



# AMERICAN CLASSICS



Matthew  
**QUAYLE**

**String Quartets**  
**Nos. 1-3**

**Avalon String Quartet**

Matthew  
**QUAYLE**  
(b. 1976)

**String Quartets Nos. 1–3**

<b>String Quartet No. 1 (2005)</b>	<b>23:11</b>
1 I. Andante espressivo	9:21
2 II. Scherzo: Presto	3:21
3 III. Andante serioso	6:44
4 IV. Allegro	3:41
<b>5 String Quartet No. 2 “Sweet Insanity” (2006)</b>	<b>9:12</b>
<b>String Quartet No. 3 (2016)</b>	<b>21:59</b>
6 I. Semplice	2:29
7 II. Straziante	1:29
8 III. Allegro	1:35
9 IV. Energico	1:56
10 V. Andantino	1:21
11 VI. Valse triste	1:52
12 VII. Allegro ma non troppo	1:40
13 VIII. Presto	1:25
14 IX. Adagietto	2:40
15 X. Straziente	1:16
16 XI. Tempo I	2:32
17 XII. Easygoing	0:53
18 XIII. Subito più mosso	0:49

**Matthew Quayle (b. 1976)**

**String Quartets Nos. 1–3**

To write a string quartet today is to engage in a long, oft-contested musical conversation about what two violins, a viola, and cello can and should do. The four individual characters in the ensemble can speak with the utmost nuance and intimacy, and yet together they can also evoke a symphonic level of power, range, and complexity. It is perhaps for this reason that the string quartet has given voice to many composers’ most introspective and unguarded expressions. Indeed, in the course of composing the three quartets on this album, I found that my own writing for this ensemble arose from particularly personal and reflective spaces.

These quartets were written over a span of 13 years, beginning in my mid-twenties and finishing just shy of my 40th birthday. Although they exhibit a range of compositional approaches, they are linked by the use of familiar musical styles and gestures to construct new emotional narratives. The musical events are rooted in my own impressions and experiences, yet the meanings that may ultimately emerge are always a complex negotiation between the composer, the performers, and each individual listener. Thus, while the quartets are not programmatic in any specific sense, it would be misleading to call them completely abstract.

The Avalon String Quartet was involved in the early performances of all three of these pieces. It was a great pleasure to reunite with these four warm and gifted musicians for the recording of this album, and I am grateful for their friendship and deep commitment to the project.

**String Quartet No. 1 (2005)**

*String Quartet No. 1* is pervaded by a sense of nostalgia, an irretrievable past viewed through the lens of the present. The first movement is a reflection on my childhood years living on Gridley Paige Road, a rural road set amid farmland, woods, and fields in central New York State. At the time of its composition in the spring of 2003, I was grappling with the recent loss of my grandmother,

who had lived for a number of years in the house next door to ours. I still use the title *Gridley Paige Road* when the movement is performed on its own.

Two years after writing the first movement, I composed three more: a manic *Scherzo*, a bleak and unsettled *Adagio*, and an animated yet enigmatic *Finale*. These later movements serve as a conflicted commentary on the idyllic opening passages of the quartet. One could say that they are the work of a young adult coming to terms with the loss of the world of his youth.

The first movement of *String Quartet No. 1* was premiered by the Avalon Quartet in Merkin Concert Hall, New York, in May 2003. The full four-movement quartet was premiered in Merkin Concert Hall in April 2005 by members of the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE). In 2007 I arranged the opening movement for string orchestra; that version (*Gridley Paige Road*) was premiered by the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra in 2008, and it has since been recorded and released by the United States Air Force Strings.

**String Quartet No. 2 “Sweet Insanity” (2006)**

Combine two disparate styles of music. The first: moderate, lyrical, haunting, tonal. The second: tempestuous, spiky, atonal, replete with twelve-tone lines and angular chords. Smooth out the mixture by sprinkling a distinctive trichord throughout the piece. Throw in a hint of blues, and you have *“Sweet Insanity”*.

*String Quartet No. 2* is more mischievous than the first quartet. It adopts something of the darkness of an entertaining horror movie rather than truly existential angst. Nevertheless, this piece is also rooted in life experience. When I first conceived of the piece, I was caught up in the struggles of a labor strike while navigating graduate studies and the chaos of everyday life in New York City. These were just some of the factors that made life seem insecure, unmanageable, and capricious that year. Yet it was not all misery; one can

derive a distinctive rush from such drama and stress. These conditions inspired the subtitle of the quartet.

*String Quartet No. 2* was originally written for the Arditti Quartet, who premiered it in an abbreviated version at New York University in March 2006. It was later revised and expanded to its present state for performance by the Avalon Quartet on the Washington Square Contemporary Music Ensemble series at Merkin Concert Hall, New York, in December 2006.

