presents

THE LARK QUARTET

EVA GRUESSER, Violin
ROBIN MAYFORTH, Violin
ANNA KRUGER, Viola
ASTRID SCHWEEN, Cello

Wednesday, February 10, 1993
8:00 p.m.
Stude Concert Hall
PROGRAM

Alauda - concert piece for string quartet (1986) Libby Larsen

Second String Quartet (1988) Ellsworth Milburn (b. 1938)

INTERMISSION

String Quartet ("musica celestis") (1990) Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960)

Flowing
musica celestis - Adagio
Scherzo - Trio semplice - Scherzo
Quasi una Danza

Following the concert, everyone is invited to a reception in the Grand Foyer.

In consideration of the performers and members of the audience, please check audible paging devices with the ushers and silence audible timepieces. The taking of photographs and the use of recording equipment are prohibited.
II. Development: Transition. Four solos which develop Theme 1 (separated by brief contrasting sections). Re-Transition.

III. Recapitulation: Theme 1 (shortened and varied). Contrasting Section (Rhythmic Section A) ending in Climax on Theme 1 variant. Theme 2 and Rhythmic Section B developed simultaneously. Closing Section variant. Harmonic Culmination. Coda.

The second movement, musica celestis, is inspired by the medieval conception of that phrase which refers to the singing of the angels in heaven in praise of God without end. "The office of singing pleases God if it is performed with an attentive mind, when in this way we imitate the choirs of angels who are said to sing the Lord's praises without ceasing." (Aurelian of Réome, translated by Barbara Newman) I don't particularly believe in angels but found this to be a potent image that has been reinforced by listening to a good deal of medieval music, especially the soaring work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). This movement follows a simple, spacious melody and harmonic pattern through a number of variations (like a passacaglia) and modulations and is framed by an introduction and codas. The Set of bits and scraps of things, while the Trio is based on a nonexistent Hindler.

The fourth movement, Quasi una danza, begins in a halting fashion but develops like sense as it goes on.

String Quartet ("musica celestis") was generously commissioned by W. Naumberg Foundation. My deepest thanks to the Lark Quartet and Mrs. Frances Kennedy, and the board of directors of the quartet.

--- Notes by the respective composers

Winner of the Gold Medal in the 1991 Shostakovich International String Quartet Competition in St. Petersburg, Russia, and the coveted Naumburg Chamber Music Award in 1990, the LARK QUARTET has established itself in the United States and abroad.

Residing in New York City, the Lark Quartet has been awarded top prizes in the 1991 London International String Quartet Competition in Great Britain, the 1991 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition in Australia, the 1990 Premio Paolo Borciani in Reggio Emilia, Italy, the 1990 Karl Klingler Competition in Munich, Germany, and the 1986 Banff Competition in Canada.

Highlights of the quartet's recent seasons include debuts at New York's Lincoln Center and in Washington, D.C., at the National Gallery, the Kennedy Center, and the Corcoran Gallery as well as in Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and a concert series at the Ordway Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota. Performances abroad have taken the quartet to China, Australia, Russia, Mexico, and to many European countries including Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and Great Britain.

The Lark Quartet has participated in the Lockenhaus Festival in Austria at the invitation of Gidon Kremer, at the Beethoven Festival (under the direction of Sviatislav Richter) in Moscow's Pushkin Museum, and has been quartet-in-residence at the Rockport, Cape and Islands, Monadnock, Grand Canyon, Albemarle, and San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, Music Festivals. In 1991, the quartet served as the official quartet at the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition in Utah.
I believe that a good piece of music should not need words to be described, so I hope that listeners will find these words superfluous in retrospect. But I would like to provide some background on some of the ideas and influences in this work.

Composing this quartet has been an exhilarating experience for me. I have wanted to write a quartet for years and hence was delighted when the Lark Quartet asked me to provide one for their Naumburg commission. But at the time I could not have imagined the sense of growth and pure pleasure that I have felt during its composition.

The form of the work is based on the string quartet model from the classical period — that is, in four movements: I. Sonata Form; II. Slow Movement; III. Scherzo with Trio; and IV. Rondo. This seems ordinary and quite basic, but if anyone had told me five or even two years ago that I’d write a classically structured work in the future, I’d have suggested (politely) that they see a helpful and friendly doctor. This quartet follows on the heels of my Symphony in Waves, written last year for the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, and for which the same remark holds true in regard to symphonic form (Not for me, thank you). I’d felt traditional forms were outmoded and unapplicable to the music of our time.

But I’ve been gradually realizing that the music I keep on going back to — the music I really love — was written before 1945 and especially before 1911. I love the emotional inclusiveness of music of the past and have grown weary of the intellectualization that has limited the expression and communicativeness of so much music in this century. I want everything to be included in music: soaring melody, consonance, tension, dissonance, drive, relation, color, strong harmony, and form — and for every possible emotion to be elicited actively by the passionate use of those elements. This brings us back to the quartet.

As I began writing it, I found that the musical ideas that I chose to work with demanded extensive development and a well-shaped harmonic basis for that development. This led me, with great reservations at first and even greater disbelief, to the use of sonata form and caused me to confront using all the above elements head on, at once, in this abstractly formed composition. This felt especially new to me since so much of my work in the past derived its inspiration from images or texts. What convinced me to use the form, however, was the organic way that it developed from the musical ideas themselves.

