

# Spektral Quartet Interview

March 26, 2016 | Uncategorized



After working with Spektral Quartet on the album “Serious Business”, we wanted to take a closer look on who they are as professional musicians and as innate comedians.

You can find the album on:

Amazon: <http://amzn.to/1RifpIQ>

iTunes: <http://apple.co/1RlnEE2>

## **Is there a lot of repertoire in the comedy genre for a string quartet? What turned you to these specific pieces?**

There are elements of humor throughout classical music, but Chris Fisher-Lochhead’s “Hack” is the first piece we’re aware of that uses stand-up as its launch point. We actually didn’t set out to release a comedy-themed album, but realized that some of our favorite recent commissions were funny in some deeper way. CFL and Dave Reminick are friends of ours, and compositional superstars here in Chicago, and we fell in love with Sky Macklay and her music when we were in-residence at Walden School in New Hampshire. I suppose the album’s theme found us. And what better prankster from history than Josef Haydn, whose inclusion fits our mission of matching the great works of the past with the great works of today?

**In your 2015/2016 season UP CLOSE, you include music written by composers who died in the 1800s and ones who are alive today. What is your opinion on what classical music**

**can teach us, no matter what the age?**

Every composer, regardless of era, seems to be chasing some illusory, sometimes quixotic urge to create, and as performers, we get juiced from that passion and drive. We have as many “Oh SHIT, he/she DIDN’T...” moments from the scores of dead composers as living ones, and skipping between styles and time periods keeps us artistically nimble and engaged. The way these approaches inform each other on a program or album is where we find our calling. If the audience isn’t leaning forward, it’s on us.

**Your humorous character is apparent in both this album and on your website. What do you think about the seriousness people place on witnessing classical performances?**

For us, humor isn’t a branding choice, but the honest portrayal of who we are in the rehearsal room, and as individuals. We are drawn to virtuosic writing, which makes for a rigorous rehearsal process, and jokes are what pull us through, intact and eager for more. We’re all for giving traditional music the respect it deserves, but have no interest in perpetuating the rarified air that historically has become synonymous with “classical music.” By all means, don’t text during a performance of Mahler 2. And also, by all means, show up to our show dressed how you like, asking questions and feeling safe to explore unfamiliar sonic territory. We’ll even throw in a whoopee cushion gag at the show, so you know you’re in good company.

**Tell your favorite musician joke.**

“Do it for the exposure.”

**Do you have any superstitions or rituals before you perform?**

We’d love to tell you, but our pre-concert ritual is actually a secret for us...and whatever poor stage manager happens to be with us, backstage.

**Was there a composer/teacher/peer/piece of music that drastically changed your philosophy of music and performance? How did they change it?**

We each have different moments that we can point to individually, but I think one we can all agree on comes from Seraphic Fire conductor Patrick Quigley. Before each show, he has a mantra he shares with the musicians (and I’m paraphrasing here, but): “People do not come to concerts to hear music. They come to concerts to hear and see music performed live.” For us, the entire experience of the listener is key...and risks are essential.

**Have you ever switched instruments during a practice session with each other just for fun?**

We played kazoos for a city-wide performance of Terry Riley’s “In C.” Does that count?

**In what ways did your vision of the recording outcome evolve during your time spent**

## **working with Dan Shores and Dan Mercurio?**

We can't say enough about The Dans. There is a level of risk-taking that can only be explored when you feel like a primo team is there to say "yes, you have it," or, "let's take that again." Recording is a process of extreme vulnerability, and Shores and Mercurio are unparalleled in the way they navigate this at-times delicate undertaking. Serious Business is us at our best, and The Dans captured (and guided) it brilliantly.

## **What caused you to want Sono Luminus to record the "Serious Business" album?**

A pre-existing love for, and fascination with, Sono Luminus CEO Collin Rae. Collin has a unique way of collecting creative people and bringing them together into collaboration. That, and the just unreal sound on Sono Luminus albums.

## **How has the 9.1 recording and process of recording changed you're thinking on how a piece of music can be captured and then heard?**

Before we got to Virginia, 9.1 was more of an abstract concept than something we knew we wanted. We didn't actually hear a true 9.1 system until after our sessions, when we got to dig in on on Peter Gregson's sumptuous "Touch," and ICE and Anna Thorvaldsdottir's "In the Light of Air." It is really like sitting in the middle of the ensemble and taking the world's most luxurious bath in sound.

Practically speaking, being seated in the round, with the mics in the middle, took a little getting used to, but we are blown away with the level of clarity this process brings to the finished record.

## **How did the Sono Luminus session differ from your other recording session?**

Each label we've worked with has had a remarkably different vibe and approach, and I think each was kind of perfect for the album in question. For Serious Business, we wanted as pure a capture as we could find, and Sono Luminus delivered the goods. Despite the high level of difficulty of the music, the atmosphere stayed positive and inspired – and everyone we worked with there is someone we'd go out for a beer with.



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## About Sono Luminus

Sono Luminus is an ultra-high fidelity record label focused on stereo and surround recordings of classical and acoustic music. 16 GRAMMY nominations, 2 wins.



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