

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

MARTIN BEAVER - VIOLIN
KIKUEI IKEDA - VIOLIN
KAZUhide ISOMURA - VIOLA
CLIVE GREENSMITH - CELLO

TUESDAY , SEPTEMBER 19, 2006

~ PROGRAM ~

Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Allegro

Andante con moto

Allegro

Presto

Five Pieces, Op. 5

ANTON WEBER (1883-1945)

Heftig bewegt

Sehr langsam

Sehr bewegt

Sehr langsam

In zarter Bewegung

~ INTERMISSION ~

Quartet in G Major, Op. 161, D. 887

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

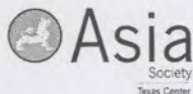
Allegro molto moderato

Andante un poco moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Allegro assai

Tonight's performance is generously underwritten by:



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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3 (1798-1800)

It is difficult to think of any other Beethoven work so broadly infused with tenderness, sweetness and light as this early quartet, which, while listed as Number 3 of his Opus 18 quartets, was in fact written first. Beethoven was acutely aware of the need to distinguish himself from his powerfully influential teacher, Franz Josef Haydn, whose splendid Opus 74 string quartets had just been published in 1796. There can be no doubt that Beethoven felt the heat. That this is so can be seen by the following incomplete list of his major published works which preceded the quartets: the three extraordinary string trios, the first three piano trios, two cello sonatas, his wind quintet, three of the violin sonatas, his horn sonata, and 12 of the piano sonatas, including the "Pathétique." He started in 1798, completing all six Opus 18 quartets in 18 months, then spent another three years reworking the earlier quartets before finally sending them for publication in 1801 in the order in which we now know them. They are dedicated to Prince Lobkowitz, who is credited with having commissioned them.

The first movement of Opus 18, No. 3 opens with a languorous, two-note harmonic question mark introducing a ten measure phrase - two long notes not quite an octave apart, set on the dominant of the home key. It is only in the third measure that the key of D major is settled. This ten-measure phrase is followed by a 16-measure response, tuneful, sinuous and gently cadenza-like. There is nothing like it in Mozart or Haydn. As the movement plays out, the orderly outline of classical sonata form is clearly discernible - the sequence of melodic inventions and their development and repetition. Yet, compared with the classical quartets of Mozart and Haydn, one hears also an uncommon amount of intricate counterpoint as well as exploration into unusual harmonic regions. Further, one is aware of gorgeous instrumental technique and a rich texture only occasionally hinted at in Mozart. Nevertheless, what is most striking about this movement is the elegant flow of each musical idea and the effortless progression of one idea to the next, illustrating utter mastery by the composer.

The second movement, a rondo marked *Andante con moto*, starts with

a lovingly throaty aria played first by the second violin to a little counter theme in the first violin, and simply harmonized by the viola and cello. Beethoven works out his theme with an abundance of contrapuntal embellishments which enrich the texture of the sound, and tell us that he is moving away, far away, from the Classical style.

The third movement, designated neither minuet nor a scherzo, is in fact a *Menuetto and Trio* in form - light, virtuosic and very brief, with a few rhythmic wrinkles to arouse one's interest.

The finale, marked *Presto*, is based on a wild Italian dance, the *salterello*. It depends for its success on brilliant ensemble playing. Towards the end of the development section, a fugue appears adding gravitas to the movement. Then they're off again to the dance floor in the recapitulation and the music whirls about until it confronts a final burst of fugal counterpoint, directly after which the notes flutter quite magically to earth, fading away with two soft little unison turns.

Such was Beethoven's introductory statement to the Viennese lovers of the string quartet.

