

NUNAVUT
Kronos Quartet
with special guest
Tanya Tagaq

PROGRAM NOTES

XPLADING PLASTIX (formed in 1998)
Work from The Order of Things (2005)

Raised in Haugsbygd and Herasbygda, Norway, Jens Petter Nilsen (b. 1976) and Hallvard Wennersberg Hagen (b. 1977) formed the electronic-music duo Xploding Plastix in 1998. Xploding Plastix utilizes acoustic instruments and digital samples to compose music and soundscapes. Their music encompasses a wide range of cut-ups, forming a genre-bending assemblage of jazz and funk beats.

In May 2000, Xploding Plastix released the limited-run single "Treat Me Mean, I Need the Reputation" on Beatservice Records, which was picked up by club DJs such as Mr. Scruff, Peshay, and Coldcut, and effectively launched their career across Europe. The next year, the band released its debut full-length album *Amateur Girlfriends Go Proskirt Agents*, followed by the EPs *Behind the Eightball* (2001) and *Benevolent Volume Lurkings* (2003). In addition, Xploding Plastix has composed music and remixes for countless documentaries, short films, television, dance and theatre performances and radio programs.

Work is the first of three movements in Xploding Plastix's *The Order of Things*. About the piece, the composers write:

"We saw a fantastic picture in an Italian magazine. A 10-year-old Hong Kong native was pictured in his Sunday's finest. He undauntingly proposed that there should be an order of things: Work, Study, Play. This piece is a musing on how a 10 year old came to hold such a wonderful view of the world.

"I. Work. The causing of motion against a resisting force. The amount of work is proportioned to, and is measured by, the product of the force into the amount of motion along the direction of the force. Energy is the capacity of doing work. Work is the transference of energy from one system to another. To exert oneself by doing physical tasks for a purpose or out of necessity. To shape, form, or improve a material. To proceed towards a goal or along a path or through an activity."

Xploding Plastix's The Order of Things was written for the Kronos Quartet.

SIGUR RÓS (formed 1994)
Flugufrelsarinn (The Fly Freer) (1999/arr. 2002)
Arranged by Stephen Prutsman (b. 1960)

The Icelandic group Sigur Rós is at the forefront of invention in today's international pop and rock (or, as some put it, "post-rock") scenes. Led by the ethereal vocals and

hauntingly bowed guitar of Jón Thor ("Jónsi") Birgisson, the group leaves traditional song forms on some less magical plane, slipping instead into ever-shifting environments of sound—sometimes coolly beautiful, more than occasionally unsettling, and always inspired.

Beyond the difficulties for non-Icelandic speakers in understanding some of Jónsi's lyrics—along with the band's reluctance to provide authorized translations—there is the fact that Jónsi sings the remainder of his songs in a self-invented language he calls Hopelandish. The group's 1999 breakthrough album, *Ágætis Byrjun*, features very little writing and, in an even further emphasis on music over semantics, its follow-up 2002 disc appeared with no song titles and no text but "Sigur-Ros.com" in the CD booklet.

In light of Sigur Rós' own wide-ranging music, it is no surprise to discover that the group's members are enthusiastic fans of the Kronos Quartet. After hearing *Ágætis Byrjun* and seeing the group in concert, David Harrington of Kronos and arranger Stephen Prutsman met the members of Sigur Rós and were invited to visit their studio outside of Reykjavík. The two ensembles rehearsed together in Iceland.

In its original, sung version, *Flugufrelsarinn* relates a parable of salvation and sacrifice, in which an unnamed narrator tries to rescue helpless flies in a lake from the jaws of the approaching salmon. In Prutsman's arrangement, the work takes on a new delicateness while losing none of its essential mystery.

Los Angeles native Stephen Prutsman began playing the piano by ear before moving on to more formal music studies. In the early '90s he was a medal winner at the Tchaikovsky and Queen Elisabeth piano competitions, which led to performances in various prestigious music centers and with leading orchestras in the U.S. and Europe. In 2004, Prutsman was appointed to a three-year term as Artistic Partner with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, where he acts as composer, arranger, conductor, program host and pianist. Prutsman's long collaboration with Kronos has resulted in over 40 arrangements of distinctive and varying musical languages.

