

# AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE



*“the ensemble gave the punchy, intricate score a tight, viscerally powerful performance” –THE NEW YORK TIMES*



*“such soul, passion, and excellent command” –NPR*

[WWW.ACMEMUSIC.ORG](http://WWW.ACMEMUSIC.ORG)



JENSEN ARTISTS

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# PROGRAMS

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## The Music of Jóhann Jóhannsson

Jóhann Jóhannsson was an Icelandic composer most widely known for his award-winning film scores for *The Theory of Everything*, *Arrival*, and *Sicario* but equally adept in the concert music world. ACME toured with Jóhannsson from 2009 until his death in 2018, and can be heard on Jóhannsson's 2016 Deutsche Grammophon album *Orphée*. ACME offers two programs of Jóhannsson's spellbinding music—his monumental *Drone Mass* for string quartet, electronics, and vocal ensemble, composed for ACME during the group's 10th anniversary season in 2015; and a program of his chamber music for string quintet, piano, electronics, and small percussion.

### *Drone Mass*

ACME premiered *Drone Mass* at The Met Museum's Temple of Dendur in 2015, and later performed it in Krakow, Poland at the Sacrum Profanum Festival; at the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, TN; at Duke Performances, and at the Summer Nostos Festival in Athens, Greece with acclaimed Copenhagen-based vocal ensemble Theatre of Voices. *Drone Mass* is a 60-minute contemporary oratorio that fuses the sounds of string quartet, electronics and vocals, and is inspired by texts from the Nag Hammadi library, sometimes referred to as the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians. The piece explores the idea of the drone, both as a musical device but also as the all-seeing, sometimes benevolent and sometimes lethal eyes that pervade our skies. *Rolling Stone* declared, "*Drone Mass* ... seems designed to tug at modern heartstrings. It has the glacial drama of minimalism, the familiar harmonies of church music, the keening drama of pop, the deep digital rumble of modern cinema—all in movements that feel about the length of a rock song...the piece made it difficult not to adhere to the unwritten, long-held orchestra rule of not applauding until the end. But after a movement where a vocal drone met a cello slide—the satisfying sound of a properly tuned guitar, an effect like a film coming into focus—the boundary was breached and torrents of applause followed."

In March 2022, ACME released the world premiere recording of Jóhann Jóhannsson's contemporary oratorio *Drone Mass* on Deutsche Grammophon, with Theatre of Voices led by Paul Hillier. *Gramophone* included the album on its list of Best New Classical Recordings. Of the album, *Gramophone* wrote, "The compelling sound world of the late Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson is powerfully captured in this epic work" and says ACME is "superb on this recording."

## The Chamber Music of Jóhann Jóhannsson

In this overview of Jóhannsson's music for small ensemble, ACME traverses his recorded catalog and performs music from his albums *Englabörn*, *IBM 1401*, *Fordlandia*, and *Orphée*. ACME and Artistic Director Clarice Jensen want Jóhannsson's music to live on not only through the film scores for which he is well known, but in the concert hall as well. The group first performed this program in Jóhannsson's memory at (Le) Poisson Rouge in New York in 2018, reprising selections that they played with the composer during their first concert with him – which was his New York debut, at (Le) Poisson Rouge in 2009. *An Earful* reported, "Taken as a whole, the concert was as strong an argument for Jóhannsson's ongoing presence in our musical lives as can be imagined. The performances were superb, exquisitely emotional but also precisely controlled...As Jóhannsson told David Garland in an interview for *Spinning on Air*, 'I think it's probably something quite visceral which I'm after, something very down in the stomach, in the blood—with the emotions. That's where the music comes from in a way, and that's where great music hits me.' I don't think I'm alone in saying that Jóhannsson's music hits me there, too, so let's keep it circulating."

### Resonance (mixed ensemble with percussion)

ACME performs deeply immersive works that surround listeners with a rich sound and create a captivating experience. Gavin Bryars' *The Sinking of the Titanic* evokes the devastating yet contemplative sounds of that tragedy inspired by the story that the ship's band performed a beautiful hymn as it sank, and that the music continued to reverberate through the water even after the ship was gone. Qasim Naqvi's *Chukwa* swells and recedes throughout, as if to hear the music breathing as a living being. In Clarice Jensen's *For this from that will be filled (b)*, drones, long loops, and a field recording from New York's Grand Central Terminal interweave with acoustic and heavily processed cello, which conjures the sound of machinery. The work examines sonic repetition and solicits both meditation and disorientation.

