



AMERICAN CLASSICS



## Serafin String Quartet

Hailed by *The Strad Magazine* (2010) for “playing with style and sophistication” and the *American Record Guide* (2011) for “combining true rhythmic precision, beautiful intonation, and beautiful articulation with an excellent sense of balance and deeply satisfying musical phrasing,” the Serafin String Quartet made its debut to a sell-out crowd at New York City’s Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in 2004. Since its debut, the Quartet has been applauded by audiences around the nation, including sell-out crowds at repeat performances in New York City’s Weill Recital Hall and recent performances at St John’s, Smith Square in London, Philadelphia’s Annenberg Center for the Arts and the Delaware Chamber Music Festival. The Quartet’s 2010 debut CD, on the Centaur label, received critical acclaim and is now widely available internationally. It features an *American Tapestry* of works by American composers and composers influenced by American sounds. Quartet in Residence for the University of Delaware, the Serafin String Quartet regularly reaches young musicians through a variety of performances and instructional activities on the University of Delaware campus and beyond.



Photo: Conrad Erb Photography

## Charles Abramovic



Photo: Joseph Labolito

Charles Abramovic has won critical acclaim for his international performances as a soloist, chamber musician, and collaborator with leading instrumentalists and singers. He has appeared as soloist with the Baltimore Symphony, the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Colorado Philharmonic, the Florida Philharmonic, and the Nebraska Chamber Orchestra. He has given solo recitals throughout the United States, France and Yugoslavia. Charles Abramovic has performed often with such stellar artists as Midori, Sarah Chang, Robert McDuffie, Viktoria Mullova, and Kim Kashkashian. His recording of the solo piano works of Delius for DTR recordings has been widely praised. Actively involved with contemporary music, he has also recorded

works of Milton Babbitt, Joseph Schwantner, Gunther Schuller and others for Albany Records, CRI, Bridge, and Naxos. He is a Professor of Keyboard Studies at Temple University’s Boyer College of Music in Philadelphia where he has taught since 1988.



Photo: Raymond Muñoz

## Eric Stomberg

Eric Stomberg maintains an active teaching and performing schedule with positions as Instructor of Bassoon at the Interlochen Arts Academy, Associate Professor of Bassoon at the University of Kansas, and as a member of City Music Cleveland. During the summer he serves as Associate Director of Music at the Interlochen Arts Camp. Stomberg released his first recording, *Victor Bruns: Music for Bassoon*, on the Azica label in 2008 in collaboration with pianist Robert Koenig and fellow bassoonists George Sakakeeny, Jonathan Sherwin, and Barrick Stees.

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# JENNIFER HIGDON

## Sky Quartet

**Amazing Grace • Viola Sonata • Dark Wood • String Trio****Serafin String Quartet****Charles Abramovic, Piano • Eric Stomberg, Bassoon**



## Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)

### Early Chamber Works

The name Jennifer Higdon has been on musicians' minds for decades, as an up-and-coming composer who would make her mark on the American musical landscape. It is fair to say that Jennifer has moved beyond the "up and coming" stage and is now one of the most influential composers in America, if not the world. The repertoire on this disc highlights some of Jennifer's early works, with each piece showing a different direction that she later explores. From the rhythmic intensity in *Dark Wood*, to the epic saga in the *String Trio*, to the lush harmonies in *Sky Quartet*, each piece is masterful, compelling and uniquely Higdon. The works on this recording introduce listeners to five unrecorded chamber works, and it stands as a historical document of a composer's desired interpretation. It has been an honor to work with a composer of such immense talent and warm personality, and we wish her continued success in the years to come.

### Composer's Note

This arrangement of *Amazing Grace* began as part of a choral cycle, called *Southern Grace*, which I composed in 1998. Many years later, the Ying String Quartet asked me to arrange it for their group. It has been a pleasure to watch the joy that this piece brings to audiences.

When I began composing *Sky Quartet*, I took as my inspiration the beauty and immensity of the sky in the Western part of the United States. This viewpoint came about because the commissioning quartet was in residence in Colorado. And so the work paints musical portraits of that sky in various stages: the start of a day, the rapture of its "blueness", a storm-wrenched fury, and its vast immensity. This work was commissioned by Frances Hettinger for the Da Vinci Quartet. Originally composed in 1997, it was revised in 2000.

The *Sonata for Viola and Piano* was composed in 1990, just as I was starting graduate school. It explores the wonderful colors of the viola, and also allows for a substantial dialogue with the piano. As I was writing this

work, I was mindful of other viola sonatas (Hindemith, Clarke) and was undoubtedly influenced by some of the flute music that I had played (the Prokofiev *Sonata* and the Copland *Duo*).

*Dark Wood* is a work that features the bassoon... a soulful instrument that does not have a tremendous amount of chamber literature. I wanted to create a piece that features the bassoon prominently, but also respects it within the framework of a true chamber dialogue (along with its partners, the violin, cello, and piano). Since much of the literature for this beautiful instrument is slow moving, I made the conscious decision also to explore its virtuosic abilities. While there is slow music within the piece, there is also an emphasis on real "bite" within the language, as well as variety in the rhythm and tempi. The title refers to the beauty of the wood of which all bassoons are made. *Dark Wood* was commissioned in 2001 by St Luke's Chamber Ensemble, with funds provided by The Jerome Foundation.

The *String Trio* dates back to 1988 and reveals a young composer in the process of finding her own voice. I had been asked by several of my Curtis classmates to write a work for this combination, because their quartet was going to be missing a player in an upcoming concert. I found it a challenge, as having recently completed a string quartet, I feared the lack of that extra violin would remove some of the "richness" of the sound. But this instrumentation adjustment made me think differently about musical lines and how they unfold. The language is restless and searching, and even the arrival points do not feel quite settled. A good place to be if you are a developing young composer.

I am honored to have had the Serafin String Quartet record these works. As a composer, working with excellent musicians is truly the most rewarding part of my job. And to have the chance to revisit these older works, and examine them through the prism of time passed, in the context of how I write now, has been surprising and

enjoyable. I am grateful for the hard work and innate musical gift that these musicians have shared in putting this disc together. In short, I am inspired by their enthusiasm and conviction. And I know they agree with

me in the sentiment that we are all thankful that you will allow us to share this with you.

Jennifer Higdon

### Jennifer Higdon



Photo: Candace di Carlo

Jennifer Higdon, Pulitzer Prize and GRAMMY® winner, is one of the most performed living American composers working today. She has been the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim, Koussevitzky, and Pew foundations, as well as awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Commissions have come from a wide range of performers: from the Cleveland Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, to the Tokyo String Quartet; from soloists such as violinist Hilary Hahn to Santa Fe Opera and Opera Philadelphia. She makes her living from commissions and serves as composer-in-residence with various orchestras throughout the country. She holds the Rock Chair in Composition at The Curtis Institute of Music. Up-to-date information may be obtained at [www.jenniferhigdon.com](http://www.jenniferhigdon.com).

