NEW MUSIC AT RICE

presents

THE BLAIR STRING QUARTET

Christian Teal, violin
Cornelia Heard, violin
John Kochanowski, viola
Grace Mihi Bahng, cello

Tuesday, April 9, 1991
8:00 p.m. in Hamman Hall
PROGRAM

Fumeux Fume (1986)  
Steven Mackey  
(b. 1956)

Part I  
Part II  
Organum  
Silver Spheres  
Point  
Free Fall  
To Ash

String Quartet No. 2 (1988)  
Ellsworth Milburn  
(b. 1938)

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 4 (1977)  
George Rochberg  
(b. 1918)

I. Fantasia (Ironico)  
II. Fuga (Adagio religioso; sereno)  
III. Serenade (Allegro impetuoso -  
    Allegretto soave e graziamente)  
IV. Fantasia (Serioso; Allegro; declamando;  
    con molto rubato)

In consideration of the performers and members of the audience, those who must  
leave before the end of the performance are asked to do so during intermission.  
The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are prohibited.
BIOGRAPHY

THE BLAIR STRING QUARTET has performed in concert throughout the U.S., including concerts on National Public Radio's "Quartessence" and "In Recital" as well as performances in New York's Carnegie Recital Hall and the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. Recent seasons include appearances at the 92nd Street Y., Merkin Concert Hall, and WQXR's Marine Midland Chamber Festival in New York. Other recent appearances include the Library of Congress and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., as well as concerts in Boston, Atlanta, Dallas, Phoenix, and on chamber music series throughout the U.S.

The Blair String Quartet has premiered works by Rodney Lister, Edgar Meyer, Ellsworth Milburn, Paul Martin Zonn, George Tsontakis, Michael Alec Rose, Frank Proto, Samuel Rhodes, Ezra Laderman, and George Rochberg. The ensemble is the recipient of a Chamber Music America C. Michael Paul Foundation grant as participating Quartet-in-Residence at the 1986-88 Sedona Chamber Music Festivals and in the same capacity at the 1986 Aspen Music Festival.

As quartet-in-residence at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music, the ensemble performs and teaches, and is an integral part of the cultural life of Nashville. In 1981 the ensemble gave the first concert by a string quartet in the new Tennessee Performing Arts Center. Consistently included on the touring rosters of the Southern Arts Federation and the Tennessee Arts Commission, the group records on the Orpheus, Redmark, Pantheon, and Varese-Sarabande labels.

PROGRAM NOTES

Fumeux Fume . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Steven Mackay

Fumeux Fume was written for and is dedicated to the Concord String Quartet on commission from the Friends of the Concord String Quartet and the Ellis L. Phillips Foundation. It is my first second — my first composition to use a combination of instruments I had used previously — or so I thought. As I began the new work, I realized I was writing for a very different quartet. The ensemble in Fumeux Fume is a single, pulsing entity to which individual parts make unique but highly dependent contributions. This stands in contrast to my previous notion of the ensemble as four discrete, polyphonic strands which interact in a thorny, contrapuntal discourse.

The nature of the ensemble is inextricable from my interest in exploring a particular sound (again, in contrast to the rhetorical narrative of my first quartet). I think I can best prepare you for the journey through this world by saying that its salient feature is, paradoxically, its elusiveness and air of mystery. Fumeux Fume contains fluttering shadows and veiled images which at times enhance the sensual (like soft-focus photography) and at other times feign to conceal the sinister. Brilliant elements are subtly distorted, like the view of a brightly lit, bustling arcade through condensation on a cold pane of glass. Even (or perhaps, especially) the boldest, virtuosic displays evanesce and join the ether which permeates this world.
Fumeux Fume is in two parts. The first (about 10 minutes long) is a continuous whole, while part two (seven minutes) comprises five fragments, varying in length from 30 seconds to three-and-a-half minutes. The two parts do not relate to one another as chapters in a book, with Part Two continuing and complementing the journey of Part One. Rather, the piece might be better described as a work of fiction bound in a single volume with five poems which are inspired by Part One, comment on it, and probe its content from various perspectives. Fumeux Fume is also the title of a 14th century rondeau by the French composer Solage.

— note by the composer

String Quartet No. 2 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ellsworth Milburn

String Quartet No. 2 was begun in 1978 at the request of Ronald Patterson, then first violinist of the Shepherd Quartet and Concertmaster of the Houston Symphony. When Mr. Patterson left to join the Monte Carlo Symphony in Monaco, the group disbanded, and the piece went on the shelf so that I could make time for other work. Over the years I worked on it as time permitted, and completed it at the suggestion of John Kochanowski in November 1988.

Like my first quartet, this one is in four connected sections — slow, fast, slow, fast — with sections three and four being developments of one and two. With the exception of one theme in the second slow section, all the melodic material is derived from the opening viola solo. Strong contrast of consonance and dissonance is characteristic of much of my music, and this is exploited in the harmonic vocabulary of the piece. Furthermore, I believe that in any musical performance there is considerable drama in the play of instrumental colors, tempos, textures, and lyrical versus non-lyrical melodic gestures, and I consider these elements to be as important to this quartet as the more technical aspects of form, harmony, and pitch content.

String Quartet No. 2 was commissioned with assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. It is dedicated to the Blair String Quartet.

— note by the composer

String Quartet No. 4 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . George Rochberg

String Quartet No. 4, which was completed December 18, 1977, and won the Kennedy Center/Friedheim Award for chamber music in 1979, is the most concentrated of the three “Concord” Quartets (Nos. 4-6). It opens with an atonal, expressionistic fantasia that unfolds rather deliberately, placing more emphasis on contrast than continuity but retaining a linkage of ideas. The second movement is a fugue, with a subject reminiscent of “Mir ist so wunderbar” from the first-act quartet in Beethoven’s Fidelio. Like a number of Beethoven’s fugues in slow tempo, it communicates a feeling of consolation mixed with awe. All three of the quartets have a serenade as their next-to-last movement. The serenade in the Fourth has a Bergian flavor as its start, which gives way to a waltz that might just as easily have come right out of late Mahler and expresses nostalgia deepened by torment. The final movement of the quartet is another fantasia; it builds in a straight line to a potent conclusion.

— note by Theodore W. Libbey, Jr.