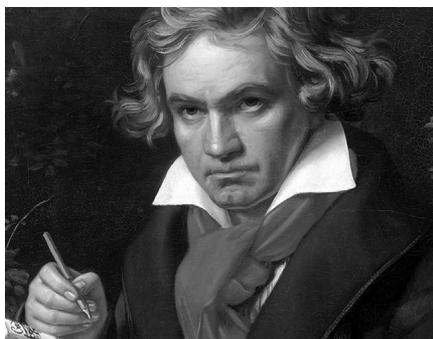


PROGRAM NOTES



String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

b. December 16, 1770, Bonn

d. March 26, 1827, Vienna

Premiere

circa 1801

Performance Time

25 minutes

Beethoven worked for two years on his first string quartets, completing that cycle of six in 1800, the year he also composed his *First Symphony*. While the quartets were not composed in the order they were published, the sixth of the set was in fact the last to be written, and it shows a number of unusual features. This is a quartet that grows more interesting as it proceeds – Beethoven was apparently experimenting here with making the finale a weightier and more significant conclusion than the usual high-spirited rondo of classical form.

Such a shift in emphasis inevitably means that the first movement – which establishes the character of a piece of music – will seem less important, and Philip Radcliffe has called the opening *Allegro con brio* of this quartet “lightweight” and “superficially Haydnesque.” Yet it is hard to dislike this spirited opening movement, with its propulsive exchanges between first violin and cello and its endless energy. The movement is remarkably short – its brevity is one of Beethoven’s ways of de-emphasizing its importance – and the development is concerned almost exclusively with the opening theme. The first violin lays out the elegant main melody of the *Adagio, ma non troppo* (the first violin has an unusually prominent part in this quartet), and this idea develops through a lengthy elaboration. The third movement is a scherzo rather than the minuet of the high-classical string quartet, and this one is full of cross-rhythms, as Beethoven sets three beats against two; the skittering trio belongs almost entirely to the first violin before a quick bridge in B-flat minor leads back to the scherzo.

The finale opens with a long *Adagio* that Beethoven calls “*La Malinconia*.” The source of this melancholy is unclear. It does not seem to reflect anything in Beethoven’s own life—perhaps it is a generalized expression of an emotional pose. The composer stresses that it should be played “with the greatest delicacy,” and this remarkable music proceeds through unexpected modulations and sharp dynamic contrasts before leading without pause into the sparkling main section of the finale, marked *Allegretto*

quasi Allegro. This music, in a quick 3/8 meter, has some of the feel of a waltz, and once again the first violin does most of the dancing. Beethoven brings back several reminiscences of “*La Malinconia*” near the close, but the music finally dashes to its close on the sunny waltz music, now accelerated to a *Prestissimo*.

—Program note by Eric Bromberger



String Quartet No. 2, “Oceanic”

DAVID DZUBAY

b. 1964, Minneapolis, Minnesota

WORLD PREMIERE

Performance Time

23 minutes

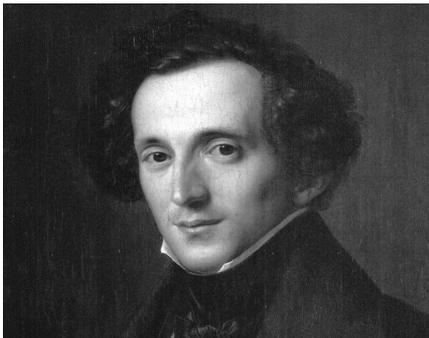
This “oceanic” quartet was composed for the Pacifica Quartet with support from the Fromm Music Foundation at Harvard. While my first quartet was subtitled “Astral” after dedicatee the Orion String Quartet, my second quartet takes its aquatic focus from the Pacifica Quartet, whom I have the good fortune to work with at the Jacobs School of Music.

