



On Monday, **January 27, 2025**, **Owls**, the inverted string quartet hailed as a “*dream group*” by **The New York Times**, and whose original, visceral, and personal performances defy categorization, announce their debut album, ***Rare Birds*** (out on **March 14, 2025**), via New Amsterdam Records. **Owls’s** all star lineup is comprised of world renowned soloists, as well as current and former members of yMusic, Aizuri Quartet, and Kronos Quartet: **Alexi Kenney (violin)**, **Ayane Kozasa (viola)**, **Gabriel Cabezas (cello)**, and **Paul Wiancko (cello)**. The album was produced by Grammy™-winner **William Britelle**.

Drawing on their experiences playing with groups such as the Kronos Quartet, yMusic, and Aizuri Quartet, **Owls** decided nothing would be off-limits for their ensemble. They built a shared playlist of tracks by their favorite musicians and collaboratively workshopped arrangements in Wiancko’s Red Hook studio. This collective approach to arranging and interpreting their diverse material proved transformative and freeing for **Owls**. It also cemented their approach to all the decisions they make as a group, as they say in their liner notes: “*All four of us must completely love everything we play.*”

The six pieces on ***Rare Birds*** feature music by an eclectic range of composers, traditions, and eras including: **Owls’s** own **Paul Wiancko**; **Dan Trueman and Monica Muga** folk duo **Trollstilt**,

Azerbaijani composer **Franghiz Ali-Zadeh**, 18th Century composer **François Couperin**; and progenitor of American minimalism **Terry Riley**. With a selection of works by artists who explore a wide spectrum of sounds, and coming together with two towering compositions reimagined explicitly for the group by Wiancko, *Rare Birds* is a heartfelt celebration of discovery, collaboration, and joy.

Rare Birds offers a new take on a seemingly familiar form, inverting the string quartet with two cellos instead of two violins, while incorporating a playful approach to repertoire curation. Existing as something between a live concert, a playlist, and an album of creative premieres, reinterpretations, and **William Brittle's** outside-the-box production, *Rare Birds* offers music imbued with creative energy in multiple directions. Vibrant double cellos build foundations for violin and viola to soar over, interwoven string parts flow through baroque harmonies, driving rhythms invite the listener to dance, and delicate textures transform into moments of rapturous joy. **Owls's** unique instrumentation affords the ensemble the freedom to explore musical possibilities without the constraints of a traditional canon, resulting in an album that is as sonically distinctive as it is heartfelt.

OUT NOW: 'When The Night' by Paul Wiancko

Alongside the announcement, **Owls** releases **Paul Wiancko's** harmonically rich and texturally innovative celebration of all things cello, *'When The Night'*—a vibrant homage to Ben E. King's iconic 1962 song 'Stand By Me.' The piece is a lullaby that incorporates elements of soul, R&B, and jazz while manipulating a recurring motif made up of the first three notes of 'Stand By Me.'



When the Night by Paul Wiancko // performed by Owls

[Listen to the single](#)

Owls in their own words

"Owls first gathered as a nameless pick-up group in 2019 with the intention of playing a single show in New York City. It only took a few notes for us to realize how special this group was: all four of us instinctively let each other feel and be exactly who we were, with an unspoken ease of communication, trust, and a joyful, raucous abandon in our music-making.

The lack of prewritten music for our "inverted quartet" configuration turned out to be liberating. We spent our first few days together in deep discovery mode, listening to recordings of all kinds, improvising, and creating on-the-fly arrangements of anything that intrigued us. Paul and Ayane's Brooklyn apartment became a creative musical laboratory as we flitted between the Big Purple Box (a recording booth Paul built in the apartment's living room) and our rehearsal space a few feet away.

*Our guiding principle was simple: All four of us must completely love everything we play. And so began the experiment that is **Owls**, with the understanding that if our principles ever felt compromised or if our feelings ever dissolved, so would the group.*

What happens when four people prioritize their love of discovering and making music together over all else? For starters, this album. This is the very music that inspired us to give our weird little side-project a name.

We love every note on this record, and we humbly invite you to join us—to listen, to trust, and to be exactly who you are.”

