

FLAGLER
Music MUSEUM
Series

THE STRADIVARI QUARTET

February 7, 2012
7:30 p.m.

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WILLIAM R. KENAN, JR.
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THE STRADIVARI QUARTET

Xiaoming Wang
violin

Soyoung Yoon
violin

Lech Antonio Uszynski
viola

Maja Weber
cello

PROGRAM

String Quartet in G minor, D. 173
Allegro con brio
Andantino
Menuetto: Allegro vivace
Allegro

FRANZ SCHUBERT

String Quartet No. 4
Allegro
Prestissimo, con sordino
Non troppo lento
Allegretto pizzicato
Allegro molto

BÉLA BARTÓK

INTERMISSION

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2
Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Quasi Minuetto, moderato

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Chamber music, as we know it, began in the Baroque era with early trio sonatas, and some of history's greatest composers used chamber music as a vehicle to create their most profound and important works. Others used the medium as an outlet for fun and lighthearted entertainment. The music was traditionally performed in homes. The Flagler name has long been associated with great music, as Henry and Mary Lily Flagler frequently hosted musical performances in Whitehall's elaborate Music Room. The Flagler Museum Music Series captures the spirit of traditional chamber music, and welcomes world renowned performers to the finest chamber music venue in South Florida. Here, performers and visitors can experience chamber music as it was intended in a gracious and intimate setting. Due to its intimate nature, chamber music has been described as "the music of friends." Consequently it is frowned upon to use stages and amplifying devices. The audio devices you will see tonight record the performance for national public radio broadcast and archival purposes.

A champagne and dessert reception with The Stradivari Quartet follows the performance.

PROGRAM NOTES

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born January 31, 1797, in Lichtenthal

Died November 19, 1828, in Vienna

String Quartet in G minor, D. 173

Schubert's thousand or more compositions are the product of an extraordinary, full life that was somehow condensed into less than thirty-two years. It was only at the end of it that Vienna's musical society, which still revolved about the aging Beethoven whom Schubert worshipped from afar, became aware of his existence and of his genius. When Schubert died, the poet Franz Grillparzer, who had so eloquently eulogized Beethoven sixteen months earlier, wrote his epitaph: "The art of music has buried a precious possession, but even fairer hopes. Franz Schubert lies here."

Schubert's brief and almost incomprehensibly fruitful musical career began in 1808, when he was eleven years old. He was the son of a music-loving schoolmaster in whose simple household string-quartet playing was the principal form of entertainment. When the boy entered a competition for a place in the Imperial Chapel Choir, Antonio Salieri, the court Music Director who had been a rival of Mozart and a teacher of Beethoven, judged him to be a good soprano, and Schubert became one of the famous Vienna Choirboys.

This distinction carried with it the privilege of free enrollment in the city's best school, where the headmaster was also a music-lover. He allowed his best young musicians to stay on after their voices changed, and he also organized them into an orchestra that rehearsed almost daily and played concerts on most Thursdays. Before long, young Schubert was its librarian and a first violinist, and was taking counterpoint lessons from Salieri. On October 28, 1813, when he was already sixteen years old but still in the school, Schubert completed the score of his *Symphony No. 1*. It is thought to have been played by the student orchestra at a celebration of the headmaster's birthday or name day; just a few days later, Schubert left the school.

That fall he enrolled in a teacher-training institute, and for two years, was a junior member of the faculty at his father's school. His work gave him neither pleasure nor satisfaction, and he seems to have devoted every moment that was not required in the classroom to writing music. In the year in which he turned eighteen, 1815, he composed the *String Quartet in G minor*, two more symphonies, a beautiful *Mass in G major*, several other works for the church and for the theater, and almost 150 songs. His enormous industry, and the fact that paper was a very expensive commodity, may have given rise to the legend that Schubert composed many of his songs on the backs of restaurant menus.

This brilliant string quartet was just a week's work for the astonishing young musician. He began it on March 25, 1815, finished it on April 1, and no doubt played it through during the next week or so, as the violist in the quartet with his brothers and his father. In 1830, his brother Ferdinand sold the work to a music publisher, but it did not appear in print until 1871, fifty-six years after it was written. The first public concert performance was given in 1863, in Vienna.

In this quartet we hear that for Schubert at eighteen, the language of musical expression was as natural as speech. It is a language that clearly resembles Mozart's and Haydn's, and we can hear it

straining, at times, to attain the weightiness of Beethoven's, for some of Beethoven's Op. 18 Quartets are clearly echoed here. Schubert's music is buoyant and youthful, but it also seems a little impatient. Musical ideas and events of the kind that he would linger over in his later works here hurry by with pressing urgency, as though he is impelled to go on to the next.

