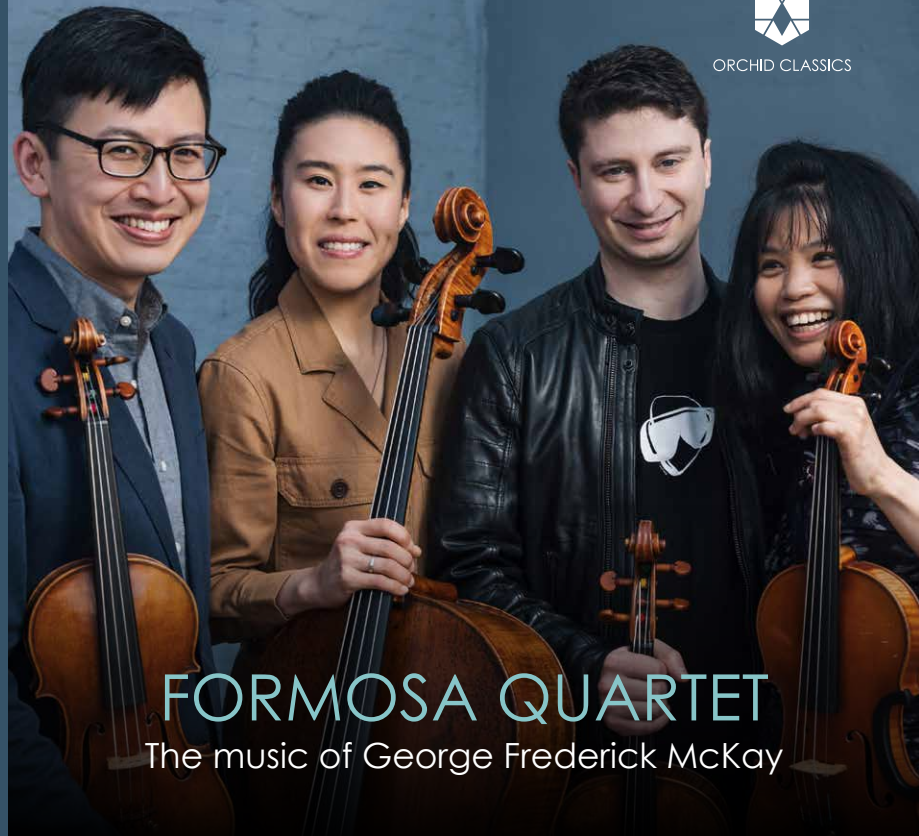




ORCHID CLASSICS



# FORMOSA QUARTET

The music of George Frederick McKay

ORC100381

## George Frederick McKay (1899-1970)

### Quartet No.1 "American Sketches"

1 I	Allegro maestoso ed appassionato	8.20
2 II	Andantino lontano	7.49
3 III	Allegro giocoso	5.35

### Quartet No.2 "Appassionato"

4 I	Allegro marcato	4.42
5 II	Moderato espressivo	8.01
6 III	Allegro energico	3.49

### Quartet No.3 "Poem of Life and Death"

7 I	Moderato poetico	8.22
8 II	Allegretto grazioso	4.11
9 III	Adagio espressivo	5.17
10 IV	Allegro vigoroso	4.55

### Quartet No.4 "Misteri Del Balboa"

11 I	Energico molto e marcato	4.38
12 II	Andantino lontano e mistico	6.42
13 III	Allegro, scherzoso, molto vigoroso	3.43

### Total time

**76.05**

Formosa Quartet

Jasmine Lin, *violin\**

Wayne Lee, *violin\*\**

Matthew Cohen, *viola*

Deborah Pae, *cello*

*\*first violin: quartets 1 & 2*

*\*\*first violin: quartets 3 & 4*

George Frederick McKay, known as the "Dean of Northwest Composers" and revered as Professor of Music at the University of Washington for 41 years (1927-1968), was born to a pioneering family in the small wheat-farming community of Harrington, Washington on June 11, 1899. McKay spent most of his childhood in Spokane where his father, Frederick, was employed as a farmland surveyor for a local bank. McKay began composing orchestral music as early as his high school years, but as his father did not approve of a career in music, McKay senior encouraged his son to enroll at Washington State College in Pullman to earn a business degree. In 1919 McKay grew weary of accounting courses at Pullman and transferred to the University of Washington, where he began seriously studying music and composition with composer Carl Paige Wood. After two years in Seattle, McKay obtained a scholarship to study composition with Christian Sinding and Selim Palmgren at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, earning the first composition degree awarded there and writing his first published compositions during this time.

