



JACK QUARTET

BEAUTIFUL TROUBLE

COMPOSER, DIRECTOR, VIDEO DESIGNER Natacha Diels

JACK QUARTET

VIOLIN Christopher Otto

VIOLIN Austin Wulliman

VIOLA John Pickford Richards

CELLO Jay Campbell

LEAD PRODUCER Julia Bumke

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, SOUND DESIGNER Matthew Craig

LIGHTING DESIGNER Kent Sprague

PROJECT MANAGER Julia Bumke

COSTUME DESIGNER Maile Okamura

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Harold Prince Theatre

Friday, February 2 @ 8 PM

There will be no intermission.

PROGRAM NOTES

Rocketing ecstatically between sadness and joyfulness, *Beautiful Trouble* is an 'opera' (as dramatic spectacle) for string quartet that explores a slim window of human existence. Moments gathered like precious stones coalesce to create both sense and nonsense, forming a logic all the piece's own. Organizing the stones just so reveals clarity in chaos, if only for a moment.

Touching on elements of:
work ethic (humans as puppets),
dystopia,
the beauty of nightmares,
unmistakable loves,
childlikeness (play),
just music,
protest (no more wars),
loss,
nature as commodity (or not),
the beauty of silliness (playful nonsense),
long walks,
and wholeness.

Act 1: On Monday

The quartet begins as puppets, performing not-quite-repetitive movements that coalesce and diverge from one another to craft the narrative. Spoken text forecasts what strange circumstances will befall you on the days of a week, in some future dystopia. When the dystopia cracks, in a period of peace, the quartet builds a fantasy landscape of outlandish protest signs, sad flailing inflatable arms and the omnipresent moon. A quasi-nightmarish reality eventually snaps back into place. The quartet performs at a fancy restaurant.

Act 2: Nightmare for JACK (a ballet)

The musicians perform a ballet comprising exaggerated versions of the motions involved in playing their instruments—a counterpoint to the musical material, as well as a cobweb of complexity upon which to lay the nightmare. Sometimes the piece pursues dreamlike streams of consciousness; at other points, the progression is more linear and concrete. Ultimately, the quartet acts as night guardians, helping to put the forest to sleep.

Act 3: Sometimes it's the Last Time

The forest is asleep, and the quartet is in the dark, echolocating with whistles and clicks. As the members tentatively explore a new environment, their world erupts into brilliant chaos. They subsequently search for melodic stability in dense, perpetually sliding sound clusters, a musical metaphor for finding beauty in the journey and taking pleasure in the unique (unrepeatable). This gives way to music that plays on the symbiosis and conflict of the canned versus the real, through pop lyrics, playful nonsense and a visual background of stock video alongside AI-generated images. Finally, the quartet gathers in song around the campfire, characterized by banjo music, children's games and a confusing quest to understand a map.

Act 4: Interlude

Music by Jay Campbell

The quartet takes an intermission in the form of learning a new board game. Momentary outward focus allows for recalibration.

Act 5: Beautiful Trouble

A long walk through a grassy field, a search for the elusive "beautiful." Sometimes one finds loss; at other times, wholeness. In each there is cherished absurdity.

PROGRAM TEXTS

On Monday

On Monday, your Beautiful Day will begin, tomorrow.
On Tuesday, your simplest simplicity will simplify, tomorrow.
On Wednesday, your demons will consume, tomorrow.
On Thursday, your eyes will brighten, tomorrow.
On Friday, your demons will be cheerful, tomorrow.
On Saturday, your transparency will envelop, tomorrow.
On Sunday, this will all make sense, tomorrow.

The Beautiful Ones, you can hardly see them, because they are far away, and no one is on the scene yet.
The Challenging Ones, you can't see them at all because they are right in front of you.
The Ugly Ones, your eye is blind so you don't even notice them. You also can't see them for a long time.
But, if you saw something Exciting happen, you would be So Focused, you could hardly see any difference between them.
It's the same thing. No One notices you.

Interlude

(excerpted text)

Example monologue:

The delicate dance of the fungi consists of several moving parts—complex strategizing, consisting of placement, position and quantity; focus, consisting of distractions, quiet and redirection strategies; and a deep understanding of mushrooms, consisting of symbiosis, identification of preferred mushrooms and love of foraging.

The mycelium, much like a network of winding pathways in the dark, connects the elements of the game. Players, in their dance, traverse these pathways with careful steps, guided by an intuitive understanding of the unseen connections. The mycelial network becomes a metaphor for the hidden strategies that players must uncover and leverage to succeed.

In the fungal dance, silence holds profound significance. Just as mushrooms thrive in the hushed realms of forests and damp soil, players find elegance in moments of quiet concentration. The game's subtleties reveal themselves in the absence of noise, allowing players to attune themselves to the nuanced movements and opportunities inherent in the darkness.

Fungi, unlike plants, thrive in the darkness of the forest floor. They're hidden until they begin to develop the incredible structures with which they reproduce. Most of the body of the fungus is hidden beneath the ground— a tangle of tiny threads which extend for hundreds of yards. Each of these threads yields a unique cap once it breaks the surface, as individual as the stars in the night sky.

