



**WHAT IS AMERICAN:** PUBLI Quartet

**WED. | SEP. 13, 2023 | 7 PM**  
**MACDONALD RECITAL HALL**  
**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA**

**USC** Visions & Voices **USC** Thornton

# PROGRAM

PUBLIQuartet's latest concert program and GRAMMY®-nominated album *What Is American* explores the resonance between contemporary, blues, jazz, free, and rock-inflected music—all of which trace their roots back to the Black and Indigenous music that inspired Dvorak's "American" String Quartet. Interrogating these traditions of our nation's complex history, PQ attempts to connect the dots, illuminating the past, present, and future of American concert music. *What Is American* is ultimately a call to ponder the kaleidoscope of composers and diverse genres that make up America's rich musical history.

This performance will be preceded by a conversation with Josh Kun, USC Vice Provost for the Arts.

## WHAT IS AMERICAN

### Fifth Verse: Prelude\*

MIND | THE | GAP: What Is American  
Improvisations on Antonín Dvořák's  
"American" String Quartet No. 12, Op. 96  
I. Allegro ma non troppo  
II. Lento  
III. Molto vivace  
IV. Vivace ma non troppo

Rhiannon Giddens - At the Purchaser Option  
(arr. PUBLIQuartet)

### Fifth Verse: Page of Her Story\*

MIND | THE | GAP: Pavement Pounding Rose—  
Improvisations on "Honeysuckle Rose" by Fats  
Waller

MIND | THE | GAP: Free Radicals  
Improvisations on "Law Years" and "Street  
Woman" by Ornette Coleman

### Fifth Verse Land of the Free\*

Vijay Iyer—Dig the Say  
I. carry the ball  
IIa. this thing together  
IIb. up from the ground  
III. to live tomorrow

### Fifth Verse Interlude\*

Roscoe Mitchell—CARDS 11-11-2020

MIND | THE | GAP: Wild Women  
Improvisations on:

"Black Coffee" by Tina Turner

"They Say I'm Different" by Betty Davis

"Er Ra" by Alice Coltrane

"Wild Women Don't Get the Blues" by Ida Cox

*\*pre-recorded tracks featuring improvisations  
on poetry by Oliver Wendell Holmes*





# About PUBLIQuartet

Applauded by *The Washington Post* as “a perfect encapsulation of today’s trends in chamber music,” and by *The New Yorker* as “independent-minded,” the **PUBLIQuartet’s** modern interpretation of chamber music makes them one of the most dynamic artists of their generation. Dedicated to presenting new works for string quartet, PUBLIQuartet rose on the music scene as winner of the 2013 Concert Artists Guild’s New Music/New Places award, and in 2019 garnered Chamber Music America’s prestigious Visionary Award for outstanding and innovative approaches to contemporary classical, jazz, and world chamber music. PQ’s genre-bending programs range from 20th century masterworks to newly commissioned pieces, alongside re-imaginings of classical works featuring open-form improvisations that expand the techniques and aesthetic of the traditional string quartet.

PUBLIQuartet has served as artist-in-residence at top institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Sawdust and has appeared at a wide variety of venues and festivals, from Carnegie Hall and the Newport Jazz Festival to *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*. Their 2019 album, the GRAMMY®-nominated *Freedom and Faith*, debuted atop the Billboard Classical Charts and was supported by a diverse array of programs at venues across the United States and abroad, including an appearance at the String Quartet Biennale in Amsterdam.

PUBLIQuartet’s commitment to supporting emerging composers inspired their innovative program, PUBLIQ Access, which promotes emerging composers and presents a wide variety of under-represented music for string quartet—from classical, jazz, and electronic to non-notated, world, and improvised music. Other unique projects include MIND|THE|GAP, a series of group-composed works developed by PQ to generate interest in new music while also engaging traditional classical music audiences. These unique creations range from “Bird in Paris” (Claude Debussy meets Charlie Parker) to more recent extended works including *What Is American* (an exploration of Dvorak’s beloved “American” String Quartet) and “Sancta Femina” (based on themes by three medieval and baroque female composers).

