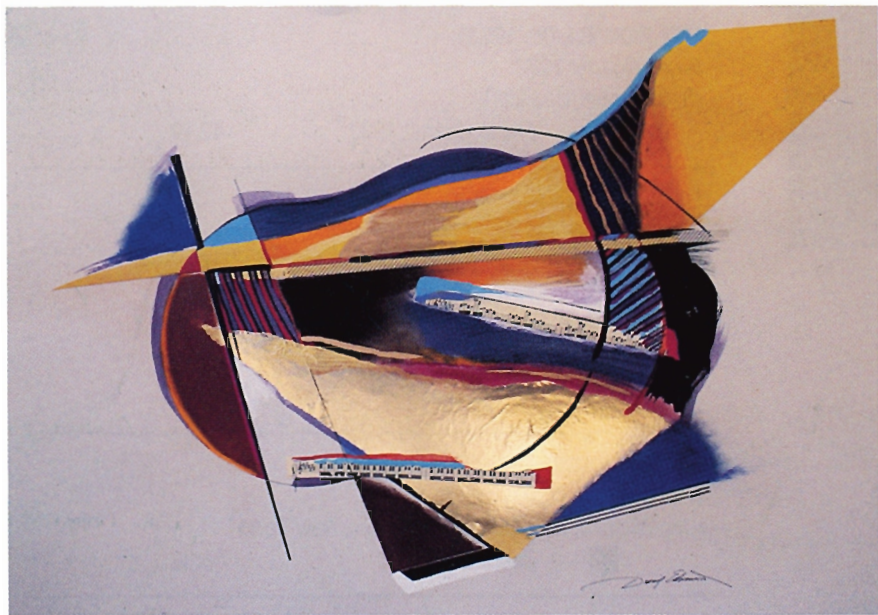


ELLIOTT CARTER QUARTET No. 4

MILTON BABBITT QUARTET No. 5

MEL POWELL STRING QUARTET 1982

COMPOSERS QUARTET



Mel Powell • Elliott Carter • Milton Babbitt • Mel Powell • Elliott Carter
Carter • Milton Babbitt • Mel Powell • Elliott Carter
Babbitt • Mel Powell • Elliott Carter • Milton Babbitt
Elliott Carter • Milton Babbitt • Mel Powell • Elliott Carter

THREE AMERICAN STRING QUARTETS

interpreted by the Composers Quartet

MEL POWELL (b. 1923)

String Quartet 1982

(G. Schirmer, New York)

1	String Quartet 1982	12:14
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ELLIOTT CARTER (b. 1908)

Quartet for Strings No. 4 (1986) 24:36

(Hendon Music/Boosey & Hawkes)

2	I. Appassionata	5:58
3	II. Scherzando	5:54
4	III. Lento	6:17
5	IV. Presto	6:25

MILTON BABBITT (b. 1916)

Quartet No. 5 (1982)

(Unpublished, handled by C. F. Peters, New York)

6	Quartet No. 5	16:32
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Total CD time: 55:09

MEL POWELL

Powell's recent works include *Modules*, which Pierre Boulez presented in its European premiere, and the *Woodwind Quintet*, which was given its New York premiere by the New York Woodwind Quintet in February 1987.

One of our most esteemed composers, Powell is a native New Yorker who has been living in Los Angeles for the past two decades. He is also renowned as one of America's finest teachers of composition, for some years at Yale, and later at California Institute of the Arts, where during the period 1972-76 he served as Provost.