– Alexi, Ayane, Gabriel, and Paul

About Rare Birds

Rare Birds opens with **Wiancko's** harmonically rich and texturally innovative celebration of all things cello, *'When The Night'*—a vibrant homage to Ben E. King's iconic 1962 song 'Stand By Me.' The piece is a lullaby that incorporates elements of soul, R&B, and jazz while manipulating a recurring motif made up of the first three notes of 'Stand By Me.'

Continuing the exploration of popular idioms, the folk-inspired *'Ricerca'* reimagines a duo for Hardinger Fiddle and Guitar originally recorded by **Dan Trueman** and **Monica Muga's** duo's self-titled 2000 album *Trollstilt*.

"I'm pretty sure I put this in our playlist to check out because I thought it had a really nice delineation between parts. We could have two people play the viola part because it has all those extra strings and we can have two people play the guitar part and we can have more or less the same idea of the piece but in a different sound world." says Cabezas.

The A Side concludes with the world premiere recording of **Franghiz Ali-Zadeh's** *'Reqs'*. Composed for *Kronos Quartet's 50 For The Future Project*, *'Reqs'* alternates from a raucous dance to a viola rhapsody and back. The quartet's "consistently propulsive" (**New York Times**) sense of pulse creates life and movement in the music. *"The first time we read through this piece, I remember it was quite electric with the piece's vitality, great rhythmic energy, and huge amounts of drama and excess. We enjoyed those extremes of playing together."* says Kenney. *"Reqs feels all out all the time and it's fun to just let it rip."*

The second half of the album begins with a brief reflection on musics from the past, with **François Couperin's** *'Les Barricades Mystérieuses'*. Composed in the 18th century and typically played by a solo piano player, it is the oldest composition on the record and a rare historical interpolation on a NewAm release. The piece's hocketing melodic lines, sounding strangely contemporary in this context, are spread out amongst the quartet to create a flowing and interwoven piece for strings.

Wiancko's compositional voice returns with *'Vox Petra'*, the emotional climax of **Rare Birds**, inspired by the stone sculptures of *Isamu Noguchi* which Wiancko describes as "turning inwardly on themselves while transforming the space around them." Wiancko's composition moves between "delicate, harmonically rich clouds and joyous, hard-driven (and sometimes forcefully plucked) melodic episodes" (**New York Times**). As one of Kenney's favorite moments on the album, he tells us, *"There's something that Paul writes halfway through the piece for both cellos that are all of a sudden harmonizing in a very consonant way while Ayane and I are just kind of vamping over the top of it. Every time we play it, I just get tears in my eyes. There's just something so powerful about the trajectory of this piece and that moment, particularly, [is] just so fulfilling."*

The album concludes with **Terry Riley's** 'Good Medicine', a joyful, 14-minute celebration of the 5/4 meter and minimalism that was first released by *Kronos Quartet* in 1989 on *Salome Dances for Peace* but here is presented in a new version for **Owls's** unique instrumentation. "The piece is filled with a lot of positivity and constant vamps and riffs in five, big five, little five. We love its eternal whirling energy."

[Upcoming Tour Dates](#)

Feb 5 — Roger Glass Center for the Arts, Dayton, OH

Feb 7 — Opalka Gallery, Albany, NY

Feb 8 — 92NY, New York, NY

Feb 12 — Crystal Ballroom at the Somerville Theatre, Boston, MA

Apr 11 — Hahn Hall, Santa Barbara, CA

Apr 13 — Hertz Hall, Berkeley, CA

Apr 15 — CSUS Capistrano Hall, Sacramento, CA

Track Listing

1. When The Night—Paul Wiancko [8:48]
2. Ricercar—Trollstilt (Dan Trueman & Monica Mugan) [4:20]
3. Ræqs (Dance)—Franghiz Ali-Zadeh [7:43]
4. Les Barricades Mystérieuses—François Couperin [3:00]
5. Vox Petra—Paul Wiancko [9:21]
6. Good Medicine—Terry Riley [12:59]

Credits

Recording Engineer: Lily Wen

Producer: William Brittelle

Mixing Engineer: Zachary Hanson

Mastering: Zachary Hanson

Artwork & Design: Brittany Bartley

Recorded at Figure 8 Recording in Brooklyn, New York, from November 7 to 9, 2022

This recording is generously supported by the University of Cincinnati Coalition for Change Fund.

