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200 word bio

Winners of The American Prize in 2021 for Chamber Music Performance, Ensemble for These Times (E4TT) consists of award-winning soprano and Artistic Executive Director Nanette McGuinness, cellist Abigail Monroe, pianist Margaret Halbig, and Senior Artistic Advisor and SF Conservatory of Music faculty member, composer David Garner. The group focuses on 20th and 21st century music that is relevant, engaging, original and compelling—music that resonates with today and speaks to tomorrow, that harnesses the power of artistic beauty, intelligence, wit, lyricism, and irony to create a deep understanding of our times and the human condition. E4TT performed at the 2016 Krakow Culture Festival, at the *Conservatorio Teresa Berganza* in Madrid in 2017, was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Budapest in 2014 for a four-city tour in Hungary, and made its international debut in Berlin. E4TT has performed locally at the German Consulate General, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Old First Concerts, JCC Peninsula, Trinity Chamber Concerts, and Noontime Concerts, among other venues. E4TT has recorded three CDs, “Surviving: Women’s Words,” “The Hungarians: From Rozsa to Justus,” (both on the Centaur label) and “Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan,” all of which have medaled in the Global Music Awards.

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Recordings

E4TT’s critically acclaimed recording, “Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan” was released in 2020 in honor of the centennial of this seminal 20th century poet, whose writing speaks to his experiences of loss, disempowerment, and survival under a brutal regime and was reviewed in *Textura* as “An imaginatively conceived and curated set.” In *The Whole Note* Raul da Gama wrote, “The Ensemble’s performance is both poised and haunting, and is raised to a rarefied realm by lustrous and soaring, songful recitatives executed by the inimitable Nanette McGuinness.” The CD won a Silver Medal in the Global Music Awards, as did the group’s debut CD, “Surviving: Women’s Words,” released on the Centaur label in 2016. Lesley Mitchell-Clarke in *The Whole Note* wrote “Now more than ever, as the U.S. experiences a déjà vu of hatred and is poised on the brink of societal unravelling, the potent and timeless messages of survival, love, tolerance and forgiveness contained on this brilliant presentation need to resonate throughout the world.” Erin Heisel, at *American Record Guide*, called the CD, “fascinating,” and

“compelling,” with music that is “varied and harmonically interesting.” Grego Applegate Edwards (Gapplegate.com) wrote, “The heartrending words put both darkness and hope in a poetic light. Garner’s music brings out the moods and is extremely well done. Recommended.” E4TT’s second CD, “The Hungarians: From Rózsa to Justus” was released digitally on in 2018 on Centaur Records. Featuring a cello duo by Hollywood movie maven and Hungarian émigré Miklós Rózsa, along with works by three of his compatriots who perished in the Holocaust, the recording won a Gold Medal in the 2018 Global Music Awards.

Full-length bio

Entering our 14th season, Ensemble for These Times (E4TT) is a contemporary music chamber group consisting of award-winning soprano, Artistic Executive Director and co-founder Nanette McGuinness, cellist Abigail Monroe, pianist Margaret Halbig, and 2015 The American Prize winner, composer, Senior Artistic Advisor and co-founder David Garner, plus regular guest artists that include Ilana Blumberg, violin, Laura Reynolds, English horn, Chelsea Hollow, coloratura soprano and other fine guest artists each season. Guest artists in 2020/21 also include Mika Nakamura, Yuchen Liu, and Tin Yi Chelse Wong.

The group won The American Prize for Chamber Music Performance and is a finalist for the Ernst Bacon Memorial Prize for the Performance of American Music in 2021.

Mission

Ensemble for These Times focuses on 20th and 21st century music that is relevant, engaging, original, and compelling, music that resonates today and will speak to tomorrow. E4TT strongly believes in the power of artistic beauty, intelligence, wit, lyricism, and irony to create a deep understanding of our times and the human condition.

History

The ensemble was formed in 2007/2008 when soprano Nanette McGuinness and David Garner met during recording sessions at Skywalker Ranch; it quickly grew to include pianist Dale Tsang and then cellist Anne Lerner. Recent performance highlights include a tour to Madrid, Spain, in Fall 2017 and at the 2016 Krakow Culture Festival in Poland. Past highlights include a four-city tour to Hungary in Fall 2014 as part of the Daniel Pearl World Music Days and sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Budapest; the world premiere of Garner’s Chanson für Morgen in 2011 at Trinity Chamber Concerts, supported in part by a grant from the East Bay Fund for Artists and produced in association with the 26th Jewish Music Festival; the European premiere of Chanson für Morgen in Berlin in 2012, with the Jüdische Gemeinde Berlin, and concerts at the German Consulate General in SF, Old First Concerts, Peninsula JCC, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Trinity Chamber and Noontime Concerts, among others. From its inception, E4TT has had a strong, ongoing commitment to new music by women composers or with texts by women writers, as well as by emerging and less-known composers.

