

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESENTS | MANDEL HALL

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2014, 7:30 PM

SHANGHAI QUARTET

6:30 PM pre-concert lecture with Philip Gossett, Robert W. Reneker Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus, Department of Music, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and the College

HAYDN

String Quartet in D minor, Opus 76, No. 2
"Fifths"
Allegro
Andante o più tosto allegretto
Menuetto: Allegro ma non troppo
Finale: Vivace assai

PENDERECKI

String Quartet No. 3: *Leaves from an unwritten diary*

Intermission

ZHOU LONG

Song of the Ch'in

VERDI

String Quartet in E minor
Allegro
Andantino
Prestissimo
Scherzo-Fuga: Allegro assai mosso



Photography is prohibited.



SHANGHAI QUARTET

30th anniversary season

“A wonderfully ferocious and illuminating performance.”

—*Washington Post*

Renowned for its passionate musicality, impressive technique and multicultural innovations, the Shanghai Quartet has become one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles. Its elegant style melds the delicacy of Eastern music with the emotional breadth of Western repertoire, allowing it to traverse musical genres including traditional Chinese folk music, masterpieces of Western music and cutting-edge contemporary works.

Formed at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1983, the Quartet has worked with the world's most distinguished artists and regularly tours the major music centers of Europe, North America and Asia. Recent festival performances range from the International Music Festivals of Seoul and Beijing to the Festival Pablo Casals in France, Beethoven Festival in Poland, Yerevan Festival in Armenia and Cartagena International Music Festival in Colombia, as well as numerous concerts in all regions of North America. The Quartet has appeared at Carnegie Hall in chamber performances

and with orchestra; in 2006 they gave the premiere of Takuma Itoh's *Concerto for Quartet and Orchestra* at Carnegie Hall. Among innumerable collaborations with noted artists, they have performed with the Tokyo, Juilliard and Guarneri Quartets, cellists Yo-Yo Ma and Lynn Harrell, pianists Menahem Pressler, Yuja Wang, Peter Serkin and Jean-Yves Thibaudet, pipa virtuosa Wu Man and the male vocal ensemble Chanticleer.

The Shanghai Quartet has been regular performers at many of North America's leading chamber music festivals, including the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and Chamberfest Ottawa.

The Quartet has a long history of championing new music and juxtaposing traditions of Eastern and Western music. For the Quartet's 30th anniversary season, the La Jolla SummeFest commissioned a sextet for piano, string quartet and bass from David Del Tredici. The Tucson Winter Festival commissioned a piano quintet from Australia composer Carl Vine, and Korean composer Jeajoon Ryu composed a concerto for string quartet and symphony orchestra.

Their 25th anniversary season featured Penderecki's String Quartet No. 3: *Leaves From an Unwritten Diary*, Chen Yi's *From the Path of Beauty*, String Quartet No. 2 by Vivian Fung and jazz pianist Dick Hyman's *String Quartet*. The Penderecki piece premiered at a special 75th birthday concert in Poland, and subsequent U.S. premieres were held at Montclair State University and the University of Richmond. It was featured at the festival celebrating the composer's 80th birthday in Poland in November 2013. Chen Yi's *From the*

Path of Beauty, co-commissioned with Chanticleer, was premiered in San Francisco, followed by performances at Tanglewood and Ravinia, Beijing and Shanghai. Other important commissions and premieres include works by Bright Sheng, Lowell Lieberman, Sebastian Currier, Lei Liang, Marc Neikrug and Zhou Long. Bright Sheng's *Dance Capriccio* had its premiere in spring 2012 with pianist Peter Serkin. Later that year, *Sweet Suite*, a piano quintet by Stephen Prutsman was premiered with the composer at the piano. Dan Welcher's *Museon Polemos* for double quartet premiered in September 2012 with the Miro Quartet at the University of Texas at Austin. The tradition will continue in 2015-16 with the premiere of a quintet for string quartet and pipa by Zhao Ji-Ping, China's most renowned composer for film (*Raise the Red Lantern*, *Farewell*, *My Concubine...*) with Wu Man.

The Shanghai Quartet has an extensive discography of more than 30 recordings, ranging from the Schumann and Dvořák piano quintets with Rudolf Buchbinder to Zhou Long's *Poems from Tang* for string quartet and orchestra with the Singapore Symphony (BIS). Delos released the Quartet's most popular disc, *Chinasong*, in 2003: a collection of Chinese folk songs arranged by Yi-Wen Jiang reflecting on his childhood memories of the Cultural Revolution in China. In 2009 Camerata released the Quartet's recordings of the complete Beethoven String Quartets, a seven-disc project.