The first movement, *Allegro con brio*, has a theme that seems to be a variant of one in the finale of Beethoven's Op. 18, No. 2, but the second subject is no more than a six-note motive, and the tiny development section is only a series of repetitions of this little figure, in a sequence that returns to the first subject in the home key of G minor. Next comes an *Andantino* of such great melodic charm that interest never wanes despite an inherently repetitious musical structure. Haydn's rustic dances and Mozart's urban adaptations of them are echoed in the Minuet, *Allegro vivace*, and in the finale, *Allegro*. Here Schubert goes to great lengths to sustain his witty music, which is assembled in a way that combines the character of sonata-form and rondo, so that there is ample opportunity for development of the recurring main idea in alternation with several contrasting episodes. Note copyright Susan Halpern, 2012.

BÉLA BARTÓK

Born March 25, 1881, in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary
Died September 26, 1945, in New York

String Quartet No. 4

"The fourth quartet comes close to being, if it does not actually represent, Bartók's greatest and most profound achievement." So wrote Halsey Stevens, the eminent composer and Bartók scholar. Audacious in concept and brilliant in execution, the work surely occupies a most notable place in twentieth-century music.

Bartók conceived the five movements of the quartet as a perfectly symmetrical arch or bridge form, with the central movement serving as the keystone to the entire structure. According to his plan, two pairs of movements—one and five, two and four—share the same themes, mood, and character. And then, to assure the perfection of the symmetry, Bartók organized the third movement into three-part A-B-A form, making the B section the crux of the entire piece.

After a few highly dissonant measures of introduction, the cello states the germinal cell that informs both the first and fifth movements, a motif that is simply made up of three rising and three falling notes. The process of expansion and development of the basic motif starts right away. Each instrument plays it; it is inverted; the intervals between the notes are widened; the rhythm is altered; it is treated canonically; it is overlapped with other statements; and new melodies are derived from the original—in short, the melody is explored in every conceivable way. While the movement follows the general scheme of sonata form, all of the thematic content is drawn from the same motivic source.

The four strings, muted throughout, race through the next movement. Replete with glissando (sliding the left-hand finger), ponticello (bowing near the bridge to produce a glassy tone), and even pizzicato glissando (plucking the string while sliding the finger), Bartók creates an amazing display of tonal effects. The principal subject is an undulant line that moves up and down by the smallest

possible intervals. There are contrasting episodes, but they maintain the same fast tempo and do not disturb the motoric forward rush of the music.

The cello solo that opens the third movement is known as a tarogato melody, named after an ancient Hungarian folk instrument related to the oboe. Traditionally, its music consists of elaborate improvised embellishments around a slow-moving, almost static, melody. The middle section, the focus of the entire quartet, is what Bartók referred to as “night music,” full of distant bird songs and other sounds of the forest and nature. The bird songs continue as the tarogato melody returns to end the movement.

Bartók wrote of the fourth movement, “Its theme is the same as the main theme of the second movement: there it moves in the narrow intervals of the chromatic scale, but here it broadens in accordance with the diatonic scale.” The viola presents the theme, with the same fluctuating line as the melody heard two movements earlier but with slightly wider intervals between the notes. All four instruments play pizzicato throughout. Bartók, however, achieves some remarkable sounds by having the players - in addition to plucking in the normal manner - strum the strings or pull on them so hard that they actually snap back against the fingerboard.

The last movement opens with grating dissonances from which the two violins emerge with a melody derived from the first movement motif. By the end of the movement, though, the motif has moved closer to its original shape, and the final two measures are almost identical to the ending of the first movement.

Bartók wrote the quartet in Budapest from July to September 1928. Although the work is dedicated to the Pro Arte Quartet, the Waldbauer Quartet gave the first performance in that city on March 20, 1929. Note from *Guide to Chamber Music* by Melvin Berger, (© 1985).

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg
Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

The Brahms second string quartet has a history similar to that of his first essay in this form. Begun in the 1850s, it was subjected to countless revisions over the following decades before he finally submitted it for publication in 1873. It was given its premiere in Berlin by the Joachim Quartet on October 18, 1873, some two months before the C minor.

If it can be said that the first quartet was written under the specter of Beethoven, the spirit that informs the second belongs to Bach. The music abounds in polyphonic devices that were favored by the older composer. Brahms made particular use of canons, in which one instrument imitates a line first played by another, starting a little after the first. (A round, such as “Frere Jacques,” is an example of a canon.) Although polyphony requires a keen intellectual grasp, Brahms, like his forbear, puts the craft to expressive purpose, successfully concealing the technical concerns behind the musical effect.

The quartet also pays homage to Brahms's good friend, Joseph Joachim, the outstanding violinist, composer, and organizer of the Joachim Quartet. Joachim's personal motto was the notes F-A-E, standing for *Frei, aber einsam* ("Free, but lonely"). Brahms made these notes the second, third, and fourth notes of the first movement's main theme. Inspired by Joachim, Brahms chose his motto, F-A-F, *Frei, aber froh* ("Free, but glad"), and also wove these notes into the musical texture. Brahms probably would have dedicated the two Op. 51 quartets to Joachim, but a petty dispute at the time of publication led him to inscribe them instead to Dr. Theodor Billroth, a well-known physician and avid chamber music player.

