

## Los Angeles Guitar Quartet

John Dearman ~ Matthew Greif ~ William Kanengiser ~ Scott Tennant

Marlow Guitar International  
The Falls Church Episcopal, Falls Church, VA  
April 18, 2020 at 8:00PM

### American Guitar Masters

Icarus (1972)	Ralph Towner (arr. W. Kanengiser) (b. 1940)	05'
Twang (1997)	Bryan Johanson (b. 1951)	05'
Chorale (2012, rev. 2017)	Frederic Hand (b. 1947)	06'
Three Country Tunes		
Blue Ocean Echo/Country Gentleman (1964)	Chet Atkins (arr. W. Kanengiser) (1924-2001)	04'
Shenandoah	Traditional (arr. A. York)	03'
B and B (inspired by Blake and Bromberg) (2003)	Andrew York (b. 1958)	05'

### Intermission

By Chants	Andrew York	10'
Commissioned by and dedicated to Grand Canyon Guitar Society, Tucson Guitar Society, and Arizona State University and Glendale Community College Guitar Programs		
Aerial Boundaries (1984)	Michael Hedges (arr. M. Greif) (1953-1997)	04'
Hidden Realm of Light (2006)	Andrew York	03'
Alki Point (2011)	Kevin Callahan (b. 1958)	03'
Road to the Sun (2016), excerpts	Pat Metheny (b. 1954)	13'

Pat Metheny: *Road to the Sun* (2016) was commissioned through the International Arts Foundation, Inc. for the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet by the lead commissioners: Newman Center for the Performing Arts/University of Denver and Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, College of Fine + Applied Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Additional support provided by co-commissioners: Lobero Theater Foundation, Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College, 92nd Street Y, Performing Arts Series at Johnson County Community College and Soka University of America/Soka Performing Arts Center.

recordings and special projects.

## PROGRAM NOTES

Celebrating nearly four decades playing together, the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet has established itself as America's most innovative classical guitar ensemble. As a tribute to the many artists who inspired them along the way, LAGQ has crafted this program entitled "American Guitar Masters".

**Ralph Towner** is a multitalented composer and instrumentalist, most admired for his unique blending of jazz, folk and early music influences in the seminal group Oregon. When Oregon recorded his classic tune **Icarus** in the early '70s, it became an instant anthem for the folk-rock movement. William Kanengiser's homage to the fingerstyle hero infuses the original Towner melody with the *bossa-nova* infused music from the film *Black Orpheus*, morphing it into a hybrid "Black Icarus". The piece's Brazilian flavor showcases some of LAGQ's signature extended effects, including imitating the *cuica* (produced by plucking the string above the nut) and other percussion, and leaves room for some free improvisation by Matt Greif.

**Bryan Johanson** is a stunningly prolific composer, able to deftly traverse musical territory from nearly every period and style. He is especially gifted at arranging and composing for guitar quartet, having written a number of works for LAGQ ("On All Fours", "Pluck, Strum and Hammer", "Let's Be Frank") and countless works for his own Oregon Guitar Quartet. **Twang** was written to unapologetically evoke the rock-and-roll essence of the guitar, with specific nods to funk, blues, and surf music. Featuring a driving set of chords over a twangy open E string, the piece features angular guitar licks traded off in call-and-response fashion, punctuated by bluesy string bends. This gives way to a lyrical pizzicato section and short fugal passages before the four guitars return to strumming away on the opening thrumming chords.

**Frederic Hand** is a Grammy-nominated composer and sought-after guitarist, currently on the faculty of the Mannes College of Music in Manhattan. His compositional style freely mixes Baroque, Americana and jazz styles into a lyrical and harmonically rich palette, and his intimate knowledge of the guitar draws a full sonority from the instrument. In his **Chorale**, Hand turns the guitar quartet into a plucked version of a vocal *a capella* group; the seeming simplicity of the piece belies the difficulty of four guitars moving with the freedom and spaciousness of a chorus. Hand writes of his piece: "Chorale was originally commissioned by the New York City Classical Guitar Society for the New York City Guitar Orchestra in 2012. It was re-imagined for guitar quartet in this new version for the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. Based on a simple theme of three notes ascending in whole steps, Chorale is inspired by the Renaissance and Baroque choral music that I listened to in my youth. Although I've integrated some of my favorite jazz harmonies and rhythms into the fabric of the music, I feel that, at its core, it very much has an "early music" sensibility.

In a set of "**Three Country Tunes**", LAGQ's love of traditional American styles comes to the fore. It begins with an homage to the legendary Nashville guitarist Chet Atkins. William Kanengiser combined two classic Atkins tunes, **Blue Ocean Echo** and **Country Gentleman**, into a new setting for four guitars. Mimicking the effect Chet used on his recording of "Blue Ocean," he turns the quartet into a giant Echo-plex: the guitarists pass notes back and forth, reverberating across the group. This moves into a setting of "Country Gentlemen" - an obvious choice given that it was Chet's personal anthem. It has a distinctly Hawaiian flavor in its B section, for which the LAGQ echo machine is turned off and bottleneck slides emerge to imitate Hawaiian lap guitar.

