

AMERICAN STRING QUARTETS

Project Muse Guide - March 2009



Southwest Chamber Music's own string quartet performs two versions of American faith, with works by Charles Ives and Wadada Leo Smith. Ives' *String Quartet No. 1, "From the Salvation Army"* is strongly influenced by Protestant hymn-tunes of New England, while Leo Smith's *Black Church, First Gathering of the World Spirit* celebrates the struggle and achievements of the Black Church.

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For this performance, we welcome Southwest Chamber Music's resident String Quartet: Shalini Vijayan and Lorenz Gamma, violins; Jan Karlin, viola; and Peter Jacobson, cello

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ABOUT SOUTHWEST CHAMBER MUSIC

GRAMMY® Award-winning **Southwest Chamber Music** has been bringing *PROJECT MUSE* in-school performances to schools throughout Los Angeles County since 1994 with music that reflects the vast diversity of art music from around the world. We perform throughout the year at the Armory Center for the Arts, Boston Court, Norton Simon Museum, Colburn School of Performing Arts, and a summer festival at The Huntington Library. Founded in 1987, Southwest Chamber Music is the most active chamber music ensemble in the Western United States, maintaining a full season of concerts, community and educational events throughout the year. To find out more about Southwest Chamber Music and our other programs, visit our website at www.swmusic.org.



FEATURED COMPOSERS



Charles Ives (1874-1954)

String Quartet No. 1, "From the Salvation Army" was written in 1896, while Ives was a student at Yale University studying under [Horatio Parker](#). The main themes of this piece are paraphrased from familiar choral melodies from Protestant hymns such as "Beulah Land," "Shining Shore," "Missionary Hymn," and "Nettleton." This early work is known for its playfulness and tonality, a far cry from the tone clusters and dissonances of his later works for which Ives would eventually be known.

Charles Ives was an American modernist composer. He is widely regarded as one of the first American composers of international significance. Ives' music was largely ignored during his life, and many of his works went unperformed for many years. Ives combined the American popular and church-music traditions of his youth with European art music, and was among the first composers to engage in a systematic program of experimental music, with musical techniques including polytonality, polyrhythm, tone clusters, aleatoric music, and quarter tones, thus foreshadowing virtually every major musical innovation of the 20th century.

Fun Fact: While at Yale, Ives played on the varsity football team. His coach once remarked that it was a crying shame that Charles Ives spent so much time at music as otherwise he could have been a champion sprinter!



Wadada Leo Smith (b. 1941)

String Quartet No. 3 "Black Church" is a lyrical blues-spiritual composition seeking to convey a similar psychological message as we find in the early blues master's performance. "Black Church" is constructed as a purely ensemble work in the tradition of the West African drumming ensemble. The reference to drumming is in the gestural strokes of the instrumentalist's bow and the contact with the strings and body of the instrument, and it does as much to illustrate the musical meaning and activity. The only improvisational moment in the composition occurs in bar 6 in the first violin part. "Black Church" was given its world premiere by Southwest Chamber Music in 1998.

Wadada Leo Smith is a jazz composer and trumpet player who grew up in Mississippi, where such legends as [B.B. King](#) inspired the young trumpeter. With his notational system of Ankhramation, he translates the freedom of improvisation into a completely democratic music—Smith's notation is no different for a jazz band, tabla and sitar ensemble or traditional string quartet. This gives his music a bold freedom in the environment of Western classical music.

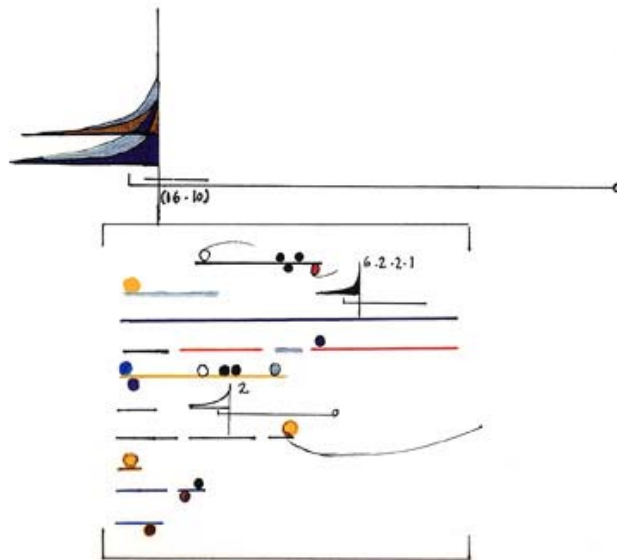


An example of Ankhramation

ANKHRASMATION

“Ankhrasmation music uses no pictures of notes, no designs of notes; it’s a symbolic interpretation of what’s there. It is a way of making music that has a little bit of both improvisation and composition inside it, but it’s an entirely different thing because it’s all symbolic.” -Wadada Leo Smith

Wadada Leo Smith developed a type of musical notation that reflected his own artistic expression; which he dubbed Ankhrasmation in 1977. This notational language leaves space for both compositional and improvisational forms; and places all instruments on an equal playing field. On paper, Ankhrasmation uses symbols to create a roadmap for improvisation:



See the difference in the image above.

