

# FOR FOUR

Bellevue String Quartet



## Introduction by Alison Luthmers

For our debut album, we wanted to create something that gets right to the heart of who we are as a quartet. Beyond being just a string quartet, we play on period instruments and are passionate about the unique sound world created by gut strings and early bows. We are curious about all music for four voices, including music composed before the classical era, which is generally considered the beginning of the string quartet.

Johann Sebastian Bach's monumental *The Art of Fugue* became the starting point for a program which explores music for four voices beyond the traditional string quartet repertoire. Our explorations led us to four-part consort music of the 17th century. Though five-part writing is the most common setting for both vocal and instrumental music pre-1700, there are gems for four voices as well, such as Henry Purcell's *Fantasias* and Matthew Locke's *Consort of Four Parts*. Although it may not be an obvious choice to combine English music with J.S. Bach, our violinist Hannah Tibell had a strong feeling that these two musical worlds would make sense together stylistically. As we developed the program we were struck by how approaching J.S. Bach from the perspective of the consort music of his predecessors transforms the way we hear his four-part writing. The distinctness and individuality of the counterpoint comes alive in ways we had never experienced before.

The word *fugue* is derived from the Latin *fuga*, meaning both "to chase" and "to flee." Our four voices take on different roles, imitating, interrupting, conversing, arguing, posing questions and responding to each other. Sometimes the questions are unanswerable, such as in J.S. Bach's *Fuga a 3*

*Soggetti* (Contrapunctus 14). This fugue ends abruptly in the middle of a phrase. The autograph manuscript contains a hand-written note by J.S. Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: "While working on this fugue, which introduces the name BACH [for which the English notation would be B♭–A–C–B♮] in the countersubject, the composer died." In other pieces, such as William Byrd's *In Nomine,* the four voices have more defined roles. The second voice provides a singing *cantus firmus*, in this case a famous plainchant melody from the 16th century, while the other three lines fill out the texture with shadowy polyphonic counterpoint.

With J.S. Bach's fugues as the central axis of the program, we wanted to balance the earlier repertoire with music of our time in order to explore how



Page from J.S. Bach's *Contrapunctus 14*

J.S. Bach still inspires composers today. Composer Guido Morini writes: "The *Compianto di Didone* is the only instrumental piece in the opera *Dido, Regina di Cartagine*, composed in 2023. It is a moment of meditation placed between the protagonist's death and the funeral ode that concludes the opera. The form is that of the 18th-century fugue, but constructed on a twelve-tone subject that touches all the keys in an ascending spiral, symbolizing the movement of the soul abandoning its mortal coil." In contrast, our commissioned work *For Four* by Hanna Blomberg plays with the dance rhythms of Swedish folk music, inviting us to explore the unlimited possibilities of the string quartet.

Individuality is a characteristic that we value in our ensemble. Just as in society, where all of our unique differences give strength to our community and all voices deserve to be heard, we find that having four distinct musical voices creates the most interesting sound as a whole. As human beings we are always searching for a balance between standing out and conforming, being an individual and part of a collective. Our recording plays with these dichotomies in an explicit way, by reducing to a single voice in Johann Schop's *Lachrimae Pavan* and adding one voice at a time, until we return to the full four-voice setting in the Anonymous *Pavan*.

When we perform the program we sit in a circle in the middle of the room, with the audience seated around us, the lights dimmed and just the music stand lamps to illuminate the scene. This intimate setting places the music at the heart of the experience, creating a space for reflection, drawing the audience into all the drama, liveliness and connection that this music creates between the four of us. Every performance of *FOR FOUR* feels like a journey. With this recording we are thrilled to be able to take you along with us.

Painting by Lars Erik Blomberg, father of the composer and inspiration for the piece *For Four*





## On *For Four* by composer Hanna Blomberg

*For Four* came about following a commission to write a piece for the concert program *FOR FOUR*. From the very beginning, the title itself became a clear point of departure in the compositional process. The number four permeates the entire work, serving as inspiration, concept, and structural framework.

The piece is written for four instruments, with each part functioning as an independent voice, possessing its own character and direction. The voices intertwine, drift apart, and meet again.

The instruments' four strings have, for example, inspired passages in which arpeggios are built across the strings. The music also moves through changing time signatures, where the rhythm is sometimes perceived as stable and at other times more unsettled.

An important source of inspiration has been Swedish folk music. Folklike and dance-inspired elements are present throughout the work, not as direct quotations but rather as an atmosphere or a feeling. This can be heard in the rhythmic figures, the phrasing, the quarter tones, and the way the melodies emerge and develop.

In *For Four*, I explore the balance between the individual and the collective, between structure and freedom, and between the predictable and the unexpected.

PHOTO BY AIJA SVENSSON

**Guido Morini** (born in Milan, 1959) is an Italian organist, harpsichordist, conductor and composer whose creative language grows directly from historical performance. A specialist in basso continuo and improvisation, he co-founded Accordone with singer Marco Beasley in 1984, developing music that joins Renaissance and Baroque practices to a contemporary imagination. This background is central to *Compianto di Didone.* Rather than treating counterpoint as an academic exercise, Morini makes its interweaving voices expressive: imitation becomes dialogue, and harmonic tension takes on the character of mourning. Heard within Bellevue String Quartet's *FOR FOUR* programme, beside 17th-century fantasias and movements from J.S. Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, the piece acts as a bridge between early and new music. Its emotional restraint suits the quartet's period instruments, whose transparent textures allow every line to speak. Morini's achievement is to make an old musical language sound personal, theatrical and immediately alive.