Powell, Babbitt and Feldman at a composers' forum, CalArts, 1986

Mel Powell became the founding dean at CalArts after leaving his position as chairman of the composition faculty at Yale University, where he had succeeded his own teacher, Paul Hindemith. For many years while at Yale, where he founded the university's Electronic Music Studio, Powell was a contributing editor of the *Journal of Music Theory*. He was also a founding editor, along with Milton Babbitt, Aaron Copland, and

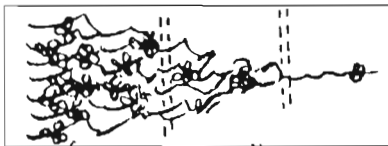
Los Angeles Philharmonic. Powell's *String Quartet 1982* was composed under a consortium commission from the National Endowment for the Arts. More recently another work, the *Settings for Two Pianos*, was also commissioned by the NEA; still others by the Library of Congress, as well as by many of the most accomplished performing ensembles and soloists here and abroad. Not long ago a writer in Europe characterized Powell's work as "elegant gourmet music composed by an American master of atonality-without-Angst." Powell was honored with a Pulitzer Prize in 1990.

His compositions are published by G. Schirmer. Several works may be heard on Nonesuch and other labels. A recording of four of Powell's recent compositions was recently released on the Musicmasters label (including the 1982 Quartet performed by the Sequoia Quartet).

STRING QUARTET (1982)

The work is played through as a single movement with clearly differentiated subdivisions. Running time is about 11 minutes. The structure is depicted in this graphic analog:

That is, beginning *in medias res*, a gnarled kaleidoscopic confusion



unwinds; and at the very end there is a brief reflection of the opening. The handful of elements rotated among the players renders the individual

parts both independent and equivalent, while no repetition of any measure occurs throughout the work.

An overall progression from greater to lesser multiplicity is carried out in diverse terms and on several levels. Most conspicuous in this regard is the textural reduction from tangles at the opening to unisonous assertions near the close. Through other, formally analogous means, the principal sections within themselves mirror that progression.

The String Quartet is an instance of modular composition. This is the venerable genre that houses composers' unigenous compulsions. Over the centuries, sustaining an art at the opposite pole from mindlessness, it has fostered processes and principles of organization such as isorhythm, fugue, passacaglia, theme and variations, twelve-tone composition, multi-dimensional set techniques, and so on. Listeners who enjoy a nodding (while staying awake) acquaintance with such musical thought may discern, even on first hearing, the interplay of the generic and the idiosyncratic in the present case.

Preliminary sketches had outlined a multi-movement work running about 35 minutes. Traces remain in the form of the present subdivisions. But the early drafts were soon threatening a span of time for performance resembling that of the uncut Ring. At last all was compacted, drastically, in the light of Frans Hemsterhuis's famous definition of The Beautiful as the greatest number of ideas in the shortest space of time.

What remains (beautiful or not) confronts the players with a substantial array of challenges.

—program note by Mel Powell

ELLIOTT CARTER

Carter's 80th birthday in December 1988 was celebrated with performances of his works in San Francisco, New York, Donaueschingen, London, Paris, and Amsterdam. The dean of American composers



Carter in 1988 (Jacob Burchardt)

remains creative in his vigorous old age. His recent works include the *Oboe Concerto* written for Heinz Holliger, *Enchanted Preludes* for flute and cello, *Remembrance* for orchestra, and *Birthday Flourish* for five trumpets, and he

has been at work on a violin concerto for the Norwegian violinist Ole Böhn. The new *Grove* says, "At best his music sustains an energy of invention that is unrivaled in contemporary composition."

Aaron Copland spoke of Carter's music at a presentation of a special Board in 1971 as:

“...unlike that of any other composer on the contemporary scene it reflects a rare combination of heart and brain: the man of feeling and the man of intellect. Its inventive ingenuity and its complexity of musical thought are something very special. Other composers may create a polyphony of musical thoughts. He has a remarkable gift for interlacing a multiplicity of musical ideas for expressive purposes that are peculiarly his own.”