Program note © Nora Avins Klein, July, 2006

ANTON WEBERN (1883-1945)

Five Pieces (Movements) for String Quartet, Op 5, (Vienna, 1909)

Webern came of age in the Vienna of 100 years ago, a time of lively new ideas in social philosophy, science and the arts. Important influences on him were the symbolists Stringberg and Maeterlinck - whose interest in the occult was seen as an attempt to penetrate unspoken thought - and Mahler and Schoenberg, the latter becoming his teacher and life-long friend. Along with Alban Berg, these three became the chief exponents of the New Viennese School. They sought a way forward from the chromaticism of the high 19th C. Romanticism represented by Bruchner, Wagner, and Strauss, which they believed had reached a dead end. Instead they moved into the uncharted territories of atonality (in which each of the 12 tones of the musical scale possess equal musical weight, and melody as previously understood, disappears) and later, serialism (the playing of each of the 12 notes in an order

fixed by the composer, none to be repeated until each has been sounded, either in sequence or all at once). They viewed these musical ideas as a logical extension of the harmonic language of the previous decades, rather than a radical break with the past. Most of the music composed in this vein has disappeared from the concert stage. But some, such as the work on tonight's program, has survived because, despite the strangeness of the language, its intensity and passion is palpable. Performers enjoy playing it and audiences are increasingly recognizing an inherent musical interest.

Of the three members of the "New Viennese School," Webern was the most radical and ultimately the actual inventor of serialism. By early training, he had been grounded in the polyphonic music of the Renaissance, and was devoted to Bach. He opposed Wagnerian expansiveness aiming instead for extreme concentration of musical expression. He viewed his *Five Movements for String Quartet* as the expression of the essence of a classical string quartet, despite the fact that as a work without a tonal center, it could not have any real themes and could not engage in a real development or harmonic progression, both of which are essential to the conventions of the classical string quartet.

In the opening movement, sonata form is represented by a first subject consisting of two notes. The shadow of a second theme is intoned by the cello, then a brief moment of a development section in pizzicato is followed by a disguised recapitulation with the first "theme" inverted. The second, slow movement, over almost before it begins, hints of the contour and sentiment of a traditional ABA song form. The half-minute third movement simulates a scherzo, and the fourth and fifth movements contain fleeting fragments of truncated themes and phrases moving in and out like thoughts in a daydream. For all its abstract formality, for a period of time which includes this string quartet, most of Webern's compositions, as he wrote to Alban Berg, were related to the death of his mother in 1906.

Webern worked as a conductor (conducting the music of Charles Ives on one occasion) and composer. He was devoted to teaching and for several years before the arrival of Hitler, taught music theory at the Jewish Cultural Institute for the Blind and conducted the Vienna Workers' Chorus. In the last weeks of the war he joined his daughter in an Austrian mountain village where, one evening, he was shot in error by an American soldier.

Program note © Nora Avins Klein, August, 2006

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)
String Quartet in G Major, Op. 161, D. 887 (1826)

Beethoven was in his late twenties when he wrote the first of his great quartets. Schubert was in his late twenties when he wrote his last. The year was 1826; he was 29. He wrote the Quartet No. 15 in G in the astonishing space of 10 days. Two years earlier he had written *Death and the Maiden*; two years later he would write his final great chamber work, the String Quintet in C.

For a composer of such melodic genius, the Quartet in G is remarkably lacking in sustained melodies. In this sense it is perhaps the most elusive of his chamber works. In place of melodies, Schubert has given us tantalizing melodic fragments, counter themes, dramatic outbursts, rapid shifts of mode and key, and other-worldly effects. He seems to have deliberately set out to suppress the full expression of his lyric gifts in favor of a more subtle, searching, tentative language as if writing in the conditional tense. This is evident from the very first moment of the opening, a chordal outburst in G major which swells to a great crescendo, thereafter collapsing with a whimper into the minor mode on the same tone. The pattern is immediately repeated in a different key followed by a short rhythmic rather than melodic transition to the first of the two exquisite and haunting fragments of melodies which, for the rest of the movement, will struggle to compete with stormy shifts in tonality and mood, producing an effect not unlike the fleeting shadows of light and dark over a cloudy, windswept landscape. Structurally, this movement bows to sonata form (a statement of themes, development and return), but in reality it is a series of variations on each of the two themes, as they migrate through the movement and on into the recapitulation. The first movement can alternatively be viewed as having an introduction which lasts up to the first "theme" - except that this introductory material finds its way into the fabric of the movement from time to time.

