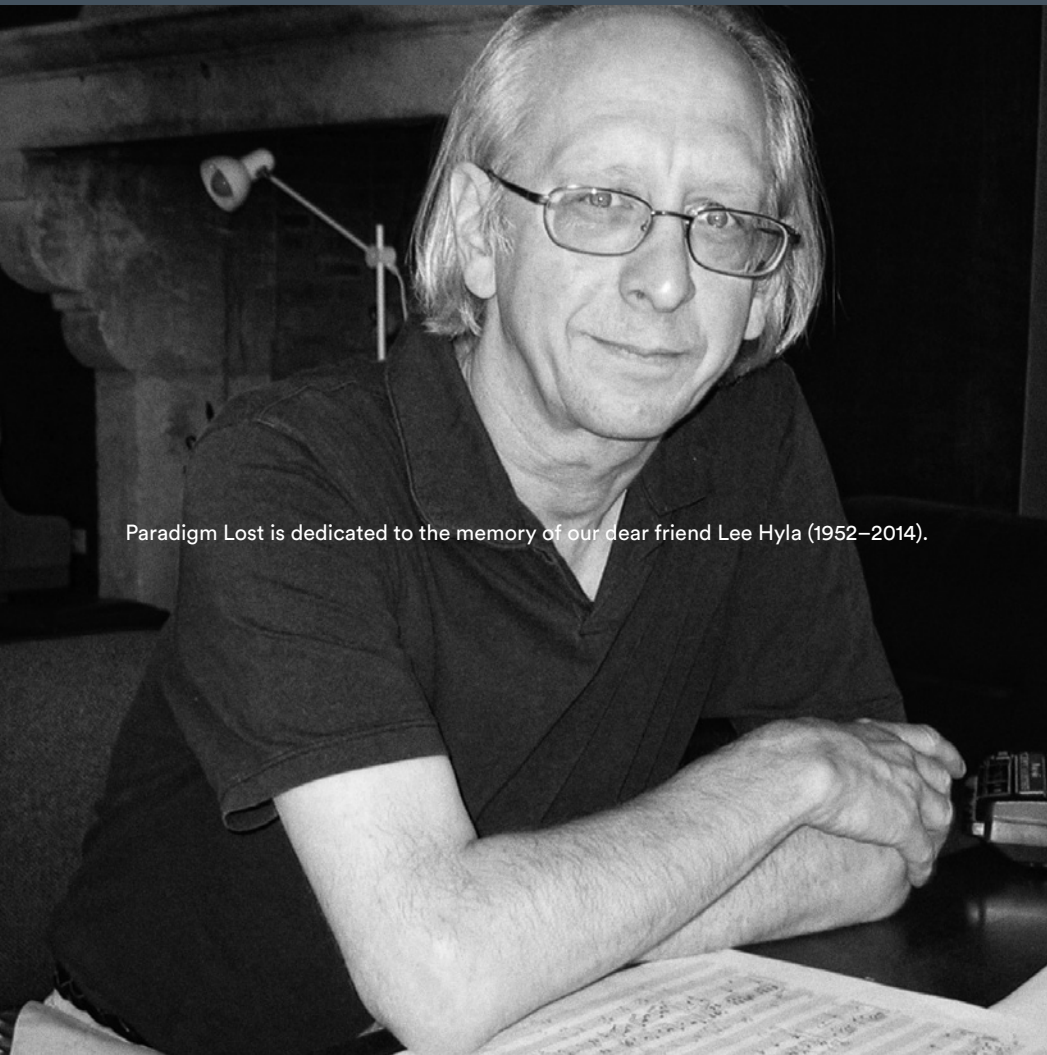




PRISM Quartet Paradigm Lost



Paradigm Lost is dedicated to the memory of our dear friend Lee Hyla (1952–2014).