Call for Scores

In E4TT’s first Call for Scores in December 2015-January 2016, the group received 275 scores by 200 composers, choosing 56 by 54 composers for a multi-year performance series entitled 56x54 that ran from 2016-2019. The group also commissioned a number of those composers to write for the group since 2016.

Recordings

E4TT’s debut CD, *Surviving: Women’s Words*, was released on the Centaur label in 2016 and won a Silver Medal in the 2016 Global Music Awards. Writing at Examiner.com, Stephen Smoliar called Mr. Garner’s settings of poetry by Jewish women Holocaust survivors “fascinating,” “passionate,” and “highly compelling;” Erin Heisel of American Record Guide also called it “fascinating,” and “compelling,” and Grego Applegate Edwards reviewed it (at Gapplegate Classical-Modern Review) as, “...extremely well done. Recommended.” Finally, Lesley Mitchell-Clarke wrote (The Whole Note) “Now more than ever, as the U.S. experiences a déjà vu of hatred and is poised on the brink of societal unravelling, the potent and timeless messages of survival, love, tolerance and forgiveness

contained on this brilliant presentation need to resonate throughout the world.”

E4TT’s second recording, "The Hungarians: From Rozsa to Justus" was released on Centaur Records on April 6, 2018 as a digital EP and won a Gold Medal in the 2018 Global Music Awards. The CD consists of music by three Hungarian and one Hungarian-American composers who were exiled or killed in the Holocaust: multiple-Oscar-recipient Miklós Rózsa (1907-1995), Sándor Vándor (1901-1945), Lajos Delej (1923-1945), and György Justus (1898-1945). Featuring duos for cello and piano by Rozsa and Vándor—plus a Scherzo from a missing cello sonata attributed to Delej—songs by Vándor and Justus for soprano and piano, and the premiere recording of a recently rediscovered set of piano miniatures by Delej, the CD is the result of the group’s successful four-city concert tour in Hungary in 2014, which was sponsored by the U.S. Embassy in Budapest.

E4TT's third recording, "Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan," was released on June 30, 2020 in honor of the centennial of the birth of one of the most important post-WWII poets, who greatly influenced 20th Century European literature. Born to a German-speaking Romanian Jewish family, Celan (1920-1970) was profoundly affected by the rise of Nazism. His parents perished in a concentration camp and he barely survived a forced labor camp, only to commit suicide in 1970. His poems—written in German, his mother tongue—speak to his experience of loss, imprisonment, and survival under a brutal regime and the themes in his work—the rise of fascism, "strong men" leaders, and nations marching to the drumbeat of nationalism—deeply resonate today with the global right-wing resurgence. The recording won a Silver Medal in the Global Music Awards and was reviewed in *Textura* as “An imaginatively conceived and curated set.” In *The Whole Note* Raul da Gama wrote, “The Ensemble’s performance is both poised and haunting, and is raised to a rarefied realm by lustrous and soaring, songful recitatives executed by the inimitable Nanette McGuinness.” The CD was chosen for the Center for New Music’s Album of the Week. “Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan,” consists of three E4TT commissions, plus a fourth relevant work: “Die eichne Tür” (The Oaken Door), by E4TT composer and co-founder David Garner to poems by Paul Celan, including "Eспенbaum" (Aspen tree), the poet's heartrending reflection on his survival and his mother's death; "Nachtlang" (Nightlong) by Jared Redmond (b. 1986), setting Celan's "Notturmo" (Night) and "Einmal" (Once); "A Song on the End of the World" by Stephen Eddins (b. 1954), setting a poem by Celan's Nobel Prize-winning contemporary, Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004) and including a reading of the poem by the translator and poet's son Anthony Milosz; "4 ½" for solo piano, by world-renowned composer Libby Larsen (b. 1950). A suite for solo piano, "4 ½" includes "In Memoriam," "an elegy for departed, beloved ones." "Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan" honors the centennial of the birth of one of the most important post-WWII poets,. These themes are the force behind "Once/Memory/Night."

