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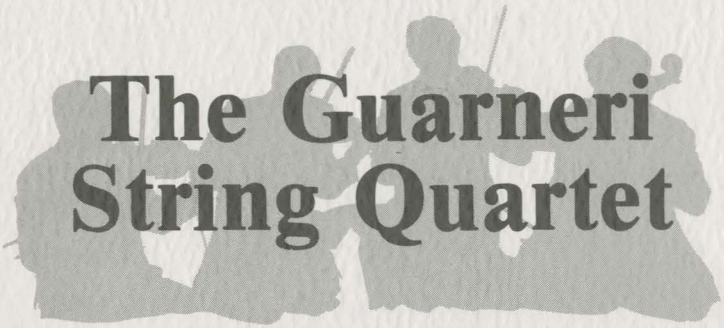

The Guarneri String Quartet

Arnold Steinhardt - violin
John Dalley - violin
Michael Tree - viola
David Soyer - cello

Hamman Hall | **Thursday, October 28, 1982** | **Rice University**
8:00 P.M.

PROGRAM

QUARTET in D Major, K. 499 **Mozart**

Allegretto

Menuetto

Adagio

Allegro

QUARTET, Opus 11 **Barber**

Molto allegro e appassionato

Molto adagio - Molto allegro

INTERMISSION

QUARTET in A-flat Major, Opus 105 **Dvořák**

Adagio ma non troppo - Allegro appassionato

Molto vivace

Lento e molto cantabile

Allegro non tanto

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Thursday, October 28.....GUARNERI QUARTET
Tuesday, November 30.....CHESTNUT BRASS
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THE GUARNERI STRING QUARTET

It was at the suggestion of Alexander Schneider of the Budapest String Quartet that the four virtuosos appearing tonight combined their talents and formed the Guarneri String Quartet. An instant critical and popular success at their first New York appearance in 1965, the ensemble has achieved one of the most glittering and durable reputations in music. By directing their individual talents to a common cause, the four artists have become the most listened-to quartet in the world.

Unlike most string quartets, this group functions without a leader. "If you follow one person," says Michael Tree, "you tend to play cautiously, as if you're following a stick." In keeping with this philosophy, they frequently switch parts, and John Dalley usually plays the single violin parts in trios and piano quartets.

But the ultimate unity of purpose which is expressed in their playing has kept this quartet in the forefront of chamber music groups through the years. In the words of Arnold Steinhardt, "Playing the great pieces over and over again gets better, not worse - like the memories that accumulate on a friend's face."

PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet in D Major, K.499 - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart's Quartet in D Major, K. 499, was written in 1786, and the manuscript carries the date August 19th as the day of completion. That summer was one of great creativity for Mozart, a summer that saw the composition of several diverse chamber works as well as the first performance of *The Marriage of Figaro.* K. 499 stands alone (it was not published as part of a set), and falls between Mozart's "Haydn" quartets and the last three so-called "Prussian" quartets, which were written for King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia. It was published in the same year it was written by a music publisher who was also a friend of Mozart's, and it is sometimes known therefore as the "Hoffmeister" quartet. Possibly Mozart had sent the quartet to his friend in payment of a debt (one of the unending series that Mozart accrued in the last few years of his life).

The first movement opens with a unison statement based on the D major chord but with unusual shape and rhythmic contour. Soon the texture dissolves into some careful counterpoint, and the movement is imbued with the polarities of parallel and contrapuntal writing. There is also a contrast between the lighthearted simplicity of the opening melody and the occasional passing shadow of the minor mode. The development section combines several of these motifs, and leads with seeming inevitability to the return of the opening. The *coda* is light, and the movement ends with the understated delicacy that is its primary feature.

The Minuet, placed second, opens with a simple but affecting country dance over a drone, but soon slips into a higher plane altogether with touches of chromaticism and syncopated counterpoint. The central Trio is characterized by skipping triplet figures. Neither the Minuet nor the Trio is free from the briefest flitting touches of tragedy.

The *Adagio* weaves a dense web of sound, with ornamental flowing lines in the first violin, though each instrument is richly involved in the texture and rhetoric. The rhythmic contour, with its moving impulse, is here also a disguise for an exploration of the deepest expressiveness.

The last movement begins hesitantly and is stopped by questioning pauses and harmonic detours. In the central section the entwined and independent writing becomes more impassioned. Descending chromatic lines color the *coda* before the brusque ending.

Quartet, Opus 11 - Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

The Quartet, Op. 11, is Samuel Barber's only string quartet, which he wrote in 1936 at the age of twenty-six.

The first movement is written in modified sonata form, with a brief central development section and a heightened return of the opening. The movement starts with a powerful unison statement, and continues with a surging energy that is thrown into relief by passages of calm contemplation. The scoring is rich and sonorous, and the texture is continually renewed by varied articulation. Powerful declamatory bowing heralds the recapitulation, and the movement ends unexpectedly.

The slow movement has achieved popular and independent status through the composer's own arrangement of the work for string orchestra at the request of Arturo Toscanini. Its hushed and captivating melodiousness unwinds dreamily and projects a sense of extended timelessness. The climaxes are formed gradually and with sure trajectory of focus. A high point is reached with long-held notes in the upper registers of all the instruments before the tranquil close.

The quartet is rounded off by a return to the *molto allegro* of the first movement, though this section is independently structured. Rushing scale passages lead to the powerful conclusion.

Quartet in A-Flat Major, Opus 105 - Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

Dvořák's String Quartet Op. 105 was the last quartet the composer wrote. It was completed in 1895, the year Dvořák left the United States and returned to Prague to resume his post as Professor of Composition at the Conservatory. It was also the year in which the great Cello Concerto (Op. 104) and the String Quartet Op. 106 were completed. These three works represent Dvořák's art at its most successful and assured. The String Quartet Op. 105 particularly is infused with a mature serenity and genial warmth.

A broadly scaled slow introduction leads straight into the first movement, which is singing and spacious--rhythmically taut passages giving way to periods of pensive and restful calm. The movement is in conventional sonata form with both of the main themes being fully and independently developed. An evocative contrast of moods pervades the flow of the music.

The Scherzo is a lively Czech dance with springing rhythms and a more expansive central Trio section. The dance returns like a welcome friend.

A fervent warmth pervades the lovely slow movement. Over throbbing chords a powerful central climax is formed, but quickly subsides to gentler romantic musings. Only occasional further stirrings are heard.

The last movement *(Allegro non tanto)* is gay and energetic, abundant in ideas and naively formed. Folk tunes and dances flit across its surface. A sketchy fugue makes an appearance. The music is decidedly reluctant to end, but the close, when it does come, is firm and optimistic.

Program Notes by Jeremy Yudkin

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