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"I don't have any favorite mushrooms—I just like the one I have. I love mushrooms, that's all. When you love something, you don't ask what draws you to it. You remember that you decided to love it, and the rest is just life experience." (John Cage)

Sometimes It's the Last Time

The feeling of flying is the same
at the bottom
there is a trampoline.

(From left to right
house
the trampoline
the pool
the trampoline again

The pool is at the bottom of the map.)

Sometimes the map is too interesting,
And sometimes the trampoline is sticky.

Sometimes the first time is hard
(The pool is at the bottom of the map)

But then it is easy to move
(At the top is the trampoline)

Sometimes the pool is too small
(There is no pool here)

And sometimes the water's too cold
(Sometimes the map is too interesting)

Sometimes the map is too interesting,
(And sometimes the trampoline is sticky)

And sometimes the trampoline is sticky.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JACK Quartet

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “our leading new-music foursome,” the Grammy® Award-nominated JACK Quartet is one of the most respected experimental string quartets performing today, synchronized in its mission to create international community through transformative, mind-broadening experiences and close listening. Comprising violinists Christopher Otto and Austin Wulliman, violist John Pickford Richards and cellist Jay Campbell, JACK was founded in 2005 and operates as a nonprofit organization dedicated to the performance, commissioning and appreciation of 20th and 21st century string quartet music. Through intimate, longstanding relationships with many of today’s most creative voices, the quartet has a prolific commissioning and recording catalog and has been nominated for three Grammy® Awards.

JACK is featured in the ongoing celebrations of John Zorn’s 70th birthday, including an album release of his complete string quartets, major global tour dates and a premiere with Barbara Hannigan. Other season highlights include a three-concert day at Wigmore Hall, the premiere of Natacha Diels’ *Beautiful Trouble* in Philadelphia, an Australian tour and the 5th edition of JACK Studio.

Through its successful nonprofit model, the quartet has both self-commissioned and been commissioned to create hundreds of new works. The world’s top composers choose JACK because of its singular dedication to innovation and experimentation, realized through the invisible labor of extensive studio time and the support of full-time leadership staff and a Board of Directors.

Committed to helping dismantle outmoded classical music pipelines for composers, JACK’s all-access initiative, JACK Studio, funds collaborations with a selection of artists each year, who receive money, workshop time, mentorship and resources to develop new works for string quartet. JACK receives more than 500 applications each season and selects up to 15 composers or artists. More than 40 composers have worked with the group through JACK Studio thus far.

Among many honors, JACK has earned an Avery Fisher Career Grant and Fromm Music Foundation Prize; been selected as *Musical America’s* 2018 “Ensemble of the Year”; and received Lincoln Center’s Martin E. Segal Award, New Music USA’s Trailblazer Award and the CMA/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming.

JACK has been nominated for three Grammy® Awards, the most recent being their albums of music by John Luther Adams – nominated in the 2022 and 2023 Best Ensemble Performance category. Other albums include music by Helmut Lachenmann, Catherine Lamb, Du Yun, Elliott Sharp, Zosha di Castri, Iannis Xenakis and an upcoming release of the complete quartets of Elliott Carter.

The JACK Quartet makes its home in New York City, where it is the Quartet in Residence at the Mannes School of Music at The New School. The group also teaches each summer at New Music on the Point in Vermont and at the Banlf Centre for Arts and Creativity. JACK has long-standing relationships with the University of Iowa String Quartet Residency Program, where they teach and collaborate with students each fall and spring, as well as with the Lucerne Festival Academy, of which the four members are all alumni. jackquartet.com

Natacha Diels

Natacha Diels’ work combines choreographed movement, video animation, instrumental practice and cynical play to create worlds of curiosity and unease. Recent work includes *Papillon and the Dancing Cranes*, for construction cranes and giant butterfly (2018/2021), a solo project entitled *Somewhere Beautiful* (2022) and *Beautiful Trouble*, an ongoing ‘opera’ for string quartet with the JACK quartet. Forthcoming is a solo album (Carrier Records 2024) and a new ‘opera’ for Festival Nueva Opera Buenos Aires (2024). With a focus on collage, collaboration and the ritual of life as art, Diels’ compositions have been described as “a fairy tale for a fractured world” (*Music We Care About*) and “the liveliest music of the evening” (*LA Review of Books*). Diels is a founding member of the composer/performer collective Ensemble Pamplemousse (est. 2003).

Notable commissions include those from the Borealis Festival for *Papillon and the Dancing Cranes* (2018); the Fromm Foundation for Talea Ensemble (2022); Darmstadt International Summer Institute (2021); the Barlow Foundation for JACK quartet (2022); the Los Angeles Philharmonic for the green Umbrella Series (2018); and Deutschland Radio Kultur in Berlin for Ensemble Adapter (2019). Diels’ work has been performed globally by Ensemble Adapter, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Nadar Ensemble, hand werk, Ensemble Decoder, TAK Ensemble, Quatuor Impact, JACK Quartet; and soloists Jay Campbell, Laura Cocks, Samuel Favre, Ross Karre, Rane Moore and Charlotte Mundy, among others. She has also created several short films and music videos which have been screened in Denmark, NYC, Chicago, Budapest and Hungary.

Diels holds degrees in performance, digital media and composition from New York University and Columbia University. She is currently an Assistant Professor of composition at the University of Pennsylvania.