

## AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

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- *Los Angeles Times*



# BIOGRAPHY

Internationally recognized as one of the world's finest quartets, the American String Quartet has spent decades honing the luxurious sound for which it is famous. The Quartet celebrated its 35th anniversary in the 2010-2011 season, and, in its years of touring, has performed in all fifty states and has appeared in the most important concert halls worldwide. Their presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartók, and Mozart have won widespread critical acclaim, and their MusicMasters Complete Mozart String Quartets, performed on a matched quartet set of instruments by Stradivarius, are widely considered to have set the standard for this repertoire.

Resident quartet at the Aspen Music Festival since 1974 and at the Manhattan School of Music in New York since 1984, the American has also served as resident quartet at the Taos School of Music, the Peabody Conservatory, and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The Quartet's diverse activities have also included numerous international radio and television broadcasts, tours of Asia, and performances with the New York City Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The 2010-2011 season featured a reprise of the Quartet's debut tour of Israel in 2009; after their inaugural visit the Americans were immediately reengaged for concerts in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv. Additionally, in Fall 2010 the Quartet will embark on its 40th European tour, with appearances in Germany, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy.

The centerpiece of the Quartet's 35th-anniversary celebrations was the release of the group's first new CD in several years;

entitled "Schubert's Echo." The American's additional extensive discography can be heard on the Albany, CRI, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch, and RCA labels.

The American's innovative approach to concert programming has won them a number of notable residencies in recent years, including "Beethoven the Contemporary" at the University of Michigan, "The Six Mozart Viola Quintets" at the Aspen Music Festival with Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree (broadcast live nationally via Chicago superstation WFMT), and a four-year cycle entitled "4-5-6..." at Princeton University, where the Quartet performed the complete quintets and sextets of Mozart and Brahms, joined in each concert by renowned guest artists.

As champions of new music, the American has given numerous premières, including Richard Danielpour's Quartet No. 4, commissioned by Kansas City Friends of Chamber Music, and Curt Cacioppo's "a distant voice calling," commissioned by Arizona Friends of Chamber Music. In May 2011, the Americans will premiere Glen Cortese's Four Dances for String Quartet and String Orchestra, a work commissioned by the Oregon Mozart Players.

Formed when its original members were students at The Juilliard School, the American String Quartet's career began with the group winning both the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Award in the same year. Individually, the members devote additional time outside the Quartet's active performance and teaching schedule to solo appearances, recitals, and master classes.

# CRITICAL ACCLAIM

**“The finesse, the thoughtfulness and depth of the performance could not be surpassed.”**

*- Berliner Morgenpost*

**“Luxurious, beautifully sculptured performances.”**

*- New York Times*

**“The American String Quartet’s program was, simply put, a comprehensive display of ensemble mastery, of passion, precision and interpretive smarts in near perfect synchrony.”**

*- Los Angeles Times*

**“The artistry of this group was unmistakable: their singing tone had an almost magical warmth.”**

*- St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

**Because of their assured rapport, flawless balance and unity of style, they play together with a sense of ease that lets each piece of music unfold like a living organism.**

*- Cleveland Plain Dealer*

**“Their unanimity of spirit and genuinely felt personal expression speak straight to the heart.”**

*- Strings*

**“The finest quartet based in New York.”**

*- The Strad*



# REVIEWS

## The New York Times

### A 1988 Commission, Revisited on an Anniversary

September 13, 2010 | Allan Kozinn

The American String Quartet is celebrating its 35th anniversary this season, and the Manhattan School of Music, where it has been in residence for 26 of those years, is giving a party in the form of a three-concert retrospective, with two performances at the school and one at Merkin Concert Hall.

At the first installment, at the Manhattan School on Sunday afternoon, works by Haydn and Ravel framed a piece the group had commissioned from George Tsontakis in the late 1980s, and the concert was so beautifully played and so rich in interpretive nuance that a listener who had not been especially impressed with this quartet in the past left the hall feeling that the two remaining concerts should not be missed.

