



**Kronos Quartet's New Portrait
Album of Works by Composer and
Documentarian Mary Kouyoumdjian,
*WITNESS***

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**Kouyoumdjian's Works Featured at
Kronos Festival at SF JAZZ, April 25-27, 2025**

"Emotionally wracking" – *The New York Times*

www.marykouyoumdjian.com

New York, NY (March 14, 2025) – Today, [Kronos Quartet](#) releases anew portrait album featuring the works of Pulitzer Prize-nominated Armenian-American composer and documentarian [Mary Kouyoumdjian](#) – [WITNESS](#) – on **Phenotypic Recordings**. The works featured on Kouyoumdjian's first portrait album exemplify her use of the arts as an amplifier of expression, often integrating testimonies from resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy. Kouyoumdjian's work seeks to humanize complex experiences around social and political conflict. A vinyl version of the release will be available in Spring 2025.

Phenotypic Recordings will donate all streaming proceeds from the album to [Kooyrigs](#) and the [Lebanese Red Cross](#) to support the Armenian and Lebanese communities.

Armenian-Canadian filmmaker (and Kouyoumdjian's frequent collaborator) **Atom Egoyan** contributes the liner notes introduction, writing, "This collection is an open letter to the tragic hymn of transmitted trauma and the possibility of art and magnificently gifted artists to help create new life." Cover artwork and design have been contributed by Armenian-Canadian photographer **Osheen Harruthoonyan**, who merges movement with themes of cultural heritage and renewal. Kronos Quartet also announced their annual **Kronos Festival** in San Francisco, on **April 25-27, 2025** at **SF JAZZ**. With five events over three days and nights, this year's festival is themed around Terry Riley's *Good Medicine*, providing the healing music the world needs. The festival will include a performance featuring a Mary Kouyoumdjian work from *WITNESS*.

The **Kronos Quartet**, who have "broken the boundaries of what string quartets do," (***The New York Times***), discovered Mary Kouyoumdjian's talent early in her career when David Harrington heard an early folk recording of the Armenian song *Groung* and was overwhelmed by the voice of Zabelle Panosian singing this plaintive call for a lost home.

Performing an arrangement written specially for the Kronos Quartet, ***Groung [Crane]*** is based on a recording of the Armenian folk song of the same name, which became an anthem for the Armenian diaspora. Of the track, Kouyoumdjian shares: "I still remember meeting with David Harrington for the first time, when he excitedly handed me his Discman and headphones, which had been carrying a recording of the Armenian folk song *Groung* [Crane]. I was deeply familiar with composer Komitas Vardapet's version of *Groung*, which had become an anthem for the Armenian diaspora, but this version that David had shared was entirely new to me. It was a recording from 1917 performed by Zabelle Panosian (1891-1986), a relatively unknown singer who had moved to Harlem, NY from her village of Bardizag, now a part of Western Turkey. In this song, the singer calls out to a crane, pleading for news from their homeland. Panosian's voice seems to

carry the burden of her entire homeland with a heart-achingly beautiful interpretation of the melody, and in my own arrangement, the ensemble is asked to emulate her unique interpretation of the song. At the time Panosian recorded this piece in the United States, her family and the Armenians were going through genocide in Ottoman Turkey, and I find the timing of her recording to bring even more meaning to the music.

This arrangement was written for the Kronos Quartet. Very special thanks to music researcher and record producer Ian Nagoski, for his thoughtful research and commitment to restoring Panosian's recordings and legacy."

Bombs of Beirut is dedicated to Kouyoumdjian's family. The audio playback includes recorded interviews with family and friends who shared their various experiences living in a time of war; it also presents sound documentation of bombings and attacks on civilians, tape-recorded on an apartment balcony between 1976–1978. Kouyoumdjian says, "Inspired by loved ones who grew up during the Lebanese Civil War, it is my hope that *Bombs of Beirut* provides a sonic picture of what day-to-day life is like in a turbulent Middle East—not filtered through the news and media, but through the real words of real people." *Bombs of Beirut* was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet as part of **Kronos: Under 30 Project**.

I Haven't the Words is a sonic journal entry from May 31, 2020, made while isolated in the early months of the pandemic, shortly after the murder of George Floyd, and "during a time in which the world seemed to spin towards its darkest corners." Kouyoumdjian adds, "This is an arrangement made for the Kronos Quartet, transcribed from that particular morning's improvisation at the piano and my own mental processing of the unspeakable."

