices of Change, this afternoon's premiere marks the first time we have heard his music on this series.

Tate's compositions hold a unique niche in the repertoire because of his strong connection to his Chickasaw heritage. He is in increasing demand for new works. In addition to today's premiere of *Woodland Songs*, he has several other significant performances pending. Oklahoma's Canterbury Voices will premieres Tate's first opera, *Loksi' Shaali' (Shell Shaker)*; PostClassical Ensemble presents an all-American-Indian program curated by Tate in Washington D.C.; and his popular work *Chokfi'* (2018), has been programmed by the Austin, Eureka, and Ft. Collins symphonies. Tate is currently at work on a new violin concerto for acclaimed violinist

Irina Muresanu, as well as new works for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic and North Carolina Symphony Orchestra.

Tate earned his Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance from Northwestern University and his Master of Music in Piano Performance and Composition from The Cleveland Institute of Music. His middle name, Impichchaachaaha', means "their high corncrib" and is his inherited traditional Chickasaw house name.

CMSFW is pleased and proud to welcome Jerod Tate to Fort Worth, to introduce his new string quartet and explain its connections to Chickasaw culture. He has graciously provided the following background.

Abokkoli' Taloowa' (Woodland Songs), commissioned by Dover Quartet, is a modern Chickasaw composition about woodland animals from our Southeastern homelands. Our traditional woodland animals are so revered that our family clans are named after them. My family is Shawi' Iksa' - Raccoon Clan. Each woodland animal has a special ethos and there are many traditional stories about them. In this work, five woodland animals are represented: Squirrel, Bird, Deer, Raccoon and Fish. Each movement is like an epitome - a deep, dramatic and rhapsodic expression of my feelings of being a Chickasaw man from a beautiful and robust culture. I love our animals and I love composing works about them.

Abokkoli' Taloowa' (Woodland Songs) is full of Chickasaw melodies, rhythms and musical structure. Sometimes these elements appear very clearly, where the melody may romantically soar above the ensemble. Sometimes they are abstracted into the texture of the quartet and hidden inside the spirit of the animal. I allow myself to fluidly dance between cultural clarity and modern expressionism. I am deeply inspired by our modern Native artists, choreographers, authors and film makers - each proudly expressing their individual identity within rich ancestry. I encourage each listener to create their own emotional story of each animal and imprint these legends into their hearts.

Woodland Songs is a consortium commission by the Curtis Institute of Music, Arizona

Friends of Chamber Music, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley, Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Houston, Chamber Music Northwest, Chamber Music Pittsburgh, Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth, Friends of Chamber Music (Denver), Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Northwestern University Bienen School of Music, and Shriver Hall Concert Series. The world premiere took place on 2 August, 2024 in Kingston, Rhode Island. This afternoon's performance is the Southwest premiere.

Rattle Songs by Pura Fé (b.1959)

Orchestrated for string quartet by Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate

SOUTHWEST PREMIERE

Pura Fé Antonia 'Toni' Crescioni is a singer/songwriter, storyteller, instructor, seamstress, artist, and founding member of the Native Women's *a cappella* trio Ulali. Born in New York City, she moved to Sampson County, North Carolina in 1997. She was pursuing her heritage as a member of the Tuscarora tribe, tracing back through a half dozen generations of female singers in her lineage, all of whom were Tuscarora Deen people mixed with African and Scottish-Irish ancestry.

Pura Fé studied dance and voice as a teenager, performing with the American Ballet Theater, the Martha Graham School, and in some Broadway musicals. At age 22, she sang with the Mercer Ellington Orchestra, and over the years she has done extensive studio work. As a soloist, she has opened for Herbie Hancock, Taj Mahal, Al Jarreau, and George Duck. In 2015

she moved to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she has continued not only singing – as an indigenous Tuscarora tribe vocalist – but also her work as a native activist and cultural leader.

In 1987, she was a founding member of Ulali, a vocal group that, according to her web site, was the first Indigenous women’s group to create their own sound from their strong traditional roots and personal contemporary styles. Their 1994 album, *Mahk Jchi* [Heartbeat Drum Song] has long been a personal favorite of Jerod Tate. When he began working with the Dover Quartet, he learned that its cellist, Camden Shaw, was also a Ulali fan. Both were particularly taken with one track, *Rattle Song*, which consists of seven short movements. Shaw asked Tate to rewrite them for string quartet. The project resonated with Tate because Woodland American Indians have a great deal in common with the Chickasaw tribe – including turtle rattles. “These are orchestrations, even though they’re not for orchestra,” Tate says. “They’re orchestrated for string quartet, translated to another musical idiom.”

His composer’s note follows.

