

PROGRAM NOTES BY GEORG FRIEDRICH HAAS

String Quartet No. 9

GEORG FRIEDRICH HAAS

b. August 16, 1953; Graz, Austria

Premiere

November 12, 2016; at Wiener Konzerthaus in Vienna, Austria, by the JACK Quartet

Performance Time

50 minutes



Fifteen years ago, I composed my Third String Quartet (*In iij. Noct.*), which requires performance in complete darkness.

It seemed to be a risky, dangerous experiment to write a piece with a 45-minute minimum duration, which has to be memorized and performed without any visual cues or communication. But it worked – quite a few talented ensembles performed it, and they enjoyed the experience.

I did not dare to compose the formal structures and developments in that string quartet. I simply presented raw, aural materials and asked the performers to be free to play with the structure; of course, the piece morphs with each performance.

In the meantime, I had several experiences with compositions performed in in darkness. I decided to write another quartet for darkness: my Ninth String Quartet. However, this time, the form is strictly composed. The musical elements and the process by which these are woven together is clearly denoted.

And then, a composer's dream became reality. This string quartet was slated to be performed within one week by two great quartets: JACK and Arditti. I was excited by this wonderful proposition – until I started to write the piece, to work on the details. Composing for darkness is fundamentally different from traditional composing: one does not directly score the piece – one composes a process for individuals, forced to perform in isolation, having only aural contact with their partners.

Arditti and JACK are comprised of different individuals, and I suddenly realized I wanted to honor their differences and write for each of their strengths.

Although I am chronically running on the edge of deadlines and am under immense pressure to complete works in time, I knew I had to write two different string quartets. The Ninth String Quartet is written for the JACK Quartet. My Tenth String Quartet is an homage to the Arditti.

String Quartet No. 9 was commissioned by the Wien Modern, Wiener Konzerthaus, funded by the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation.

—Georg Friedrich Haas