E4TT will release The "Guernica" Project in the spring 2022 season in honor of the 85th anniversary of the Picasso painting of the same name, which itself commemorated the bombing of the Spanish town of Gernika-Lumo.

Commissions

The ensemble has commissioned 32 new works and two arrangements for premiere in the U.S. and Europe. Major commissioning projects include "The Cassandra Project," (new music inspired by the Greek myth of this famous woman, cursed to foretell the truth but never be believed), "Mothers & Daughters," the "Film Noir Project" (E4TT's homage to all things musical and film noir), The "Guernica" Project (commemorating the 80th anniversary of Picasso's iconic painting "Guernica," which itself commemorated the horrific bombing of the eponymous Spanish town); "Once/Memory/Night: Paul Celan" (new music focusing on the world and works of seminal 20th century poet Paul Celan); Surviving: Women's Words" (four new song cycles by David Garner to texts by women Holocaust survivors, which became the group's first CD); and "Women's Love and Loss" (three new works by women composers focusing on lost love in women's lives, to poetry by Lucille Clifton, Robert Frost, and Robinson Jeffers).

Repertory

In addition to commissions, the group's repertory has included works by: *21st century composers*: John Adams, Elinor Armer, Victoria Bond, Chen Yi, Anna Clyne, David Conte, Stephen Eddins, Tom Flaherty, Gabriela Lena

Frank, Vivian Fung, Stacy Garrop, Osvaldo Golijov, Arthur Gottschalk, John Harbison, Alden Jenks, Juliana Hall, Martyna Kosecka, Lori Laitman, Emma Logan, Ruth Lomon, Lennie Moore, Missy Mazzoli, Polina Nazaykinskaya, James Primosch, Jared Redmond, Elena Ruehr, Judith Shatin, Heather Schmidt, Laura Schwendinger Sarah Kirkland Snyder, Greg A. Steinke, Brennan Stokes, Aleksandra Vrebalov, Melinda Wagner, Weiwei Miao, Mercedes Zavala, and Ellen Taafe Zwillich;

20th century composers: Audrey Call, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Lajos Delej, Manuel de Falla, Josima Feldschuh, Edwin Geist, Pavel Haas, Paul Hindemith, György Justus, Bronislaw Kaper, Vitezslava Kapralova, Wojciech Kilar, Erich Korngold, Miklos Rozsa, Arnold Schoenberg, William Grant Still, Alexandre Tansman, Ernst Toch, Sándor Vándor, Henryk Vars, Franz Waxman, Kurt Weill, Hans Winterberg and Alexander Zemlinsky; *and artistic collaborations with the Jewish Music Festival cinematographer* Emma Kazaryan, digital artist Corinne Whitaker, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and the Zazpiak Bat Dance Group.

Formerly the **Jewish Music & Poetry Project (JMPP)**, the ensemble rebranded in Fall 2015, with the JMPP continuing as a project of the group. The ensemble's new name was inspired by one of E4TT's first songs, "In dieser Zeit" (translation, "In These Times"), to a text by German/Polish poet Mascha Kaléko (1901-1976). Part of Garner's first major work for the group, "In dieser Zeit" is on the ensemble's 2016 CD, *Surviving: Women's Words*, four major song cycles to texts by Jewish women poets, reflecting on their wartime experiences. "Surviving: Women's Words" was made possible by grants from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and SFFCM's Musical Grant Program. Since its first major commission using texts about the Holocaust by Polish-German/ Jewish poet Mascha Kaléko, the JMPP has focused on bringing new, nearly new, forbidden, and forgotten music to light, with a dual emphasis: 1) new music to texts by Jewish women poets or by women composers; 2) music by composers who were banned, exiled, or destroyed in the Holocaust.