“His virtuoso handling of the rhythmic aspects of music has often been pointed out. Here again there is nothing quite like it in other men’s music. Carter’s way with rhythms has come to be known as ‘metrical modulation,’ by which is meant a simultaneity of rhythms, each one moving ahead at its own pace without in any way encroaching on the rhythmic independence of its neighbor. To conceive such a notion is one thing; to carry it out with the clarity and imagination of Carter’s rhythmic sensibility is a major achievement”

String Quartet No. 4

A preoccupation with giving each member of the performing group its own musical identity characterizes my *String Quartet No. 4*; thus mirroring the democratic attitude in which each member of a society maintains his or her own identity while cooperating in a common effort—a concept that dominates all my recent work. In this quartet, more than in others of my scores, a spirit of cooperation prevails. Each player’s part has its own musical materials and expressive character

and each participates in its own way in the four part dialogue. While there are many changes of mood and speed, and frequent pauses, the work is in one long constantly changing movement. In the background, however, there is a suggestion of the traditional four movement plan of the classical string quartet—Appassionato, Scherzando, Lento, Presto.

String Quartet No. 4 is dedicated to the Composers String Quartet. The score was composed during part of 1985-86 in New York City, Waccabuc, and at the American Academy in Rome. The Composers Quartet gave its premiere at Festival Miami on September 17, 1986.

—program note by Elliott Carter¹

An additional relevant comment by the composer appears in the highly informative interview with Carter by Ruth Dreier printed in *Musical America*, November 1988. Here Carter says :

“My music is primarily an attempt at various kinds of expression which are individualized by the various instruments. The pieces involve the interplay of these various things. It’s not unlike the kinds of things that Mozart did in some of his operas—for instance, in *Don Giovanni*, where the Don and Leporello and the rest of them sing a big concerted number in which they are all doing and saying different things and also singing different material. That’s very dramatic to me, and it’s the kind of thing I’ve attempted to achieve. It’s all part of the drama that I conceive of in my work, it’s something I’ve felt very strongly about and

¹ Reprinted with the kind permission of Hendon Music/Boosey & Hawkes from the introduction to the score of the music published by them.

have developed considerably. The *Fourth Quartet* is an example. Although the listeners don't really hear it, each instrument has a complete repertory of its own—different kinds of harmony, rhythm, and shapes of melodic figures and expression. This is all welded into one comparatively unified piece that doesn't give the impression of constant opposition; it's an interweaving of these contrasting things that makes a total piece out of it. It's not something that you find at all in music. It's said that my work derives from Charles Ives. But Ives doesn't do this. In his *Second Quartet*, for example, even though there's a great deal of simultaneous material, he doesn't make it into a program that penetrates the entire work. Everyone marches together. They don't march out of phase as they do in almost all of my quartets.”

MILTON BABBITT

Milton Babbitt was born in 1916 in Philadelphia, Pa. He was educated in the public schools of Jackson, Mississippi, and at New York and Princeton Universities. His primary teacher of musical composition was Roger Sessions, with whom he studied privately for three years.

At present, he is William Shubael Conant Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, where his teaching career began in 1938, including three years as a member of the Mathematics faculty, from 1942-5. He also is on the Composition Faculty of The Juilliard School, and was Fromm Foundation Visiting Professor at Harvard University, 1988.

His many honors include a MacArthur Fellowship (1986-91). His most recent compositions include: *Concerto for Piano & Orchestra*; *Transfigured Notes* (for the Philadelphia Orchestra), *The Joy of More Sextets* (for violin and piano), *Whirled Series* (for saxophone and piano), *Consortini* (for five players).



The most recent recordings of his music are of *Paraphrases* (by Parnassus, on CRI). *Composition for Guitar* (by David Starobin, on Bridge),

piano music (by Robert Taub, on Harmonia Mundi), *Piano Concerto* and *The Head of the Bed* (on New World Records), *Groupwise*, *An Elizabethan Sextette*, and *Time Series* on CRI, *Sextets* and *The Joy of More Sextets* on New World Records, and the *Widow's Lament* on Nonesuch.

In his book *All American Music* John Rockwell identifies Babbitt as “an unquestionably important American composer. He has written some of the most austere and compelling music of our time. He helped pioneer electronic music in this country. He conceived new dimensions of musical theory that have had an enormous influence in America. He has

taught a host of younger composers. He has contributed provocative and influential essays. And he has played an important role in our musical politics.”

QUARTET No. 5

My Fifth String Quartet was completed in May or June (if one includes the completion of the copying of the score) of 1982. It is dedicated to the Sequoia String Quartet, and was first performed on October 24, 1982.

