

JASPER STRING QUARTET

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Four Seasons | Four Composers a Jasper String Quartet commissioning project

“Fragile Autumn” by Christopher Theofanidis

Commissioned by Chamber Music Northwest. Premiered March 2020, Tuscon AZ

Fragile Autumn explores a sense of the precariousness that vulnerable seasons of our lives carry. The music climbs steadily upwards over time, like a mountain climber, past the musical slips of the foot that are inevitably on the path. Beginning with a cello solo, the piece unfolds as a tapestry of lines in imitative counterpoint, insisting on lyricism, even as it trips on protruding punctuations like crags in the mountainside. In contrast

to obstacles that arise, a still and steady thread interposes moments of spaciousness that culminate in a final bright, epiphanic moment.



“Frozen Dreams” by Lera Auerbach

Commissioned by Arizona Friends of Music. Premiered March 2020, Tuscon AZ

The Seasons

Poem by Lera Auerbach (originally in Russian).

English translation by Maria Donde and Lera Auerbach

I Life is an ouroboros. Spring
Doesn't keep count, but accurately binds
Everything and everyone, life and death.
For centuries, this world's rebirth has turned
The earth. Only God, surely, knows
What lies behind this endless rotation.

When life lies ahead, we are more honest;
Stripping down the earth, we lay our deposit on love.
At times like this we can be happy in a cell
And the poorest shelter can become our palace.
At this age, the year seems long
And we battle windmills like the Don.

II The days pass, and in this time of life
Spent Spring feels Summer's farewell breath behind.
We grow used to maturity, and it always
Reminds us of home, of our native land,
Of household chores, and of the family,
Of work and the titles we have taken on ...

This time of hot middays, when the sun
Stares straight into its own reflection
It's single eye shattering the water
(Life allows us to submit to the flow) –
Stamping out grains of dust with yellow rays
It reaches the height of its paralyzed state.

III The days pass and the birds fly by, away.
The leaves fall, fall, but still they cannot
Quite find a way to settle on the ground ...
At times my thoughts cohere –
A sign offered up my senses
Like a question put to a departing God.

Life resembles a flowing garment. Sewn
Out of days like a toga's folds, the last
Made from foreknowledge of coming winter.
The cradle is draped with sunset's shroud.
And the fir tree's fractured trunk
Crooked, like a hanging question mark.

IV The days pass. Crows' nests –
Old rags on the bare branches.
The snow settling on your temple
No longer even melts, and iron nails
Start to come loose, and the frame of the house
Breaks up, springing leaks like a canoe

Or like an ancient ship. And the heart's gasp
Oppresses. Something weighs down on your breast
Sounds are muffled ... The deadly scaffold
Rises up suddenly, a cross on your path;
So unexpected is it that you have
Time for just three words: "For everything – forgive."

“Spring - Azure Dragon” by Akira Nishimura

Commissioned for the Bill and Mary Meyer Concert Series by the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian. Premiered April 2019 in Washington DC

Spring - Azure Dragon is Akira Nishimura's eighth string quartet. It was composed in Tokyo in February and March 2019 by commission of Jasper String Quartet.

The theme of this work is "spring", and the piece is composed as a hymn to spring. The title Azure Dragon is a magical sacred symbol of spring in East Asia. It is also a symbol of the eastward orientation of the rising sun. (The other symbols of the seasons are Vermillion Bird in summer, White Tiger in autumn, and Black Tiger in winter.) The azure color represents the blue of the sky as well as the greenery of the plants that cover the earth.



Azure Dragon awakens from winter sleep, saturates its vitality, rises to heaven, and dances in the spring sky. Dragon is also a symbol of springs and the powerful flow of water, and is said to have the power to evoke spring storms. This song is also a hymn to Azure Dragon, the holy spring beast.

Part of the song depicts a row of cherry blossoms in full bloom, a symbol of Japan's spring, shining in the spring sunlight.



Wild Summer by Joan Tower

Commissioned by anonymous donors. Premiered June 2018 at Bard College in Annandale-On-Hudson NY

Wild Summer was commissioned by the Jasper String Quartet as part of a four-season set composed by four composers. I was asked to represent summer. The first thought I had about summer were memories of when I was younger and going to school. Although I was expected to get a summer job, it was also a time for a vacation to finally be free and to have a really good time. Since I was a rather wild teenager, I vividly remember being intent on as much dancing, partying, and going after the boys as possible. This goal had an intense manic side to it that bordered on an anxiety, a possible failure of actually having a good time, sort of the like the vacation you fantasized about that

never quite worked out the way you expected. This nine-minute piece alternates between a driving, wild, and manic type of energy with a relaxed, meditative, slow feeling in between - a breathing and recuperating space (on the beach).