- 1 **Paradigm Lost** (2005) 13:05
Lee Hyla (1952–2014)
 - 2 **Fearful Symmetries** (excerpt, 1988) 3:03
John Adams (b. 1947), Arr. Timothy McAllister
 - Compass** (2010)
David Rakowski (b. 1958)
 - 3 **W** 6:20
 - 4 **N** 4:18
 - 5 **S** 6:24
 - 6 **E** 4:15
 - 7 **Prism (Memo 6b)** (2008) 10:55
Bernard Rands (b. 1934)
 - 8 **Not Alone** (2014) 14:03
Chen Yi (b. 1953)
 - 9 **Squeeze** (2007) 2:35
Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)
- PRISM Quartet**
Timothy McAllister soprano saxophone
Zachary Shemon alto saxophone
Matthew Levy tenor saxophone
Taimur Sullivan soprano (track 9) and baritone saxophones

If it is possible for a group with over three decades of pioneering work to reintroduce itself, then that's what *Paradigm Lost* does for the PRISM Quartet. After a string of important and boundary-busting releases on Innova, ECM, and many other contemporary music labels, this collection firmly establishes PRISM's own XAS label, and offers a kind of "State of the Union" address for the saxophone quartet. Here are works that demonstrate the various ways of building a repertoire: through commissioned works, transcriptions, arrangements, and multi-media work.

The album title is also well-considered. If there ever was a paradigm for a saxophone quartet, PRISM has long since dispensed with it, through a radical re-examination of what the saxophone can do... and who it can do it with. The quartet has worked with choirs, chamber ensembles, jazz bands, and the weird and wild instrumentarium designed by Harry Partch. As it happens, the works on this album, whatever their origins, are simply for saxophone quartet (I may regret writing that word "simply"), but they all come from a place of collaboration, with composers who reflect the musical and cultural diversity of 21st century America.

The piece "Paradigm Lost," by the late Lee Hyla, not only lends the album its title but also stakes out a wide sonic territory. This 2005 work was written for PRISM, and is built around two major musical gestures: a series of birdsong-like figures, and slower passages with lovely, wistful harmonies that support a wandering solo melody. After a quiet,

quizzical opening, that solo begins, with only brief attempts at harmony behind it. But the piece rouses itself, acquires more rhythmic intensity, and the short, quick bursts of birdsong begin. Eventually, those birdsong figures become more angular, the rhythm becomes more insistent, and the juxtaposition of those two musical gestures become more frequent and shorter. The effect is like watching a mash-up unfold. But Hyla has an elegant resolution, as he finally envelops the solo melody in stately, slowly moving harmonies.

When John Adams wrote his orchestral piece "Fearful Symmetries" in 1988, he did not have a saxophone quartet in mind. But he did have the sounds of American big band music in his mind's ear, so when PRISM's Timothy McAllister began arranging an excerpt of "Fearful Symmetries" for the quartet, he was, in a sense, uncovering a hidden intention in the work. "A seriously aerobic piece" is how Adams described it, mixing "the weight and bravura of a big band with the glittering, synthetic sheen of techno pop (samples and synthesizer) and the facility and finesse of a symphony orchestra." Here, stripped of its techno-orchestral garb, the piece is revealed to be—in this excerpt at least—a cousin to Adams' famous "Chairman Dances." Like that outtake from the opera *Nixon In China*, this part of "Fearful Symmetries" uses the horns to evoke the spirits of 1930s dance bands, as summoned by Steve Reich.

David Rakowski's "Compass" was commissioned by a consortium of ten quartets, although Rakowski says it was PRISM's Taimur Sullivan who gave him some good tips on repertoire to listen to before essaying his first sax

quartet. “Compass” is in four movements, each corresponding to one of the main directions on a compass, but there is nothing particularly “directional” about any of them, and in fact they don’t even appear to be in any conventional order. Instead, Rakowski has created a series of etudes. “W” is a study in hocket technique, where musical material is passed like a hot potato from one sax to the next, with the interlocking of the parts combining to produce the rhythmic texture. “N” is a series of oscillating figures that support a swirling melody. All that pulsing and vibrating hints at jazz, and a brief passage near the end is a bit more obvious about it. “S” is a slow, hushed soundscape, but one that is harmonically unsettled. The finale, “E,” is a series of braided figures, constantly combining and recombining to form passing harmonies and melodic fragments.