Following McKay's graduation from Eastman in 1923, he embarked upon a teaching career that included posts in North Carolina, South Dakota, and Missouri and finally at the University of Washington. As an active mid-century composer, he became both professionally and socially connected with John Cage, Heitor Villa-Lobos, Carlos Chavez, Sir Thomas Beecham, Arthur Benjamin, George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Quincy Porter, Morton Gould, Bela Bartok, Leopold Stokowski, William Grant Still and countless others. His orchestral works were widely performed and broadcast by Stokowski, Beecham, Benjamin, Fabien Sevitsky, Milton Katims, Howard Hanson, Carmen Dragon, Frederick Fennell, and Arthur Fiedler.

Among many significant performances of his works were the 1946 premiere of "From A Moonlit Ceremony" by Stokowski and the Hollywood Bowl Symphony, and the premiere of McKay's tribute to Abraham Lincoln, "To A Liberator", for orchestra and chorus, with Fabien Sevitsky and the Indianapolis Symphony,

which was broadcast worldwide during the early days of WW II. McKay, also a professional caliber violinist and violist, was a frequent conductor of his own symphonic works, notably with the Seattle Symphony and the CBR Radio Symphony in Vancouver, B.C.

He was the recipient of many honors during his lifetime, twice holding the Alchin Chair at the University of Southern California (also held by Arnold Schoenberg and Howard Hanson). He received important commissions from major American orchestras, including the Indianapolis Symphony and the Seattle Symphony, and garnered national prizes for harp, woodwind, piano, organ, symphonic compositions. In 1941 his Violin Concerto received a prize in a competition created by Jascha Heifetz to identify the best contemporary American violin concertos.

Self-described as "the man who loves energy and movement," and coincidentally a passionate athlete, there was always for him a fascination with the physicality of dance as related to music. In fact, McKay collaborated with (the then incarcerated) Henry Cowell, John Cage and progressive dance legend Bonnie Bird in generating musical material for Bird's notable "Hilarious Dance Concert" of 1939 with Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts dance troupe, an avant-garde affair with Jean Cocteau's "Marriage at the Eiffel Tower" as its centerpiece and Merce Cunningham as a featured dancer. He continued his involvement with works for dance with Bird in the 1940's with works including "Dance Suite No.2", now recorded by Pulitzer Prize winning composer and former student William Bolcom.

McKay was equally successful as a teacher and in addition to Bolcom, Earl Robinson, John Cage and Goddard Lieberson numbered among his students. McKay is the author of several music theory books and scholarly articles including *Creative Orchestration*, *Creative Harmony and Processes* and *Prototypes for Composers* (referencing Beethoven's works), which are still in circulation today.

George Frederick McKay's string quartets occupy a most prominent place in his oeuvre. In fact, McKay said that he preferred composing string quartets above

all other forms. According to his son Fred, McKay kept a notebook for at least ten years from the early days of his career with sketches of nascent quartets and quartet concepts. The works on this recording fall into three distinct periods of McKay's compositional life. No.1 is from 1935, receiving a national broadcast performance on NBC radio by the Kreiner Quartet (Sylvan Shulman, 1<sup>st</sup> vln, Josef Gingold, 2nd vln, Edward Kreiner, viola, Alan Shulman, cello). No.2 is from 1937 and was premiered later by the Philadelphia String Quartet while they were in residence at the University. No.3 was composed at Balboa Island, California in 1950, and has alternative titles of "Sinfonia Romantica" or "Poem of Life and Death" (reminiscences of cherished youthful times and the oncoming passage of time). As he was frequently looking to increase the public exposure of his music, McKay considered this piece to be adaptable for arrangement and performance as a string orchestra composition. No.4 was also from the Balboa Island period in 1950, a time interspersed with travels throughout the Southwest. The actual writing was done during only four days, but the basic thematic material had been growing in the previously mentioned notebook and was presumably part of his subconscious for more than ten years. Quartet No.4 is as well alternatively scored as a string orchestra piece called "Music for Strings", which was performed by the Seattle Symphony, with Milton Katims conducting.

With his notebook as his companion, McKay composed his quartets reflecting upon several decades of life among an ever-changing series of events in world history, including the Great Depression, World War 2, the dawning of the Atomic Age, the advent of television and the overlapping musical schools and styles of the mid 20th century. His music reflects deep meditation, dance motifs from the American scene, the spirit of the American West and the discipline of a man who believed composing music to be inextricably linked to everyday life, once stating in a news interview that "art is part of living".

McKay died in 1970 in Lake Tahoe, Nevada.



## Formosa Quartet

Winners of the First Prize and Amadeus Prize at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, the Formosa Quartet has been hailed as “spellbinding” (The Strad) and “remarkably fine” (Gramophone), and has given critically acclaimed performances at the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian, the Da Camera Society of Los Angeles, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center, the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Wigmore Hall in London, die Glocke Bremen, and the Kammermusiksaal at the Berliner Philharmonie.

