

UChicago Presents | Performance Hall | Logan Center

April 24, 2016, 3:00 PM

Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin
Sibbi Bernhardsson, violin
Masumi Per Rostad, viola
Brandon Vamos, violoncello

Pacifica Quartet is the Don Michael Randel Ensemble-in-Residence with the University of Chicago

2 PM lecture with Patrick Fitzgibbon, PhD Candidate in Music

MOZART

String Quartet in G Major, K. 387
Allegro vivace assai
Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio
Andante cantabile
Molto allegro

SHOSTAKOVICH

String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 122
Introduction: Andantino
Scherzo: Allegretto
Recitative: Adagio
Etude: Allegro
Humoresque: Allegro
Elegy: Adagio
Finale: Moderato

BEETHOVEN

String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

Performance Time

approximately 28 minutes

Premiere

Composed in 1782. First performance in a private setting on February 12, 1785 with Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart on first and second violin and Joseph Haydn in the audience.

After he left Salzburg in 1781 and arrived in Vienna to earn his living, Mozart heard the first performance of Franz Joseph Haydn's six Op. 33 string quartets on Christmas Day. The Op. 33 quartets were, as Haydn said, "written in a new and special way." The most striking innovation was what he called "thematic elaboration": building melodies from small related phrases in such a way that the melody could be broken apart, modified, and later reintegrated, thus creating many musical possibilities. Another novelty was an equal importance given to each instrumental voice. Haydn also used baroque polyphony together with the classical style in a way that made it sound fresh and natural rather than backward looking.

Mozart recognized that Haydn had elevated the string quartet to a level of great art. Inspired to assimilate Haydn's advances, Mozart began work on string quartets of his own and completed a set of six quartets in early 1785. That he found their composition difficult can be seen both in the time he devoted to the project and the unusual number of cross-outs and changes on the manuscripts. Mozart presented the quartets to Haydn on September 1, 1785 with an elegant printed letter of dedication: "I send my six sons to you, most celebrated and very dear friend. They are, indeed, the fruit of a long and arduous labor...Please receive them kindly...I entreat you to be indulgent to those faults that may have escaped a father's partial eye." After hearing the quartets, Haydn famously told Mozart's father, "Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me."

The influence of Haydn's Op. 33 quartets can be heard throughout K. 387, the first of Mozart's six 'Haydn' quartets. The lyrical first movement presents a series of short melodies that are immediately modified for a few measures in a manner traditionally reserved for the formal development section of sonata form. When extended development does arrive, the instruments converse as equals on their separate paths through harmonic variations of the main themes.

Mozart pays tribute to Haydn's fondness for rhythmic surprises in the second movement. The *Menuetto* opens in triple meter with the usual emphasis on each measure's first beat. In some measures, however, Mozart writes a strong second beat and occasionally has instruments emphasize different notes in the same measure. The effect is a wobbly, humorously off-kilter rhythm. The stern *Trio* in strict triple meter briefly puts an end to such playfulness before the *Menuetto* returns.

The third movement is an extended song without words, as intimate and moving as an opera aria. The first violin is foremost, but other instruments also sing the melodic lines. The movement's essential sweetness is enriched by darker harmonies and imitated lines passing among the voices.

The finale is a high-spirited romp that seamlessly weaves together baroque and classical styles of composing. Each of its two themes is introduced as a four-part fugue, only to be followed, with no break in the breathless flow, by music in the classical style. Late in the movement, the two themes are brought back simultaneously. After rising to a final climax, the movement ends in unexpected calm.

String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 122

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Born September 25, 1906, Saint Petersburg

Died August 9, 1975, Moscow

Performance Time

approximately 16 minutes

Premiere

on March 25, 1966 at the USSR Composers' Club in Moscow by the Beethoven Quartet

Shostakovich dedicated the Eleventh Quartet to Vasily Shirinsky, second violinist and a founding member of the Beethoven Quartet, who died suddenly in 1965. The founding members of the Beethoven Quartet performed together for over forty years without a change of personnel and premiered all of Shostakovich's quartets except the first and last. Shirinsky's death was a severe blow, and Shostakovich suffered the loss of a close friend and music colleague. He urged the remaining Quartet members to carry on its existence, and he responded to the loss of his friend by writing the Eleventh Quartet in Shirinsky's memory. It was the first of a series of four quartets dedicated to the founding member of the Beethoven Quartet.

