

# AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE



*“the ensemble gave the punchy, intricate score a tight, viscerally powerful performance” –THE NEW YORK TIMES*



*“such soul, passion, and excellent command” –NPR*

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# AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

In a little more than a decade, led by cellist and artistic director Clarice Jensen, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble (ACME) has risen to the highest ranks of American new music through a mix of meticulous musicianship, artistic vision, engaging collaborations, and unwavering standards in every regard. The membership of the amorphous collective includes some of the brightest young stars in the field. *NPR* calls them “contemporary music dynamos,” and *Strings* reports, “ACME’s absorbing playing pulsed with warm energy... Shared glances and inhales triggered transitions in a flow so seamless it seemed learned in a Jedi temple.” ACME was honored by ASCAP during its 10th anniversary season in 2015 for the “virtuosity, passion, and commitment with which it performs and champions American composers.”

The ensemble has performed at leading international venues including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, BAM, The Kennedy Center, Washington Performing Arts, UCLA’s Royce Hall, Stanford Live, Chicago’s Millennium Park, Duke Performances, The Satellite in Los Angeles, Triple Door in Seattle, Melbourne Recital Hall and Sydney Opera House in Australia, and at festivals including the Sacrum Profanum Festival in Poland, All Tomorrow’s Parties in England, Auckland Arts Festival in New Zealand, Summer Nostos Festival in Greece, Boston Calling, and Big Ears in Knoxville, TN.

World premieres given by ACME include Ingram Marshall’s *Psalmbok*, Jóhann Jóhannsson’s *Drone Mass* (commissioned by ACME in 2015; recorded for Deutsche Grammophon in 2019), Caroline Shaw’s *Ritornello*, Phil Kline’s *Out Cold*, William Brittelle’s *Loving the Chambered Nautilus*, Timo Andres’ *Senior and Thrive on Routine*, Caleb Burhans’ *Jahrzeit*, and many more. In 2016 at The Kitchen, ACME premiered Clarice Jensen’s transcription of Julius Eastman’s *The Holy Presence of Joan d’Arc* for ten cellos, the score of which had been lost since the premiere in 1981. Jensen transcribed a recording of the work to recreate the score.

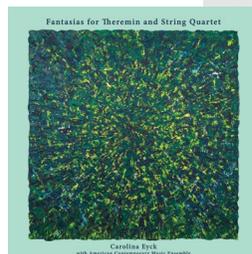
ACME’s collaborators have included The Richard Alston Dance Company, Wayne McGregor’s Random Dance, Gibney Dance, Satellite Ballet, Meredith Monk, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Max Richter, actress

Barbara Sukowa, filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, Blonde Redhead, Grizzly Bear, Low, Matmos, Micachu & The Shapes, Jeff Mangum, A Winged Victory for the Sullen, Roomful of Teeth, Lionheart, and Theo Bleckmann.

In 2017, ACME released its first portrait album on Sono Luminus, featuring music by members Caroline Shaw, Timo Andres, and Caleb Burhans, plus John Luther Adams. The release was featured as Album of the Week on *Q2 Music* and *Gramophone* praised it, reporting, “The ACME players capture the aura of tranquility to hypnotic effect [in the Adams], the repeated patterns in the keyboard instruments contrasted beautifully with the lyrical strings.” *The Strad* raved, “Warmth and care are fully evident in the ensemble’s immaculate, considered performances—the four composers could hardly wish for more committed, convincing accounts of their music.”

ACME’s discography also includes Jóhann Jóhannsson’s *Orphée* and Max Richter’s eight-hour piece, *Sleep* (which the ensemble regularly performs live), both on Deutsche Grammophon; *Fantasias* with thereminist Carolina Eyck on Butterscotch Records; *Joseph Byrd: NYC 1960-63*, the first commercial recording of the music of rediscovered American Fluxus composer Joseph Byrd, on New World Records; William Brittelle’s electro-acoustic chamber work *Loving the Chambered Nautilus*, and Jefferson Friedman’s *On In Love* with vocalist Craig Wedren, both on New Amsterdam Records.