“Squeeze,” by Augusta Read Thomas, is a high-spirited pastiche of classical and jazz elements, with rapid-fire passagework and chattering rhythms. (The work is scored for two sopranos, one alto, and one tenor.) Like John Adams, Thomas seems to have had an earlier form of horn-based music in mind: “the work,” she writes, “should be played standing, and facing the audience, in a kind of ‘Big Band’ mode.”

Bernard Rands’s “PRISM (Memo 6b)” is an example of reinvention and recomposition. “Memo 6” was originally a solo for alto sax; it is part of a series of “Memo” pieces that Rands composed for specific musicians whose virtuosity and expressivity he admires. In this respect the series recalls the legendary “Sequenza” series by Luciano Berio. But Rands has

often taken his solo pieces further, building ensemble pieces around them; and this newer version of “Memo 6” takes the DNA of that solo work and refracts it through the... well, the prism, of a sax quartet. Full of quicksilver changes of mood and texture, “PRISM (Memo 6b)” is a reminder of why we use the verb “to play” when we talk about making music. The piece ends with a brief passage that seems to echo the sounds of Mozart’s *Wind Divertimenti*.

Chen Yi, the Chinese-born, American-based composer, wrote “Not Alone” as part of a dance-theater work in which PRISM performed with the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company of New York. “Not Alone” was inspired by the ancient Chinese poet Li Bai’s famous poem “Drinking Alone under the Moon with the Shadow.” As with much of her music, Chen employs percussive effects and glissandi; in Chinese music these are not considered “extended techniques” or special effects, but an important part of the performer’s arsenal. Here, they help create the twilight mood of the opening moments. The piece soon becomes more dramatic, suggesting the arrival of the drinker’s companions (real or imagined) and his or her increasingly garrulous outbursts. Passages of consonance and discord can easily be heard as companionable singing and bouts of drunken argument. The piece bustles along on a kind of restless energy, until, finally, that restlessness subsides, giving way to a gently humorous ending where a short falling phrase signals the drinker falling asleep.

— John Schaefer

Intriguing programs of great beauty and breadth have distinguished the PRISM Quartet as one of America's foremost chamber ensembles. Two-time winners of the Chamber Music America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, PRISM has been presented by Carnegie Hall, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and as soloists with the Detroit Symphony and Cleveland Orchestra. Champions of new music, PRISM has commissioned over 250 works, many by Pulitzer Prize-winning composers, including Julia Wolfe, William Bolcom, Jennifer Higdon, Zhou Long, and Bernard Rands. PRISM has collaborated with an eclectic range of artists, including BMOP, Ethel, Sō Percussion, Partch, Talujon, Music From China, Inti-Illimani, The Crossing, Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, Miro Dance Theatre, and top jazz artists, including Jason Moran, Miguel Zenon, Steve Lehman, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Tim Ries, Greg Osby, Dave Liebman, Chris Potter, Ravi Coltrane, Ben Monder, Jay Anderson, Bill Stewart, Gerald Cleaver, and John Riley. PRISM's discography includes releases on the Albany, ECM, Innova, Koch, Naxos, New Dynamic, New Focus, and XAS labels. PRISM may also be heard on the soundtrack of the film *Two Plus One* and has been featured in the theme music to the weekly news magazine *NOW* on PBS.

The PRISM Quartet performs exclusively on Selmer saxophones.

Keep in Touch Visit PRISM online at prismquartet.com and on Facebook, Twitter, Soundcloud, and YouTube.



