

Kuss Quartet, String Quartet

Biography

Jana Kuss, violin

Oliver Wille, violin

William Coleman, viola

Mikayel Hakhnazaryan, violoncello

Chamber music is elevated to great, existential art by the Kuss Quartet.

Radio Bremen Zwei, Klassikwelt, December 2024

The Kuss Quartet has been setting new standards for many years with their sophisticated conceptual programmes. The aim and ideal is to offer both traditional audiences and new listeners unique experiences. Primaria Jana Kuss and second violinist Oliver Wille have been playing side by side for over 30 years – together with their long-standing colleagues William Coleman and Mikayel Hakhnazaryan, they continue to explore, with unceasing curiosity, the enduring imperative of string quartet playing: its ever-present question, “Does it have to be?”

The quartet regularly collaborates with artistic collectives to break across genres and formats in the arts, as seen in concert modules such as “KISS@COCOON” (featuring dancers Yui Kawaguchi and Ruben Reniers, drummer Johannes Fischer, and slam poet Bas Böttcher; supported by the Reload stipend from the Federal Culture Foundation) or the music and dance theatre “Nico and The Navigators,” whose joint Beethoven program in 2022 was produced by ARTE TV as a music film. This successful collaboration will continue in 2025 with Heiner Müller’s play *Quartett* and Janáček’s string quartets (premiere 12/2025 at Radialsystem Berlin).

Following their successful concept albums “Krise” and “Freizeit,” as well as Beethoven’s string quartet cycle, the quartet’s most recent album - Schubert’s *Der Tod und das Mädchen*, woven with new works written for the Kuss Quartet by Iris ter Schiphorst and Mark Andre - was honored with the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik and the Editor’s Choice of Gramophone Magazine. In the 2025/26 season, the quartet curates another album project: all six Mozart String Quintets paired with six miniatures by contemporary composers. In November 2025, they will premiere a new work by Johannes Maria Staud in Salzburg as part of the “Dynamik Festival”.

With the help of Niedersachsen/“Music 21” concept funding, over the past ten years the Kuss Quartet has commissioned numerous new works, expanding the string quartet repertoire with compositions by Enno Poppe, Aribert Reimann, Manfred Trojahn, Bruno Mantovani, Iris ter Schiphorst, Johannes Fischer, Mark Andre, Francisco Coll, Sara Glojnarić, and Mauro Montalbetti. Partners in collaboration have included, among others, Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, the Paris Biennale, Wigmore Hall London, and Suntory Hall Tokyo.

The musical partners the Kuss Quartet enjoys collaborating with repeatedly are Miklós Perényi, Dénes Várjon, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Sarah Maria Sun, Maurice Steger, Johannes Fischer, and many more.

In 2019, the ensemble became the first string quartet from Germany to receive the legendary Paganini Quartet by Stradivarius as a loan from the Nippon Music Foundation. On these instruments, the quartet performed Beethoven’s complete string quartet cycle in June 2019 at Suntory Hall in Tokyo, by invitation. The live recording from that performance appeared in spring 2020 on the British label Rubicon Classics, with support from G. Henle Verlag. “One of the most intriguing complete recordings of the ever astonishing (Beethoven) string quartets, which always seem startlingly new and as if just invented when played by an outstanding ensemble” says the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

Early in its career, the quartet was awarded first prizes by the German Music Council and at the Borciani Competition, received a Borletti-Buitoni Award, and was named “Rising Star” of the European Concert Hall Organisation. In numerous masterclasses, the Kuss Quartet today inspires the next generation, and William Coleman (in Salzburg) and Oliver Wille (in Hanover and Biella/Italy) are professors at European universities. Mikayel Hakhnazaryan teaches chamber music at the Karlsruhe University of Music, Jana Kuss at the Accademia Perosi in Biella.

Season 2025/26

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