

New Century Saxophone Quartet

Biography

Michael Stephenson, soprano saxophone
Christopher Hemingway, alto saxophone

Stephen Pollock, tenor saxophone
Drew Hays, baritone saxophone

The first ensemble of its kind ever to win First Prize of the Concert Artists Guild Competition, the NEW CENTURY SAXOPHONE QUARTET is a pioneering and versatile group winning new-found enthusiasm for the saxophone quartet and its diverse repertory, ranging from the complete *The Art of the Fugue* of J.S. Bach to innovative contemporary works. The recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, Chamber Music America, and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, New Century has been heard in major concert venues in Los Angeles, New York, and Amsterdam; on radio and television in the United States, Europe, and Central America; in recordings for the Channel Classics label; and in unusual performance settings, ranging from two Command Performances for President Clinton in the White House to a concerto performance with The United States Navy Band, Washington. The Quartet has commissioned numerous works, most notably a concerto from Peter Schickele, and has recorded extensively for Channel Classics Records.

New Century's 1993 New York debut at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall earned the group praise for their "virtuosic display of dexterity and keen ensemble work," in which the "players handled all the music with panache" (*New York Post*). Upon becoming the first saxophone quartet presented at the Ambassador Auditorium in Los Angeles, the *Los Angeles Times* heralded the Quartet's West Coast debut: "Tackling brave new territory in the conservative-leaning realm of classical music takes a unique blend of conviction, refined talent, and a bit of damn-the-torpedoes ambition. Those qualities are amply in evidence with the New Century Saxophone Quartet, not to mention a finely honed musicality deserving wider acceptance." Other engagements include Chicago's Pick-Staiger Concert Hall, Atlanta's Spivey Concert Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall and Gardner Museum, New York's Merkin Concert Hall and the Kosciuszko Foundation Townhouse, Washington, D.C.'s Strathmore Hall, and the Juneau Jazz and Classics Festival in Alaska.

New Century premiered Peter Schickele's *New Century Suite* with the North Carolina Symphony in September 2000. Subsequent performances include the Canton, Western Piedmont, Waterbury, Billings, Bakersfield, and Winston-Salem Symphonies. Over the past two decades, New Century has been responsible for a significant broadening of the repertory of saxophone quartet. The quartet premiered David Lang's *Revolutionary Etudes* at the Rockport Chamber Music Festival in June 2006. In January 2002, the Quartet premiered a new work from the well-known jazz saxophonist Bob Mintzer, commissioned by Chamber Music America. A commission from Lenny Pickett, band leader and lead saxophonist of the Saturday Night Live Band, had its premiere in 1997 at Merkin Concert Hall in New York. The Quartet premiered a concerto with wind ensemble from Benjamin Boone in Carnegie Hall in 1999. Other premieres include works of Ben Johnston, Barbara Kolb, David Ott, Sherwood Shaffer, John FitzRogers, Arthur Frackenpohl, Ken Valitsky, and Jacob ter Veldhuis. Most recently, New Century co-commissioned and premiered, with the Amstel Saxophone Quartet, Michael Torke's "May" and "June" (2010), companion pieces to that composer's earlier work, "July" (1995).

The quartet has frequently performed Bach's *The Art of Fugue* in synchronization with computer-generated animations created by the New York-based design and animation house, Misha Films. These performances include Purdue University Convocations in Indiana, Premiere Performances at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, a collaboration of North Carolina State University and the Raleigh Chamber Music Guild in North Carolina, Whittier College in Los Angeles, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the University at Buffalo, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, the Detroit Institute of Art, and at the Chamber Music America National Conference.

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