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in Cooperation with Pacific's Conservatory of Music presents

ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET

ZAKARIAS GRAFILO, violin
FREDERICK LIFSITZ, violin
PAUL YARBROUGH, viola
SANDY WILSON, cello

2:30 PM, Sunday, September 21, 2014
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

WOLFGANG A. MOZART (1756–1791)
QUARTET NO. 23 IN F MAJOR, K. 590 (1790)
Allegro moderato
Andante
Menuetto: Allegretto
Allegro

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY (1882–1967)
STRING QUARTET NO. 2, OP. 10 (1916-18)
Allegro
Andante—Quasi recitativo—Allegro giocoso

INTERMISSION

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)
QUARTET NO. 2 IN A MAJOR, OP. 68 (1944)
Overture: Moderato con moto
Recitative and Romance: Adagio
Valse: Allegro
Theme with Variations: Adagio

The ALEXANDER STRING QUARTET is represented by BesenArts LLC
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ARTIST PROFILE

The Alexander String Quartet was formed in New York City in 1981 and the following year became the first string quartet to win the Concert Artists Guild Competition. The ASQ has performed in the major music capitals of five continents, securing its standing among the world's premier ensembles over nearly three decades. Widely admired for its interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, and Shostakovich, the quartet has also established itself as an important advocate of new music through over 25 commissions and numerous premiere performances.

The ASQ is a major artistic presence in its home base of San Francisco, serving there as directors of the Morrison Chamber Music Center at the School of Music and Dance in the College of Creative Arts at San Francisco State University and Ensemble in Residence of San Francisco Performances. The Alexander String Quartet is also Ensemble in Residence at New York City's Baruch College.

The Alexander String Quartet's annual calendar of concerts includes engagements at major halls throughout North America and Europe. The quartet has appeared at Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, and the Metropolitan Museum in New York City; Jordan Hall in Boston; the Library of Congress and Dumbarton Oaks in Washington; and chamber music societies and universities across the North American continent. Recent overseas tours have brought them to the U.K., the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, France, Greece, the Republic of Georgia, Argentina, and the Philippines.

In 1985, ASQ captured international attention as the first American quartet to win the London International String Quartet Competition, receiving both the jury's highest award and the Audience Prize. In May of 1995, Allegheny College awarded Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees to the members of the quartet in recognition of their unique contribution to the arts. Honorary degrees were conferred on the ensemble by St. Lawrence University in May 2000.

A Message to Our Friends

Welcome to the 59th continuous season of the Friends of Chamber Music Series. We have reached this point in our history because of you, our steadfast supporters, to whom we are deeply indebted. We are grateful also to those who have provided grant and foundation funding, especially the C. A. Webster Foundation, and to the University of the Pacific Conservatory of Music for their ongoing, vital support.

Your continuing support also allows us to fulfill a responsibility to reach out to the youth of our community and cultivate an appreciation of classical music through free admission for students, the master classes at University of the Pacific, and the educational programs that some of the ensembles give.

We hope to be able to continue our tradition of bringing the finest chamber music to our community, which deserves only the best. Because of your past generosity, we have been able to bring you these internationally acclaimed musicians and still maintain a ticket cost that remains within the reach of all. We are pleased that you are joining us for another great season!

Mozart: Quartet No. 23, K. 590

The String Quartet No. 23 in F major, K. 590, written in July 1790, is the third of Mozart's three (six planned) Prussian Quartets[1]. It is written in a similar style to the quartets of Joseph Haydn whom Mozart had met in Vienna in the winter of 1781 and whose facility with the quartet style Mozart had honored in his mature string quartets. Conventional wisdom[2] states (1) that the quartet was written for and dedicated to the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm II, an amateur cellist, (2) that Mozart and his friend Karl Lichnowsky met the king in Potsdam in April 1789, and (3) that Mozart played before the king in Berlin on 26 May 1789. Scholarly evidence suggests that nothing could be further from the truth. Despite this romantic legend, we should still appreciate Mozart's brilliant work.

The F Major is the final string quartet Mozart composed, written in June 1790, a year after his return from Berlin and a year and a half before his death. The tenth of his mature string quartets, it is the 23rd he wrote.