## RECENT RELEASES:



# PROGRAMS

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## The Music of Jóhann Jóhannsson

Jóhann Jóhannsson was an Icelandic composer most widely known for his award-winning film scores for *The Theory of Everything*, *Arrival*, and *Sicario* but equally adept in the concert music world. ACME toured with Jóhannsson from 2009 until his death in 2018, and can be heard on Jóhannsson's 2016 Deutsche Grammophon album *Orphée*. ACME offers two programs of Jóhannsson's spellbinding music – his monumental *Drone Mass* for string quartet, electronics, and vocal ensemble, composed for ACME during the group's 10th anniversary season in 2015; and a program of his chamber music for string quintet, piano, electronics, and small percussion.

### *Drone Mass*

ACME premiered *Drone Mass* at The Met Museum's Temple of Dendur in 2015, and later performed it in Krakow, Poland at the Sacrum Profanum Festival; at the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, TN; at Duke Performances, and at the Summer Nostos Festival in Athens, Greece with acclaimed Copenhagen-based vocal ensemble Theatre of Voices. *Drone Mass* is a 60-minute contemporary oratorio that fuses the sounds of string quartet, electronics and vocals, and is inspired by texts from the Nag Hammadi library, sometimes referred to as the Coptic Gospel of the Egyptians. The piece explores the idea of the drone, both as a musical device but also as the all-seeing, sometimes benevolent and sometimes lethal eyes that pervade our skies. *Rolling Stone* declared, "*Drone Mass* ... seems designed to tug at modern heartstrings. It has the glacial drama of minimalism, the familiar harmonies of church music, the keening drama of pop, the deep digital rumble of modern cinema – all in movements that feel about the length of a rock song ... the piece made it difficult not to adhere to the unwritten, long-held orchestra rule of not applauding until the end. But after a movement where a vocal drone met a cello slide – the satisfying sound of a properly tuned guitar, an effect like a film coming into focus – the boundary was breached and torrents of applause followed."

## The Chamber Music of Jóhann Jóhannsson

In this overview of Jóhannsson's music for small ensemble, ACME traverses his recorded catalog and performs music from his albums *Englabörn*, *IBM 1401*, *Fordlandia*, and *Orphée*. ACME and Artistic Director Clarice Jensen want Jóhannsson's music to live on not only through the film scores for which he is well known, but in the concert hall as well. The group first performed this program in Jóhannsson's memory at (Le) Poisson Rouge in New York in 2018, reprising selections that they played with the composer during their first concert with him – which was his New York debut, at (Le) Poisson Rouge in 2009. *An Earful* reported, "Taken as a whole, the concert was as strong an argument for Jóhannsson's ongoing presence in our musical lives as can be imagined. The performances were superb, exquisitely emotional but also precisely controlled ... As Jóhannsson told David Garland in an interview for *Spinning on Air*, 'I think it's probably something quite visceral which I'm after, something very down in the stomach, in the blood – with the emotions. That's where the music comes from in a way, and that's where great music hits me.' I don't think I'm alone in saying that Jóhannsson's music hits me there, too, so let's keep it circulating."

### *Sleep* by Max Richter

*Sleep* by Max Richter is an 8-hour work intended to send the listener to sleep. ACME recorded *Sleep* with Richter for Deutsche Grammophon and has performed it with him in overnight performances at the Sydney Opera House, Auckland Arts Festival, SXSW, and in New York and Los Angeles. Rather than seats, audience members are provided with beds for a performance lasting from midnight to morning. The landmark work is scored for piano, strings, electronics and vocals – but no words. "It's my personal lullaby for a frenetic world," Richter says. "A manifesto for a slower pace of existence."