Silent Cranes, a music-documentary work marking the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, is also inspired by the Armenian folk song *Groung*, in which the singer calls out to the migratory bird, begging for word from their homeland, only to have the crane respond with silence and fly away. The first, second, and fourth movement titles quote directly from the folk song lyrics. *Silent Cranes* includes testimonies by genocide survivors, recordings from the genocide era of Armenian folk songs, and a poem from investigative journalist David Barsamian (*Alternative Radio*) in response to the question: Why is it important to talk about the Armenian Genocide 100 years later? Kouyoumdjian says, "Those who were lost during the genocide are cranes in their own way, unable to speak of the horrors that happened, and it is the responsibility of the living to give them a voice." *Silent Cranes* was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet with support from the **David Harrington Research and Development Fund**.

WITNESS CD Track Listing

1. Traditional arr. Mary Kouyoumdjian (b. 1983) – *Groung* [Crane] (1917) [04:20]

Mary Kouyoumdjian – *Bombs of Beirut* (2014) [22:30]

2. I. Before the War

3. II. The War

4. III. After the War

5. Mary Kouyoumdjian – *I Haven't the Words* (2020) [04:22]

Mary Kouyoumdjian – *Silent Cranes* (2015) [30:08]

6. I. slave to your voice

7. II. you did not answer

8. III. [with blood-soaked feathers]

9. IV. you flew away

Total Time: [01:01:20]

Produced by Reshena Liao and Kronos Quartet

Recorded December 9–13, 2023 at 25th Street Recording in Oakland, California

Scott Fraser, Engineer

Gabriel Shepard and Karishma Kumar, Assistant Engineers

Edited and mixed by Scott Fraser and David Harrington
Mastered by Scott Fraser
Executive Producer: Janet Cowperthwaite

Cover art and design by Osheen Harruthoonyan
Graphic design by Baron Arts
Liner notes by Atom Egoyan and Mary Kouyoumdjian
PR-2501

*Parental Advisory: This work includes pre-recorded sounds and interviews on topics of war and violence that some listeners may find disturbing and may not be suitable for children.

About Mary Kouyoumdjian

Mary Kouyoumdjian is a composer and documentarian with projects ranging from concert works to multimedia collaborations and film scores. As a first-generation Armenian-American and having come from a family directly affected by the Lebanese Civil War and Armenian Genocide, she uses a sonic palette that draws on her heritage, interest in music as documentary, and background in experimental composition to progressively blend the old with the new. A strong believer in freedom of speech and the arts as an amplifier of expression, her compositional work often integrates recorded testimonies with resilient individuals and field recordings of place to invite empathy by humanizing complex experiences around social and political conflict. A finalist for the 2024 Pulitzer Prize in Music, Kouyoumdjian has received commissions for the New York Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Beth Morrison Projects, Alarm Will Sound, Bang on a Can, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, and Roomful of Teeth among others. Her work has been featured internationally at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art, MASS MoCA, the Barbican Centre, Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Millennium Park, Benaroya Hall, Prototype Festival, Cabrillo Festival, Big Ears Festival, Cal Performances, Tribeca Film Festival, and PBS. Kouyoumdjian holds a D.M.A. and M.A. in Composition at Columbia University, an M.A. in Scoring for Film & Multimedia from New York University, and a B.A. in Composition from UC San Diego. Kouyoumdjian is a cofounder of the annual new music conference New Music Gathering, is on faculty at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University and The New School, and is based in Brooklyn, NY. Learn more at www.marykouyoumdjian.com.

About Kronos Quartet

For 50 years, San Francisco's **Kronos Quartet** has reimagined what the string quartet experience can be. One of the most celebrated and influential groups of our era, Kronos has given thousands of concerts worldwide, released more than 70 recordings, and collaborated with many of the world's most accomplished composers and performers across many genres. Kronos has received more than 40 awards, including three Grammys and the Polar Music, Avery Fisher, and Edison Klassiek Oeuvre Prizes. In 2024, Kronos' *Pieces of Africa* album was inducted into the National Recording Registry at the Library of Congress. Through its nonprofit organization, Kronos Performing Arts Association (KPAA), Kronos has commissioned more than 1,100 works and arrangements for quartet. KPAA also manages Kronos' concert tours, local performances, recordings, and education programs, and produces an annual Kronos Festival in San Francisco. In its most ambitious commissioning effort to date, KPAA has recently completed *Kronos Fifty for the Future*. Through this initiative, Kronos has commissioned — and distributed online for free — 50 new works for string quartet designed for students and emerging professionals, written by composers from around the world. Learn more at www.kronosquartet.org.

**Photo Credit: Osheen Harruthoonyan*