Stephen Prutsman's arrangement of Flugufrelsarinn was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the Reykjavik Arts Festival. Kronos' recording of Flugufrelsarinn is available exclusively as a download through the iTunes Store. Program note by Matthew Campbell.

KAIJA SAARIAHO (b. 1952)
Nymphéa (1987)

Born in Finland, Kaija Saariaho lived a childhood embedded in music, playing several instruments. At the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, she studied composition with Paavo Heininen, and later in Darmstadt and in Fribourg with Brian Ferneyhough and Klaus Huber. Her research of new timbres led to the study of new instrumental and computer techniques, which she worked on at IRCAM in Paris, starting in 1982.

Her major works include a violin concerto, *Graal théâtre*, written for Gidon Kremer; two works dedicated to Dawn Upshaw (*Château de l'âme*, which premiered at the

Salzburg Festival, and *Lonh*, premiered at the Wien Modern Festival); *Oltra mar*, premiered by the New York Philharmonic; *Orion* for the Cleveland Orchestra; and *Quatre Instants*, written for Karita Mattila. Her first opera, *L'Amour de loin*, libretto by Amin Maalouf and staging by Peter Sellars, premiered at the Salzburg Festival and won the Grawemeyer Award. Her second opera, *Adriana Mater*, also on a libretto by Amin Maalouf and staged by Peter Sellars, appeared at Opéra Bastille. A vast oratorio, *La Passion de Simone*, was commissioned by the Wien Festival, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Barbican and Lincoln Centers. Among the many awards and prizes she received are the Prix Italia, the Musical Award of the North Council, the Nemmers Composition Prize, and *Musical America* Composer of the Year in 2008.

About *Nymphéa*, Risto Nieminen writes:

“The string quartet, of all the musical genres the most closely bound to its 200-year history, is perhaps a surprising discovery in Kaija Saariaho's list of published works. Then again, the ensemble of four string instruments does offer a host of different ways of producing sound, from noise to pure flageolet harmonics. At the same time, *Nymphéa* formed a natural supplement to the experiments with various string techniques found in *Lichtbogen* and *Io* from 1985-87.

“The basis of the harmonic world inhabited by *Nymphéa* lies in the rich spectra of the cellos sounds, which the composer has analyzed on the computer, using the structures that were revealed as a framework for the harmonies. This also helps to account for the subtitle *Jardin secret III*, which refers us to Kaija Saariaho's computer software developed at IRCAM and applied in the two previous works in the series.

“Naturally Saariaho goes on to expand her harmonic world with electronic effects. Another semantic ingredient in the mix of sounds is the text to be heard at the close of the work, a poem by Arseniy Tarkovsky (English translation by Kitty Hunter-Blair), the lines of which are delivered in a whisper by the players through the medium of microphones wired up to a sound sampler. Tarkovsky's melancholic verse, which describes man's desire to reach for the unknown, begins with the words:

Now summer is gone
And might never have been.
In the sunshine it's warm,
But there has to be more.

“A second extra-musical echo is in the title of the work, which takes our thoughts to Claude Monet's lily pads, although I suspect the composer herself was more conscious of the water lily as a physical object, when she writes:

““One or two ideas were going around in my mind as I was writing the piece: an image of the symmetrical structure of the lily, bending and taking new shape in the rocking motion of the waves. Interpretations of the same image in different dimensions; on the one hand a one-dimensional surface of colors and forms; on the other the different materials state, and dimensions to be sensed and experienced.””

Kaija Saariaho's Nymphéa was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Program note excerpted from the liner note of Kronos' recording of Nymphéa on Ondine Records.

TANYA TAGAQ (b. 1975) & KRONOS QUARTET (formed 1973) Nunavut (2006)

Tanya Tagaq was born in the remote Inuit town of Cambridge Bay in Northern Canada. She began her career as an accomplished painter, moving to Halifax in the 1990s to study visual arts at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

When southern living caused her to be homesick for the sounds of the Arctic, she began to teach herself traditional Inuit throat singing. Soon Tagaq was performing solo at festivals and clubs in Canada and Europe. In 2001, she toured with Björk and won favorable reviews of her own.

