

Thalea String Quartet

“Thalea never failed to deliver a stirring performance” - Calgary Herald

The Thalea String Quartet brings their signature vibrancy and emotional commitment to dynamic performances that reflect the past, present, and the future of the string quartet repertoire while celebrating diverse musical traditions from around the world. Fueled by the belief that chamber music is a powerful force for building community and human connection, the Thalea String Quartet has performed across North America, Europe, and China, and has appeared at the Kennedy Center, Massey Hall, and Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall. They have shared the stage with luminaries of the chamber music world, including members of the Emerson, Brentano, and St. Lawrence String Quartets, and they have performed alongside celebrated artists including Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw, violist Lawrence Power, acclaimed Canadian band BADBADNOTGOOD, Detroit hip hop icon Mahogany Jones, and visionary R+B artist Charlotte Day Wilson.

Committed to shaping and contributing to the future of the string quartet repertoire, the Thalea String Quartet has premiered dozens of new works and has collaborated on new commissions with composers including Osvaldo Golijov, Paola Prestini, Anthony R. Green, Akshaya Avril Tucker, and Tanner Porter.

Winners of the 2021 Ann Divine Educator Award from the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, the members of the Thalea String Quartet have been celebrated for their innovative approach to education and community engagement. The Thalea String Quartet has presented masterclasses and workshops at institutions across North America, including the Berkeley College of Music, the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, and San Francisco State University. They have presented lectures and led discussions at institutions including the University of Maryland, Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, and Wayne State Medical School in Detroit, where they presented a workshop on non-verbal communication to first year medical students alongside the Emerson String Quartet. Committed to youth mentorship and community music education, the Thalea String Quartet serve as teaching artists for Washington Performing Arts. The ensemble served as faculty and artistic advisors for the inaugural 2023 Fischhoff Summer Chamber Music Intensive. Pioneers of virtual educational programming, the Thalea String Quartet has developed a variety of digital content, including two digital video series for students of all ages and the CHAMPS Virtual Chamber Music Seminar, which brought together students from across North America for an eight-week intensive study of the music of Florence B. Price, Joseph Haydn, and Antonín Dvořák.

The Thalea String Quartet served as the Doctoral Fellowship String Quartet at the University of Maryland from 2020-2023. The quartet has also held fellowship positions at the University of Texas at Austin and the San Francisco Conservatory. They served as Associated Artists at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Waterloo, Belgium for the 2019-20 season and were the 2019-20 Ernst Stiefel Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts. They

were the 2022 and 2023 resident ensemble at the Lakes Area Music Festival and were 2023 visiting artists at the Garth Newel Music Center. The Thalea String Quartet were top prize winners at the 2018 Fischhoff Competition and 2018 Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition.

Christopher Whitley (violin) is from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Kumiko Sakamoto (violin) is from Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada; Lauren Spaulding (viola) is from San Antonio, Texas; and Alex Cox (cello) is from South Palm Beach, Florida.

Christopher and Kumiko perform on instruments generously on loan from the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank. Christopher performs on a 1900 Stefano Scarampella violin and Kumiko performs on an 1820 Joannes Franciscus Pressenda violin.

Christopher Whitley

Canadian violinist Christopher Whitley is an engaging and versatile performer. From Baroque to electronic music, Christopher is committed to exploring and performing music of all styles.

An avid proponent of contemporary music, Christopher actively performs and commissions works from new and established composers. His debut solo album, DESCRIBE YOURSELF, features newly commissioned works by Nicole Lizée, Kara-Lis Coverdale, Fjóla Evans, Leslie Ting, and Evan J. Cartwright. Christopher is the violinist, guitarist, and arranger for Colour of Anyhow, a multi-instrumental duo founded in 2020 with Kumiko Sakamoto. He has performed on period instruments at the Boston Early Music Festival, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, and the Valley of the Moon Music Festival. During his time in the Bay Area, Christopher was a regular guest of San Francisco jazz group Le Jazz Hot, performing music inspired by Stephane Grappelli and Django Reinhardt.

As a composer, Christopher has explored a variety of methods and mediums, over a body of work that incorporates acoustic improvisation, electronic processing, and multimedia experimentation. He has released four albums of original compositions and has been invited to create new works at residencies at the Banff Centre and at the Britten Pears Young Artist Program in Aldeburgh, UK. Christopher writes and releases songs as Body Surfer.

Christopher received his Bachelor's of music at McGill University studying with Mark Fewer and continued his studies at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music with Ian Swensen.

In his spare time, he can be found at record stores, libraries and coffee shops and does whatever he can to get into a canoe.

Kumiko Sakamoto

Born in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Kumiko Sakamoto is a devoted performer, chamber musician, and pedagogue. Her commitment to fostering human connection through art has led Kumiko to pursue a richly diverse career as a violinist, vocalist, and advocate. She is dedicated to sharing the power of music with audiences around the world.