The quartet opens with the gracefully arching F-A-E theme, followed by a three-note upbeat, which also appears later in the theme of the last movement. The development section is an outstanding demonstration of polyphonic writing, replete with canons, inversions, and retrograde motion, in which the melody is, respectively, imitated, turned upside down and played backward. At the start of the recapitulation, the viola plays the Brahms three-note F-A-F motto; just before the coda, the second violin plays F-A-F overlapped with Joachim's F-A-E.

Over a sinuous, implacable line in the viola and cello, the first violin sings the warmly lyrical theme of the second movement. As this melody is extended, the first violin and cello, in canon, interrupt with an outburst that is almost operatic in character. When the first violin comes back with the opening melody, however, it is a false return in the wrong key. Finally, the cello sets things right by bringing the melody back in the expected key of A major.

The *Quasi Minuetto* is marked by a changing archaic quality. Two sparkling interludes, though, come along to disturb the calm flow. Following each of the interludes are passages that display the telling effect of Brahms's canonic skills. In an amazing double canon, the first violin and viola play a slowed-down augmentation of the interlude theme in imitation, while the second violin and cello have a variant of the minuetto theme, also in imitation.

The finale sparkles with the musical and rhythmic energy of a czardas, a fast, wild Hungarian dance. Alternating with the varied statements of the czardas tune is a relaxed, waltz-like melodic strain. The coda starts with the cello and first violin giving out the opening melody slowly and quietly in canon; then the entire quartet plays it even more softly, with notes of longer duration. Eventually, the four instruments pick up speed and volume, bringing the music to a brilliant conclusion.

Note from *Guide to Chamber Music* by Melvin Berger, (© 1985).

THE STRADIVARI QUARTET

Four Stradivaris, perfect musical instruments, find four musicians who bring out of them all the height and depth of human emotion that music can express. Xiaoming Wang forms together with Soyoung Yoon, Lech Antonio Uszynski and Maja Weber the Stradivari Quartet. What unites them is their love of music; what drives them is their enthusiasm for using their musical talent to tell stories; technical perfection is a basic precondition which can be allowed to slip into the background. They breathe life into the completed work: the work of Stradivari and the works of the composers. This love is something that reaches to the heart that can be felt by anyone who is able and willing to listen.

The musical interpreters of the Stradivari Quartet tell stories in their music, communicating with each other on the stage. With their passion they cause the music to come alive, they convey content to the public through their interactive story telling mode.

Stradivari instruments are inimitable in their tone. Their unique quality and the myth associated with them are part of the Stradivari Quartet program. This presupposes a special communication between four string players who each have their own qualities and characteristics, as do the Stradivari instruments they play. There has to be room for spontaneous ideas, which any of the players can follow blindly. The story-telling quartet community lends wings to the listener's imagination, forming pictures in the mind that turn into the listener's own story. In this way playing becomes a declaration of love to the only protagonist: music.

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January 10

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Stradivari Quartet
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Joanna Marie Frankel
March 6

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Lara St. John
Sonos Handbell Ensemble
Ahn Trio

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Christopher O'Riley
Brentano String Quartet
Leila Josefowicz
Windscape
Ames Piano Quartet

2008

The Brazilian Guitar Quartet
Trio Fedele
Red Priest
Cuarteto Casals
Alexander Markov

2000 - 2001

Judith Ingolfsson
Sonos Handbell Ensemble
Nina Kotova
Russian National Orchestra
String Quartet
Christopher Basso

2004 - 2005

Andrew Kohji Taylor
Musica Pacifica
Auréole
Lark Quartet
Trio Solisti

2009

Poulenc Trio
The Santa Fe Guitar Quartet
The Prima Trio
Yi-Jia Susanne Hou
Tempesta di Mare

2001 - 2002

Edgar Meyer
Meliora Winds
Tamaki Kawakubo
Hélène Grimaud
Beaux Arts Trio

2006

Nokuthula Ngwenyama
Colorado String Quartet
Thomas Gallant
Gryphon Trio
Borealis Wind Quintet

2010

Violinist Frank Almond
Leipzig String Quartet
Amelia Piano Trio
Intersection Trio
American String Quartet

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St. Lawrence String Quartet
Marina Piccinini
Mari Kodama
Guild Trio
Robert McDuffie

2007

Claremont Trio
Rossetti String Quartet
Pedja Muzijevic
Georgia Guitar Quartet
Janice Martin

2011

Enso String Quartet
Ying Quartet
Alianza String Quartet
Storioni Trio
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