Tagaq often incorporates many non-traditional musical styles—including electronica, dance music and rave—into her singing. The collaboration of Tanya Tagaq and DJ Michael Deveau in 2002 takes traditional music from Canada's North and blends it effortlessly with an underpinning of urban music to create something quite new and breathtaking.

In 2003, Tagaq took part in the "Sonic Weave Tour," where she performed in many European cities, including Germany, Austria, Italy, Poland, and the Czech Republic. She also recorded the special project "Erren" with Basque txalapartaris Ugarte Anaiak, which was released at the end of the year. Tagaq's album *Sinaa* was released in 2005 to critical acclaim; the album won several of Canada's Aboriginal Music Awards, including Best Female Artist. She continues to collaborate with artists such as Kronos Quartet, Björk and Laio.

The region known as Nunavut (which means "our land" in Inuit) is the newest and largest of the Canadian territories and has been home to the indigenous Inuit population for more than 4,000 years. Inuit throat singing is not singing per se, but more closely associated with vocal games or breathing games. Two women usually face each other—one leads, while the other responds—the leader produces a short rhythmic motif that is repeated with a short silent gap in between, while the other rhythmically fills in the gaps. Each singer uses the other's mouth cavity as a resonator. Sounds are either voiced or unvoiced through inhalation or exhalation. Thus, singers develop a breathing technique, somewhat comparable to circular breathing. Words and meaningless syllables are used in the songs—the words can simply be names of ancestors and the syllables often represent sounds of nature or cries of animals and birds. The game is such that both singers try to show their vocal abilities in competition, by exchanging these vocal motives. The first to run out of breath, or to be unable to maintain the pace of the other singer, will start to laugh or simply stop and lose the game.

Kronos' violinist and artistic director, David Harrington, first heard Inuit throat singing in 1981, and became convinced that the art form held great potential for a collaboration with Kronos; Harrington says, "Inuit throat

singing is one of the most string-like sounds that I've ever heard come from the human voice." However, it was not until 2002 that he discovered a recording of Tanya Tagaq and realized immediately that he had found his collaborator. "She made every other Inuit throat singer sound like Mozart," Harrington explains. "It was clear that Tanya was the Jimi Hendrix of Inuit throat singing. Her voice sounded like four voices—it was as if she were carrying around a quartet in her voice!"

To compose *Nunavut*, Kronos recorded a broad range of Tagaq's sounds in order to map out her stylistic vocabulary. From there, Kronos created an underlying compositional structure out of Tagaq's "alphabet of sounds," a set of building blocks that allows for improvisation on the part of both quartet and singer. The performers engage in a call-and-response exchange, with the instruments of the quartet acting as the second voice in the throat song game.

Kronos extends special thanks to Osvaldo Golijov and Jeremy Flower for their contributions to the creative process that resulted in this new work.

Nunavut by Tanya Tagaq and the Kronos Quartet was commissioned by the PuSh International Performing Arts Festival, The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts at UBC, CBC Television, the Canada Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Henry Kolenko/Kolenko Productions was the Executive Producer of the world premiere tour of Nunavut.

HURDY-GURDY (STEFAN BRISLAND-FERNER & TOTTE MATSSON) (formed 2001) Scatter (2008)

The Swedish duo Hurdy-Gurdy was formed in 2001 by Stefan Brisland-Ferner and Totte Mattsson as a project and a platform, where the basics as well as the possibilities of the hurdy gurdy are explored to their limits. The focus is on the primitive and limited nature of the particular Swedish version of the instrument that they use, and by recording the various noises and artifacts it can produce, Hurdy-Gurdy has built a unique wall of sound that is both beautiful and haunting, poetic and raw. The idea behind their duo is simple: Make music out of every sound that comes out the hurdy gurdy and use nothing else. Hours of material are recorded and then processed in the studio. The result is drums, basslines, ambient noises, percussions and even spooky choirs that float in and out of the intense melodies. The soul of the music comes from traditional Swedish music, but it is hard to tell in this setting.

Brisland-Ferner and Mattsson had both performed with the hurdy gurdy for many years before deciding to start working together. They have both explored the possibilities of post-modern folk before with success: with Swedish bands Garmarna (Brisland-Ferner) and Hedningarna (Mattsson), they have been in the forefront of a whole movement of modern folk music.

