

Thalea String Quartet

Carrot Revolution by Gabriella Smith



The **Thalea String Quartet** brings their signature vibrancy and emotional commitment to dynamic performances that reflect the past, present, and the future of the string quartet repertoire while celebrating diverse musical traditions from around the world. Fueled by the belief that chamber music is a powerful force for building community and human connection, the Thalea String Quartet has performed across North America, Europe, and China, and has appeared at the Kennedy Center, Massey Hall, and Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall.

Committed to shaping and contributing to the future of the string quartet repertoire, the Thalea String Quartet has premiered dozens of new works and have collaborated on new commissions, and has been celebrated for their innovative approach to education and community engagement.

Christopher Whitley (violin) is originally from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, **Kumiko Sakamoto** (violin) is from Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada; **Lauren Spaulding** (viola) is from San Antonio, Texas, and **Titilayo Ayangade** (cello) is from Cincinnati, Ohio. Christopher performs on the 1700 “Taft” Stradivari, generously on loan by the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank.

Gabriella Smith is a composer and environmentalist from the San Francisco Bay Area. Her music has been called “high-voltage and wildly imaginative” by The Philadelphia Inquirer. Smith wrote in “**Carrot Revolution**” in 2015 after being inspired by a quote from painter Paul Cézanne that the “day will come when a single, freshly observed carrot will start a revolution.” The piece draws on diverse influences ranging from Bach to Celtic fiddle tunes to Gregorian Chants created by monks centuries ago. It was commissioned by the Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and modeled after their founder’s curatorial style, which juxtaposed paintings with furniture, pottery, and other objects in ways that highlighted unexpected resonances.

While Smith learned later that the quote was likely misattributed—Cézanne probably didn’t say it—“Carrot Revolution” nonetheless celebrates the idea of fresh perspectives, of finding revolutionary ways to look at old things.



Paul Cézanne, *Fruit on a Table (Fruits sur la table)*, c. 1890

This Paul Cezanne painting is one of the many incredible artworks at the Barnes Foundation, which commissioned *Carrot Revolution*. Cezanne is perhaps best known for his still-life paintings, often of fruit.

He reportedly said he wanted to “astonish Paris with an apple”.

Whether Cezanne said these specific words or not, we can still consider what these ideas—astonishing with an apple, revolution with a freshly-observed carrot—might mean.

For Los Angeles gardener, writer and sustainability educator Rick Perillo, it means a revolution of thought. “Take one seemingly simple item from the natural world; a blade of grass, a working ant, a carrot pulled from the earth. Spend some time really looking at it. In it is the intricacy and wonder of the world. It is revolutionary.”

For visual artists, it might mean representing or capturing overlooked beauty.

For others, it may mean finding gratitude in unexpected places, like poet Pablo Neruda does in his poems celebrating the simplest things—socks, a chair, soap. (See page 4 for a chance to write your own poem in this style).

For a composer or musician, it might mean combining traditional styles and techniques with something totally new and challenging.

What do you think?

WHAT IS CHAMBER MUSIC?

Chamber music is music that is composed for and performed by small ensembles or groups of musicians. In its original sense, chamber music referred to music intended to be played in a home—even if that home was a grand palace chamber—rather than the large public spaces of churches or concert halls that could accommodate an orchestra.

Since the 1500's, music has been composed for these smaller spaces and groupings, featuring a variety of instrument combinations from lute to harpsichord to human voices. Around 1750, the string quartet as we know it today (two violins, viola and cello) became the most prominent and popular ensemble format.

Today, musicians in string quartets have over 400 years worth of compositions to choose from, and many—like Thalea String Quartet—are forging new ground, exploring new ways to use their instruments, drive innovative new composition, and carry this centuries-old format into the future.

DIG DEEPER: Discussion Topics and Further Reading

- Did anything about the performance surprise you?
- Have your ideas about chamber music or classical music changed?
- Do you think that Carrot Revolution was fun to play or perform?
- If you play an instrument, have you ever explored the sounds it can create outside the 'normal' playing techniques (like using the cello for percussion)? Have you ever tried to make music on something that isn't a traditional instrument?

Find out more about Thalea's members:

[Christopher Whitley](#) (violin)

[Lauren Spaulding](#) (viola)

[Titilayo Ayangade](#) (cello)

[Kumiko Sakamoto](#) (violin)

Learn about [the 400 year-old violin](#) that Chris Whitley performs on.

Meet composer and environmentalist [Gabriella Smith](#)

Be sure to watch the Backstage Conversation with members of Thalea String Quartet (it's right after the filmed performance).

REFLECTION: FIRST THOUGHTS

Take a moment to collect your thoughts and make some notes about the experience of this performance and conversation.

Memorable Moments	
I Feel...	
I Wonder...	

POETRYACTIVITY

Just as ‘Carrot Revolution’ celebrates looking at familiar things in new ways, the great Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, celebrated the poetry of ordinary things.

Neruda wrote a series of *odes*, or lyrical poems full of enthusiastic praise, about things we usually don’t take time to notice in our daily lives.

[In this activity](#), you can read some of Pablo Neruda’s poems, and create your own, celebrating an everyday object.