Like the three string quartets which preceded it, the Fifth Quartet is in a single movement, with sections which are to greater and lesser degrees most immediately demarcated by timbral, registral, and tempo distinctions, individually and in conjunction. However, the tempo differentiations are relatively slight, employed more to equate the overall rhythmic motion among the “sections” than to contrast them, since more striking changes of motion tend to occur in the small and therefore, for practical reasons, are “composed out” within a single indicated tempo.

Perhaps the most evident articulation occurs about halfway through the work, where the instrumental dispositions and associations are altered, but in this case, too, the change is likely to be perceived, at least initially, as less abrupt and immediate than as gradual and emergent.

But if these are not extended dimensionally coordinated repetitions cre-

ating familiar patterns of putative “form”, the composition assumes “form” and “shape” by the continual, progressive, expanding interplay of recollective and predictive self-references, which should serve comparably the musical memory of the attentive listener.



If this quartet seems rhythmically less complex than some other of my recent works, it is perhaps because its temporal properties derive more directly and extensively from its basic pitch structure, rather than that both the pitch and temporal dimensions are appositely analogous interpretations and realizations of the same underlying ordering.

—program note by Milton Babbitt

THE COMPOSERS STRING QUARTET

Since its formation in 1966, the Composers String Quartet has won enthusiastic international acclaim, and has long been recognized as one of the foremost interpreters of contemporary chamber music. Violinists Matthew Raimondi and Anahid Ajemian were founders of the Quartet; cellist Mark Shuman joined in 1977; and violist Karl Bargaen joined in

1989, replacing Maureen Gallagher, who retired because of an injury (Maureen Gallagher is heard in the Powell and Carter works recorded in 1988, while Karl Barga is heard in the Babbitt work, recorded in 1989). As Quartet in residence at Columbia University since 1975, the ensemble has been featured in a variety of concerts there, including three complete cycles of the Beethoven String Quartets.

The Quartet's discography includes recordings on CBS Masterworks, CRI, Golden Crest, Musical Heritage, and Nonesuch. Its discs of Elliott Carter's *First* and *Second Quartet*, on the Elektra/Nonesuch label, won a Grammy nomination, *Stereo Review's* "best chamber music of the year" designation, *High Fidelity's* "best quartet of the year" designation and was also named one of the "50 great albums of the decade."

Matthew Raimondi, born and raised in New York City, has worked closely with such prominent figures in contemporary music as Igor Stravinsky, Roger Sessions, John Cage, Luigi Dallapiccola, Elliott Carter, and Milton Babbitt.

Anahid Ajemian is also native of New York. Early in her career, she concertized with her pianist sister, Maro, in Europe, Canada, and the United States, performing works written for them by such noted composers as John Cage, Henry Cowell, Alan Hovhaness, Ernst Krenek, Lou Harrison and Carlos Surinach.

Maureen Gallagher, a native of Grants Pass, Oregon, has been a

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AMERICAN STRING QUARTETS OF THE LATE 20th CENTURY

PERFORMED BY THE COMPOSERS QUARTET

1	Mel Powell	String Quartet (1982)	12:52
	Elliott Carter	Quartet For Strings No. 4 (1986)	
2		I. Appassionata	6:05
3		II. Scherzando	5:48
4		III. Lento	6:17
5		IV. Presto	6:25
6	Milton Babbitt	Quartet No. 5 (1982)	16:32
		[Recording Supervisor – Milton Babbitt]	

Credits

Violins – Anahid Ajemian, Matthew Raimondi
Viola – Karl Bargaen (track 3), Maureen Gallagher (tracks 1-5)
Cello – Mark Shuman

Liner Notes – Elliott Carter, Mel Powell, Milton Babbitt
Producer /engineer – Judith Sherman

“String Quartet 1982” and “Quartet For Strings No. 4” recorded 1988, “Quartet No. 5” recorded 1989, all at the School of Music, State University of New York, Purchase, N.Y.



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