The form of the first movement follows the traditional exposition-development-recapitulation “formula.” Unlike older sonata movements, most of the conflict and development occurs in the exposition and recap. The development section here is harmonically relaxed and mostly lyrical, acting as an extended interruption between the two larger sections. For those interested in a more detailed view of the first movement’s form, see below (others may skip without fear to the next paragraph).

I. Exposition: Theme 1 (alternates between pairs of instruments). Contrasting Section (Rhythmic Music A) ending in Climax on Theme 2 (solo viola, then solo violin 1). Rhythmic Music B (variant of end of first climax). Climax with Theme 1 variant. Closing section.
With a strong commitment to the performance of contemporary music, the Lark Quartet has commissioned and premiered works by many of today’s leading composers, including Aaron Jay Kernis, Peter Schickele, Jon Deak, and Libby Larsen. The Quartet has held visiting professorships at San Diego State, Florida State, and Florida Atlantic Universities and assisted the Juilliard Quartet at the Juilliard School. The Quartet has recorded for Decca Records and the Arabesque label.

EVA GRUESSESR is originally from the Black Forest region of Germany. After graduation summa cum laude from the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg, she studied with Ilona Feher at the Rubin Academy in Tel Aviv, Israel, and at The Juilliard School with Rammy Shevelov, Szyon Goldberg, and Burton Kaplan. While in Israel, Ms. Gruesser played in the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. She has been concertmaster of the Juilliard Orchestra, the Juilliard Chamber Orchestra, and the Orchestra in New England in New Haven, Connecticut. She has played as soloist with many orchestras of her native Germany and recently soloed with the Arcady Festival Orchestra in Maine. Ms. Gruesser has also participated in the Monadnock Music Festival in New Hampshire. In recital, she has appeared twice at New York’s Merkin Concert Hall and has performed in West Germany, Holland, Switzerland, and Israel.

ROBIN MAYFORTH, a native of Wilmington, Delaware, received her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from The Juilliard School where she was a student of Dorothy DeLay and Paul Kantor. She also studied at the Yale School of Music. Ms. Mayforth has appeared as soloist twice with the Juilliard Philharmonica in Alice Tully Hall and with the Delaware Repertory Orchestra, the Lancaster Symphony, Newark Symphony, and Lennett Square Symphony. She has been assistant concertmaster of the Aspen Chamber Symphony and the Juilliard Orchestra and has toured Sicily as a member of I Solisti Veneti under Claudio Scimone.

ANNA KRUGER received her master’s degree from the Manhattan School of Music where she was a student of Karen Tuttle. Her bachelor’s degree is from Indiana University where she studied with Abraham Skernick and James Buswell and performed with her award-winning piano quartet. Ms. Kruger has participated in the Grand Teton Music Festival, the Yale Summer School of Music and Art, the Aspen Music Festival, Spoleto Festival USA, the Taos Chamber Music Festival, and the Cleveland Chamber Music Seminar. Formerly principal violist of the New Jersey Symphony, she is a native of Columbus, Georgia.

ASTRID SCHWEEN, a native of New York City, began playing the cello at age seven. Shortly thereafter she entered the Juilliard School, where she later received both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees. As a winner of the Young People’s Concert Series competition, Miss Schween performed a concerto with the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Zubin Mehta. An active chamber musician, she has performed at the Marlboro Music Festival with Rudolf Serkin and with the Grand Canyon Music Festival, and concertizes regularly in New York’s Merkin and Weill recital halls with Chamber Sound. For many years she studied with the late Jacqueline Du Pre in London and also participated in the William Pleeth Master Classes at the Aldeburgh Festival. Most recently she studied with Bernard Greenhouse in pursuit of her doctoral degree at Rutgers University.
Alauda - concert piece for string quartet . . . . . . . . Libby Larsen

“It seems to be a rule of thumb that modestly colored birds are among the most gifted singers. There is perhaps a good reason for this: Whereas brightly colored birds tend to use their gay patterns to advertise themselves, many of the drab, streaky birds of the fields and plains can only advertise vocally... the skylark, colorless on the ground, dominates many acres of meadow from its aerial vantage point...”

In western music, the lark has lent its name and personality to composers, including Haydn, Vaughan Williams, and Ruth Crawford Seeger. My interest in the lark, specifically the skylark (alauda arvensis), was at first inspired by Gloria Sewell, who upon discussing the present work, suggested that both the Haydn “Lark” and the fact that the performers had given themselves the name “Lark” be used as springboard in my creative thinking. I studied the Haydn and indeed have used some small quotes from transitional material in my work. However, it is the bird itself, both singularly and in flock, that suggested tempo, texture, and gesture for the composition. Larks are champion flyers and singers. Larks nest in open country. Such large expanses cause them to run, rather than hop, and when flying — to perform conspicuous display flights during which they sing. They tend to whirl and wheel about in the air with spurts of vigorous energy before landing. Musically, I sought to capture the feeling of several larks in flight as they circle, passing both motion and song equally among them. Anyone who has ever spent time watching three or four birds flying updrafts knows the exuberation of the incomplete swoop, the near miss of two birds as they dive to capture the other’s drafts, and the wonder at the ability to remain aloft. I have tried to suggest this feeling in Alauda - concert piece for string quartet.

Second String Quartet . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ellsworth Milburn

The Second String Quartet 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 to 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.

Second String Quartet was commissioned with the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.