

## **The Ying Quartet**

Ayano Ninomaya, violin

Janet Ying, violin

Phillip Ying, viola

David Ying, cello

The Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today's world. Now in its second decade as a quartet, the Quartet has established itself as an ensemble of the highest musical qualifications in its tours across the United States and abroad. Their performances regularly take place in many of the world's most important concert halls, from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House. At the same time, the Quartet's belief that concert music can also be a meaningful part of everyday life has also drawn the foursome to perform in settings as diverse as the workplace, schools, juvenile prisons, and the White House. In fact, the Ying Quartet's constant quest to explore the creative possibilities of the string quartet has led it to an unusually diverse array of musical projects and interests.

Beginning with the 2010-2011 season, versatile violinist Ayano Ninomaya joined the Quartet as first violinist. Ninomaya fills the chair of Timothy Ying the original first violinist of the all-sibling quartet; Timothy and his siblings, cellist David, violist Phillip, and violinist Janet, are the ensemble's founding members. Since her recital debut at Boston's Jordan Hall on the Bank of Boston Emerging Artist Series in 1997, Ninomaya has been featured on the Rising Stars series at the Ravinia Festival, was named the 2002 JAL Classical Special New Artist, took second-prize in the 2003 Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition, won the Astral Artists' National Auditions in 2003 and performed on Astral's Rising Stars series, and received the S&R Washington and Lili Boulanger Memorial Awards, presented to young musicians showing exceptional talent and promise. Praised for her dazzling technique, pure tone, and intensity of expression, she has built a wide-ranging professional career encompassing solo appearances with orchestras in Europe and the United States, chamber music performances, research, and outreach programs. "Ayano is a first-class musician who is well-known in chamber circles and is particularly creative," said David Ying. "She's curious and broad-minded, and the way she views music and herself and wants to place music in a broader context in society matches the Quartet's historical aims. We're excited to play with her."

The Ying Quartet's recordings reflect many of the group's wide-ranging musical interests and have generated consistent, enthusiastic acclaim. Their 2007 Telarc release of the three Tchaikovsky Quartets and the Souvenir de Florence (with James Dunham and Paul Katz) was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Chamber Music Performance category. In addition, their much-heralded collaboration with the Turtle Island Quartet, "Four + 4," explored the common ground between the classic string quartet tradition and jazz and other American vernacular styles, and won a Grammy Award in 2005. "Dim Sum" (Telarc) is the Ying's most recent recording, featuring music by Chinese-American composers that merges the Western string quartet with the aural world of traditional Chinese music. The Quartet has also documented its noteworthy LifeMusic commissioning project in its recorded work. Released by Quartz, "The Ying Quartet play LifeMusic" was named Editor's Choice by Gramophone magazine and is the first in a continuing series.

In addition to appearing in conventional concert situations, the Ying Quartet is also known for its diverse and unusual performance projects. For several years the Quartet presented a series called "No Boundaries" at Symphony Space in New York City that sought to re-imagine the concert experience. Collaborations with actors, dancers, electronics, a host of non-classical musicians, a magician and even a Chinese noodle chef gave new and thoughtful context to a wide variety of both traditional and contemporary string quartet music. They have also worked with composer Tod Machover and the MIT Media lab in the use of Hyperscore, an innovative musical composition software. Other musical partners range from pianists Menahem Pressler and Gilbert Kalish and cellist Paul Katz to folk musician Mike Seeger, jazz pianist Billy Childs, and the Turtle Island Quartet.

The Ying Quartet's ongoing LifeMusic commissioning project, created in response to their commitment to expanding the rich string quartet repertoire, has already achieved an impressive history. Supported by the Institute for American Music, the Yings commission both established and emerging composers to create music that reflects contemporary American life. Michael Torke, Kevin Puts, Paquito D'Rivera, Paul Moravec, Lowell Liebermann, Bernard Rands, Pierre Jalbert, Sebastian Currier, and Carter Pann are only some of the renowned composers and musicians who have written for LifeMusic. Their most recent recording of commissions is titled "The United States" and was released in 2007. It features works by Ned Rorem, Jennifer Higdon, Chen Yi, and Augusta Read Thomas. Commissions for the 2008-2009 season included those by Peter Knell and Sebastian Currier, as well as Lowell Liebermann's String Quartet No. 3, "To the Victims of War." The 2009-2010 season included works by John Novacek and Richard Danielpour.

The Ying Quartet first came to professional prominence in the early 1990s during their years as resident quartet of Jesup, Iowa, a farm town of 2000 people. Playing before audiences of six to six hundred in homes, schools, churches, and banks, the Quartet had its first opportunities to enable music and creative endeavor to become an integral part

of community life. The Quartet considers its time in Jesup the foundation of its present musical life and goals. The residency, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, was widely chronicled in the national media. Toward the end of the residency, the quartet and several of the townspeople were invited to Capitol Hill to testify before Congress on behalf of the NEA.

During the summers, the Ying Quartet's activity is primarily centered at music festivals. They are presently ensemble-in-residence at the Aspen Music Festival and also have performed and taught for several summers at the Bowdoin International Music Festival. Other festival appearances have been at Tanglewood, Ravinia, Caramoor, San Miguel de Allende, Kneisel Hall, Norfolk, Skaneateles, Amelia Island, Interlochen, and many others. The Quartet's 2008-2009 season featured performances at Carnegie Hall and McGill University's Haydn Festival, in addition to appearances with the Billy Childs Sextet.

As quartet-in-residence at the Eastman School of Music, the Ying Quartet teaches in the string department and leads a rigorous, sequentially designed chamber music program. One cornerstone of chamber music activity at Eastman is the noted Music for All program, in which all students have the opportunity to perform in community settings beyond the concert hall. From 2001-2008, the Ying Quartet was also the Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University.

(August 2011)