

Fry Street Quartet
National Gallery -- Washington, DC
"their balance, blend and rhythmic cohesion work beautifully"

Fry Street Quartet explores the Earth's resources in new works

Washington Post [March 14, 2016](#) by Joan Reinthaler

Call it eco-art. The Fry Street Quartet, as part of the "Crossroads Project" at Utah State University, has teamed up with scientists, composers Laura Kaminsky and Libby Larsen, visual artists and poets to create multimedia works that focus on the Earth's gifts and support the sustainability of the planet. On Sunday at the National Gallery, they presented two works from the project — Kaminsky's "Rising Tide" and Larsen's "Emergence" — minus the visuals and poetry. Their program, in celebration of Women's History Month, also included Amy Beach's Op. 89 quartet and Joan Tower's "Night Fields."

This is an interesting ensemble. The lower strings, manned by violist Bradley Ottesen and cellist Anne Francis Bayless, produce a warmly rich, opulent tone, while the violinists, Robert Waters and Rebecca McFaul, play with a much more restrained sound. But together, their balance, blend and rhythmic cohesion work beautifully.

The four movements of Kaminsky's "Rising Tide" track the planet's basic resources — water, the biosphere, food and human society — in a carefully structured idiom that makes the most of textures, sometimes delicate and almost weightless, sometimes thick and convoluted, but always vivid. Kaminsky manages both tension and humor in the most natural way, and her final movement conveyed a profound sense of philosophical acceptance.

Larsen's five-movement study on various states of water was a virtuoso piece of dramatic musical composition that traced bubbles and whirlpools, quiet ponds and racing eddies. In one movement, based on the folk song "The Water Is Wide," she threw in a little "Ol' Man River" for good measure, and she generally had a good time with water's unpredictable playfulness.

Beach's one-movement quartet, with its daring early-20th-century astringency and



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its homage to an American folk idiom, was a fine buffer between Kaminsky's and Larsen's more intense writing. But Tower's "Night

Fields" was probably a more insistent and energetic finale than this already insistent program needed.

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