For two decades and counting, the Formosa Quartet has forged uncharted musical terrain in performances that go “beyond the beautiful and into the territory of unexpectedly thrilling... like shots of pure espresso” (MUSO Magazine). The founding members' interest in championing Taiwanese music and Indigenous cultures has since expanded to include the exploration of the rich folk traditions and heritages found in America today. Whether in its uncompromisingly exploratory approach to the standard quartet literature; its socioculturally probing American Mirror program concept; or its unique Sets curated from its collection of folk, pop, jazz, and poetry arrangements, the Formosa Quartet is committed to an insatiable search for the fresh and new in string quartet expression.

The Formosa Quartet undertakes a variety of residencies at organizations and institutions across North America and Asia. The ensemble serves as the Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music, Faculty Resident Ensemble at the National Youth Orchestra of Canada (NYOC) and has enjoyed residencies at Art of Élan; Rice University, University of California, Los Angeles; University of California, San Diego; San Diego State University, and Heidelberg University. During the 2023-2024 season, they held the M. Thelma McAndless Distinguished Professor Chair in the Humanities at Eastern Michigan University where they launched their *American Mirror Project*, a collaborative initiative that holds up mirrors and highlights personal reflections on the history, identity, and meaning of “America” through a thought-provoking exploration of American music.

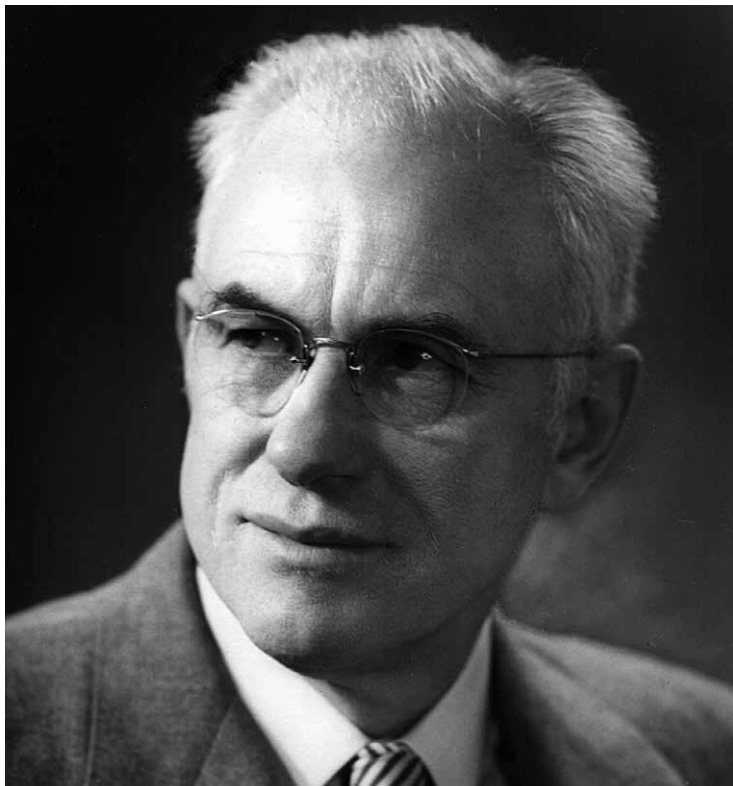
The Formosa Quartet has played a leading role in actively commissioning new works, contributing significantly to the modern string quartet repertory. FQ's 2019 milestone album *From Hungary to Taiwan* includes premiere recordings of three Formosa commissions: Lei Liang's *Song Recollections*, Dana Wilson's *Hungarian Folk Songs*, and Wei-Chieh Lin's *Five Taiwanese Folk Songs*. Other works composed for the quartet include pieces by Dana Wilson, Wei-Chieh Lin, Shih-Hui Chen, and Clancy Newman.

The members of the Formosa Quartet – Jasmine Lin, Wayne Lee, Matthew Cohen, and Deborah Pae – have established themselves as leading solo, chamber, and orchestral musicians. With degrees from the Juilliard School, Curtis Institute of Music, New England Conservatory, Colburn Conservatory, and the Cleveland Institute of Music, they have performed in major venues throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe and have been top prizewinners in prestigious competitions such as the Paganini, Primrose, Fischhoff, and Naumburg competitions. As chamber musicians, they have appeared regularly at the Marlboro,

Kingston, Santa Fe, and Ravinia festivals, as well as at Lincoln Center, La Jolla Summerfest, Caramoor, and Chamber Music Northwest. The members of the Formosa Quartet currently serve on faculty at Eastern Michigan University, Roosevelt University, and Heifetz International Music Institute. They have previously taught at the Taos School of Music and the Juilliard School.

Formed in 2002 when the four Taiwanese-descended founders came together for a concert tour of Taiwan, the Formosa Quartet's cultural identity has since expanded to include broader American, pan-Asian, and Eastern European roots. Their name “Formosa” is taken in its most basic sense: Portuguese for “beautiful.”

The Formosa Quartet forms an octet with violins Andrea Guarneri (1662) and Joseph Curtin (2001), a Peter Westerlund viola (2014), and a Vincenzo Postiglione cello (1885).



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Immersive producer: David Sabee

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