Using the Swedish hurdy gurdy onstage, in the studio and in rehearsal, they were constantly frustrated with the stubborn nature of the instrument. A love/hate relationship with the instrument led to the discussion where they decided to simply embrace its flaws and instead use them and make music out of them.

Hurdy-Gurdy's debut album *Prototyp* (2005, Northside) was a satisfying presentation of ideas—a prototype of things to come. Hurdy-Gurdy are currently working on a follow-up album.

About *Scatter*, the composers write:

"*Scatter* was built for Kronos with the modular working process of Hurdy-Gurdy. When David Harrington approached us with the idea of using the Kronos the same way we create our own music, we were excited: To start with, the hurdy gurdy is a little string quartet in itself – although extremely limited. But the really exciting thing was to turn Hurdy-Gurdy into a string quartet and Kronos into Hurdy-Gurdy. It has been mind blowing to turn our roles inside-out and make them blend together, throwing whole genres together and watch them take shape as a third and unique form. The modular way of working with disparate information and gaining strength from their limitations is our key to doing that. "

Hurdy-Gurdy's Scatter was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by Luminato, Toronto Festival of Arts & Creativity.

DEREK CHARKE (b. 1974) Tundra Songs (2007)

Derek Charke is a composer, flutist and professor of music at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada. Born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, Charke completed a Ph.D. in composition and masters in flute performance at SUNY Buffalo. A recipient of the NUFFIC grant by the Dutch government, he also received a BMI student composer award and a special mention from the Kubik Prize. Charke is an associate composer of the Canadian Music Centre. *Tundra Songs* is the second piece composed by Charke for the Kronos Quartet; the first, *Cercle du Nord III*, has been performed by Kronos over 30 times throughout Europe and North America. Charke has also written extensively for the flute; *WARNING! Gustnadoes Ahead* was commissioned for the 2008 National Flute Association Convention. His works have been broadcast internationally and nationally on CBC Radio Two and on Radio-Canada.

Charke and Tanya Tagaq first met in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, where Kronos and Tagaq were developing *Nunavut*, allowing each to hear each other's work and to establish this musical relationship. About *Tundra Songs*, Charke writes:

"I've been fascinated with the Arctic for as long as I can remember. I've lived there, I met my wife there and I continue to return as often as I can. Naturally I was thrilled when David Harrington asked me to write a new work for Kronos and Tanya Tagaq based on the north. The first step was to collect as many sounds as possible.

"In March 2007 I traveled to Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut. Fresh off the plane, and in -30 degree weather, I hooked up with Polar Explorer Matty McNair for a two-day trip out on the ice by dog sled. Leaving town I recorded the dogs and the sled. We went to a polynia, an open area of water surrounded by ice. Dropping my hydrophone into the water I recorded sounds of shrimp, krill, seals and other marine life. Later that day as the dogs rested we went on a

short hike to take in the scenery; magnificent sheets of ice lined the walls of the valley where the tide had receded. We camped that night in a cabin at the edge of the frozen ocean. It was remarkably clear and the aurora borealis decided to give us a beautiful show. I left my microphone outside all evening to capture any sounds that might have occurred. The next morning I set the microphone on an ice floe and recorded the cracking ice; huge chunks of ice grinding together as the tide came in pushing the entire frozen ocean up. Later that afternoon when we had arrived back in town I positioned a microphone in the centre of some dog food to attract the ravens. Just like clockwork as soon as the food appeared the ravens swarmed. I recorded their calls and shrieks, their wings flapping in the frigid weather.

“Over the next week I wandered the streets with my recording gear capturing daily life in the north; a group of kids playing shimmy street hockey, snowmobiles racing around town, airplanes coming and going, a dog sled race, someone carving a soapstone sculpture, the beeps of the water trucks backing up, howling wind and dogs tied up in front of homes. I was invited to a Country Feast. We ate polar bear, seal, caribou, whale and arctic char. After the feast the tale of Sedna, the Inuit goddess who created all living beings, was vividly recounted.

