

BRIDGE MUSIC SERIES

presents

FLUX QUARTET

Wednesday, February 7, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall | Conrad Prebys Music Center

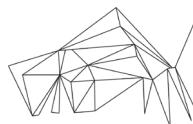
Morton Feldman's *String Quartet No. 2* (1983)

San Diego Premiere

I first heard of the mystique and aura of Feldman's *String Quartet #2* (*FSQ2*) in late 1998. About three months prior to FLUX's premiere of this grand work in 1999, I received four thick, bound, over-sized scores – and at that moment, the piece's immensity struck a new chord with my psyche. With every performance, I grow more awe-struck by *FSQ2* – nothing else in my music library can receive the level of reverence and admiration that this masterpiece deserves.

There are many aspects of the piece that overlap characteristics of standard repertoire – traditional notation, recognizable motivic structure, etc. What takes it above and beyond and to a new realm is its glacial scale and scope, which erases many conventional perceptions of form. For instance, unlike the neatly packaged four-bar phrases in both old and new music, *FSQ2*'s melodic cells can repeat as much as thirteen times, and some sections can last fifteen minutes or more before moving onto something new. That the piece has clearly defined sections certainly helps the musician conceptualize its architecture. But the sheer size of *FSQ2* throws musical memory for a loop. In a standard pop song the chorus might come back within a minute, and in sonata form the first theme almost always recurs within ten minutes; but with *FSQ2*, recapped sections might not occur for sixty minutes or more.

From the perspective of string technique, playing *FSQ2* requires incredible physical stamina. The length is a huge hurdle in itself – let's face it, string players (in fact, nearly all musicians) are not trained to play six hours without a break. Another big challenge, perhaps less obvious, is the act of playing very quietly. It actually requires much more physical energy to do less than more. Downshifting both the speed and pressure of the bow goes against many years of training, and much repertoire requiring us to be in constant motion. Furthermore, the suspension of the right arm in mid-air – working against the gravitational pull of the arm's natural weight – can become rather uncomfortable. Imagine yourself typing on a keyboard that is positioned about one foot higher than its normal placement, and doing that for six hours. That partly describes the experience of playing this piece. To deal with this, we are constantly experimenting to find ways to minimize motion and streamline energy use.



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Much has been made about the biological challenges of performing *FSQ2*, including an announcement in the *Village Voice* (prior to the premiere) that comically fancies the potential use of a catheter. But I have learned that the lack of bathroom breaks is just one part of the biological equation. The other physical component is about fending off dehydration and the depletion of energy, which is far more critical than any concerns of a biological mishap. Moreover, it has become clear that the challenge of maintaining mental focus exceeds the physical demands. It's just way too easy to get swept up in Feldman's mesmerizing sonorities.

As for the performance itself – each one is unique, impacted by the space, the city, the audience, and the time of day. Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Norway, the UK and various American cities have produced different experiences in concert halls, churches, museums, and even a hotel convention room. Including today, most of our seventeen performances to date have occurred after dusk, but one actually began at noon and finished before sunset, and another started post-midnight and ended pre-sunrise. Whenever and wherever *FSQ2* occurs next, I know that eventually, an appreciative applause will emerge from the stillness of the final, suspended silence. I will gather myself and my thoughts, then take a deep breath. And be humbled by another transcendental musical journey.

--Tom Chiu, 2024

The **FLUX Quartet** has performed to great acclaim worldwide, including the Tate Modern in London with BBC Radio 3, Park Avenue Armory, Kennedy Center, Walker Art Center, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, arts incubators Mount Tremper Arts and EMPAC, and international festivals in Australia, Europe, and Asia. The group's discography includes recordings on the Cantaloupe, Innova, New World, and Tzadik labels, in addition to the full string quartet catalog of orton Feldman on Mode Records, and the complete quartet output of the late Toshi Ichiyanagi. Widely regarded as the authoritative ensemble on Feldman's epic *String Quartet No.2*, FLUX gave the premiere performance of the full-length version of the piece in 1999.

Strongly influenced by the "anything goes" philosophy of Fluxus, violinist Tom Chiu founded FLUX in the late 1990s. The quartet has since cultivated an uncompromising repertoire that combines late 20th-century groundbreaking works by Feldman, Nancarrow, Ligeti, Scelsi and others, with today's pioneers such as Oliver Lake, George Lewis, Lei Liang, Rand Steiger, Hans Tammen, Henry Threadgill and more. To support the creation of new works, FLUX actively commissions and has been awarded grants from the American Composers Forum, The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the Fromm Foundation, Meet the Composer, New Music USA, and Chamber Music America.

The spirit to expand stylistic boundaries is a trademark of FLUX. To that end, the quartet avidly pursues interdisciplinary collaborations, resulting in acclaimed creation of new works with choreographers Pam Tanowitz and Christopher Wheeldon, balloonist Judy Dunaway, video artists OpenEndedGroup, and visual artist Matthew Barney.

Bridge Music Series focuses on bridging the classical and contemporary music genres and working across disciplines to create cultural connections.

This concert is made possible in part by the Chris Villars Fund.

Audience members are reminded to please silence all phones and noise-generating devices before the performance. As a matter of courtesy and copyright law, no unauthorized recording or photography is allowed in the hall. UC San Diego is a non-smoking campus.

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