

# 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."

## 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:** *Pulsations*

-OR-

**Robert Sirota:** *Triptych*

**Shelley Washington:** *Middleground*

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

**Susie Ibarra:** *Pulsations*

## Offerings (string quartet + 6 male voices):

ACME performs two large works influenced by sacred song. Ingram Marshall's affinity with American hymnody is exemplified in his work, *Psalmbook*, which is based on the earliest known printed music in North America. In 2012, ACME gave the premiere of this work with vocal ensemble Lionheart. Clarice Jensen's new work will be based on seven hymns of Enheduanna, 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. She spread her theological ideas throughout the country and wrote hymns to each of the forty two major temples in the land. Each hymn is written to the temple itself, as though Enheduanna was devoting the text to a living being.

**Ingram Marshall:** *Psalmbook*

**Clarice Jensen:** new work based on the hymns of Enheduanna

# AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

Over the past fifteen years, 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 inhaled 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, Triple Door 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; recorded for Deutsche Grammophon in 2019), 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.

In 2017, ACME released its first portrait album on Sono Luminus, featuring music by members Caroline Shaw, Timo Andres, and Caleb Burhans, plus John Luther Adams. The release was featured as Album of the Week on *Q2 Music* and *Gramophone* praised it, reporting, “The ACME players capture the aura of tranquility to hypnotic effect [in the Adams], the repeated patterns in the keyboard instruments contrasted beautifully with the lyrical strings.” *The Strad* raved, “Warmth and care are fully evident in the ensemble’s immaculate, considered performances – the four composers could hardly wish for more committed, convincing accounts of their music.”

ACME’s discography also includes Jóhann Jóhannsson’s *Orphée* and Max Richter’s eight-hour piece, *Sleep* (which the ensemble regularly performs live), both on Deutsche Grammophon; *Fantasias* with thereminist Carolina Eyck on Butterscotch Records; *Joseph Byrd: NYC 1960–63*, the first commercial recording of the music of rediscovered American Fluxus composer Joseph Byrd, on New World Records; William Britton’s electro-acoustic chamber work *Loving the Chambered Nautilus*; and Jefferson Friedman’s *On In Love* with vocalist Craig Wedren, both on New Amsterdam Records.

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