



LEI LIANG

STRING QUARTETS: LIVE

BRENTANO QUARTET • JACK QUARTET • FORMOSA QUARTET • MIVOS QUARTET



Lei Liang • String Quartets: Live

- 1 Lamento della ninfa (2024)** 6:04
Claudio Monteverdi, arranged by Lei Liang
Brentano Quartet
- 2 Gobi Gloria (2006)** 11:06
JACK Quartet
- 3 Song Recollections (2016)** 22:17
Formosa Quartet
- 4 Serashi Fragments (2005)** 7:09
Mivos Quartet
- 5 Madrigal Mongolia (2024)** 18:41
Brentano Quartet

Total Time: 66:17

Notes

“**Lamento della ninfa**” (“The Nymph’s Lament”) is from Monteverdi’s Madrigals Book VIII. It is structured as a dialogue between a lamenting nymph and a trio of male voices who commiserates with her sorrow. In 1636, Monteverdi wrote:

The way to perform the present vocal piece: the three voice parts to be sung before and after the Lament of the Nymph have been kept separate because they are sung to the beaten time (“to the time of the hand”). The other three parts, which softly commiserate with the Nymph, have been printed in score, so that they accompany her lament, which must be sung in time with the emotions of the mind and not in time with the hand.

Claudio Monteverdi is one of my musical heroes and an ultimate experimentalist. I was particularly taken when I visited the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice, seeing fresh flowers brought to his tomb every day.

Gobi Gloria belongs to a series of compositions that grew out of my admiration for Mongolian music. A principal melody is played against its own inversion, retrograde and retrograde-inversion in an otherwise mostly heterophonic texture. The piece alludes to various genres of Mongolian music that include the long-chant, as well as the music of dance and

shaman rituals. It concludes with a rendering of a folk song that I heard during my visit to Nei Monggol region in 1996.

Song Recollections is based on the beautiful folk music of Taiwanese aboriginal tribes, which I fell in love with many years ago. My good friends from Taiwan introduced these songs to me when I was a college student. I was, and still am, amazed by this magical music! My quartet treats each song as a musical ‘landscape’ through which one can ‘travel’. To compose a work is very much like curating a journey for a listener to traverse through the song’s inner terrain and sonic landscape.

Serashi Fragments is a tribute to the Mongolian chor (an ancient two-string fiddle) player Serashi (1887-1968). It is not in any sense an imitation of his performance style or the music of Mongolia, although an allusion appears briefly in the middle of the piece. In this work, the notes *Sol*, *La* and *Si* appear in various forms as musical inscriptions of the artist’s name.

Serashi Fragments was first performed by the Arditti Quartet (Irvine Arditti, Ashot Sarkissjan, Ralf Ehlers, Lucas Fels) on April 2nd, 2006 in Paine Hall, Cambridge MA. It received the University Composition Prize—The George Arthur Knight Prize—from Harvard University.

Madrigal Mongolia sprang from a musical and spiritual heritage that has a special place in my heart—the music of Inner Mongolia. I have loved this music since my childhood. One of my family’s closest friends, the renowned Mongolian scholar Wulalji, visited our home in Beijing frequently. With a sip of alcohol, he would start singing, sometimes continuing late into the night. These personal memories date to the years after the Cultural Revolution, when obnoxiously cheerful propaganda music flooded the airwaves. Yet it was these lonely long songs that evoked in me a deep sense of longing and awakening.

The Mongols were the world’s most feared conquerors, yet the music they sing today is not martial in character. Quite the contrary, they sing of a mother’s devotion, friendship, loss of loved ones, and homeland. Their melancholy sentiments are understandable, for the warriors were always far from home. These songs remind us of what it means to be away.

Aren’t we all living far away from “home” today?

Madrigal Mongolia was commissioned by the Brentano Quartet who worked closely with Professor Chou Wen-chung, who once told me these inspiring words about the cultural heritage of our home: “In calligraphy, every stroke has emotion. Here, lines become waves and textures.” *Madrigal Mongolia* was written in memory of him.

Madrigal Mongolia was commissioned by the Spiralis Music Trust in honor of Chou Wen-chung, ProtoStar Group, Salt Bay Chamberfest with Richard Replin and Elissa Stein, and Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts for the Brentano Quartet.

—Lei Liang

Lei Liang is the winner of the Rome Prize, the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Koussevitzky Foundation Commission, a Creative Capital Award, and the Goddard Lieberman Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His concerto *Xiaoxiang* for saxophone and orchestra was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 2015. His orchestral work, *A Thousand Mountains, A Million Streams*, won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition in 2021.

Lei Liang was commissioned by the New York Philharmonic, the Fromm Music Foundation, Meet the Composer, Chamber Music America, among others. Lei Liang’s sixteen portrait albums are released on prestigious labels. He authored and edited ten books and published more than sixty articles. As a musicologist, Lei Liang leads projects that help preserve the music of the Mongolian *choor* (two-stringed fiddle) and *uttin duur* (long song), the Qing dynasty literati *sanxian* (three-stringed plucked instrument), and Peking Opera.