We are accustomed to thinking of Mozart as a natural prodigy, whose intellect gave rise to great works of music fully formed. In reality, his later quartets gave him some trouble: the "Prussian" Quartets were a project of several months' duration, which he referred to as "that exhausting labor."

Even with these feelings about the final three quartets, we find nothing laborious in the music. The six "Haydn" Quartets, composed several years before, show fertile energy and originality and amaze us with their complexity and determined expression. These last three quartets are far more transparent with a more simply stated, but nevertheless expressive, message.

Think of the opening theme of the quartet as an ascending arpeggio followed by a descending scale in a discourse between the first violin and cello, which has the second subject. To start the second theme the cello rises in a broken chord from its lowest note over two octaves to the new lyrical melody. Then listen for how Mozart transforms the character originally presented by changing the dynamics, the individual notes, and the scoring. The first theme returns to end the exposition and a brief development leads to a little changed recapitulation. The coda begins like the development but swiftly unwinds to a delightfully witty ending.

The basis of the second movement is not so much a melody as a rhythm: a plain, rhythmic figure played at the outset by the entire quartet. The first two measures introduce us to the rhythm that constructs most of the remainder of the second movement.

The openings of the *Menuetto* and the central trio are rich with appoggiaturas, quick ornamental notes that are played just before main notes. Listen also for asymmetric theme lengths in both of these openings.

The rapid, lively romp that is the *Finale* allows all four players opportunity to test their technical competency. Constructed in a combination of rondo and sonata forms, this alluring and appealing conclusion has complex fugal and contrapuntal sections, harmonic surprises, unforeseen breaks and silences, and even a brief imitation of a bagpipe. It is a brilliant conclusion to Mozart's string quartet-writing.

Kodály: String Quartet No. 2

Zoltán Kodály, along with Béla Bartók, is widely regarded as one of the two most important Hungarian composers of the 20th century. Born in Kecskemet, Kodály learned to play violin at an early age from his amateur musician father. In 1900, he entered the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest where he studied composition. After graduating, he began a serious study of Hungarian folk melody. In 1905, he started visiting remote villages and collecting folk songs. Together with Bartók, Kodály outlined the structure for folk music research in 1913. This activity created the collection, classification, and editing of over 100,000 folk songs that throughout his career imbued Kodály's compositions with a national heritage.

Kodály's contributions to the musical life of Hungary in the 20th century have been immense, and have gone beyond mere nationalism; his orchestral compositions enjoy a place in the standard repertory. His researches into his country's folk music have been models for ethno-musicologists, and he made many significant contributions in the fields of music history, music criticism, history of literature, linguistics and language education. His teaching methods also went far beyond the borders of his native land with the worldwide use of the "Kodály Method" for teaching music in schools focused on achieving general music literacy. He composed in most genres, and while he wrote little chamber music, what he wrote is unvaryingly engaging.

Kodály composed his relatively few chamber works, and his only two string quartets, early in his career during the

[1] K. 575 & K. 589 are the other two.

[2] In this case, of Mozart's own fabrication, perhaps based on wishful thinking

second decade of the 20th century, before refocusing his attention about 1920 on orchestral music and later choral works. The Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet premiered the first quartet in 1910, and in 1918 it gave the first performance of the second.

No one could have been better prepared to write string quartets than Kodály who played violin, viola and cello. His quartet writing is fluent and confident, both quartets evincing the impeccable synthesis of his beloved folk music and orthodox musical structure. Nevertheless, the material in the Second Quartet is his own: he does not quote Hungarian folk melodies nor use their themes. However, the essence of both Hungarian folk music and spoken language inform much of the distinguishing essence this quartet.

The second string quartet was written between 1916 with World War I raging and 1918 after the end of the war and just before the reemergence of Hungary as a liberated country. This music is aptly described as a "fusion between Kodály's personal voice and the spirit of folk music." The structure of the Second Quartet is atypical. The work has four sections, but the last three are played without pause, making this a quartet of only two movements. Despite this, it retains the sense of a three-movement work.

