



ENIGMA

Movement I 11:16

Movement II 07:54

Movement III 09:14

Total Time: 28:28

This album is the result of a multi-year alchemy between the singular writing of composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir and the playing of three-time GRAMMY nominees Spektral Quartet. The first string quartet composed by Thorvaldsdottir, Enigma is simultaneously colossal and introspective, moving between heart-wrenching chord progressions and the scrapes and clicks of extended string techniques. A piece of profound emotional magnitude, Enigma provokes considerations of our relationship to the vast cosmos that surrounds us – and the infinite universe within.



Anna Thorvaldsdottir



Anna Thorvaldsdottir’s “seemingly boundless textural imagination” (NY Times) and “striking” (Guardian) sound world has made her “one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary music” (NPR). Written as an ecosystem of sounds where materials continuously grow in and out of each other, her music is composed as much by sounds and nuances as by harmonies and lyrical material, and tends to evoke “a sense of place and personality” (NY Times) through a distinctive “combination of power and intimacy” (Gramophone).

Anna’s music is widely performed internationally and has been commissioned by many of the world’s leading orchestras, ensembles, and arts organizations – such as the Berlin Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, International Contemporary Ensemble, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and Carnegie Hall. Among the many other orchestras and ensembles that have performed her music include the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, Münchener Kammerorchester, London Contemporary Orchestra, and Bang on a Can All-Stars. Anna holds a PhD from the University of California, San Diego.

Spektral Quartet

Multi-GRAMMY-award nominees, the Spektral Quartet creates vivid conversations between exhilarating works of the past and the extraordinary works of today. With the New York Times writing that, “they have everything: a supreme technical command that seems to come easily, a capacity to make complicated music clear, and, most notably...an ability to cast a magic spell”, Spektral is regarded as one of the most forward-thinking ensembles working today.

Invited to take the stage at notable venues such as the Kennedy Center, Library of Congress, American Academy in Rome, and NPR’s Tiny Desk Concerts, the quartet is also in demand for residencies at leading music schools around the country including Stanford University, New World Symphony, and Northwestern University. Distinguished by its stylistic versatility, Spektral Quartet is honored to collaborate with artists and community-builders such as Theaster Gates, Miguel Zenón, and Nathalie Joachim, and frequently commissions new work from one-of-a-kind composers including Augusta Read Thomas, Charmaine Lee, and George Lewis.

Named “Chicagoans of the Year 2017” by the Chicago Tribune, Spektral is currently a digital artist-in-residence in collaboration with Afro-Tarab pianist Tarek Yamani at the University of Michigan’s University Musical Society.

Maeve Feinberg, violin
Clara Lyon, violin
Doyle Armbrust, viola
Russell Rolen, cello

If you would, coax your mind back to a time when you believed ducking your head beneath the covers was ample defense against the bogeyman. Do you remember, in the haze of half-sleep, seeing something or someone in your room that didn’t belong? As you breathlessly flicked on the light, you were relieved to find it was only a chair lopsided with laundry, or a vacuum propped against the doorframe. That faint halo of light, surrounding this once sinister and now innocuous object, that is the penumbra – that permeable border between light and dark. This is the space where *Enigma* lives.

We’ve all been living in an in-between of sorts for the last year, haven’t we? Nothing quite as poetic as the blend of blinding light and unfathomable dark one encounters with an eclipse, an early touchstone for this composition it is worth noting. But we’ve done quite a bit of living in the grey area, which is maybe broader than we thought. The thing is, traveling to Virginia to record this album was in some ways the first glint of hope on the horizon...well...that there was still a horizon.

Cut to us loading up a rental van with instruments and gummy bears and hurtling 640-odd miles southeast. So much had led up to this point.

We had managed to magically edge onto Anna Thorvaldsdottir's commission schedule before, say, the Berlin Philharmonic, and collaborated with video artist Sigurdur Gudjonsson to create a 360-degree immersive film magnifying her music, and partnered with the Adler Planetarium in Chicago to kick off what we hoped would be the 2020/21 Spektral Quartet National Planetarium Tour, and won a substantial award through the Music Academy of the West to reimagine the project in the virtual reality realm, and persuaded Carnegie Hall and Washington Performing Arts to not only be our co-commissioners, but to book the project as our Carnegie and WPA debuts. *Enigma* was then, and is now, a monumental leap forward for us in innumerable ways.

But back to gas station coffee and the perils of terrestrial radio, our van eventually pulled up to the charming stone church that is the Sono Luminus studio. What a homecoming, to be greeted at the door by engineer and surround-sound black-belt Daniel Shores, hear the reassuring voice of producer Dan Merceruo over the talk-box, and be set up with rooms at a literal farm with literal horses by CEO Collin Rae, Anna's unrivaled US evangelist who created a zealot by mailing me her debut album in 2011.

Now, to pivot from travelogue to the music.

The most striking element of Anna's music, if I may be so bold, is how immense it sounds, irrespective of the number of players. It is somehow devastatingly personal and profoundly expansive at the same time. This is music without an overt lineage...it is something entirely her own. It is music for staring out the window at cold rain, confronting a contemplative, unhurried dusk. It takes almost no effort, whether in a live or recorded setting, to fold inwards and watch your concerns and the audience around you evaporate from your consciousness.

I'll be spare with the commentary because this music is about *your* trip, not mine. That said, maybe keep your mind's ear open to the dichotomy of desiccated bow clicks and sweeps and the rich, sonorous journey of the chorale-like writing. Each is only truly recognizable by contrast, and each infiltrates the other in ways that transform the setting from a concert hall to a garden of the gods. There are moments that will pull you back to earth, but what you will ultimately be met with is the emancipating and terrible truth that our lives ultimately reside somewhere in the borderlands of light and dark.

You may have an entirely different experience. We hope so. The penumbra is about seemingly contradictory elements being true, simultaneously. What we offer you here is the chance to embrace your own variation of the in-between.

– Doyle Armbrust

Gratitude & Acknowledgements

Spektral Quartet would like to name yet-to-be-discovered galaxies after:
Our co-commissioners Carnegie Hall & Washington Performing Arts //
The singular and brilliant Anna Thorvaldsdottir // The mesmeric video
art of Sigurdur Gudjonsson // The irreplaceable trio at Sono Luminus:
Collin Rae & Daniel Shores & Josh Frey // Our producer-cum-therapist
Dan Merceruio // Our fellow science nerds at the Adler Planetarium //
Our enduringly supportive spouses & partners & families // The mystical
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exceedingly valiant Board of Directors // All Haribo brand gummy treats
// All our Wolfdogs & Narlugas & Wholphins & Grolar Bears & Ligers //
Science & Dr. Anthony Fauci

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Merging Technologies Hapi. Recorded in DXD at 24 bit, 352.8kHz in Native
7.1.4



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legacyaudio.com



DSL-92250

Producer: Dan Merceruio
Recording, Mixing & Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores
Editing Engineer: Dan Merceruio
Assistant Engineer: Joshua Frey
Photography: Hrafn Asgeirsson (Sleeve, Cover, p. 3), Jocelyn
Chuang (Spektral Quartet), Anna Maggy (Anna Portrait), Collin J.
Rae (Booklet Background Art)
Liner Notes: Doyle Armbrust
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