Founded in 2010, PUBLIQuartet is currently based in New York City.



PUBLIQuartet



## BIOS

### CURTIS STEWART, violin

A New York City native and graduate of the Eastman School of Music, Curtis Stewart has performed as a soloist with the National Repertory Orchestra at the Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. He has made chamber music appearances at Zankel Hall and the Rochester International Jazz Festival, holding his audiences “spellbound” with his “warm, clear sound... sparkling rhythmic energy” and “prodigious technique” (*New Amsterdam Times, SoundWordSight*). An avid teacher, he currently teaches at the LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts. Curtis’ eclectic background has led him to concerts in many different realms of music from MTV specials with Wyclef Jean to stints at the Kennedy Center with the Jimmy Heath Big Band. His ensembles PUBLIQuartet and The Mighty Third Rail perform frequently at many of New York’s illustrious venues including Carnegie Hall, Symphony Space, Merkin Hall, the Cornelia Street Cafe, BAMcafé, the Lincoln Center, Nuyorican Poets Cafe, and the Stone. Curtis has worked with today’s prominent musicians including Henry Threadgill, Dick Oatts, Jason Lindner, Edmar Casteñeda, Linda Oh, Chris Dingman, Dave Liebman, and Matt Wilson, among many others. A supporter and practitioner of many styles of music, Curtis is excited to continue expanding and blending all the elements of his stylistic and expressive range, developing a unique and relevant voice in New York’s boundless music scene.



### JANNINA NORPOTH, violin

Jannina Norpoth made her debut as a soloist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at age 14. Since then, she has built a career as an innovative collaborative artist, performer, arranger, and educator. She has performed internationally, including appearances at the Lincoln Center’s “Great Performers” series, the Mostly Mozart Festival, Women of the World Festival at the Apollo Theater, the Ecstatic Music Festival, VH1 Save the Music, and *Saturday Night Live*. She has been featured alongside acclaimed musicians James Carter, Nadia Sirota, Regina Carter, Marcus Belgrave, Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Pharrell, Stevie Wonder, Anita Baker, My Brightest Diamond, and many others.

Norpoth is a sought-after arranger in the classical and non-classical worlds. Praised by *The Strad* magazine for her ability to write a transcription “so natural sounding that it could have been the composer’s original version,” recent commissions include an adaptation of Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha* for the Volcano theatre company in Toronto and Dvorak’s “American” suite for Trinity Wall Street’s 12th Night Festival. Norpoth has arranged/recorded strings for GRAMMY®-winning producers Jerry “Wonda” Duplessis and Bryce Goggin and for artists Keyshia Cole, Keri Hilson, Black Dahlia Murder, Akron/Family, John Legend, and her own ensembles PUBLIQuartet and HOLLANDS.



Norpoth performs and writes in HOLLANDS. Praised for their multi-faceted sound, the folk/rock duo was profiled by BBC as “pulsing indie pop that really puts a spring in your step ... mixing fun, folk, rock and elements of classical.” In 2016 HOLLANDS, PUBLIQuartet, and artist Amy Khoshbin created The Scheherazade Project (TSP), a multimedia song cycle inspired by the stories of *One Thousand and One Nights*. TSP was awarded a Sphinx MPower Grant for its creation and premiered as part of the NYC Electroacoustic Music Festival and the NY Phil Biennial celebration, with support from MAC Cosmetics and DPA Microphones.

### NICK REVEL, violin

When Nick Revel is not touring as founding violist of the multi-GRAMMY™-nominated PUBLIQuartet, he is composing, producing, and performing original solo pieces; audio engineering ensembles of various shapes and sizes; and teaching students of all ages. His recent compositions have won the Red Jasper Award shortlist, the Catalyst Quartet’s CQ Minute competition, fivebyfive’s 2020 call for original scores, and placement on top podcasts such as Doug Fearn’s *My Take on Music Recording*. These works appear on his newest album, *Dream Collider*, which is available on all major platforms. He has served as artistic and executive director of the Norwalk Youth Chamber Ensembles, is co-creator of the New York String Studio, and is on the board of the Seabury Academy of Music and the Arts in Norwalk, CT.