Rattle Songs is a suite of compositions created by the Tuscarora vocalist, Pura Fé Crescione, for the ensemble, ULALI. Pura Fé’s Tuscarora cousin, Jennifer Kreisberg, and her Maya/Apache friend, Soni Moreno are the other two vocalists of the group. In 1994, this Native trio made history when they released their album, *Mahk Jchi (Our Hearts)*. This album is a unique work of genius, where Native songs are modernized through innovative arrangements and stunningly rich harmonies. Their work had a powerfully deep impact on my personal vision as a Native composer and I am privileged that they are my friends.

Chickasaw music is based in turtle shell shaking as our percussion for stomp dancing and social songs. The Tuscarora people share a very similar shell shaking tradition, as do most Native woodland tribes. In *Rattle Songs*, ULALI brought together songs from different parts of Indian Country and brilliantly couched them in traditional woodland shell shaking styles.

After Camden Shaw [inquired] if I might be interested in orchestrating *Rattle Songs* for string quartet, my immediate acceptance and enthusiasm could not be overstated. After consulting with Pura Fé, I have created these orchestrations that are classically impressionistic in a post-modern style. I make no deliberate attempt to imitate the exact sound of rattles from the original songs; rather, I have created a new home for them in the string quartet. Pura Fé created *Rattle Songs* as an homage to her Native North American cousins and it is my hope that my orchestrations create another layer of honoring our people.

The songs are quite varied. Sometimes we hear a single melodic line as an introduction, which then breaks into harmony. Most often those harmonies are in three parts (parallel triads); however, sometimes they expand to four parts and, in ‘Grammah Easter’s Lullaby,’ to six. The transference to string quartet is seamless, by definition emphasizing the music rather than text. There are snippets of call and response. In the songs, the sharply defined rhythms are enhanced by percussive techniques, including clapping, rattles, and hand drums. Tate’s orchestration does not use extra percussion instruments. “The only time I directly simulate the percussive rattles is when the cello uses the fiddling ‘chop’ technique,” he says. “Otherwise, I express Ulali’s music through a modern impressionist style.”

Jerod Tate’s orchestrations were commissioned by the same organizations as his *Woodland Songs*, and were also premiered on 2 August by the Dover Quartet in Rhode Island. This afternoon’s performance is the Southwest premiere.

String Quartet No. 13 in F Major, Op.96 ("American")

Antonin Dvorák (1841-1904)

The “American” Quartet holds an analogous position among Dvořák’s chamber works to the “New World” Symphony in his orchestral music. Both are especially beloved to American audiences because of their origins in the United States.

Dvořák had been in New York City for a year, directing the National Conservatory, when he decided to take a summer holiday in 1893. Homesick for his native Bohemia but contractually bound to remain in the United States for another year, he chose a destination where he could at least speak his mother tongue. He traveled to the remote hamlet of Spillville, Iowa, literally halfway across the American continent. After a season of big city hustle and bustle, this small farming community provided welcome relief. Spillville’s 400 Moravian immigrants welcomed their famous countryman with open arms.

The summer months in Iowa proved fruitful both personally and professionally. Dvořák’s children joined him for the sojourn, and he was extremely happy to have family around him and to be among other Czech speakers. Filled with energy, enthusiasm, and a host of melodic ideas, he began to sketch a new string quartet on 8 June, 1893. Two days later, after apparently effortless work, he completed the sketch, marking on the manuscript, "Thanks be to God, I am satisfied, it went quickly." On 23 June he finalized the full score.

Perhaps because it is suffused with the excitement and immediacy of the moment, the “American” has become Dvořák's most popular string quartet, rivaled only by the A-major Piano Quintet among his chamber works. That stated, it would be an injustice to Dvořák not to mention

that he composed fourteen string quartets that contain a wealth of wonderful music. Anyone who enjoys this one should seek out the other mature quartets, which generously reward the curious.

The "American" is one of a group of works that Dvořák sent to Fritz Simrock, his German publisher, from the United States. In order to expedite prompt issuance of the new compositions, Simrock asked Johannes Brahms to proofread the musical galleys. When he learned of Brahms's labor on his behalf, Dvořák was overwhelmed, writing to Simrock, "I can scarcely believe there is another composer in the world who would do as much." The story is heart-warming testimony to the depth of the friendship between Dvořák and Brahms, and the exceptionally high regard in which Brahms held his younger friend.

The music of the "American" quartet, like that of the "New World" symphony, has historically been associated with Negro spirituals and American folk song. In fact, its syncopations, dotted rhythms, and propensity for pentatonic scales all share roots in the folk music of Dvořák's native Bohemia. In addition, Bedřich Smetana's autobiographical quartet, "In my Life," also served as an important model for Dvořák's first movement. British commentator Richard Graves once described Op.96 as 'eating blueberry pie and washing it down with Slivovic.'

Dvořák's genius in this work is his fusion of African-American, Native American, and Czech harmonies and rhythms. It doesn't take too much imagination to hear Indian drums in the

finale, and the quartet's wholesome melodies and vigorous rhythms may well prompt aural memories of folk songs we recall from our American youth. Nevertheless, ultimately Dvořák's own national spirit prevails, making this quartet is Czech through and through.