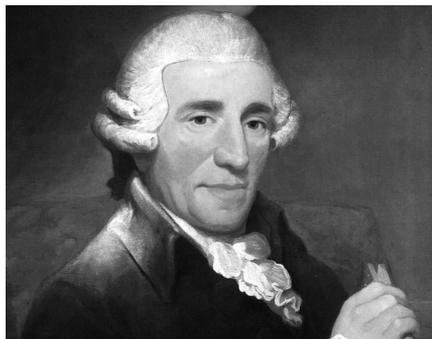
A diverse and interesting array of media projects include a cameo appearance playing Bartók's String Quartet No. 4 in Woody Allen's film "Melinda and Melinda"

to PBS television's *Great Performances* series. Violinist Weigang Li appeared in the documentary "From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China," and the family of cellist Nicholas Tzavaras was the subject of the 1999 film "Music of the Heart," starring Meryl Streep.

The Shanghai Quartet currently serves as Quartet-in-Residence at the John J. Cali School of Music, Montclair State University, New Jersey, Ensemble-in-Residence with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra, and visiting guest professors of the Shanghai Conservatory and the Central Conservatory in Beijing. They are proudly sponsored by Thomastik-Infeld Strings.

This is the Shanghai Quartet's first appearance with UChicago Presents.

PROGRAM NOTES



String Quartet in D Minor, Opus 76, No. 2 “Fifths”

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

b. March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria

d. May 31, 1809, Vienna, Austria

Haydn composed the six quartets of his Opus 76 shortly after returning from his second trip to London, completing them in the summer of 1797 when he was 65. This was a moment of transition for the aging Haydn. He was moving away from instrumental music: all his symphonies were behind him, and he would write only a few more string quartets. Even as he composed his Opus 76, he was beginning work on the oratorio *The Creation*, and he would devote the remainder of his creative energies almost exclusively to vocal music.

If Haydn was nearing the end of his purely instrumental music (the Quartet in D Minor is the 75th of his 83 quartets), he was also writing at a very rarefied level, and this quartet is particularly impressive. It is sometimes nicknamed the “Fifths” because the first movement is constructed so rigorously around that interval. But Haydn is just as rigorous in his handling of tonality, and much of the tension in this quartet rises from his stark

opposition of D major and D minor.

The opening *Allegro* is an unusually stern movement. The first violin’s first four notes twice outline the interval of the falling fifth, and all the movement’s thematic material derives from that drop of a fifth. Haydn writes with great economy and concentration here – and with great rhythmic vitality: the movement takes much of its vigor from its constant syncopation. By contrast, the second movement brings relaxation and sunlight. The dark D minor of the opening movement gives way to D major here, and the movement belongs largely to the first violin, which soars easily over the other voices.

The third movement brings back the rigor of the first. Haydn returns to D minor and writes a minuet in strict canon: the violins (an octave apart) are followed at a one-measure interval by the viola and cello (also an octave apart). This minuet, which plows implacably forward, has sometimes been nicknamed the “Witches’ Minuet” because of its so-called “weird” sound. The trio section begins in D minor but quickly relaxes into D major as the first violin dances high above the other voices.

Haydn returns to D minor for the finale. The main theme is syncopated in a way that has suggested folk origins to some scholars, but the theme was apparently Haydn’s own. Some have heard the braying of a donkey in the first violin’s swooping descents in the second theme. The movement moves toward what seems a close in D minor, but in the final moments Haydn eases gracefully into D major: the first violin makes this change *pianissimo*, gradually gathers energy,

and then rushes the quartet to its radiant D-major conclusion.



String Quartet No. 3

Leaves from an unwritten diary

KRZYSZTOF PENDERECKI

b. November 23, 1933, Debica, Poland

String Quartet No. 3 by Krzysztof Penderecki was commissioned in 2008 by Peak Performances, Montclair State University, New Jersey, lead commissioner Modlin Center for the Arts, University of Richmond, Virginia for the Shanghai Quartet in honor of their 25th Anniversary and Maestro Penderecki's 75th Birthday. The Shanghai Quartet expresses its gratitude to Montclair State University for generously underwriting the major portion of this Commission.

The Third String Quartet was given its world premiere at the Krzysztof Penderecki Festival in Warsaw, Poland on November 21, 2008. The American premiere was given at the Kasser Theater, Montclair State University on February 21st, 2009.