From 2013-2016, Lei Liang served as Composer-in-Residence at the Qualcomm Institute where his multimedia works preserve and reimagine cultural heritage through combining scientific research and advanced technology. In 2023, the Institute launched “Lei Lab” where he continues to collaborate with engineers, geologists, oceanographers and software developers, to explore what he calls “the unique potential for learning offered by creative listening.” He was the featured TEDx Talk speaker on “Tipping Points” in 2025.

Lei Liang received degrees from the New England Conservatory of Music (B.M. and M.M.) and Harvard University

(Ph.D.). He is Chancellor's Distinguished Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego. His catalogue of more than a hundred works is published exclusively by Schott Music Corporation (New York). lei-liang.com

The **Brentano String Quartet** is one of the preeminent chamber ensembles of its generation, acclaimed for its rich sound, profound interpretations, and stylistic versatility. Formed in 1992, the quartet includes violinists Mark Steinberg and Serena Canin, violist Misha Amory, and cellist Nina Lee. They have performed on major stages around the world, including Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, and the Library of Congress. Winners of the Naumburg Chamber Music Award and the inaugural Cleveland Quartet Award, the Brentano Quartet has earned praise for both classical repertoire and adventurous new works. They have commissioned pieces by composers such as Lei Liang, Vijay Iyer, and Steven Mackey. Currently the ensemble-in-residence at the Yale School of Music, they previously held a long-term residency at Princeton University. With a deep commitment to education and artistic exploration, the Brentano String Quartet continues to engage audiences with performances that are intellectually rigorous, emotionally rich, and musically compelling.

brentanoquartet.com

Hailed for their “spellbinding virtuosity” (BBC Music Magazine), the **Formosa Quartet** is committed to an insatiable search for the fresh and new in string quartet expression that goes “beyond the beautiful and into the territory of unexpectedly thrilling” (MUSO Magazine). Since winning the 1st Prize and Amadeus Prize at the 10th Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, the Formosa Quartet has

sustained a vibrant career celebrating the string quartet as a vehicle for advocacy, storytelling, reinvention, and innovation. From major concert halls including the Smithsonian, Taipei's National Concert Hall, and the Berliner Philharmonie to K-12 schools around the country, the Formosa Quartet's “brilliant energy and carefully detailed authenticity” (*Sequenza21*) can be heard in their uncompromisingly exploratory approach to the standard and modern string quartet literature including commissions, unique sets curated from its collection of folk, pop, jazz, and poetry arrangements; and the socio-culturally probing American Mirror Project. formosaquartet.com

Comprising violinists Christopher Otto and Austin Wulliman, violist John Pickford Richards, and cellist Jay Campbell, **JACK Quartet** is a pioneering string quartet synchronized in their mission to create an international community through transformative, mind-broadening experiences and close listening. Founded in 2005, JACK Quartet has both self-commissioned and been commissioned to create new works with artists such as Philip Glass, Georg Friedrich Haas, Liza Lim, Caroline Shaw, and John Zorn, with upcoming and recent premieres by John Luther Adams, Ellen Fullman, Catherine Lamb, George Lewis, Gabriella Smith, and Tyshawn Sorey. JACK Quartet has performed to critical acclaim at venues such as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Library of Congress, Berlin Philharmonie, BBC Proms, Philharmonie de Paris, La Biennale di Venezia, Sydney Opera House, Bali Arts Festival, and Festival Internacional Cervantino. JACK Quartet makes their home in New York City, where they are the Quartet-in-Residence at the Mannes School of Music at The New School.

jackquartet.com

The **Mivos Quartet** is a cutting-edge string quartet devoted to performing and commissioning contemporary music. Founded in 2008, the quartet is known for its fearless interpretations and technical brilliance. Mivos collaborates with a wide range of composers, from emerging voices to established figures like Helmut Lachenmann, Sam Pluta, and George Lewis. The quartet has performed at major festivals and venues worldwide, including the Lucerne Festival, Wien Modern, and the Kennedy Center, and is recognized for its commitment to new music across genres, including electronics, improvisation, and multimedia work. Mivos also prioritizes education, working closely with young composers through workshops and residencies at institutions such as Harvard, Columbia, and UC San Diego. Through bold programming and a dedication to artistic experimentation, the Mivos Quartet has established itself as a leading force in the evolution of the contemporary string quartet.

mivosquartet.com

CREDITS

Performance Dates:

Brentano Quartet, *Lamento della ninfa, Madrigal Mongolia*,
February 28, 2025

Formosa Quartet, *Song Recollections*, April 20, 2016

JACK Quartet, *Gobi Gloria*, February 13, 2013

Mivos Quartet, *Serashi* Fragments, October 12, 2016

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