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**FORMOSA QUARTET RETURNS TO IRVINE BARCLAY THEATRE IN
AN EVENING WHICH MELTS JAZZ, BLUES, AND CLASSICAL
TRADITIONS**



Formosa Quartet (Photo: Jose Franch Ballester)

(IRVINE, CA, MARCH 26, 2026)—Winners of the First Prize and Amadeus Prize at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, the **Formosa Quartet** returns to Irvine Barclay Theatre on Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 8pm in an evening which melds jazz, blues, and classical traditions. This concert marks their first performance back in the United States following a tour across Taiwan, which included stops at the TaoYuan

Performing Arts Center, Weiwuying Recital Hall in Kaohsiung, and the majestic National Concert Hall in Taipei. This performance is part of the Philharmonic Society of Orange County's America@250 Celebration.

The evening is set to open with Shelley Washington's SAY (2016), a bold, rhythm-driven work that challenges the string quartet to "speak" through extended techniques and percussive energy, followed by a groove-inspired set from the Formosa Quartet which blends a wide range of American influences—from Dvořák's "American" String Quartet, inspired by spirituals and folk songs, to music by Jelly Roll Morton, Muddy Waters, Benny Goodman, and Louis Armstrong. The evening will culminate with Wynton Marsalis' dynamic String Quartet No. 1 "At the Octoroon Balls," which blends classical form with the spirit of ragtime, dance, and early jazz in a joyous finale that brings the program's musical threads together in a celebration of American creativity.

The Formosa Quartet uses the string quartet as a vehicle for advocacy, storytelling, and innovation. Their critically acclaimed performances at venues including the Library of Congress, the Chicago Cultural Center, the Walter Reade Theater at Lincoln Center, the National Concert Hall in Taipei, and the Kammermusiksaal at the Berliner Philharmonie have forged uncharted musical terrain that are "spellbinding" (*The Strad*), "remarkably fine" (*Gramophone*), and "go beyond the beautiful and into the territory of unexpectedly thrilling... like shots of pure espresso" (*MUSO Magazine*).

Formed in 2002 when the four Taiwanese-descended founders came together for a concert tour of Taiwan, the Formosa Quartet's cultural identity has since expanded to include broader American, pan-Asian, and Eastern European roots. Their name "Formosa" is taken in its most basic sense: Portuguese for "beautiful." The founding members' interest in championing Taiwanese music and Indigenous cultures has since expanded to include the exploration of the rich folk traditions and heritages found in America today. Whether in its uncompromisingly exploratory approach to the standard quartet literature; its socioculturally probing *American Mirror Project*; or its unique sets curated from its

collection of folk, pop, jazz, and poetry arrangements, the Formosa Quartet is committed to an insatiable search for the fresh and new in string quartet expression.

The Formosa Quartet has played a leading role in actively commissioning new works, contributing significantly to the modern string quartet repertory. The ensemble's milestone album *From Hungary to Taiwan* (Bridge Records, 2019) includes premiere recordings of three Formosa commissions: Lei Liang's *Song Recollections*, Dana Wilson's *Hungarian Folk Songs*, and Wei-Chieh Lin's *Five Taiwanese Folk Songs*. Other works written and premiered by the quartet include pieces by Shih-Hui Chen, Katinka Kleijn, Wei-Chieh Lin, Clancy Newman, Paul Novak, Angeliqye Poteat, and Dana Wilson. Formosa Quartet's latest release of *The Music of George Frederick McKay* (Orchid Classics, 2025), a world-premiere recording of the American's four reflective, playful, and intricate string quartets, was praised by the BBC's *Record Review* as "just gorgeous—perfect, really." The ensemble's discography can be heard on EMI Classics, New World Records, Delos, and New Focus Recordings.

The Formosa Quartet undertakes a variety of residencies across North America and Asia, and serves as the Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Houston's Moores School of Music, Texas Music Festival, and National Youth Orchestra of Canada. During the 2023-2024 season, they held the M. Thelma McAndless Distinguished Professor Chair in the Humanities at Eastern Michigan University where they launched their *American Mirror Project* with a community of 14,000 people, a collaborative initiative that holds up mirrors and highlights personal reflections on the history, identity, and meaning of "America" through a thought-provoking exploration of American music.

The members of Formosa Quartet—Jasmine Lin, David Bernat, Matthew Cohen, and Deborah Pae—form an octet with violins Andrea Guarneri (1662) and Samuel Zygmuntowicz (1984), a Giuseppe Guadagnini viola (1793), and a Vincenzo Postiglione cello (1885).

Irvine Barclay Theatre is located at 4242 Campus Drive, Irvine, CA 92612. Ticket prices start at \$42 and are available at the Philharmonic Society box office at (949) 553-2422, or online at www.philharmonicsociety.org, and at the Barclay box office at (949) 854-4646.

All artists, dates, venues, programs, and prices are subject to change.

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ABOUT THE PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY OF ORANGE COUNTY:

Founded in 1954 as Orange County’s first music organization, the Philharmonic Society of Orange County presents national and international performances of the highest quality and provides dynamic and innovative music education programs for individuals of all ages to enhance the lives of Orange County audiences through music.

Since its inception, the Philharmonic Society has evolved and grown with the county’s changing landscape, presenting artists and orchestras who set the standard for artistic achievement from Itzhak Perlman, Gustavo Dudamel, Yo-Yo Ma, and Renée Fleming to the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and many others. In addition, the Philharmonic Society celebrates multi-disciplinary performances under its Eclectic Orange brand and embraces music from a wide range of countries with its World Music performances. Its celebrated concerts introduce children to classical music with creative and inspiring performances, instilling music appreciation for future generations.

The Philharmonic Society’s nationally recognized Youth Music Education Programs, offered free of charge, engage more than 80,000 students annually through curriculum-based music education programs that aim to inspire, expand imaginations, and encourage learning at all levels. These programs are made possible by the Committees of the Philharmonic Society comprised of nearly 450 volunteer members who provide more than

50,000 hours of in-kind service each year. As a key youth program, the exceptional Orange County Youth Symphony and String Ensemble provide top-tier training to the area's most talented young musicians through multi-level ensemble instruction, leadership training, touring opportunities, challenging professional repertoire, and performances in world-class venues. The Philharmonic Society also promotes life-long learning, connecting with colleges and universities to conduct masterclasses and workshops and providing pre-concert lectures to introduce audiences to program selections.

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WHAT: Formosa Quartet

WHEN: Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 8pm

PROGRAM: **Shelley WASHINGTON:** SAY
Formosa Quartet: Blueish Groove set (works to be announced from the stage)
Wynton MARSALIS: String Quartet No. 1 “At the Octoroon Balls”

WHERE: Irvine Barclay Theatre
4242 Campus Dr.
Irvine, CA 92612

TICKETS: Ticket prices start at \$42.

Available at the Philharmonic Society box office (949) 553-2422,
or online at www.philharmonicsociety.org.

Tickets are also available at the Barclay box office at (949) 854-4646,
Or online at www.thebarclay.org.

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