**Gavin Bryars:** *The Sinking of the Titanic*

**Qasim Naqvi:** *Chukwa*

**Clarice Jensen:** *For this from that will be filled (b)*



## Reflections (mixed ensemble, no percussion)

ACME creates a profoundly meditative experience, inviting listeners to a shared introspective through music. Max Richter's *On the Nature of Daylight* exhibits a simple melody over a heavy bass line that creates an achingly beautiful and emotional journey. Richter says he thinks of the piece as "a meditation on violence and its repercussions." Ingram Marshall's *Entrada (At the River)* is based on a fragment for string quartet, amplified with electronic delays that slowly and deliberately reveals itself. In *Gemini*, composer Hanna Benn presents a longing melody over a bass line that ebbs and flows. *Jahrzeit*, Caleb Burhans' moving tribute to his late father, contemplates the annual Jewish tradition of honoring a deceased loved one. Clarice Jensen's *For this from that will be filled (a)* showcases the seamless union of acoustic and electronic sound that solicits both meditation and disorientation. Brian Eno's *Discreet Music*, from the album of the same name, is a minimalist work also featuring the blend of acoustic and electronic, inspired by Satie's concept of "furniture music" or ambient music.

**Max Richter:** *On the Nature of Daylight*

**Ingram Marshall:** *Entrada*

**Hanna Benn:** *Gemini*

**Caleb Burhans:** *Jahrzeit*

**Clarice Jensen:** *For this from that will be filled (a)*

**Brian Eno:** *Discreet Music* arr. by Grey McMurray

## Recounting (string quartet)

Composers often tell stories within the music they write, transporting listeners to worlds outside of their own. ACME retells the stories of a diverse group of composers in string quartet form. Caroline Shaw's *Entr'acte* traverses different eras like Baroque and Classical and demonstrates the surprising shift between styles that can happen within one piece. Shaw writes, "I love the way some music (like the minuets of [Haydn's] Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition." Philip Glass' *Mishima* is from his soundtrack to the 1985 film, *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters*, based on the life and work of Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. Throughout the film, moments from Mishima's life are interwoven with dramatizations of segments from his books. Composed for her family, Shelley Washington's *Middleground* retells moments of her own life. Washington writes, "The stories shared, books read sprawled in the yard, family prayers over anything, late evening walks, quiet nights. Open arms, open hearts, humble and extraordinary." Raven Chacon describes his *The Journey of the Horizontal People* as, "a future creation story telling of a group of people traveling from west to east, across the written page, contrary to the movement of the sun, but involuntarily and unconsciously allegiant to the trappings of time." Of her quartet, Susie Ibarra says, "*Pulsation*, like a pulse in the human body, is written with a continuous rhythm beating throughout the music, which flows through different pathways and

patterns. Some beat patterns are inspired by pulsating signaling language from Philippine kulintang gong rhythmic modes." *Triptych*, Robert Sirota's first string quartet, was written to commemorate the victims of September 11, 2001. The musical composition was created in tandem with a painting of the same name by Deborah Patterson; the three panels of the painting bear the same subtitles: "Desecration," "Lamentation," and "Prayer."