Photo: Peggy Peterson

Lee Hyla

Lee Hyla, to whom this recording is dedicated, was described by *The New York Times* as “an American composer whose work married the formal rigor of classical music with the driving energy of rock and the improvisational abandon of jazz.” *The Boston Globe* wrote that Hyla’s music “hurls through space with visceral immediacy” and that “moments of surprising beauty arrive like clearings in a forest.” He was the recipient of Guggenheim and NEA fellowships, the Rome Prize, and the Goddard Lieberson Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

John Adams

Composer, conductor, and creative thinker—John Adams occupies a unique position in the world of American music. His works, both operatic and symphonic, stand out among contemporary classical compositions for their depth of expression, brilliance of sound, and the profoundly humanist nature of their themes. *Le Monde* wrote that his music “gives the impression of a rediscovered liberty, of an open door which lets in the fresh air in great gusts.” He is the recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Music, the Grawemeyer Award, and multiple Grammy awards.

David Rakowski

David Rakowski’s music is prized for its originality, explosive high energy, visceral surface, unusual and quirky turns, meticulous attention to detail, and unfaltering sense of form. He has received the Rome Prize, the Stoecker Prize from the Chamber Music Society

of Lincoln Center, the Barlow Prize, Fromm and Koussevitzky Foundation commissions, and has twice been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He serves on the faculty of Brandeis University.

Bernard Rands

The Boston Globe wrote that Bernard Rands “has been pursuing an aesthetic ideal that has made him one of the foremost composers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Rands’ compositions are elegant yet meticulously structured, bringing tonal and nontonal elements into a fusion that is firmly enough based in musical tradition to be inviting, yet unpredictable enough... to convey a sense of modernity.” He has been a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, Kennedy Center Friedheim Award, and a Grammy Award.

Chen Yi

Chen Yi blends Chinese and Western traditions, transcending cultural and musical boundaries. Yo-Yo Ma once commented, “Chen Yi’s music sounds both modern and ancient. Her music manages to sound both authentic and unexpected, which is what you always want from art.” She is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Elise Stoecker Award from Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Ives Living Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She is a Distinguished Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance.

Augusta Read Thomas

The music of Augusta Read Thomas is nuanced, majestic, elegant, capricious, lyrical, and colorful. *The New York Times* wrote that “Ms. Thomas’s compositional idiom is one of modernist complexity, yet the sheer delight she takes in exploring instrumental sonorities proves infectious.” A finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize, she has been the recipient of awards and fellowships from ASCAP, BMI, the NEA, the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and the Guggenheim, Koussevitzky, Naumburg, and Fromm foundations.

Credits

Executive Producer: Matthew Levy

Producer: PRISM Quartet

Session Engineer: David Schall

Editing, Mixing, Mastering: Matthew Levy

Photography, Design, Layout: Jon Rohrer, fluxism.com

Tracks 1–7 and 9 recorded August 27–31, 2015

at Stamps Auditorium at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Track 8 (“Not Alone”) Recorded March 23, 2016

at the First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti, MI

Support This recording was made possible with generous support from the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc.; the National Endowment for the Arts; and New Music USA, made possible by annual program support and/or endowment gifts from Helen F. Whitaker Fund, and Aaron Copland Fund for Music. Many thanks to the PRISM Quartet’s alma mater, the University of Michigan, for providing the use of Stamps Auditorium.

Commissioning Acknowledgements “Paradigm Lost” was commissioned by the PRISM Quartet with funds from Chamber Music America’s Commissioning Program, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Chamber Music America Endowment Fund. “Compass” was commissioned by PRISM and a consortium of ensembles that included the Capitol, h2, Iridium, Oasis, Radnofsky, Red Clay, Zzyzx, United States Air Force Academy Band, and United States Coast Guard saxophone quartets. “Squeeze” was commissioned by and is dedicated to Paul Bro. “Prism (Memo 6b)” was commissioned by the PRISM Quartet with support from the New York State Music Fund, established by the New York State Attorney General at Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. “Not Alone” was commissioned by Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company for the PRISM Quartet with a New Music USA Live Music For Dance Award.

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