

SPEKTRAL QUARTET



SERIOUS BUSINESS

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1 **MANY MANY CADENCES** 2014 8:36
Sky Macklay

THE ANCESTRAL MOUSETRAP 2014
David Reminick
Text by Russell Edson

2 Killing the Ape 4:32
3 The Old Woman's Breakfast 1:34
4 Oh My God I'll Never Get Home 1:51
5 Bringing a Dead Man Back Into Life 4:17
6 The Ancestral Mousetrap 4:08

STRING QUARTET OP. 33
NO. 2 IN E-FLAT "THE JOKE" 1781
Josef Haydn

7 Allegro moderato 5:05
8 Scherzo: Allegro 3:15
9 Largo e sostenuto 4:47
10 Presto 3:12

HACK 2015
Chris Fisher-Lochhead

Set 1

11 Lenny Bruce 3:34
12 Sarah Silverman 0:50
13 Dave Chappelle 1:03

Set 2

14 George Carlin 2:17
15 Robin Williams 1 0:41
16 Dick Gregory 1:35
17 Professor Irwin Corey 1:12

Set 3

18 Rodney Dangerfield 1/2 0:16
19 Sam Kinison 1:13
20 Rodney Dangerfield 3 0:10
21 Redd Foxx 0:53
22 Rodney Dangerfield 4/5 0:14
23 Kumail Nanjiani 0:44
24 Rodney Dangerfield 6/7 0:22
25 Mort Sahl 1:14
26 Rodney Dangerfield 8 0:09
27 Susie Essman 0:43
28 Rodney Dangerfield 9 0:16

Set 4

29 Richard Pryor 2:19
30 Robin Williams 2 1:02
31 Ms. Pat 1:29
32 Tig Notaro 2:11

TOTAL TIME 65:26

THIS ALBUM IS NOT FUNNY

More accurately, playing this album will not induce the brand of gut-busting, teary-eyed revelry that an episode of Chappelle's Show or a YouTube clip of Anna Karkowska's vibrato will. It is funny like the idea of a Rothko turning the stomachs of well-heeled gluttons at the Four Seasons is funny, or how anything Andy Kaufman ever suited up for is funny. It might be a little uncomfortable, rings clear in its truth, and sometimes reveals itself gradually.

As a quartet, we are drawn to virtuosic string writing like flies to...stuff that smells good to flies, which by extension means we are drawn to the dark cave of the rehearsal room. Parsing nested tuplets and tuning microtonal harmonies is an intense bit of business, and more often than not, it is a salty one-liner or vocal impersonation of Aaron Neville that comes to the rescue when the pressure reaches DEFCON 2. Humor is also so much more than a setup and tag, though. It can compel us to inquire why we are laughing, and expose hypocrisy, and

digest an otherwise off-limits topic, and question our assumptions, or simply be clever.

Serious Business comprises four different perspectives on humor through the lens of classical music – a flavor of music that could use a little more funny, in general. You, dear listener, won't be popping in this CD in the way you would a Louis C.K. special. This is an album *about* what makes something funny, and more importantly, a collection of music we think is brilliant, and clever, and unequivocally worth entering the cave for.

We met Sky Macklay during our week-long residency



at The Walden School in New Hampshire – a bucolic retreat we occasionally threaten to move to and illegally homestead – eager to workshop and perform her *Many Many Cadences*, and also sporting emotional subdural hematoma from the preparation of it. Here

you have each instrument base-jumping from the upper reaches of their range, pinging rapid-fire, tonal cadences all the way down in rhythmic unison, only to scramble back up



for another adrenaline fix. Heaping nothing but cadences on top of one another is a little like an America's Funniest Home

Videos highlight reel of dads getting head-butted by waist-high toddlers...which is to say, all payoff.

The absurdist, existential horrors found in the verse of American poet Russell Edson provide the libretto for David Remnick's stunner, *The Ancestral Mousetrap*. Yeppers, you read that right: *libretto*. Amidst the staves of this often hyper-kinetic writing lie vocal passages – the usual stuff, to do with taking a decaying corpse out for a night on the town or becoming the porridge one is slurping for breakfast – which compel the players to sing in four part harmony or

as fragmented solos against their own instrumental lines. As the lead singer of the punk outfit Paper Mice, Dave is one of the fastest thinkers and most imaginative writers we know, and here we get a flavor of the asymmetrical beats and deranged pitch collections he summons when assaulting a Gibson SG and a microphone. This five-movement timbral kaleidoscope opens with a preposterous slide and ends with a scurry up the fingerboard, but for what happens in between, you are on your own. In the immortal words of Ira Glass, sensitive

listeners or those with young children in the room may want to turn the dial for the next few minutes.

