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## Miró Quartet premieres new music by Pulitzer Prize-winner Kevin Puts

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Posted: 1:22 p.m. Monday, Dec. 2, 2013

BY LUKE QUINTON - SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

A decade before he won last year's Pulitzer Prize for music, Kevin Puts was here in Austin, leading a different life.

"I just remember hours and hours of writing all day," the composer says, from his Yonkers, N.Y., home.



Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts. The Miró Quartet and the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra will premiere Puts' "How Wild the Sea" on Wednesday at the Bass Concert Hall of a work written for the Miró Quartet and – in an usual combination – the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra.

When he taught at UT from 1999 to 2005, he says, "I didn't have many duties. I was single. I didn't have any kids."

He wasn't well-known, even in classical music circles.

(actor) Craig Hella Johnson really briefly at a time when we didn't work together – he didn't know my music."

He had a choral commission in need of a choir, he said, "I know a great choir in Austin."

And that resulting collaboration with Conspirare was recorded and released earlier this year.

Certainly everyone in Austin's classical community knows Puts' name now.

And Austin's connection with Puts is continuing to bear fruit, this time with the world premiere on Wednesday at

Bass Concert Hall of a work written for the Miró Quartet and – in an usual combination – the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra.

Puts' piece – "How Wild the Sea" – is performed as part of the

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Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts. The Miró Quartet and the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra will premiere Puts' "How Wild the ... [Read More](#)

upcoming yearlong celebration of the centennial of UT's School of Music. (UT co-commissioned the work along with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra Society, City Music Cleveland, ProMusica Chamber Orchestra and the Naples Philharmonic.)

"I'd do just about anything for them," Puts says of the Miró. "I feel a real musical and personal kinship with them."

This kinship resulted in the recording of a stunning work by Puts, called "Credo," but the latest work is something altogether different.

"How Wild the Sea" came together when the composer saw an image from Japan's catastrophic 2011 tsunami.

"It was this man, an old man, floating on the roof of his house – which was floating in the waters," Puts says. "They said that his wife had drowned some ways back."

Puts translates this devastation into a musical work that is part elegy and part virtuosic swirls of musical waves.

The image of one man against the waves is an apt metaphor for the unusual array of musicians who will be on stage: The four quartet members will be dwarfed by the UT Symphony Orchestra in chamber orchestra formation. Gerhardt Zimmerman will conduct.

"One of the problems of this orchestration is it's so easy to cover up the string quartet," especially the cello and viola, Puts says. "There's just a massive sound that tends to swallow them up. I just thought, 'What if you embrace that problem?'"

So Puts wrote slow-moving lines that begin with the quartet. "The orchestra gradually begins to play that texture, and takes over."

The mood shifts in the second part, which is titled "Saisei," the Japanese word for rebirth. Puts recalls visiting Kobe, Japan, years ago, after a different disaster. "They had rebuilt the city, and it was kind of amazing," he says. Part of this work charts that galvanizing spirit.

Puts writes music with harmonies that are approachable. "I don't shy away from tones and harmonies that elicit a certain emotional response in me."

"It's tough to write melody in the traditional sense of melody and have it feel fresh," he says. "But I sing everything I write. So there is a sense of line – of melodic line in almost everything I write."

Puts found the challenge of writing for a quartet with an orchestra appealing, because almost no composers have done it.

“Just the fact that you’re doing something new will lead you to places that you haven’t gone before – and probably no composer’s gone before,” he says.

And that’s probably a good space to occupy, because Puts says that winning the high-profile prize was a little disorienting, to the point that he was having trouble sleeping.

“I thought – oh god, now I have to write Pulitzer music!”

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### Miró Quartet and the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra

When: 8 p.m. Wednesday

Where: Bass Concert Hall, UT campus

Tickets: \$32-\$40

Information: 512-477-6060, www.texasperformingarts.org

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