The first pleasant surprise was the dark burnished tone the group applied to the opening of Haydn's Quartet in G (Op. 77, No. 1), a courtly work in which a touch of velvet is not amiss, at least in the first two movements, but which also demands an ability to pivot quickly between elegance and forcefulness. In the Adagio, the players — Peter Winograd and Laurie Carney, violinists; Daniel Avshalomov, violist; and Wolfram Koessel, cellist — used vibrato sparingly, yet their sound could not have been more sumptuous. And they gave energetic but carefully shaped accounts of the Menuetto and the Presto finale.

Mr. Tsontakis's Quartet No. 4, "Beneath Thy Tenderness of Heart," was composed in 1988 for this ensemble, which recorded it (with Mr. Tsontakis's Quartet No. 3, for New World) in 1991. It is a magical piece, and much of its power comes from something borrowed: a Russian Orthodox chorale, played at the start in a soft-focus, vibrato-free style.

The concert ended with a supercharged performance of the Ravel Quartet in F that began with the same ear-catching, deep timbre as the Haydn but expanded kaleidoscopically, in ways that the Ravel (and, for that matter, the Tsontakis) allows and the Haydn does not. In the pizzicato passages in the second movement, and in the vigorous finale, the musicians' playing was the picture of ensemble unity.

# Palm Beach Daily News

## American String Quartet's sound luxurious, cohesive in Flagler Museum concert

March 10, 2010 | James Youngblood

The Flagler Museum was the site Tuesday evening of an extraordinarily elegant performance by the American String Quartet. The luxurious sound for which the quartet is famous was apparent, as was the careful attention to dynamics and accents, and an ensemble and balance that made the group sound like a single instrument. ...The program consisted of but two works: Quartet in G, Op. 18, No. 2 by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) and Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810, "Death and the Maiden," by Franz Schubert (1797-1828). The opening of the Beethoven features quick changes of dynamics and

an attractive flutelike violin passage. The members of the quartet caught the mystery and the drama of certain passages, and executed them stylistically. ... The concert closed with Schubert's "Death and the Maiden" quartet. ... The response was so enthusiastic that the quartet responded with a spirited reading of the Presto Finale from Franz Joseph Haydn's Quartet in D, Op. 76, No. 5. The American String Quartet gave a concert that was intense and dramatic. ...May this quartet look forward to another 35 years of music making."



# EL MERCURIO

October 19, 2009 | Santiago, Chile

The members continued with Dmitri Shostakovich's Quartet No. 3, written and premiered in 1946, a year when the Stalinist censorship was rampant through a plan of cultural mediocrity exercised by officials with no taste, but diligent in monitoring. ....The American String Quartet's interpretation was at the height of the apparent lightness that is mixed with raw sarcasm in the first movement; first violin Peter Winograd shone here,

nimble and lyrical at once. After this introduction, what follows is obscuring the panorama: from the arpeggio urgent siren on the viola (Daniel Avshalomov) with which begins the second movement, through the hard line and the unison of the third with Wolfram Koessel's impeccable cello, until the reflexive end, an extended meditation that goes out in harmonics of the violin.



November 2008 | Düsseldorf, Germany

The American showed in Haydn and Debussy how deeply profound, noble and full of nuances they can sound.... Particularly in the Debussy, they succeeded with a multifaceted interpretation. Here all the motives were

apparent and glowing. One heard romantic passion and impressionistic ideals of nature. All said: a chamber concert that was rightly featured as a 'Masterconcert'.

# The Birmingham News

October 11, 2008 | Michael Huebner

Composed in 1893 in Spillville, Iowa, Dvorak's "American" String Quartet, Op. 96, was not composed for this ensemble, as violist Dan Avshalomov jested, but it may as well have been. The group's muscular, full-bodied sound is an ideal match for this richly-textured score. Solos, especially from Avshalomov and cellist Wolfram Koessel, resonated deeply. Violinists Peter Winograd and Laurie Carney matched with penetrating, incisive playing. From

its gutsy accents to its soft lyrical blend, this was a gripping performance. "Holding your Own," a wild rhythmic ride by the quintessential American composer, Charles Ives, closed out an enriching and enlightening two evenings of music. Kudos to the Birmingham Chamber Music Society for booking these programs.