**Caroline Shaw:** *Entr'acte*

**Philip Glass:** *Mishima*

**Shelley Washington:** *Middleground*

**Raven Chacon:** *The Journey of the Horizontal People*

**Susie Ibarra:** *Pulsation*

-OR-

**Robert Sirota:** *Triptych*

**Shelley Washington:** *Middleground*

**Raven Chacon:** *The Journey of the Horizontal People*

**Susie Ibarra:** *Pulsation*

## Exaltations (string quartet + 3-6 female voices)

ACME performs three dynamic works that focus on the unique perspective of women from ancient through contemporary times in poetry, writing, and music. Clarice Jensen's new work for six female voices, string quartet and electronics is based on Enheduanna's *The Exaltation of Inanna*. The world's first author known by name, Enheduanna (2300 BC) was the daughter of the first king to build an empire, Sargon. He appointed Enheduanna to the position of high priestess at the most prestigious temple in the ancient city of Ur, where she presided for over forty years, spreading her theological ideas and authoring hymns. Ravel composed his *Chansons Madécasses* ("Songs of Madagascar"), a set of three songs for mezzo-soprano, cello, flute, and piano, with text from poet's Évariste de Parvy collection of the same name. With a woman as narrator, the first song, "Nahandove," depicts de Parvy's lover and the anticipation of her arrival. In contrast, the second song, "Aoua," serves as a warning to the indigenous people of Madagascar against the white men who captured them and colonized Madagascar. The final song, "Il est doux," echoes the soothing nature of the first song and is also inspired by the poet's intrigue of women. Of her quartet, Susie Ibarra says, "*Pulsation*, like a pulse in the human body, is written with a continuous rhythm beating throughout the music, which flows through different pathways and patterns. Some beat patterns are inspired by pulsating signaling language from Philippine kulintang gong rhythmic modes."

**Maurice Ravel:** *Chansons Madécasses*

**Clarice Jensen:** *The Exaltation of Inanna*

**Susie Ibarra:** *Pulsation*

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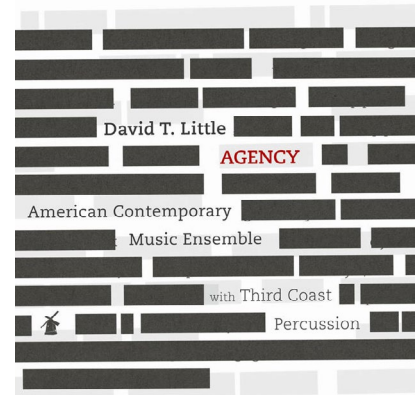
Since 2004, led by cellist and artistic director Clarice Jensen, the **American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME)** has risen to the highest ranks of American new music through a mix of meticulous musicianship, artistic vision, engaging collaborations, and unwavering standards in every regard. The membership of the amorphous collective includes some of the brightest young stars in the field. *NPR* calls them “contemporary music dynamos,” and *Strings* reports, “ACME’s absorbing playing pulsed with warm energy. . . Shared glances and inhales triggered transitions in a flow so seamless it seemed learned in a Jedi temple.” ACME was honored by ASCAP during its 10th anniversary season in 2015 for the “virtuosity, passion, and commitment with which it performs and champions American composers.”

The ensemble has performed at leading international venues including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, BAM, The Kennedy Center, Washington Performing Arts, UCLA’s Royce Hall, Stanford Live, Chicago’s Millennium Park, Duke Performances, The Satellite in Los Angeles, STG Presents in Seattle, Melbourne Recital Hall and Sydney Opera House in Australia, and at festivals including the Sacrum Profanum Festival in Poland, All Tomorrow’s Parties in England, Auckland Arts Festival in New Zealand, Summer Nostos Festival in Greece, Boston Calling, and Big Ears in Knoxville, TN.

World premieres given by ACME include Ingram Marshall’s *Psalmbook*, Jóhann Jóhannsson’s *Drone Mass* (commissioned by ACME in 2015) Caroline Shaw’s *Ritornello*, Phil Kline’s *Out Cold*, William Britton’s *Loving the Chambered Nautilus*, Timo Andres’ *Senior and Thrive on Routine*, Caleb Burhans’ *Jahrzeit*, and many more. In 2016 at The Kitchen, ACME premiered Clarice Jensen’s transcription of Julius Eastman’s *The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* for ten cellos, the score of which had been lost since the premiere in 1981. Jensen transcribed a recording of the work to recreate the score.

ACME’s collaborators have included The Richard Alston Dance Company, Wayne McGregor’s Random Dance, Gibney Dance, Satellite Ballet, Meredith Monk, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Max Richter, actress Barbara Sukowa, filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, Blonde Redhead, Grizzly Bear, Low, Matmos, Micachu & The Shapes, Jeff Mangum, A Winged Victory for the Sullen, Roomful of Teeth, Lionheart, and Theo Bleckmann.

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## RECENT RELEASES:

