



Mark  
**NOWAKOWSKI**

## **Blood, Forgotten**

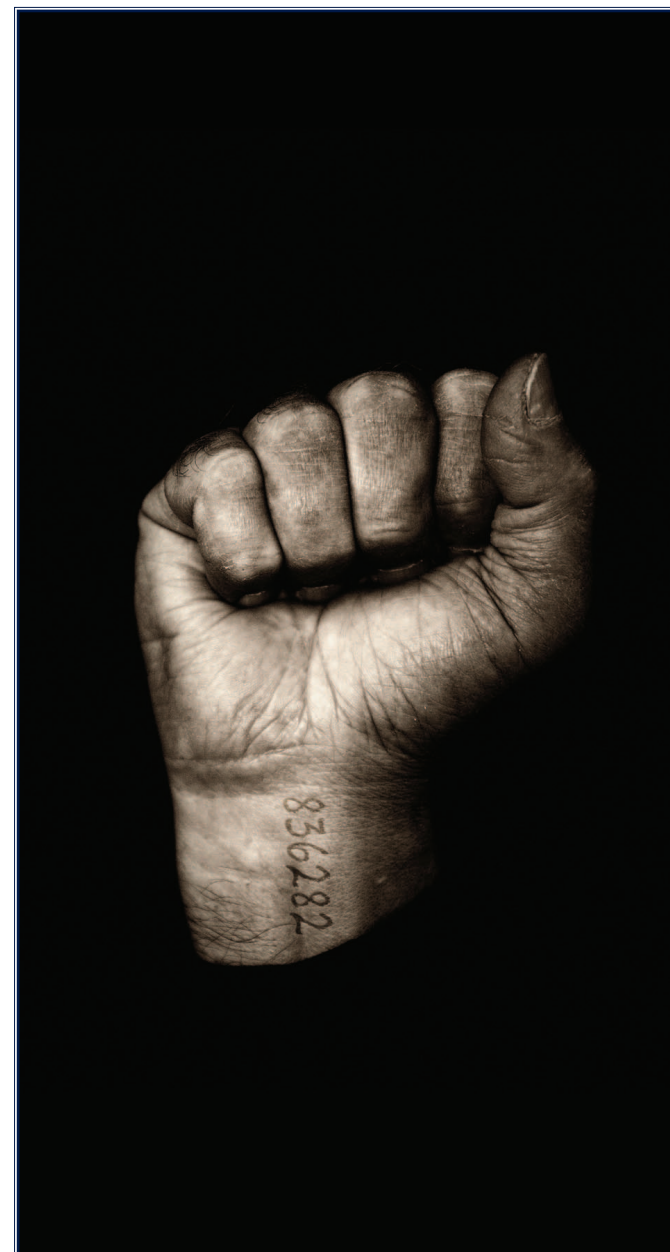
**String Quartet No. 1 'Songs of Forgiveness'**

**String Quartet No. 2 'Grandfather Songs'**

**A Ušnijze mi, ušnij**

**Emily Ondracek-Peterson, Violin**

**Voxare String Quartet**



## Mark Nowakowski (b. 1978)

### Blood, Forgotten • String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 • A Uśnijże mi, uśnij

*"Today I know, when ends this game unreasonable:  
Sadness – larger than our hearts, the world –  
is smaller than the grave."*

– Antoni Slonimski

Over the past three centuries the people of Poland have lived through often impossible times and conditions, culminating in the unprecedented brutality of the second world war and the half-century communist occupation that followed. As a child of the American Polish diaspora, the stories of my ancestors wound their way deeply into my psyche and eventually my compositions as well. The works selected by the Voxare Quartet for this recording are linked by their concern for Polish history, culture, and song, and are a tribute to a people who have somehow persevered through every attempt to eradicate them. That Poles often left great beauty in the wake of tragedy is a testament to their character and story.

In the summer of 2008 I participated in the Summer Academy of Music in Kraków, the uniquely beautiful old city acting as a balm against a recent stinging setback and betrayal in my life and career. During this trip I would also benefit from the combined efforts of scholar Adrian Thomas and representatives from Boosey & Hawkes to arrange a meeting with the legendary Henryk Górecki in his mountain summer home near Zakopane.

While Górecki was initially guarded during our meeting, his reticence melted away when I presented him with a book about my home city, Chicago, of which it turned out he held wonderful memories (especially regarding his *Miserere* recording with Lucy Ding). As the recluse faded and the engaging storyteller emerged, I was able to experience what it was like to be a trusted pupil sitting at the feet of a cherished master, and our planned "brief meeting" would last well into the night. I would return home to the United States renewed and ready to finish composing *String Quartet No. 1 'Songs of Forgiveness'*.