TEXT BY LARS HANNIBAL



PHOTO BY CARLO BONAZZA



# The Bellevue String Quartet

## Hannah Tibell, Violin | Alison Luthmers, Violin
## Rastko Roknic, Viola | Judith-Maria Blomsterberg, Cello

The Bellevue String Quartet, based in Malmö, Sweden, was founded by four friends who began meeting regularly to drink coffee and play chamber music together. The quartet engages audiences through their unique, conceptual programs which weave together literature, visual art and music. In order to break down barriers between musicians and audience, the quartet creates an intimate concert environment, both on the international concert stage and in small, non-traditional venues like art galleries and bookstores.

As one of the only period instrument string quartets in Scandinavia, the quartet is a springboard for repertoire ranging from the Renaissance to the present day. They have commissioned new works from Malmö-based composer Hanna Blomberg and Icelandic composer Hugi Guðmundsson. With a passion for interdisciplinary concert experiences, the Bellevue String Quartet has collaborated with haiku poet Birk Andersson on a program that combines haiku with nature-themed string quartets of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Franz Joseph Haydn. The Bellevue String Quartet has worked together with Malmö Konstmuseum to create an interactive musical tour of their permanent collection and has curated a program which combines texts of William Shakespeare with music from Matthew Locke's *The Tempest* and Purcell's *Fairy Queen*. An interest in the intersection between culture and social consciousness led to benefit concerts in support of UNHCR, Doctors Without Borders and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation.

PHOTO BY REINHARD WILTING

**Thore Brinkmann** a German-Norwegian Tonmeister and producer, was born in Germany and studied at the Hochschule für Musik Detmold, specializing in Tonmeister training. Based in Sweden for the past 25 years, he began his career at BIS Records before co-founding Take5 Music Production. Since 2013, he has also served as the sound producer for the Danish National Symphony Orchestra (DR), contributing to over 70 live concerts, including TV broadcasts and concept shows. With a career spanning decades, Thore has produced and engineered over 500 albums for renowned labels such as BIS, Naxos and Dacapo Records. Today, Thore is at the forefront of immersive sound, focusing on Dolby Atmos productions to redefine the listening experience in classical music.

Thore loves collaborating with musicians, guiding them through the creative process of recording with a focus on both the finest details and the broader artistic vision. He works with individual soloists, small ensembles, and full orchestras, embracing repertoire from early baroque to newly composed works within the classical genre. His passion lies in capturing the essence of each performance, helping to bring out its unique character and emotion.

PHOTO BY REINHARD WILTING





PHOTO BY THORE BRINKMANN

Recorded in Borlunda Kyrka, Eslöv, Sweden, January 2026

Recording, editing, mixing and mastering: Thore Brinkmann
Executive producer: Lars Hannibal
Cover notes: Alison Luthmers & Hanna Blomberg
Cover photo: Johnny Teyssier
Artwork: Toke Bjørneboe

Recorded in 24bit 96kHz PCM on Sequoia DAW with RME converters. Monitored on Headphones by Sennheiser and Neumann as well as Speakers by Neumann.
Recorded with Schoeps, Neumann and DPA microphones

Thank you to the foundations that have made this recording possible: Kulturrådet, Konstnärsnämden and Helge Ax:son Johnsons stiftelse. Thank you also to our Crowdfunding supporters! Thanks to Johnny Teyssier and Reinhard Wilting for their wonderful photos, our friends and family for their support and input, and to Tyska Kyrkan Malmö for providing our rehearsal space and home base.



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|---|---|---|
| 1 | Hanna Blomberg (b. 1990): For Four | 5:58 |
| 2 | J.S. Bach (1685-1750): Contrapunctus 1 | 2:58 |
| 3 | Henry Purcell (1659-1695): Fantasia in G Major | 3:26 |
| | **Matthew Locke (c. 1621-1677): Consort of Four Parts no. 3 in F Major** | |
| 4 | I. Fantazia | 3:33 |
| 5 | II. Courante | 1:24 |
| 6 | III. Ayre | 1:59 |
| 7 | IV. Saraband | 0:55 |
| 8 | Henry Purcell: Fantasia in c minor | 4:04 |
| 9 | William Byrd (c. 1540-1623): In Nomine | 2:26 |
| 10 | Johann Schop (c. 1590-1667): Lachrimae Pavan | 1:00 |
| 11 | Thomas Morley (c. 1557-1602): Lamento | 2:55 |
| 12 | Matthew Locke: Fantasia in D Major from The Broken Consort | 1:50 |
| 13 | Anonymous c. 16th century: Pavan | 5:56 |
| 14 | J.S. Bach: Contrapunctus 9 | 2:27 |
| | **Matthew Locke: Consort of Four Parts no. 2 in d minor** | |
| 15 | I. Fantazia | 3:30 |
| 16 | II. Courante | 1:02 |
| 17 | III. Ayre | 1:54 |
| 18 | IV. Saraband | 1:13 |
| 19 | J.S. Bach: Contrapunctus 14 | 7:33 |
| 20 | Guido Morini (b. 1959): Compianto di Didone | 5:28 |
| | Total | 61:36 |

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