Former LAGQ member **Andrew York** arranged the classic American folk tune **Shenandoah** for LAGQ several years before he actually joined the group. Having grown up near the Shenandoah Valley, Andrew knew the piece well, and adapted it his own original style. Opening in a haunting minimalist setting, the tune reveals itself gradually, unfolding into a full chorale-like treatment.

**Andrew York** composed his piece **B and B** for the seminal 2014 recording "LAGQ's Guitar Heroes" as a tribute to his fingerpicking guitar heroes, Norman Blake and David Bromberg. Long before "O Brother Where Art Thou" sparked a resurgence of interest in bluegrass music, Blake and Bromberg raised flat-picking to a high art. Drawing inspiration from the classic "Arkansas Traveler", "B and B" calls on the guitarists to flat-pick their nylon strings, imitating mandolins, banjos, steel-string guitars and the double-bass, and even add a "hum"-orous syncopated vocalization filling a pregnant pause.

LAGQ is joined by an ensemble of local guitarists to perform **By Chants** by **Andrew York**, which was commissioned by the Arizona Guitar Orchestra and premiered in Flagstaff in 2017. Beginning with a rhythmic groove in a pop big-band style, the piece establishes a conversation between the guitar orchestra and guitar quartet. A new rhythmic figure enters, reminiscent of a guitar riff by Andy Summers of The Police (a close friend of York and LAGQ member John Dearman). Slowly emerging underneath these contemporary sounds is a plaintive solo, which is a direct transcription of a traditional Havasupi chant. Gradually, this new motive takes over, accompanied by the drumbeats of the orchestra. Ultimately, it shows that even

though modernism and technology can drown it out, the ancient spiritual vibrations of Native American song still resonate if we take the time to listen.

Following the collaboration with orchestra, LAGQ presents a set of miniatures by three distinctly original American composers:

The first is by the hugely influential **Michael Hedges**, who created a revolution in steel-string guitar playing with his innovative tapping and open-tuning creations. Revered for his virtuosity and sonic brilliance, he was also a composer of great depth and sophistication. He took the world by storm with his groundbreaking 1984 recording **Aerial Boundaries**, and Matthew Greif's arrangement of the title track presents it faithfully, providing a brief excursion before returning to Hedges's original. **Andrew York's** scintillating **Hidden Realm of Light** shows his brilliance as a musical colorist, with flashes of bright tones over muted pizzicato accompaniment. Freely playing with the interplay of 6/8 and 3/4, the piece has some overtly African overtones. **Kevin Callahan** is a Seattle-based composer and guitarist who freely informs his classical guitar pieces with rock, jazz and folk elements. **Alki Point** is a wistful portrait of the historic settler's point on the westernmost coast of Seattle, now a home to a vibrant artist colony. Opening with a plaintive melody over a polyrhythmic ostinato, the piece diverges into an insistent section over a pulsing bass rhythm. This gradually turns back into the opening material, with a distinctly jazzy coda.

Jazz guitar legend and inexhaustibly creative composer **Pat Metheny** has established himself as one of America's true Guitar Masters. In 2017 he wrote the following comments on his piece **Road to the Sun**:

"A few years back, I was flattered to have one of my compositions included in the LAGQ's Grammy winning CD *Guitar Heroes*. The idea of writing a large-scale guitar quartet inspired by the talents of the LAGQ has been simmering somewhere in the back of my mind ever since. The thought of addressing the instrument in a more formal way under the auspices of what this quartet has come to embody was something I really wanted to do; it was just a matter of finding the time. After a particularly active touring schedule, I finally saw a window opening up in late 2015. With the approval of the guys and a few really useful tips from all of them, I jumped in, hoping to write a concert piece of 7 to 9 minutes.

Two weeks later, I found myself with a nearly 25-minute, 6-movement treatise on the potentials of a multi-guitar format, blazingly inspired by the thought of hearing these four incredible guitarists play these notes. The piece just literally poured out. In particular, I decided to really embrace the instrument and "get under the hood" of a bunch of things that I do with the guitar that are somewhat identified with my particular style. As much as those components provided an aspirational environment to work from, I was also reaching for the narrative element of storytelling that is always the imperative and primary function for me as a musician.

With the piece now complete, it feels like an emotional journey to me, almost a road trip in scale and scope. Somehow, through the challenge of writing for this unique platform and aiming it towards the hands of these especially talented players, I was able to get to a very personal area of what music itself is to me. As I was writing, my mind would sometimes flash to the stunning views of the trip up to Glacier National Park on the famous "Going-to-the-Sun Road", right after hearing LAGQ play live for the first time at a festival in Montana. I am very excited to hear what William, Scott, John and Matt will do on their journey with this work."

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