Two years later I found myself intractably mired in the final stages of composing my second string quartet – *Grandfather Songs* – for the Kronos Quartet, when news of Górecki's death reached me from Poland. A profound artistic departure struck me in a very personal way, and I was eager to respond musically. A few days after Górecki's death I received an email from David Harrington stating:

Dear Mark,

You might be interested to know that Leonard Bernstein died during the composition of Górecki's SQ #2, 'Quasi Una Fantasia', and Henryk placed a Bernstein quote in the piece.

Best wishes,

David

I gratefully took the hint and quoted the first thing that came to mind: Górecki's *Songs are Sung*. I had long suspected that this work – written for Kronos – was his personal elegy, hence his reluctance to release it to the world too soon. Once the mournful opening bars of this piece were placed into my score, the creative impasse was breached and I was able to connect my quartet to the already completed final chorale section. From this came the subtitle: "In Memoriam Henryk Górecki."

*Grandfather Songs* initially emerged as an act of personal nostalgia and remembrance. In the process of going through family archival videos, I came across various compelling scenes – the sound of playing children, a recording of my grandfather's voice – all of which coaxed new music out of me. About a month after Kronos held their public reading of the work at the University of Maryland, they asked to premiere the work at the 2011 Festival of Polish Music in Poland.

On a cloudy Kraków evening, disoriented and overjoyed at the birth of my first child two days earlier, I sat in awe as the legendary quartet premiered my work. When the piece's final section began, the audience looked around confusedly as an old recording of my family singing the war song *Hej Ulani* appeared under the quartet's finale chorale-like section, as if the disembodied voices were just offstage and about to emerge. I realized then that the voice which had so enthusiastically lead the singing was that of my beloved aunt Janina; she had passed away a few days earlier, and would have been truly amused at her philharmonic premiere. Death, nostalgia, hope, and new life had wound their way very deeply into my experience of this piece, and I could only hope that other listeners could somehow share in this journey.

The *First String Quartet* also occupies a place between personal and societal strife. The title *Songs of Forgiveness* emerges from the struggle I had experienced that first summer in Kraków, and in coming to grips with this I thought more widely on the great themes of misunderstanding and betrayal which so terribly mar the human story. The first movement – titled, with a Thomistic wink, *Unmoved Movement* – is a meditation on anger and grief, resolving in the final fury of the unaccompanied cello. The second movement quotes from the ghostly Polish folk song *Czemu tak rychło, Panie*, sung from the perspective of a young child who has experienced premature death. At that time I was contemplating the Culture of Death which has thoroughly seized our society, especially in the West. Seen against a stark reality, forgiveness – both for people and society – becomes the necessary defining aspect of our character and a key element in the main thrust of our lives.

The title work of this album, *Blood, Forgotten*, is a multimedia memorial for the victims of Nazi and Soviet aggression in Poland during the second World War. It tells a story generally unfamiliar to western people, most of whom are unacquainted with the national Golgotha

experienced by Poles during that time. As much of the world celebrated VE day, Warsaw lay ruined, forgotten, and about to experience the heavy boot of a more lasting oppressor. The full configuration of the work includes a video backdrop, whose images progress from scenes of pre-war Poland to the initial days of invasion, deep into the terrible heart of this war. As images of holocaust fade into the scar on the Black Madonna's face – the only color image in this video – images of hope and individual resilience emerge. The accompaniment to the solo violin is entirely constructed of digitally manipulated violin recordings made by the Polish born violinist Marcin Arendt, who played these excerpts on a violin of somewhat mysterious origins which had survived a concentration camp in the hands of Dr. Antoni Gościński.

New life and hope must always emerge from the ashes, and so the album's final work – *A Uśnijże mi, uśnij* – is directly inspired by the lullaby of the same name. I first encountered this beautiful song in an archival recording, and was surprised to find that none of my family and friends had ever heard the melody before. I had a very distinct cinematic thread in my mind as I composed the piece: a single mother sings her child to sleep in a time of new peace and hope; as the viewer recedes one is encountered by many homes with many gentle lights flickering in their windows, where other young mothers sing their newborns to sleep. We recede even further then to the outline of the mountains just barely visible above the darkening horizon, drawing our attention ever upwards...

None of these successes would be possible without the friendship and diligent support of Erik and Emily Peterson, as well as the willingness of the wonderful Voxare Quartet. Musical visions require visionary performers, and I can only count my blessings that Emily, Erik, Gaïna, and Adrian have made my deepest musings their own.

