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Kronos Quartet

UCSB Arts and Lectures Presented Kronos on Thursday, November 19

Friday, December 4, 2015

By [Charles Donelan](#)

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he enduring achievement of the Kronos Quartet transcends eclecticism. Decades of performing contemporary music with every imaginable enhancement — from simple amplification and sampling to the far limits of digital multimedia — has left them in the enviable position of being able to make it all look and sound easy and fun. This Arts and Lectures presentation at Campbell Hall was the work of an organization that's grown comfortable with peak performance, and the music benefits enormously from the confidence and clarity with which they perform it.

The evening was split into two distinct halves, with the opening set almost a complete concert in itself, and the second devoted primarily to presenting a substantial multimedia work, young composer Mary Kouyoumdjian's musical documentary of the Armenian genocide, *Silent Cranes*. The first half literally spanned the globe, from Russia with Sofia Gubaidulina's *String Quartet No. 4* to Mississippi for Geeshie Wiley's blues, then over to Wu Man's vision of the Gobi desert, before other stops in Serbia, Brooklyn, and an eventual landing in Nicole Lizée's very twisted version of obsolete East German electronic pop music, *Death to Kosmische*. The latter required the group to wield an amazing array of odd little instruments including such archaic pieces of musical technology as the Stylophone and the Omnicord.

After the intermission and a beautiful short piece from the 12th century composer Hildegard von Bingen, the group dove into *Silent Cranes*. This stunning multimedia work incorporates music, audio testimony, documentary photographs, and a tapestry of abstract images based on carpet patterns that crossed the large screen behind the players. Intensely moving, boldly beautiful, this could be the future of a new kind of documentary that's told primarily through music. Ken Burns, look out — Mary Kouyoumdjian has something to show you.

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