The Eleventh Quartet is divided into seven short movements played without pause. It is an apparently simple and accessible work with open, transparent textures and movements linked by the repeated use of a relatively small amount of thematic material. The Introduction movement opens with a lyrical theme in the first violin that is not carried forward by the other instruments. Instead, the inconspicuous three-note musical motif in the cello under the violin's theme becomes, as music historian Patrick McCreless observes, the "thematic 'germ' for the entire quartet...A variant of it forms the fugue theme in the Scherzo; it supplies the only melodic material of the Recitative...[it] is the foundation of the chorale-like theme that appears in the three instruments *not* playing the virtuoso sixteenth notes in the Etude; it is the only tune in the Humoresque; it underlies the funeral march of the Elegy; and it dominates the Finale, at the end of which it winds down to just repeated *staccato* F's."

The Eleventh Quartet may be read as a narrative of shock and disruption following the loss of second violinist Shirinsky. The Introduction highlights the missing 'middle' voice by repeating dull open fifth chords under the high violin's searching lines. The second-movement Scherzo fugue, based on the cello's opening thematic 'germ', is derailed when the (replacement?) second violin enters six bars late and then gets stuck on a four-note figure. The next three movements continue the development of the cello's opening three-note 'germ', but the second violin part is still wounded. For the entire length of the Humoresque movement, it obsessively repeats a steady G—E 'cuckoo', seemingly insensitive to the shifting harmonies around it.

The Elegy opens somberly, and the second violin now recovers, opening the way to a more lyrical statement of grief. The exquisite passages of violin duet are the first moments of beauty in the quartet's bleak landscape. In the Finale, the ensemble seems to function again. Now the second violin's running figure responds to harmonic changes in the first violin's line, and the movement's recapitulation makes many 'corrections' as it brings back music from earlier movements. The Finale is also sprinkled with allusions to the composer's earlier quartets.

--Program note by Robert Strong © 2016

String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

b. December 16, 1770, Bonn

d. March 26, 1827, Vienna

Performance Time

approximately 40 minutes

Premiere

composed in 1826, published in Mainz in April 1827

After Beethoven had completed a three-quartet commission for Prince Galitzin (Opp. 127, 130, 132), he composed the C-sharp Minor Quartet, Op. 131 and presented it to his publisher in July 1826. Beethoven's flippant note on the score—"Put together from pilferings of this and that"—caused the publisher great concern, and the composer had to assure him that the music was completely original and his remark only a joke. Scholars believe Op. 131 was first performed at a private concert before Beethoven's death, but that the initial public performance was not until 1835.

Beethoven once confided to friend Karl Holz that while each of his sixteen string quartets was unique, "each in its way," his favorite was the C-sharp Minor, Op. 131. Holz reported that when Schubert heard the piece shortly before his death, "He fell into such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that we were afraid for him." Critics and audiences, however, did not like Beethoven's Op. 131 or the other "late" quartets. He had moved beyond many of the accepted musical norms, creating new formal structures, vastly increasing the music's length and scope, and demanding more from the players than was ever dreamt possible. For over 50 years, Beethoven's late quartets were rarely performed in public.

Op. 131 is divided into seven movements played without pause, placing on the performers the burden of creating organic integration while maintaining the proper tempo and mood of each movement. The somber *Adagio* begins with a fugue followed by four episodes and a coda, all based on the first violin's chromatic opening melody of two rising notes and two descending notes. This short 4-note motif returns throughout all the movements as a unifying element across the entire quartet.

The fast second movement is cheery, with none of the expressivity of the first movement. Warm spirits prevail in contrast to the first movement, although it is linked to the first through its use of half-tone pairs. The short *Allegro moderato*, only eleven measures long, is in effect a rhythmically free recitative introduction to the *Andante* that follows.

The *Andante* is the quartet's central movement, an expansive theme and variations. The syncopated melody, incorporating half tones in yet another form, is put through six variations, and the two notes heard at the very end determine the speed of the *Presto* that follows. The *Presto* opens with an abrupt four-note growl by the cello, and the first violin picks up the dancelike tune. Humorous in spirit, it has a lightness of character that disguises a treacherously difficult score requiring split-second timing. Beethoven directs that the final return of the opening tune be played *ponticello* (bowed near the bridge), producing a glassy sound.

The short, introspective *Adagio* provides a transition between the excitement of the *Presto* and the strongly rhythmic *Allegro* finale, which returns to the key of C-sharp Minor and is based on another reshuffling of the quartet's opening half tone notes.

--Program note adapted from "Guide to Chamber Music" by Melvin Berger