Mark Nowakowski

## Mark Nowakowski



Mark Nowakowski (pronounced "nova'kovski") is a composer whose works represent a modern merger of bold expressionism and mystical contemplation, Slavic pathos and American individualism. The music of this American-born son of Polish immigrants derives a great deal of its aesthetic influence from his experience of the Polish diaspora, while also being philosophically and spiritually guided by the long history of Catholic mysticism and art. Mark is also active as a writer, currently publishing columns on a variety of topics. Nowakowski's music has been commissioned and performed by such notables as the Kronos Quartet, the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, The Monteverdi Cello Octet, The Voxare Quartet, the FiveOne Experimental Orchestra, Three Notch'd Road,

Stowarzyszenia Mozart, Vox Musica of Sacramento, the Choir of the Shrine of the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, the Dominican House of Studies Schola, the wind ensembles at the University of Maryland, Ursinus College, and Illinois State University, and the Cracow Brass Quintet. In 2011, the Kronos Quartet premiered his *String Quartet No. 2 'Grandfather Songs'* at the International Festival of Polish Music in Kraków. In 2012, he was the composer in residence for Projekt Mozart, seeing his *O Piękności niestworzon* premiered in a concert tour of seven Polish cities culminating in Czestochowa and Warsaw. Mark has received degrees from the University of Maryland, The Cleveland Institute of Music, the University of Colorado Boulder, and Illinois State University, and was student composer-in-residence for the Canton Symphony Orchestra. His main composition teachers include Paul Schoenfield, Daniel Kellogg, Mark Wilson, Margaret Brouwer, Lawrence Moss, Stephen Andrew Taylor, John Drumheller, David Feurzeig and Michael Theodore. He has taught at the University of Maryland, Christendom College, DuPage College of Illinois, and Benedictine University, and currently serves on the faculty of music at Kent State Stark.

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

## Emily Ondracek-Peterson



Photo: Erik Christian Peterson

Praised by *The New York Times* for her "elegant solowork," and by *Strad* magazine for her "dazzling passagework," Dr. Emily Ondracek-Peterson's multifaceted pursuits embody the scope, versatility, and ability required for a successful music career in the twenty-first century. Making her solo debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the age of 16, she has since performed as soloist with the New York Philharmonic and in hundreds of concerts at renowned venues as first violinist of the Voxare String Quartet. Ondracek-Peterson has written and lectured extensively about entrepreneurship and career development for conservatory-trained musicians. With flutist and arts advocate Eugenia Zukerman, she founded Noted Endeavors, which publishes in association with Musical America videos excerpted from interviews with leading artists and administrators. Dr. Ondracek-Peterson is the director of both string studies and chamber music – and professor of violin – at Metropolitan State University of Denver; she's also on faculty at Teachers College, Columbia University. She is a two-time Morse Fellow and was a New York Philharmonic Teaching Artist. She is also co-artistic director of the Crested Butte Music Festival along with her violist husband, Erik Christian Peterson. She received performance degrees from The Juilliard School, and her doctorate in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

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

### Voxare String Quartet



The Voxare String Quartet was formed in 2008 and has received critical praise for inventive programming, technical prowess and passionate performances. They have appeared at the Guggenheim Museum, Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, as well as at Avery Fisher Hall as soloists with the New York Philharmonic. Additionally, the Voxare String Quartet has been the prestigious quartet-in-residence at New York's Bargemusic. The ensemble's unique performing activities have earned them Chamber Music America's ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. Voxare is often seen on TV, featured on such shows as National Geographic's *Brain Games* and *Good Morning, America*.

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

Mark  
**NOWAKOWSKI**  
(b. 1978)

**String Quartet No. 1**  
**‘Songs of Forgiveness’ (2010) 20:14**

- ❶ I. Unmoved Movement 10:51
- ❷ II. ...So Soon to Leave 9:23

❸ **Blood, Forgotten (2005)**  
**for Solo Violin and Electronics 11:32**

❹ **String Quartet No. 2 ‘Grandfather Songs’**  
**(in memoriam Henryk Górecki)**  
**(2011) 19:35**

❺ **A Uśnijże mi, uśnij (Lullaby:**  
**O Sleep for me, sleep) (2012) 4:14**

**Emily Ondracek-Peterson,**  
**Solo Violin ❸**

**Voxare String Quartet ❶-❷ ❹ ❺**

**Emily Ondracek-Peterson, Violin I**  
**Galina Zhdanova, Violin II**  
**Erik Christian Peterson, Viola**  
**Adrian Daurov, Cello**

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Engineers: Antonino D’Urzo and Erik Christian Peterson  
Publisher: Mark Nowakowski • Booklet notes: Mark Nowakowski  
Cover photograph by duncan1890 (iStockphoto.com)



**AMERICAN CLASSICS**

The people of Poland have lived through often impossible conditions over the last three centuries, and this album is Polish-American composer Mark Nowakowski’s tribute to their spirit of survival. *Songs of Forgiveness* is both a meditation on anger and grief and a lamentation on the stark realities of a society riven by tragedy. *Blood, Forgotten* is a multimedia memorial for the victims of Nazi and Soviet aggression during World War II, the electronic soundtrack using sounds from an instrument that survived one of the concentration camps. Partly written as a memorial for Henryk Górecki, *Grandfather Songs* also includes the surreal element of a recording of Nowakowski’s family singing the war song *Hej Ulani*.

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Playing  
Time:  
**55:34**