Josef Haydn dedicated his String Quartet Op. 33 No. 2, "The Joke" to the Grand Duke and Duchess of Russia (this Grove Dictionary of Music is smudged, but their names appear to be Rod and Trish), and one can only speculate how the schmaltzy glissandi of the second movement Scherzo would have played in this rarefied environment. Was he lampooning some over-zealous violinist at court, perhaps? The real zinger here, though, arrives with

the final movement. Some 235 years later, these trap-door endings of the lively Presto continue to con audiences into premature applause and stifled laughter.

Chris Fisher-Lochhead's *Hack* was the launch point for this project, a compositional venture that is astonishing in scope...and nerve. If the piece were limited to Chris's transcriptions of comedians' bits, down to the tiniest rhythmic level and variation in pitch, we'd still be shuddering at the incomprehensible amount of time and myopic listening

involved to get the piece on the page. Lay these scores, with their elusive meter changes, pinpointed metronome markings, and fluid pitch collections on



top of the comics' original audio, and in the majority of cases (some are fully abstracted), you have a nuanced, impeccable graph of the cadence and delivery

of 16 comedians ranging from Lenny Bruce to Kumail Nanjiani. *Hack* is so much more than just a detailed transcription, though.

The near-monotone of Tig Notaro is transformed into gauzy glissandi, resting on dead-sexy jazz chords, and the manic vocal gallop of Robin Williams digging on the Chardonnay-swilling Swiss Army becomes a series of berserker, unison outbursts. Richard Pryor, overflowing with love for his fellow man emerges as a tender chorus and then takes a hard left turn as a renaissance dance, as viewed from a UFO. In

each case, whether it's Sarah Silverman riffing on birth control, Dick Gregory deriding Chicago politics, or Sam Kinison trumpeting in his pterodactyl vocal register, this 22-movement collection removes words from the formula of the joke, leaving us all to wrestle with – and marvel at – the sounds and cadences of *The Funny*.

—Doyle Armbrust



SPEKTRAL QUARTET

Clara Lyon, violin

Austin Wulliman, violin

Doyle Armbrust, viola

Russell Rolen, cello

Since its inception, the Spektral Quartet has sought out the discourse between the great works of the traditional canon and those written this decade, this year, or this week. Creating connections across centuries, the group invites

its listeners in further with charismatic deliveries, interactive concert formats, an up-close atmosphere, and bold, inquisitive programming.

The ensemble is regarded for its forward-thinking endeavors including the Mobile Miniatures project, which rallied more than forty composers from across the US including David Lang, Augusta Read Thomas, Nico Muhly and Shulamit Ran to write ringtone-length pieces for download to mobile devices. In addition

to finding vehicles for bringing classical music into everyday life, the

Spektral Quartet prioritizes immersion and inclusivity and delivers the majority



of its Chicago concerts in vibrant, unconventional venues.

As ardent advocates for composers within its home city, the group recorded its debut album, *Chambers* (Parlour Tapes+), in 2013 featuring works by Hans Thomalla, Marcos Balter, LJ White, Chris Fisher-Lochhead, and Ben Hjertmann. That same season saw the release of the South American jazz and tango-themed *From This Point Forward* (Azica Records), with bandoneon/accordion virtuoso Julien

Labro and saxophone luminary Miguel Zenón. Spektral Quartet appears on Swiss violin soloist Rachel Kolly d'Alba's 2015 record, *Fin de siècle* (Aparté), performing Ernest Chausson's *Concerto for Violin, Piano, and String Quartet* and will be featured on upcoming albums from composers Augusta Read Thomas and Ryan Ingebritsen.

Keen on frequently treading outside the lines of classical music, Spektral Quartet counts among its collaborators Julia Holter,

Kurt Elling, Teitur Lassen, Julien Labro, and Billy Childs, and has appeared on pathfinding series including Ecstatic Music Festival, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra's Liquid Music, University of Michigan's University Musical Society (UMS), University of Maryland's Common Tone, Jazz at the Logan, University of Chicago Presents, Bent Frequency, and UNC Chapel Hill's Conversations in Modern Music Series.

The Spektral Quartet proudly serves as ensemble-in-residence at the



University of Chicago's
Department of Music.
spektralquartet.com

SPEKTRAL QUARTET THANKS

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MANY MANY CADENCES

Commissioned by The Walden School for Spektral Quartet

THE ANCESTRAL MOUSETRAP

Commissioned by Spektral Quartet

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STRING QUARTET OP. 33, NO. 2 IN E-FLAT “THE JOKE”

Commissioned by Grand Duke Paul of Russia, not for Spektral Quartet in particular.

HACK

Commissioned by the Barlow Endowment for Music Composition at Brigham Young University for Spektral Quartet.



In loving memory of Sky Mall.



Serious Business Spektral Quartet

DSL-92198

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sonoluminusstudios.com

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Austin Wulliman, violin

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Russell Rolen, cello