## HAMILTON BERRY, cello

Hamilton Berry's eclectic taste has led him to pursue a variety of performing, arranging, and composing projects in the New York area and beyond. A member of the Toomai String Quintet, Founders, Decoda, and the Con Brio Ensemble, he has also performed with Ensemble Connect, Novus NY, the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and A Far Cry, and has collaborated with pop artists including Vampire Weekend, Rostam, Björk, Debbie Harry, fun., Cults, and Becca Stevens. He is assistant program director of the Musicambia program at Sing Sing Correctional Facility, where he teaches string students.

A Nashville native, Hamilton has played at the Cooperstown, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Olympic, and Yellow Barn music festivals. In 2009 he received his Master of Music from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Timothy Eddy. His previous teachers include Felix Wang, Grace Bahng Gavin, and Anne Williams. During his fellowship with Ensemble Connect—a program of Carnegie Hall, Juilliard, and the Weill Music Institute in partnership with the New York City Department of Education—Hamilton was a visiting teaching artist at IS61 on Staten Island.



## JOSH KUN, moderator

Josh Kun is USC Vice Provost for the Arts, professor and Chair in Cross-Cultural Communication at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, author and editor of many books and anthologies, and curator of numerous art, music, and public humanities projects. His research and practice focus on the arts, music, and politics of cultural connection with an emphasis on archives, global migration, and Los Angeles. He has worked with the Getty Foundation, SFMOMA, the GRAMMY® Museum, the California African American Museum, the Vincent Price Museum of Art, and more. From 2013–19, Kun led a trilogy of projects based on the special collections of the Los Angeles Public Library that resulted in a celebrated series of books, exhibitions, and public programs. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Yorker*, and more. He co-edits the book series *Refiguring American Music* for Duke University Press, serves on the editorial boards of *Public Culture*, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and the *Music Research Annual*, and is on the boards of dublab and the University of California Humanities Research Institute. He also co-curates CALA Crossfade Lab and directs the Popular Music Project of the Norman Lear Center.



PUBLIQuartet

**What is chamber music?**

Chamber music is classical music composed for a small group.



Artwork by Marian C. Holmes

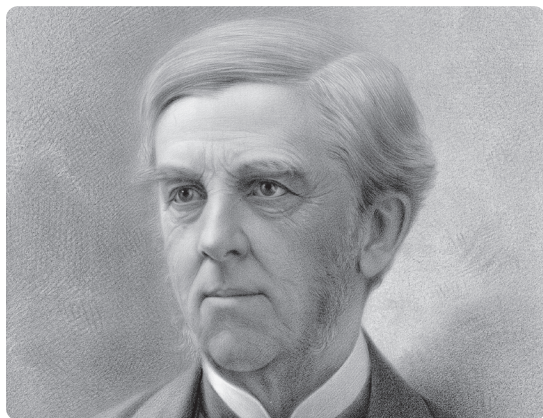
What Is American

**WHAT IS AMERICAN**

PUBLIQuartet’s album *What Is American* features improvisations on the works of iconic and influential American composers and musicians. *What Is American* was nominated for a GRAMMY Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance.

Some of the artists whose work is explored, riffed on, or responded to on the album include:

- ◉ **Ornette Coleman** (1930–2015), a saxophonist, trumpeter, violinist, composer, and one of the originators of free jazz.
- ◉ **Alice Coltrane** (1937–2007), a jazz pianist, harpist, composer, and bandleader.
- ◉ **Vijay Iyer** (1971–), a jazz pianist and composer.
- ◉ **Roscoe Mitchell** (1940–), a musician and composer considered one of the key figures in avant-garde jazz.
- ◉ **Tina Turner** (1939–2023), a rock/soul/R&B/pop singer and songwriter whose career spanned half a century.
- ◉ **Fats Waller** (1904–1943), a jazz pianist, organist, singer, and composer who was one of the greats of stride piano, a quick-tempo style that came out of ragtime.



Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

**THE FIFTH VERSE OF “THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER”**

A track on *What Is American* titled “Fifth Verse” was composed by PUBLIQuartet, with lyrics drawn from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s little-known fifth verse of the U.S. national anthem. The fifth verse was written by Holmes—a poet, physician, and the father of Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.—in 1861, during the Civil War. The first four verses were written by Francis Scott Key in 1814.

**The lyrics of the fifth verse:**

*When our land is illum’d with Liberty’s smile,  
If a foe from within strike a blow at her glory,  
Down, down, with the traitor that dares to defile  
The flag of her stars and the page of her story!  
By the millions unchain’d who our birthright have gained  
We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained!  
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph shall wave  
While the land of the free is the home of the brave.*



Antonín Leopold Dvořák

**DVOŘÁK’S STRING QUARTET NO. 12, OP. 96, “AMERICAN”**

*What Is American* includes improvisations on Dvořák’s “American” string quartet, written in 1893. The Bohemian composer wrote the piece while on summer vacation in Spillville, Iowa, on a break from his duties as director of a New York City music conservatory from 1892 to 1895. Dvořák (1841–1904) is known for incorporating Moravian and Bohemian folk music into his compositions, bringing a distinctly Czech idiom to 19th-century classical music. In the “American” quartet, he aimed to capture something of the American musical spirit.







LA Phil | Walt Disney Concert Hall



Artwork: Dark Matter in Breaking Cyphers book cover

Hip Hop 50: A Birthday Party for Hip Hop



Cover Art: Ofi Carino

Jessie Montgomery, *Strum: Music for Strings*

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What musical genres or traditions did you notice in the music?
- How did the quartet bring different traditions and genres together?
- What is “American music”?

## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Classes and events at the USC Thornton School of Music [music.usc.edu](https://music.usc.edu)
- Chamber Music LA | [chambermusic.la](https://chambermusic.la)
- LA Phil | [laphil.com](https://laphil.com)
- Jazz at LACMA—Free concerts from April to November [lacma.org/programs/music](https://lacma.org/programs/music)
- Upcoming Visions and Voices Events
  - 9/20/23** [Hip Hop 50: Celebrating Hip Hop Scholarship](#)
  - 9/30/23** [Hip Hop 50: A Birthday Party for Hip Hop](#)
  - 10/4/23** [Hip Hop 50: Celebrating Collaboration & Community](#)
  - 10/5/23** [ABC—Live in Concert](#)
  - 10/19/23** [Ephrat Asherie Dance: UNDERSCORED](#)
  - 10/22/23** [The Met in HD: Dead Man Walking](#)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

**ANDREW JUSTICE** of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](https://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### AUDIO

- Lara Downes et al., [Light: Migration Music, Part I](#) (Rising Sun Records, 2021).
- Lara Downes et al., [New Day Begun](#) (Rising Sun Records, 2021).
- Jessie Montgomery, Bob Stewart, et al., [Connections: Mind the Gap](#) (Sunnyside Communications, 2014).
- Jessie Montgomery, et al., [Strum: Music for Strings](#) (Azica, 2015).
- PUBLIQuartet, [\[Self-titled\]](#) (Concert Artists Guild, 2015).
- PUBLIQuartet, [What Is American](#) (Bright Shiny Things, 2022).
- Danielle Eva Schwob, et al., [Out of the Tunnel](#) (Innova, 2021).

### ARTICLES

- Leah Hollingsworth, [“Can Classical Music Be for Young People?”](#) *Strings* 37, no. 2 (2023): 50–53.
- Nick Revel, [“Leveling Up,”](#) *Strings* 37, no. 3 (2023), 70–71.
- Kate Wakeling, [“What Is American \[review\],”](#) *BBC Music Magazine* 30, no. 12 (2022), 86.