An examination of the first movement of Beethoven's "Razumovsky" No. 2 written 20 years earlier reveals a possible source of inspiration. In that movement, too, there are only fragments of thematic material never longer than two measures, and a restless profusion of strongly contrasting

ideas. It too starts with two annunciatory chords followed by a swift change in character. We know that Schubert studied Beethoven carefully from other examples: the rondo movement of Beethoven's piano sonata Op. 31, No. 1 served as a structural model for the last movement of Schubert's great A major sonata, and Beethoven's Septet was a model for Schubert's Octet.

The second movement is a solemn march for cello and string trio in rondo form - an unusual form for a slow movement (his previous slow movements in *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosamunda* utilize the more traditional theme and variation, which Schubert based on his own well-known lieder). The cello starts its beautiful and somber song on the dominant rather than the tonic, as if in the middle of a thought. Throughout, thereafter, the composer will return repeatedly to this wistful theme, all the while circling about the tonal center of gravity, alighting upon it only fleetingly, a single measure at a time and only at the end of a cadence, before moving on to another harmonic region, producing a trance-like effect like the wandering of a sleepwalker. The movement ends, at last, in the repose of a major phrase.

The third movement starts with a delicate scherzo in a minor key. It alternates with a *Ländler*, Schubert's characterization of which is far more gentle than one has been accustomed to expect of this robust country dance.

The Finale is a rondo in 6/8 meter, completely ambiguous in tonality, with famously rapid vacillations between major and minor. Once again we see the influence of Beethoven's Opus 59, No. 2, this time its final movement which is also ambiguous, starting out in the wrong key, sharing the same rhythmic vitality. Schubert, however, has again chosen to expand the rondo form by developing themes rather than merely re-stating them, even incorporating variations into his scheme, thus markedly blurring the movement's formal structure.

Nothing about this final quartet of Schubert's turns out to be straightforward and in hearing it one has a sense of passing familiar landmarks while traveling into uncharted waters, glimpsing things to come in a future which, tragically, was not to be.

Program note © by Nora Avins Klein, September, 2004

Tokyo String Quartet

MARTIN BEAVER - VIOLIN

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CLIVE GREENSMITH - CELLO

The Tokyo String Quartet has captivated audiences and critics alike since it was founded more than 30 years ago. Regarded as one of the supreme chamber ensembles of the world, the Tokyo Quartet has collaborated with a remarkable array of artists and composers, built a comprehensive catalogue of critically acclaimed recordings, and established a distinguished teaching record. Performing well over a hundred concerts worldwide each season, the Tokyo String Quartet has a devoted international following that includes not only the major capitals of the world but also reaches all four corners, from Australia to Estonia to Scandinavia and the Far East.

Officially formed in 1969 at the Juilliard School of Music, the quartet traces its origins to the Toho School of Music in Tokyo, where the founding members were profoundly influenced by Professor Hideo Saito. Soon after its creation, the quartet won First Prize at the Coleman Competition, the Munich Competition and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions. An exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon firmly established it as one of the world's leading quartets, and it has since released more than 30 landmark recordings. The ensemble now records on the Harmonia Mundi label.

The Tokyo has served on the faculty of the Yale School of Music as quartet-in-residence since 1976. The musicians also regularly participate in master classes throughout North America, Europe and Japan.

The Tokyo String Quartet performs on "The Paganini Quartet," a group of renowned Stradivarius instruments named for legendary virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, who acquired and played them during the 19th century. The instruments have been loaned to the ensemble by the Nippon Music Foundation since 1995, when they were purchased from the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

For more information, visit them online at www.tokyoquartet.com.