How does this compare to traditionally notated music?

How would you read this music?

Think about your favorite song. What would your musical roadmap look like for that song?

Fun Fact: The word Ankhrasmation was derived by splicing together the ancient Egyptian word for “vital life force” (Ankh), the Amharic word for “head” or “father” (Ras), and a universal word for mother: (Ma).

Musical Vocabulary (from the California Standards for the Arts)

ALEATORIC MUSIC is when a certain number of compositional/performance decisions are left up to the performer, either before or during the actual performance. [Learn more...](#)

ANKHRASMATION is a type of musical notation developed by composer Wadada Leo Smith in which various notated symbols serve as a guidepost for improvisation

THE BLUES is a genre of music developed in the late 1800s which came to prominence during the early 20th century. Blues music was developed in African American communities throughout the American South, and its roots can be found in Negro spirituals, call-and-response hymns, African scales, and a Western “tonic-predominant-dominant” harmony. Most blues music, which follows a codified harmonic and lyrical structure, deals with themes of depression and sadness as well as redemption. [Learn more...](#)

DYNAMICS are various degrees of volume in the performance of music, such as loud and soft.

EXTENDED TECHNIQUES are unconventional, unorthodox or “improper” techniques of playing musical instruments, in order to expand and explore the possibilities of different instruments. [Learn more...](#)

IMPROVISATION is the spontaneous creation of music.

An **INTERVAL** is the distance in pitch between two tones.

MODERNISM IN MUSIC is characterized by a desire for or belief in progress, and/or breaking with the past or common practice to make something new.

POLYTONALITY is when a piece of music has more than two pitch centers simultaneously.

POLYRHYTHM is when two distinct rhythmic figures, such as a set of triplets and a set of sixteenth notes, are played simultaneously.

PONTICELLO is a string instrument technique where one plays on the bridge of the instrument to achieve a special effect.

A **QUARTER TONE** is an interval about half as wide as a semitone, which is half a whole tone. While the use of quarter tones in Western music is a more recent and experimental phenomenon, these and other microtonal intervals have been an important part of the music of the Arab world for many centuries.

SCORDATURA is an alternate tuning used for the open strings of a string instrument. It is an extended technique used to allow the playing of otherwise impossible melodies, harmonies, figures, chords, or other note combinations.

A **SCORE** is the written form of the entire composition. All players have a part of the score for their instrument, unless they have memorized the notes.

The **STRING FAMILY** (also called **Chordophones**) is the group of instruments that use strings to produce sound. The strings are made of gut, steel, or nylon. Stringed instruments can be played with a bow, or they can be played by plucking or strumming the strings with the fingers. [Learn more...](#)

The **TIMBRE** is the tone color or character of sound heard.

The **TONALITY (KEY)** is the tonal center of a composition.

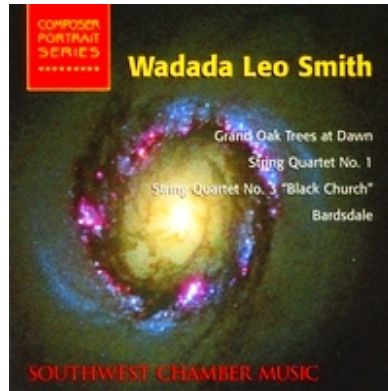
-tone clusters are chords comprised of three or more consecutive notes of a scale, e.g. C-C#-D#

TREMOLO is a shaking sound which is achieved by repeating the same note extremely quickly or by playing two notes very quickly, one after the other.

Look for Southwest Chamber Music CDs on Itunes & CD Baby!

Check out our recording of Wadada Leo Smith as part of our extensive

Composer Portrait Series:



Continue Learning with these Internet Resources:

For more information on our featured composers, visit their websites:

www.charlesives.org

<http://music.calarts.edu/~wls/index.html>

To learn more about African Heritage in Classical Music:

www.africlassical.com

www.colum.edu/CBMR

For more information about the Contemporary Classical Music Community:

www.sequenza21.com

Watch a video of Wadada Leo Smith performing with his Golden Quartet:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqkZem06b3U>

To try to create your own composition at

www.creatingmusic.com

Another excellent interactive website for kids with information about instruments is

www.playmusic.org

For more information, and to access exciting educational videos and podcasts:

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46 N. Los Robles Ave., Pasadena 91101

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