You can't accuse Ethel of being a hidebound classical group. Since its founding in 1998, this New York City-based string quartet has devoted itself to breaking down the barriers between high art and pop culture. The group appears in rock clubs, plays amplified music (the louder the better) and is omnivorous in its musical tastes. Not since the halcyon days of the Kronos Quartet in the 1980s has a classical group created so much excitement.

This weekend, Ethel will be in town for a two-night date at OZ Nashville. On Friday, the group will present an ambitious multimedia event called *Documerica*. The ensemble will jam with Nashville musicians on Saturday.

*Documerica*, commissioned by the Brooklyn Academy of Music and co-commissioned by OZ Nashville and the Cheswary Foundation, traces its origins back to the early days of the Environmental Protection Agency. Between 1972 and 1977, the agency dispatched about 70 freelance photographers to capture images of "environmental happenings and non-happenings." The photographers returned with more than 20,000 prints depicting everything from barnyards and smokestacks to big-city parades and long gas lines.

Composers James Kimo Williams, Ulysses Owens Jr., Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate,

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Mary Ellen Childs and the Ethel members used some of these prints as inspiration to create a pulsating, prismatic score. Visual artist Deborah Johnson then took 3,000 of the photos to create a projection, which will be shown on three giant digital screens during the performance.

Williams, who is best known for playing guitar in actor Gary Sinise's Lt. Dan Band, composed "Into the Liquid" to accompany photos of lakes. "It's so beautiful it sounds like it could have been written by Strauss," says Ethel violinist Kip Jones. Tate, a Chickasaw classical composer, introduced a Hopi buffalo song into his piece. Childs' "Ephemeral Geometry" features spiky rhythms and melodies to match photos of flower petals and thorns.

Ethel last passed through Nashville in 2005, when it played with Joe Jackson and Todd Rundgren. The opening of OZ Nashville has provided the cutting-edge quartet with an appropriately adventurous space. "There are maybe a half-dozen venues in the country like OZ Nashville," says Jones. "And we're thrilled to be playing there."