“I wasn’t able to get all the sounds I needed from this one trip. In particular I didn’t have recordings of mosquitoes. So I created a bug recorder. It’s a plastic container with a hole for the microphone. You simply add one mosquito and *voilà!* During the summer of 2007 I recorded kayak sounds, waves and paddle noises, as well as birds, geese, ptarmigan and other wildlife. Some sounds were difficult to find, the caribou with their hoofs clicking for example, and in lieu of the real thing you’ll hear a castanet. Other sounds were produced in my home studio including drums, shakers, some of the whale sounds and the various processed effects.

“*Tundra Songs* is divided into five continuous movements. Each section explores a specific sound world. In addition the form roughly follows the seasons. Two primary ‘extended’ techniques are explored: circle bowing and vertical bowing. Using these methods of tone production it is possible to make the string quartet sound similar to Inuit Throat singing. Throat singing is a game usually played between two women. Tanya Tagaq is unique because she does this on her own. The sounds are raw and guttural. The singing is rhythmic and emulates sounds of animals, birds and other natural or man-made sounds. Paired with the sounds on the soundtrack, and Tanya’s singing, the effect is highly evocative of northern Canada.”

About the individual movements, Charke writes:

“I. Ice. *Winter / Ukiuq* – Sounds of drums and cracking ice are heard from a distance. Quickly they get closer. The string quartet enters. Circle bowing, grinding and vertical bowing techniques over a static harmonic backdrop begin the work. A systematic increase in tempos occurs until at just over four minutes a final flourish and Tanya is left singing on her own with just the ice to accompany her. Four main rhythmic sections alternate with slower regions where

we can hear the sounds of the raw ice cracking as the tides recede.

“II. Water. *Spring / Upirngaksaq* – A whale call starts us off. More whale calls ensue, heard as descending harmonic sounds. Seals grunt, shrimp crackle and streaming water is heard flowing under the arctic ice. An atmospheric and rhythmic backdrop accompanies a jazzy string quartet. The tempo increases and we hear the opening whale call again. The seal grunts are transformed to become a rhythmic backing track. The string quartet hockets similar material back and forth as the energy increases. The string quartet is left on its own for a moment before we are plunged into the depths of the ocean once more. A high beep signals the last part of this movement. Water, whales and ice are heard as the string quartet plays a march-like rhythm in unison, *pizzicato* or *col legno battuto* (with the wood of the bow). Synthesized sounds are included, a choir, shakers and drums. Geese honks signal the arrival of summer, and a clash of thunder signals the transition to the third movement

“III. Sedna’s Song. *Summer / Aujaq* – ‘Lakaluk would like to tell us a story,’ kids are playing hockey, ‘What a goal!’ and a snowmobile whizzes along. Birds, wildlife and a band-saw used for carving are in the background. The string quartet plays *pizzicato*. A folksy solo melody on the violin accompanies the story. Castanets emulate caribou hooves clicking. The story takes an unexpected turn and the music becomes more virulent, more chromaticism ensues. Eventually things calm down, birds and wildlife return as the movement comes to its conclusion.

“IV. Lament of the Dogs. *Fall / Ukiaqsaak* – The sound of dogs howling is very sad. These particular dogs are singing in pitch, in the key of D-sharp minor to be exact; a dark, remorseful key. The cries are stretched in time and layered to create a pad of sounds to accompany the strings. A lachrymose melody is heard in the viola while fast arpeggiated figures are passed between the other voices. The momentum builds; more dog cries are heard. Voices, a children’s song in Inuktitut (the main language of Nunavut) filter through. The arpeggios win over from the melody and build in intensity. Eventually the melody returns, first in the violin, and then the cello, transformed and stretched we come to the end of the movement. A quick modulation and the sound of a Ravens begin.

“V. The Trickster Tulugaq. *Winter is coming / Ukiaq* – Ravens squawk as they fight for food. Wings flap overhead. Mosquitoes swarm as they live their last moments in search of blood. Raven sounds are transformed until they become a rhythmic backdrop. The string quartet takes up some circle bowing techniques, a few harmonics before settling into a longer passage in a triplet feel and quick change of mode. A synthesized organ enters and the mood changes. Finally a honky-tonk ending ensues, complete with ravens and the buzzing of mosquitoes. Strings play a flurry of open strings. Ice joins the mix for the last time, as the cycle completes itself. Winter, once again, settles in.”

Derek Charke’s Tundra Songs was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet and Tanya Tagaq by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Music Director.