Notes from the performers:

Penderecki's String Quartet No. 3 is

16 minutes in length, composed in a single movement with strongly defined subsections. Starting with an almost grave introduction, a dark, screaming melody in the viola leads directly into a driven, brilliant *vivace* in G minor which recurs throughout piece. Soon a beautiful waltz emerges, followed by a poignant and sweetly singing *notturmo*, then back to the *vivace* pattern which Penderecki insisted we play "faster, faster." By the end of our work with the composer in November we could barely play all the notes in this furious tempo. As we increased the tempo however, the excitement and intensity were slowly revealed. Towards the end of the work, a spectacular gypsy melody appears, a theme that hasn't been heard in any of the composer's previous works. We asked Maestro Penderecki about this theme and he told us it's a melody his father used to play on his violin when he was a child, perhaps a Romanian melody. Soon after comes the climax of this masterpiece, where all of the previously heard themes collide in a powerful moment that is full of intensity and drama. The end follows shortly after this: soft and introspective, almost walking off into the distance, with stopped harmonics played by the 2nd violin, echoing the gypsy melody as the work draws to a close.

The Shanghai Quartet is very grateful to both commissioners for playing an important role in the creation of this work. We believe the String Quartet No.3 by Krzysztof Penderecki will become a prominent part of the string quartet repertoire and perhaps be recognized as one of the significant chamber music composition of our young 21st century.

Notes from the world premiere:

For Penderecki, in the beginning was the violin. “When I was twelve, my father bought a good instrument for me from a Soviet soldier in exchange for a bottle of raw spirits,” he recalled in an interview. And he adds that he wrote his first violin pieces for his own pleasure, at eleven or twelve.

Two string quartets occupy a significant place in the composer’s *oeuvre*. His first (of 1960) appears in the context of *Threnody*, *Anaklsasis* and *Polymorphia*, i.e. works that shaped the image of Polish sonorism. In the 1960s, sonorism became a trademark of the Polish School of Composition phenomenon which highlighted tone *and* color. The Second Quartet (of 1968) was composed after the St. Luke Passion, which gave rise to accusations of Penderecki’s betrayal of the ideals of the avant-garde, the same avant-garde that he had spearheaded and defined. The Second and Third Quartets were written forty years apart. Significant changes had occurred in the composer’s *oeuvre* within these four decades: he was no longer “a barbarian in the garden” of music (as he had been seen with his early sonorist works that had caused such an outcry); using melody and euphony, he now drew thinner, more delicate lines, purified of excess.

A first reading of the score of the Third Quartet is enough to observe some features of the piece. Its dramaturgy is constructed according to the principle of continuity in the course of music — quite similar to what happens in *Concerto grosso*. Yet this assumed continuity has its own phases, its own facets of

music, contrasted as they are in tempo, character and tone. This music, then, can accommodate equally the brilliant and energetic playing in *Vivace* sections and the moments of softness and meditation as exemplified by the reflexive *Adagio notturno*. The singing and nocturne-like, indeed nocturnal tone has become a trademark of Penderecki’s “sound language” of recent years — and the same is true of recurring motives of music anchored in static tonal centers. What remains is thinking in terms of form delineated within clear boundaries of beginning and end. And intense emotion meeting a predefined order.

In a conversation with students of the Academy of Music in Kraków (conducted in February 2008), the composer confessed: “My entire life is to surprise, seek and find myself in a thicket.” This finds its confirmation in his music. More and more often, very special places can be found in the thicket of sounds — like green, sun-drenched clearings in a dark forest.

—Malgorzata Janicka-Slysz



Song of the Ch'in

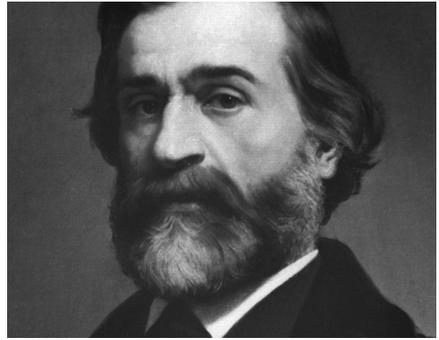
ZHOU LONG

b. July 8, 1953, Beijing, China

Zhou Long is part of the generation of young Chinese composers whose careers were delayed and in some cases derailed by the Cultural Revolution. Sent to work in a rural area, he was eventually allowed to enter the Central Conservatory in Beijing, and from there he moved on to Columbia University, earning his DMA after studies with Chou-Wen Chung. Zhou Long has made his career in the United States, where he has worked with Yo-Yo Ma on the Silk Road Project and taught at different universities. In his own compositions he has aimed for a fusion of Chinese and Western music, and in this he has been quite successful: he received that 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Music for his opera *Madame White Snake*. Currently on the faculty of the University of Missouri at Kansas City, Zhou is married to the composer-violinist Chen Yi.