REVIEWS:

"Lerner-Wright and Tsang knew how to tap into the rhetorical side of Rószka's Opus 8 duo, making it clear that there was more to the music than the composer's skill in reflecting Hungarian idioms." ([Stephen Smoliar at The Rehearsal Studio](#))

"With the release of this deeply moving and well-conceived project, the San Francisco-based Ensemble for These Times (E4TT) has put forth a superb and relevant spoken word and musical recording...Now more than ever, as the U.S. experiences a déjà vu of hatred and is poised on the brink of societal unravelling, the potent and timeless messages of survival, love, tolerance and forgiveness contained on this brilliant presentation need to resonate throughout the world." ([Lesley Mitchell-Clarke at The Whole Note](#))

"...four passionate meditations on the Holocaust experience delivered through a unique and highly compelling pair of voices, those of both composer and singer." ([Stephen Smoliar at Examiner.com](#))

"fascinating...Garner's music is difficult but compelling, varied and harmonically interesting... [McGuinness] manages the vocal and musical challenges well." ([Erin Heisel at American Record Guide](#))

"The heartrending words put both darkness and hope in a poetic light. Garner's music brings out the moods and is extremely well done. Recommended." ([Grego Applegate Edwards at Classical-Modern Music Review](#))

"Garner's settings are effective, particularly in the longest work here, *Chanson für Morgen* (2012) to words by Mascha Kaléko (1907-1975)... The pieces' effectiveness lies in the way they speak of the destruction of Judaism and Jewish culture in Eastern Europe while making the loss of history and of a sense of belonging into a wider experience, not one unique to Jews or to a specific time period." ([Mark Estren, TransCentury Communications review](#))

"The San Francisco composer David Garner has set four female Jewish poets, of whom the most gripping is

the exotic Berliner Elsa Lasker-Schüler, represented here by her Blue Piano cycle." ([Norman Lebrecht at Lebrecht Weekly](#))

"The compositions ...[in the Film Noir Project] felt appropriate in style, often highlighting the vast range of the cello. There were deep and mysterious rumblings from the low register, performed with appropriately harsh staccato attacks or jazzy pizzicato. This contrasted nicely with harmonics and eerie themes in the upper register, and the melancholy mid-range of a soprano voice, in German dialect evocative of the dark songspiel of Weill or Berg....To close the program, Lerner-Wright and Tsang presented a cello and piano duo titled Waltz Noir, by the young Russian composer Polina Nazaykinskaya. This accompanied Emma Kazaryan's varying and overlapping film footage...[and] was well chosen as the closing number." ([Alex Rosenfeld, SFCV.org, April 9, 2019](#))

"E4TT's soprano Nanette McGuinness effectively channeled this nervous energy [in Derek Jenkins' "Fruehlingsglaube" from "Nach Raum und Zeit"], and guest pianist Taylor Chan beautifully shaped the late-Romantic harmonies... Dan Senn's song "The Never Close"... [and "Paper Money" by Scott Etan Feiner], among several others on the program, were performed with conviction by Chan and guest soprano Chelsea Hollow... In his Missed Connections, Sam Krahn sets texts from Craigslist's Casual Encounters section (R.I.P.). You can't make this stuff up, and Krahn's music, full of tongue-in-cheek references, would be perfect for a cabaret. I'd go to that show." ([Rebecca Wishnia, SFCV.org, January 29, 2019](#))

"Lerner-Wright is definitely an impressive cellist. She was clearly up to the full scope of challenges of all of the works on the program; and she could "play well with others" as effectively as she could present her solo work. She even knew how to maintain audience attention with informative comments while retuning her instrument." (Stephen Smoliar, [The Rehearsal Studio, June 30, 2018](#))

"Soprano Nanette McGuinness (accompanied by Dale Tsang on piano and Laura Gaynon on cello) deftly negotiated Garner's convolutions." (Stephen Smoliar, [Examiner.com, April 5, 2016](#))

"The high point of the program was definitely the Mendelssohn. Both Macadam-Somer and Tsang-Hall went at it with all the spirited energy it demands." (Stephen Smoliar, [Examiner.com, Sept. 10, 2013](#))

"All four poems in the set [of Phoenix] have a decidedly dark quality. Garner served this quality well...and McGuinness captured that effectively in her delivery of the texts." (Stephen Smoliar, [Examiner.com, April 23, 2013](#))

"Tsang-Hall flawlessly delivered the catchy, syncopated rhythms of Labyrinth (1991), the darting little figures and wonderful bursts of high treble light in Traveling Light (1991), and the surfeit of energy in the delicious Dodecahedron (1993, 2012).... Also on the program were Gabriela Lena Frank's lovely Barcarola latinoamericana (2007), whose repeated notes, redolent of the mandolin, Tsang-Hall captured beautifully. The pungent chromaticism of Laura Schwendinger's Pedal Point (1996) and engaging forward momentum of Elena Ruehr's Prelude III (2002) flowed easily through her hands." (Jason Victor Serinus, [SFCV.com, April 2, 2013](#))