The music is partly inspired by memories of time at the Oregon coast in my youth, especially an annual month spent at an isolated, unnamed beach south of Cape Meares with its famous lighthouse and “Octopus tree” and north of Oceanside and the offshore Three Arch Rocks National Wildlife Refuge. This beach is one quarter of a mile long, bordered by high rocky bluffs, with a cliff in between facing the ocean; a rough road carved into the cliff face is the only means of accessing the beach except at a very low tide. The northern bluff is pierced by a Y-shaped tunnel called “Lost Boy Cave” that has openings to the beaches either side and the ocean in between. Depending on the shifting sand level and tide, it is sometimes possible to walk through to the neighboring beach, observing cave walls covered in starfish, mussels and barnacles, and tidepools with seaweed and sea anemones. Each summer for quite a few years, my family and another would rent a cabin above the cliff. While our working fathers were present mostly on weekends, the five kids and two mothers would spend a month at this unique and magical place. Playing at the edge of the great Pacific Ocean was an endless adventure: skimboarding and jumping waves in the frigid water, digging and designing elaborate games in the sand, building driftwood castles, climbing rocky faces and protrusions, exploring the windy forest atop the Northern bluff, finding agates, shells and if very lucky, Japanese glass floats in the

surf, running the beach or even the log “highways” uphill from the layers of ocean, sand and surf-smoothed rockpile, and more. Everything seemed elemental, ancient, and a bit dangerous, with signs of life and death everywhere. As JFK said, “We are tied to the ocean. And when we go back to the sea, whether it is to sail or to watch it we are going back from whence we came.”

The Oregon coast memories served as prompt for the central movement of the quartet. Unmentioned above are the sounds at the beach, hints of which might be heard in the movement: the usual coastal sounds of water, wind and seagulls, but also the gurgling cacophony of water and sea life near and inside the cave; perhaps even sea lions barking from nearby Three Arch Rocks. But to quietly begin building the large-scale Tsunami that is the quartet, *Full Fathom Five* emerges from the depths to set the second stanza of Ariel’s Song from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. *Bergy Bits and Growlers* are chunks of glacial ice, smaller than an iceberg, but still dangerous to ships; in the second movement they appear as interruptions to a rather “pacific,” easy-going flow. *Icebreaker* imagines a powerful ship pushing through the ice, bending and splitting the frozen ocean to the breaking point from within or above. Continuing without pause is the final movement, *Riptide*, suggesting a doomed soul at times gasping for air and eventually being carried away by relentless currents. Above all when at the Oregon coast, we learned to respect nature... and never turn our back on the ocean.

–Program note by David Dzubay, June 11, 2018



String Quartet in D Major, Op. 44, No. 1

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

b. February 3, 1809, Hamburg

d. November 4, 1847, Leipzig

Premiere

circa 1838

Performance Time

30 minutes

In March 1837 Mendelssohn married nineteen-year-old Cécile Jenrenaud, and in the brief time allotted them (Mendelssohn died ten years later at age 38), the couple found much happiness: every account suggests that this was one of the most successful marriages enjoyed by any composer. Mendelssohn was always a prolific (and very fast) worker, and in the months following his marriage he composed an

unusual amount. He actually wrote a string quartet on his honeymoon, and over the next year came two more quartets. He published the three quartets in 1839 as his Opus 44.

The Quartet in D Major was the last to be completed (in July 1838), but it was Mendelssohn's favorite of the three, and he published it as the first of the set. Shortly after completing the score, he wrote to the violinist Ferdinand David: "I have just finished my third Quartet, in D Major, and like it much. I hope it may please you as well. I rather think it will, since it is more spirited and seems to me likely to be more grateful to the players than the others."

Mendelssohn's description is accurate – this is energetic music, and it lies gracefully under the hand. The aptly-marked *Allegro Vivace* opens with the first violin leaping up powerfully over rustling accompaniment from the middle voices. This movement is in sonata form, and its second subject – a quiet chordal melody – brings nice contrast; the climax, marked *con fuoco*, drives to a close on a variation of the opening theme. The second movement should be a scherzo, a form at which Mendelssohn excelled, but he instead offers a minuet, the form favored by Haydn and Mozart at this point in a string quartet. The term sometimes used to describe this movement is "delicate." Violins in thirds sing a long melody marked by dark shadings despite the D-Major tonality, and a smooth trio section leads to the return of the minuet.

The final two movements contrast sharply. The first violin has the expressive main theme of the B-Minor *Andante espressivo* over the second violin's steady accompaniment. Mendelssohn gracefully weaves together the voices in this movement before it closes on quiet pizzicato strokes. The blistering final movement, *Presto con brio*, races along a 12/8 meter that often gives the effect of cascading triplets and swung rhythms. Some of the writing for first violin is extremely high in this athletic movement, and the coda is full of cadenza-like brilliance.

–Program note by Eric Bromberger