The composer has provided a program note for *Song of the Ch'in*:

“This work is intended for the string quartet. The ‘ch’in’ is a traditional Chinese seven-stringed, plucked zither, which was associated with sages and scholars. The sophisticated technique of ‘ch’in’ playing involves various ways of plucking the strings, as well as range, timbre and the use of ornaments. In this composition for string quartet, Zhou captures the essence of these special musical gestures frequently found in ‘ch’in’ music.”



String Quartet in E Minor

GIUSEPPE VERDI

b. October 9/10, 1813, Roncole, Italy

d. January 27, 1901, Milan, Italy

Verdi came out of retirement to compose *Aida*, which was triumphantly premiered in Cairo on Christmas Eve 1871. Once back in Italy, the composer supervised productions of his new opera in Milan and Parma and, in the fall of 1872, went to Naples for the first production there. But Theresa Stolz, who was to sing the part of *Aida* in Naples, fell ill, and the production was delayed. Verdi found himself marooned in Naples, waiting for the recovery of his soprano and with nothing to do. In a letter written the following spring, he described what happened: “In my moments of idleness in Naples I actually wrote a quartet. I had it performed one evening in my house without attaching the slightest importance to it, and without issuing invitations of any kind. Present were only seven or eight people accustomed to visiting me. Whether the quartet is beautiful or ugly I don’t know . . . All I know is that it’s a quartet!”

Despite Verdi’s self-deprecation, the quartet was an immediate success: those “seven or eight people” demanded a second performance on the spot. But

Verdi remained uncertain and for several years refused to publish it — this music remained the property of a few of the composer's friends. He relented and allowed the quartet to be published in 1876 and even went so far as to sanction performances by a string orchestra rather than a quartet; it is still sometimes heard in that version.

The Quartet in E Minor has been called Verdi's only non-vocal composition (and this is true so long as one regards his opera overtures — often performed as concert works — as part of vocal compositions). Strange as the thought of a string quartet by this most operatic of composers seems at first, it is really not so remarkable that Verdi would write a quartet — he owned the scores of the quartets of the classical composers, kept them by his bedside, and studied them with care. His own quartet may be regarded as the effort to fuse the discipline and economy of the string quartet with the vocal impulse at the center of his own creative imagination, and various critics have imagined that they hear echoes of his operas in this quartet: *Aida* in the opening movement, *Rigoletto* and *Trovatore* in the third movement, *Falstaff* in the fugal finale. Yet we should grant Verdi his due and consider this music on its own terms: it is quite successful as a string quartet, and if its four movements do not conform exactly to the pattern established by the classical composers, they are nevertheless beautifully written for the four instruments.

This quartet is also quite difficult and demands the most proficient players. The opening *Allegro* is in sonata form, with the dramatic first subject —

announced by the second violin — set against a simple and appealing second subject marked *dolce*. The animated development treats the first theme; the music passes through E major as the shining second subject makes a brief reappearance, and then Verdi drives the movement to a firm close in E minor. The lyric *Andantino* is in ternary form, and its opening belongs to the first violin, whose part is scrupulously marked *dolcissimo* and *con eleganza*; the middle section grows turbulent before the return of the opening material and a quiet close. The *Prestissimo* is also in ABA form: its opening — full of trills and bristling energy — is marked *brillante*; the trio section is one of the places that invariably strike listeners as “operatic,” and some have gone so far as to imagine the cello's tune here as a song conceived for baritone. The finale has an unusual marking: *Scherzo-Fuga*. This movement is a fugue, and it is a scherzo, and in that sense it looks ahead twenty years to the finale of *Falstaff*, where the assembled cast sings a great fugue on the text *Tutto nel mondo è burla*: “Everything in the world's a jest.” Here the second violin announces the subject and is gradually joined by the other instruments in music of great precision and delicacy. At the end of this concise movement, the music rushes ahead on a (non-contrapuntal) coda marked *Poco piu Presto*, and Verdi brings his one venture into the world of chamber music to a dramatic close on four resounding E-major chords.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger © 2014