*Sleep is booked by Jean-Jacques Cesbron at CAMI Music.*



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## Cracking the Code

### ACME + Third Coast Percussion Music by David T. Little

In *Cracking the Code*, new music superstars ACME and Third Coast Percussion present two major works by leading American composer David T. Little: companion pieces that explore the tension between the individual, secrecy, and state violence. *Haunt of Last Nightfall*, a visceral “ghost play in two acts” for percussion quartet and electronics, examines America’s role in the 1981 massacre at El Mozote, El Salvador. *AGENCY*, for string quartet and electronics, questions individual autonomy, whether we are subject to unknown and powerful social and political forces. When paired together, *The New York Times* described the music as “forthright, visceral, bloody, with the intimacy and polish of a classical chamber ensemble but bulging with the loud, reverberant sweatiness of rock.”

## Resonant Space

Resonant Space is designed to make the most of the concert environment by specializing the sound and creating an immersive concert experience. The concert can be performed in the round, with the audience and performers interspersed, with amplification surrounding the concertgoers, or in other unusual configurations customized to the performance venue. A program can be selected from the following works:

John Luther Adams: *In a Treeless Place, Only Snow* for string quartet, vibraphones, piano, and celeste

Morton Feldman: *Durations II* for cello and piano

Morton Feldman: *Durations IV* for violin, cello, and vibraphone

Philip Glass: String Quartet No. 3 “Mishima”

Philip Glass: String Quartet No. 5

Philip Glass: Dance No. 4 for solo organ

Michael Harrison: *Cello Constellations* for solo cello

Clarice Jensen: *For this from that will be filled (b)* for solo cello

Charlemagne Palestine: *Strumming Music* (graphic score created by Clarice Jensen)

## Frequencies

ACME presents a sonic exploration of both early and recent electronic music, featuring John Cage’s landmark indeterminate work *Fontana Mix* from 1958, performed from his graphic transparencies; plus pioneering electronic-music composer Laurie Spiegel’s 1975 classic *The Expanding Universe* in a new graphic score transcription by Clarice Jensen and Christina Vantzou. Two works for solo cello and electronics complete the program. *bc* was co-composed by Clarice Jensen and the late Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson, and displays the startling effect subtle changes have on conventional elements across many repetitions, employing the simple devices of a two-octave c-major scale and a three-chord loop. In *For this from that will be filled (b)*, also composed by Jensen, drones, long loops, and a field recording from New York’s Grand Central Terminal interweave with acoustic and heavily processed cello, which conjures the sound of machinery. The work contemplates sonic repetition and solicits both meditation and disorientation.

Clarice Jensen: *For this from that will be filled (b)*  
Clarice Jensen and Jóhann Jóhannsson: *bc*  
John Cage: *Fontana Mix*

Laurie Spiegel: *The Expanding Universe*  
(arr. by Clarice Jensen & Christina Vantzou)

## Thrive on Routine

*Thrive on Routine* features works from ACME’s debut portrait album, which was released in spring 2017 on Sono Luminus. *Gramophone* proclaimed the album, “a bounty of appealing recent works,” while *The Strad* reported, “Warmth and care are fully evident in the ensemble’s immaculate, considered performances.” The album highlights ACME’s make up of performers who are also composers, including *Thrive on Routine* by Timo Andres, *Gustave le Gray* for solo piano and *in manus tuas* for solo cello by Caroline Shaw, and Caleb Burhans’ moving tribute to his father, *Jahrzeit* for string quartet. John Luther Adams’ ephemeral *In a Treeless Place, Only Snow* for string quartet, piano, celeste, and two vibraphones completes the program. Each of these works represents music which ACME loves to perform, and is repertoire with which the members have a deep and lasting relationship.

# AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE: THE MUSIC OF JÓHANN JÓHANNSSON

*“The performance was polished and exuberant, and it consistently drew the listener in. . .”* —MUSICAL AMERICA

*“sense of greater force,” “pure, sustained beauty,” “majestic sonic balance”*

—I CARE IF YOU LISTEN



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# ACME + THIRD COAST PERCUSSION CRACKING THE CODE MUSIC BY DAVID T. LITTLE

*“forthright, visceral, bloody”* —THE NEW YORK TIMES



PHOTO BY ROB DAVIDSON

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David T. Little: *Haunt of Last Nightfall*

David T. Little: *AGENCY*



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