# THE ASPEN TIMES

August 13, 2008 | Harvey Steiman

Someone should have set up a video camera and recorded Wednesday's recital by the American String Quartet in Harris Hall, if for no other reason than to demonstrate what chamber music is all about. For the audience, it was like listening in on a private conversation that was eloquent and poised. ...For us voyeurs in the audience, the first thing to savor was how completely

violinists Peter Winograd and Laurie Carney, violist Daniel Avshalomov and cellist Wolfram Koessel adopted the deft, witty style Haydn's music demands. This is music of finesse, but it's anything but wimpy. They gave it enough vigor to propel it rhythmically even as the melodies intertwined. Intonation was on the mark. It sounded fresh and sprightly. Perfect Haydn.

# FEATURES

## ASQ Travels the World

### To China, Germany, Israel, Spain and Switzerland

In addition to having performed in all 50 states, the ASQ frequently tours abroad. In 2010–11, the Quartet celebrated its 35th anniversary with performances in China, Germany, Israel, Spain and Switzerland. The Quartet also celebrated with the release of its latest CD, *Schubert's Echo*, which invites the listener to appreciate the influence of Schubert on two masterworks of early 20th-century Vienna.

During the 2009–10 season, the quartet toured South America (with the distinguished pianist Menahem Pressler) and Israel (Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa). The ASQ performed in Beijing, China (at "The Egg"), Montreal, Canada, and Puerto Rico (at the Casals Festival) and spent two weeks in residency at Taipei National University, in Taiwan. During the 2008–09 season, the quartet toured The Netherlands (Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Enschede, Groningen), Germany (Berlin, Bonn, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Klais, Munich) and Italy (Cefalu, Palermo, Treviso).

In summer 2010, the ASQ returned to Beijing for their fifth residency at the Great Wall International Music Academy. Involving 80 of the world's most promising young artists on violin, viola and cello from China and



throughout the world, the Academy focuses primarily on developing solo and chamber music skills, with additional opportunities to rehearse and perform concertos with the Great Wall Festival Orchestra, a professional Beijing orchestra with the sole purpose of supporting the young artists of the Great Wall International Music Academy. Guest artists, faculty, and young artists perform concerts in Badaling and Beijing.

# Career Highlights

- 1974** American String Quartet founded by students at The Julliard School  
Winners of the Coleman Prize & the Naumburg Award  
Aspen Music Festival residency begins
- 1975** New York debut, Alice Tully Hall
- 1976** Featured ensemble: Carnegie Hall/The Julliard School BiCentennial Concert Series
- 1977** Featured on CBS's *Camera Three* "Quartets" broadcast
- 1978** One of first NEA Concert/Workshop Tour Grant Winners
- 1979** First tour of Taiwan
- 1979** Taos School of Music residency begins
- 1980** 1st European Tour
- 1980** Peabody Conservatory residency begins
- 1982** Featured ensemble on Steve Martin's *Best Show Ever*, produced by NBC's *Saturday Night Live*  
Rice University Shepherd School of Music residency begins
- 1984** Manhattan School of Music residency begins  
Complete Schoenberg Quartet Cycle for UCLA Schoenberg Institute 10th Anniversary
- 1988** Featured Ensemble in Hermann Prey's *Schubertiade* at the 92nd Street Y, New York City
- 1989** Commission of George Tsontakis 4th Quartet with a grant from Chamber Music America

- 1990** Violinist Peter Winograd joins the quartet
- 1991** University of Nebraska Lied Center residency begins (1991–1994)  
First tour of Japan  
Complete Mozart Quintets with violist Michael Tree at Manhattan School of Music
- 1992** Complete Recordings of Mozart String Quartets on set of matched Stradivarius instruments
- 1993** Second tour of Japan — Inaugural concerts for Yokohama's Philia Hall
- 1994** Performance of Bartók's 4th Quartet with New York City Ballet
- 1996** "Cycles within Cycles," Mozart Viola Quintets and Bartók Quartets at Orange County Performing Arts Center
- 1996** Montreal Symphony season opening performances
- 1997** *Beethoven the Contemporary* series for University of Michigan, Ann Arbor Musical Society
- 1997** Performers and adjudicators at the Evian Music Festival and Quartet Competition
- 1999** 25th Anniversary — Tour of all 50 U.S. states
- 2005** First tour to China
- 2006** Cellist Wolfram Koessel joins the ASQ
- 2010** 35th Anniversary — NSS Music releases CD *Schubert's Echo*



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