A passionate collaborator, Kumiko has performed alongside members of the Emerson, Kronos, St. Lawrence, Brentano and Borromeo quartets, as well as Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Caroline Shaw, Eighth Blackbird, Leila Josefowicz, Lawrence Power, and the Joe Goode Performance Group. As a founding member of the Thalea String Quartet, Kumiko has performed across North America, Europe, and China, including performances at Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and Massey Hall. The quartet's commitment to community engagement has led Kumiko to develop a variety of unique educational projects, including virtual teaching residencies, and a strings program for young people with special sensory needs. As a dedicated educator, Kumiko is committed to fostering creativity, health, and well-being amongst musicians of all ages.

Kumiko is an award-winning solo artist, and has performed across France, Italy, and Poland, including performances at La Fenice in Venice, and St. Sulpice in Paris. Her debut album, featuring the first recordings of the works of composer Gino Gorini, was released under the Tactus (Naxos) label in 2015.

Kumiko's love for musical theater, art song, and choral music led her to pursue conservatory training as a coloratura soprano. During her time in San Francisco, she was a member of the Grammy award winning San Francisco Symphony Chorus.

A dancer for most of her life, Kumiko still enjoys attending ballet classes in her spare time, as well as cooking healthy meals and baking for her friends and family. She is a dedicated advocate for social justice, health, and food awareness.

Lauren Spaulding

Lauren Spaulding, under the alias of @MonochromeViola, has established herself as a rising genre-defying soloist and chamber musician through her "anonymous practice blog" on Instagram. Spaulding, a Texas native, studied under the tutelage of Professor Peter Slowik at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Geraldine Walther of the Takács Quartet, Erika Eckerts, Roger Tapping of the Juilliard String Quartet, and Katherine Murdock.

Spaulding is the co-founder of the Tallā Rouge Viola Duo (www.tallarouge.com) with fellow violist Aria Cheregosha. Tallā Rouge, a Cajun & Persian viola duo, inspires composers from around the world to explore the virtuosity and beauty of the unusual instrument pairing across

genres. Tallā Rouge is the Ensemble-in-Residence for 2023 —2024 at Dumbarton Oaks, a Harvard Research Institute in Georgetown, DC.

Beyond her involvement with Thalea String Quartet and Tallā Rouge, Spaulding is a sought after collaborator, performing alongside Nobuko Imai, Carolin Widmann, Lawrence Lesser, Jorja Fleezanis, and members of the London Haydn Quartet and Imani Winds. Lauren is a member of Meredith Monk's contemporary performance ensemble, an award-winning studio recording artist, and Principal Violist and Festival Artist of the Colorado MahlerFest.

Driven by the belief that "good music is good music," Spaulding harnesses her passion for genre-bending performances to challenge societal perceptions of classical music. She is a staunch advocate for composers of all genders, identities, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Having personally navigated the hurdles of learning disabilities and embracing her queer identity during her formative years, Spaulding possesses a deep-seated commitment to inspiring young neurodivergent and LGBTQ+ musicians to pursue their artistic aspirations. Spaulding's unwavering dedication to social advocacy through music earned her the esteemed privilege of performing at the White House in 2012. As a "Champion of Change," she was recognized by President Obama for her contributions in using music as a catalyst for positive social transformation.

When Lauren isn't on an airplane (playing Pokémon), in rehearsal, or performing, she loves hanging in the sun, exploring new cities, and learning new skills! Always full of exciting projects, Lauren is often unable to sit idle during the day, but you can sometimes find her relaxing in the evenings while cuddling with her cat Pyrite, drinking coffee, and watching scary movies!

Alex Cox

Cellist Alex Cox was born into a Cuban American family who had never seen a cello before the fateful day that he lugged one home from school. Having sawed away at the violin for a year prior, his parents were delighted at the more favorable low pitches that squeaked from the other room after some homecooked arroz con pollo. Soon after, the clamor subsided, and the cello became the preferred voice in a family of loud extroverts.

Alex's early studies were with the late Orlando Cole. He later earned degrees at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Juilliard School, and New England Conservatory, studying with Melissa Kraut, Timothy Eddy, Paul Katz and Laurence Lesser.

He co-founded the Omer Quartet with friends while studying in Cleveland, which ignited his passion for shared discovery and the quartet repertoire. They went on to win international competitions, including the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, Young Concert Artists International Audition, Premio Paolo Borciani Competition (Italy), and Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition (Norway), as well as holding residencies at the New England

Conservatory, University of Maryland and Yale University. Subsequently, the group concertized throughout North and South America as well as Europe and developed performances for incarcerated populations in the mid-Atlantic as well as a series of concerts benefitting local food pantries in the DC-Metro area.

During the pandemic, the group amicably ended their near-decade-long adventure together. Nowadays, you can find Alex in a concert performing in the Philly/NYC area or a cafe working feverishly on his laptop, trying to help bring greater efficiency to the clinical trial review process as a software engineer.