Ræqs by Franghiz Ali-Zadeh was commissioned for Kronos Fifty for the Future, a project of the Kronos Performing Arts Association. The score and parts are available for free at kronosquartet.org.



About Owls

Drawing from a deep well of musical passions and backgrounds, Owls is a quartet collective that defies expectations and labels with original, visceral, and personal performances. Each an artistic force in their own right, violinist Alexi Kenney, violist Ayane Kozasa, cellist Gabriel Cabezas and cellist-composer Paul Wiancko share an uncommonly fierce creative spirit which drives the quartet to challenge the way meaningful concert experiences are conceived. While weaving together new compositions with original arrangements of music ranging from the 1600s to the present, Owls' distinctive instrumentation allows them access to beautiful and exhilarating new sound worlds—effectively guaranteeing that each performance is uniquely them and without limits.

Artist bios

Alexi Kenney, violin

Violinist Alexi Kenney is forging a career that defies categorization, following his interests, intuition, and heart. He is equally at home creating experimental programs and commissioning new works, soloing with major orchestras around the world, and collaborating with some of the most celebrated musicians of our time. Alexi is the recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award.

Kenney has soloed with The Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, l'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Detroit Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony, Gulbenkian Orchestra, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Oregon Symphony, Louisville Orchestra, and l'Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, as well as in a play-conduct role as guest leader of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. www.alexikenney.com

Ayane Kozasa, viola

Hailed for her “magnetic, wide-ranging tone” and “rock solid technique” (Philadelphia Inquirer), violist Ayane Kozasa is a chamber musician, collaborator, educator. Winner of the 2011 Primrose

International Viola Competition, Kozasa is the violist of Kronos Quartet as of 2024. She succeeds Hank Dutt, the ensemble's violist of 45 years.

Kozasa is a founding member of the Aizuri Quartet, who was the 2018 quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the grand prize winner of both the Osaka International String Quartet Competition and MPrize Chamber Arts Competition. The Aizuri Quartet's debut album *Blueprinting* (New Amsterdam Records) was nominated for a GRAMMY Award and named one of NPR's top 10 classical albums of 2018. www.ayanekozasa.com

Gabriel Cabezas, cello

Cellist Gabriel Cabezas is a true 21st-century musician. A prolific and sought-after soloist and collaborator, he is as comfortable interpreting new works as he is with the pillar scores of the cello repertoire. Cabezas has appeared with America's finest symphony orchestras and has premiered dozens of new works by some of the most brilliant composers of his time.

Cabezas is a member of the acclaimed chamber sextet yMusic, quartet collective Owls, and is a co-founder of Duende, a new music and contemporary dance collective. In 2016, Cabezas received the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, a career grant awarded to extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians. Cabezas studied at the Curtis Institute of Music under Carter Brey. www.gabrielcabezas.com

Paul Wiancko, cello

Paul Wiancko is a composer, cellist, and serial collaborator. A member of Kronos Quartet since 2023, Wiancko succeeded the late Geoff Nutall as Artistic Director for Chamber Music at Spoleto USA. He is the first composer to hold either position. Called a "multifaceted talent" with a "singular voice" by The Washington Post, Wiancko has composed, arranged, and performed in a dramatically large range of genres, collaborating with artists like Max Richter, Chick Corea, Norah Jones, Dirty Projectors, The National, Wye Oak, and the Aizuri Quartet, Guarneri, JACK, St. Lawrence, and Kronos Quartet. www.paulwiancko.com

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About New Amsterdam

New Amsterdam is a Brooklyn-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit artist's service organization dedicated to supporting new music by composers and performers whose work transcends traditional and outdated genre distinctions. The label's artists have won numerous awards and accolades, including two Grammy Awards, seventeen Grammy nominations, and a Pulitzer Prize. New Amsterdam has also curated and presented more than 500 live concerts of groundbreaking new music. In recent years, the label embarked on a partnership with Nonesuch Records, seeing the release of approximately three albums per year to support contemporary American composers in realizing ambitious creative projects.