The first movement, a concise sonata-form, has but one theme with three separate motifs rather than fully-developed melodic ideas. Despite being marked *Allegro*, there is no reckless character, and it presents with a lyricism transformed by a brisk, swaying barcarole rhythm in $^{6}/_{8}$ that draws to a quiet close. Because of all this you may find it difficult to discern the sonata form.

The concluding section opens with a long, improvisatory *Andante* that bears a resemblance to his *Epitaph,* Op. 11, for piano and which functions as both a slow middle movement and finale. Listen for a dance melody heard as from afar followed by interplay of the various motivic groups that function like a sequence of dance scenes. You should hear the initial $^{6}/_{8}$ meter of the first dance evolve into a series of solos in duple meter that suggest the sound of Hungarian speech.[3] All of this occurs over what may sound like the drone of bagpipes. Finally a *stretto* leads the piece to its stormy conclusion. The composer's ability to achieve a remarkable range of orchestral effects with only four instruments is evident throughout the work but is mainly on display in the final movement.

Shostakovich: Quartet No. 2

Historically, string quartets came in sixes (Haydn, Mozart) where each was part of a larger cycle. Certainly there have been exceptions (Cage!, Fauré), and some, such as Villa-Lobos and Milhaud, have used the form as a diary of their creative lives but still wrote in multiples of six (died in the process trying to).

The cycle of 15 Shostakovich quartets is a different matter. It is the weightiest long series since Beethoven and covered a period exceeding 30 years later in his life.[4] The chronological order is of little importance. What seems more important is the composer's uncertainty of the function of chamber music in a socialist state.

Chamber music had flourished in Imperial Russia, appreciated in small circles and supported by connoisseurs. The quartet form is about small groupings not classes or nations and Shostakovich had to deal with the concept that it was not an apt vehicle for music of the people unless based on folk tradition that insures the art is both popular and national. Fortunately, there was less political prescription than for the mass form of symphonies and he was able to be more expressive.[5]

Shostakovich's first two quartets were written when the nations of Europe were contriving to blow each other into ever smaller pieces. Surprisingly, they reflect little of this in contrast to his seventh and eighth symphonies composed in the same period. In contrast, the third and fourth quartets relate powerfully to his wartime experiences perhaps reflecting a delayed reaction.

Shostakovich's first quartet is brief, includes much that is trivial, and has an astonishing bareness of texture. The second, which came 6 years later, is written in "correct" form (the only one of the 15 that is), opening in sonata form with exposition repeat, then a slow movement, a scherzo, and a finale in variation form. It is twice as long as the first, more far-ranging, and made of stronger stuff. What is not "correct" are the odd keys for the internal movements (B-flat major, E-flat minor) and the devaluing subtitles for the movements.

The weight of the *Overture* is similar to the custom of the Classical composers with the exposition played forte or louder, but the themes turn aggressive and dissonant and the conclusion does not relax the tensions.

The *Recitative and Romance* is Shostakovich's first use of recitative in his quartets, which he will use more in later quartets and had used frequently in his other compositions. The first violin opens the movement with a long fantasia over chordal accompaniment.

The *Valse* is more Russian in character: it is fast, restless, dark, brooding in tone, and muted throughout. The waltz rhythm arises in the pulsing of the second violin and viola as the cello intones the flowing melody. There are several appearances of the theme in different characters and keys, then a return to the opening material and a quiet close.

The *Theme and Variations* is also more Russian than usual. After a short, slow introduction in a rising-falling structure, the theme, which is similar to the subject in his first quartet, appears in the viola, but the movement is more ambitious in scale. The four variations that follow the statement of the theme are incredibly ingenious and stirring. There is a sequential quickening of tempo in each succeeding variation expressing the aggressive character of the first movement. The piece culminates in the return of the slow introduction before a last, grand statement in A-minor of the original theme.

—notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

[3] Parlando inflections are compositional constructions that mirror speech patterns.

[4] Shostakovich was 19 years old when he wrote his first symphony, but 31 for his first quartet.

[5] There are no *'Leningrad'*, *'Year of 1917'*, nor *'Soviet Artist's Reply to Just Criticism'* quartets.

59TH SEASON
2014-2015

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