### String Quartet No. 3 (2016)

*String Quartet No. 3* comprises 13 short, diverse movements, each under three minutes in length. These miniatures veer without warning from one style and mood to another. A sentimental opening movement is suddenly interrupted by a series of tragic declamatory chords, followed by (among other things) an emphatic Bach quotation, a rambling neo-Baroque viola solo, a rock theme scored like barre chords on an electric guitar, a searching *intermezzo*, a poignant waltz in the minor mode, a mischievous *scherzo* with a twelve-tone theme

and modernist *glissandi*, a sincere hymn-like chorale, and a banal tune resembling a 1960s sitcom theme. Just when a quiet finish seems inevitable, a rollicking but dissonant bluegrass groove begins, spinning out to an abrupt and explosive conclusion.

The events in *String Quartet No. 3* capture something of life in our time, with our dizzying diet of news clips, YouTube videos, randomized song playlists, ads, and soundbites. The experience of brief emotional commitment followed by dislocation, so commonplace in our current media experience, is reflected in the erratic musical trajectory of this piece. The large-scale form, which derives from a classic narrative arc with a nod towards palindromic symmetry, is perhaps overshadowed by these frequent disruptions.

*String Quartet No. 3* was written in Abu Dhabi in the spring of 2016 for the Avalon Quartet. They presented its live recital premiere on 15 January 2017 at Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center in Rockford, Illinois.

Matthew Quayle

### Matthew Quayle



Photo: Omar Shoukri

Matthew Quayle has received commissions and performances from ensembles and soloists including the Akira Saxophone Quartet, Alarm Will Sound, the Albany Symphony Orchestra, the Arditti String Quartet, the Avalon String Quartet, the Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, eighth blackbird, the International Contemporary Ensemble, the Silverwind Duo, the United States Air Force Strings, the Westchester Symphonic Winds, Deborah Andrus, Emanuele Arciuli, Claire Chase, Gail Levinsky, and Ashley Sandor Sidon. *Songs Without Words*, his album of original solo piano music, was released in 2015. He wrote the music and lyrics for *Amazed By You*, a 2013 Indie album of original cabaret songs with soprano Marian Murphy. Quayle has performed widely as a solo pianist and chamber musician, collaborating frequently with cellist Jameson Platte since 2005. Their forthcoming album *Entr'acte*, features works by Chabrier, Tom Cipullo, Debussy, Quayle, Rachmaninov, and Webern. Originally from Waterville, NY, Quayle studied at Oberlin Conservatory (B.M.), the University of Cincinnati (M.M.), and New York University's Graduate School of Arts and Science (Ph.D.). He is currently Assistant Arts Professor of Music and Head of the Music Program at NYU Abu Dhabi, where he has taught since 2012.

[www.matthewquayle.com](http://www.matthewquayle.com)

## Avalon String Quartet

From left to right: Anthony Devroye, Cheng-Hou Lee, Marie Wang, Blaise Magniere



Photo: Todd Rosenberg

Since capturing the top prize at the ARD Competition in Munich and the Grand Prize at the Concert Artists Guild, the Avalon String Quartet has performed in major venues including Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the 92nd St Y and Merkin Hall in New York, the Library of Congress and National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Wigmore Hall in London, and the Herkulesaal in Munich. Other performances include appearances at the Bath International Music Festival, the Aldeburgh Festival, Caramoor, La Jolla Chamber Music Society, NPR's St. Paul Sunday, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Dame Myra Hess Concerts, and the Ravinia Festival. They presented the complete quartet cycles of Beethoven, Bartók, and Brahms in recent seasons at the Art Institute of Chicago. The Avalon String Quartet has also recorded for Cedille Records, Channel Classics, Bridge and Albany Records. In 2015, the quartet released *Illuminations* on Cedille Records, which was followed by a critically acclaimed album of new music by American composers on the Albany label. The Quartet presently serve as quartet-in-residence at the Northern Illinois University School of Music and previously held a similar position at Indiana University South Bend. [www.avalonquartet.com](http://www.avalonquartet.com)

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**String Quartets Nos. 1–3**

- 1–4** String Quartet No. 1 (2005) **23:11**
- 5** String Quartet No. 2  
“Sweet Insanity” (2006) **9:12**
- 6–18** String Quartet No. 3 (2016) **21:59**

**WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**Avalon String Quartet**

**Blaise Magniere, Violin I**  
**Marie Wang, Violin II**  
**Anthony Devroye, Viola**  
**Cheng-Hou Lee, Cello**

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.  
Recorded: 25–27 May 2016 at Boutell Memorial Concert  
Hall, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA  
Producer: Matthew Quayle  
Engineer and editor: Bill Maylone  
Booklet notes: Matthew Quayle  
All works unpublished  
Cover photograph by Ryan Deberardinis (Dreamstime.com)



**AMERICAN CLASSICS**

“I am delighted to share the Avalon Quartet’s powerful rendition of my three string quartets on Naxos. These remarkable musicians display their uncommon insight and interpretive range throughout the album – from the introspective yet ardent journey of the expansive *First Quartet*, to the spiky mischief of the *Second*, to the enigmatic meandering through the thirteen fleeting movements of the *Third*. They have fully captured the stylistic diversity and dramatic intensity of these deeply personal pieces.”

– Matthew Quayle

**www.naxos.com**

Playing  
Time:  
**54:35**