

## **Juilliard String Quartet**

Founded in 1946, the ever-evolving Juilliard String Quartet has become a legend known as the "quintessential American string quartet." The Quartet's sound is characterized by clarity of structure, compelling rhythmic drive, and unity of purpose. In the current season the Juilliard String Quartet welcomes its new cellist, Astrid Schween, and celebrates the Quartet's 70th anniversary.

Violinist **Joseph Lin** joined the Juilliard String Quartet in 2011. From 2007-2011 he was a professor of music at Cornell University. In 1996, Lin was awarded First Prize at the Concert Artists Guild International Competition. Mr. Lin graduated magna cum laude from Harvard in 2000.

Violinist **Ronald Copes** has been a member of the Juilliard String Quartet since 1997. As a faculty member at the Juilliard School he serves as chair of the violin department. Mr. Copes has toured with Music from Marlboro, and with the Los Angeles and Dunsmuir Piano Quartets. For two decades he served as Professor of Violin at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Violist **Roger Tapping** joined the Juilliard String Quartet and the Juilliard School faculty in 2013. He moved from London in 1995 to join the Takacs Quartet. Mr. Tapping taught regularly at the Aspen Festival. In recent years he has also served on the faculty of the New England Conservatory where he directed the Chamber Music program. He holds degrees from the University of Cambridge.

Cellist **Astrid Schween** succeeded Joel Krosnick as cellist of the Juilliard String Quartet in September of 2016. She was a longtime member of the Lark Quartet. She was recently a guest speaker at the Library of Congress on the role of women in music. She received her degrees from the Juilliard School, and has participated in the Marlboro Music Festival.

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Adagio - Allegro vivace

Adagio non lento

Intermezzo. Allegretto con moto - Allegro di molto

Presto - Adagio non lento

Felix Mendelssohn was just 18 years old when he composed this remarkable work in 1827. Several relevant factors of his biography are pertinent to following the music, including the fact that he had recently completed a study of counterpoint focusing on Bach's work, as well as a study of Beethoven's last three quartets for which he obtained the parts as they had not yet been published as a set. The music of these two composers—especially Beethoven's string quartets and piano sonatas—were a rich resource for the young Mendelssohn, but these influences, while relevant to the present work, cannot explain it fully. The young composer habitually made good use of musical ideas gained through his intense studies, but always according to his own design. As a matter of course, comparisons offer us the opportunity to appreciate and to probe the development of his musical thinking.

Early in 1827 he composed a short Lied, titled "Frage" ("Question"), the text of which expressed a message for a young woman with whom he was infatuated and who intrigued him. With its direct approach the words allowed him the freedom to compose as if he were actually asking the "question". . . but, of course without an audible answer.

*Is it true? is it true? [pause] that you always wait for me there in the leafy path by the grape arbor and ask the moonlight and the little stars about me? Is it true? Speak! [pause] What I feel can only be understood by someone who feels it with me, and who will stay forever true to me.*

A few months later, Mendelssohn composed his second string quartet, and when it was published he included the song, thus acknowledging its importance to the work. And he wrote to a friend: "The song that I sent with the quartet is its theme. You will hear it - with its own notes - in the first and last movements, and in all four movements you will hear its emotions expressed. If it doesn't please you at first, which might happen, then play it again, and if you still find something 'minuetish,' think of your stiff and formal friend Felix with his tie and valet. I think I express the song well."

The first movement begins with a thoughtful tuneful chordal passage, a sort of slow introduction to that moment when he arrives at the "question," "Ist es wahr?" ("Is it true?" *long-short-long*). Using the song's notes and rhythm, Mendelssohn hesitates, briefly, before continuing the transition out of the introduction toward the statement of the—rather impetuous—first theme of the first movement's sonata form. Thus the material that follows the introduction expresses the composer's musical responses to his thought and emotional state. And in true Romantic fashion, in the last measures of the last movement, Mendelssohn returns to the same

music and conjures the crucial question with its motive—hesitating with a pause—and continues with a composed response to the question. But then as he moves to the very last phrase we hear it again, softly in the inner voices, another quiet reference—left, finally, unanswered.

One principal feature of this quartet is its “ongoing” nature. By that I mean that Mendelssohn bridges all the sections of the sonata form by creating transitions to obscure the boundaries between them. The chordal introduction “morphs” into the main body of the sonata form by means of rushing 16<sup>th</sup> notes that, when they reach a climax, initiate the opening of the first theme. The same thing happens with the development and the recapitulation. One arrives in good time—but, somehow, later and more smoothly than expected. Accordingly, the second theme just slips in between restatements of the first one. Throughout the work often the same, crafty working out of ideas creates this seamless quality. Most interestingly, this results in efficient exposition in the first movement, whereas in the last two, it provides opportunity for expansion.

As mentioned, a texture with prevailing counterpoint reflects Mendelssohn’s recent studies of Bach and Beethoven but he is also interested in thematic transformation. Both these characteristics are, in any case, features of Romantic style. There are only a few among the many themes in the work that are not treated contrapuntally, sometimes with an approach as complex as inversion, and this happens sometimes more in the spirit of thematic transformation. Several of these are motives linking the movements together, but all of them introduce “poetic meaning” into the quartet. The “theme” or motive from the “question” appears in the main theme of the first movement, it also is found in movement two—even in inversion—and is eventually part of the fugato theme in the development of the last movement. The quartet is a marvel of extraordinary early ingenuity. Mendelssohn was quite right when he implied writing to his friend, that getting to know this work meant getting to know him.

The second movement opens with lovely 4-part choral-like phrases that initiate a delicate, miniature three-part form in F Major. In the ensuing rather complex segment, the composer indulges in creating a full-blown developmental section, losing himself in transformations of his theme, a rather simple, unassuming tune in D minor. One needs to take time and listen carefully to enjoy this youthful extravagance, which closes out as it began, with a return to the hymn-like choral. But wait, Mendelssohn cannot resist one last gesture with his fugue subject, changed to conform to the initial key of F Major.

The Intermezzo starts innocently enough. An unassuming Allegretto, this simple three-part dance form in A minor encloses a contrasting three-part form, one of Mendelssohn’s very own scherzo specialties, a tricky and very spry Allegro. And again, at the very end of the returning Allegretto, an accelerating and irresistible sliver of the scherzo. Then suddenly, presto and *sf*, a recitative from nowhere to usher in the last, and most complex, movement of all. A full-blown sonata form into which Mendelssohn manages to insinuate the first theme from the first movement just before the transition to the second key area. Further on, he returns to the recitation of the introduction and then to the tune from the second movement. A most interesting passage at this time, for the tune is in 3-part counterpoint, leaving the cello free to act as the

agent of change that nudges the upper three voices into the long and sustained development section that moves apace toward the end. But first, a sudden break in motion, with a stark change in direction and temperament, from high enters the first violin, *p*, sustained by *pp* tremolos, bringing the movement's forward motion under control. Progressively slower and quieter phrases that eventually dissolve into the return of the now-very-familiar second theme. Slowly the solo violin moves again into recitative mode to lead naturally, hesitatingly, back to the music from the very first measures. Twice more the "question" is articulated, the last very quietly in the innermost voices, but without any real answer.

Lento.

Poco a poco accelerando al Allegretto.

(Introduzione). Allegro - Meno vivo - Allegro - Meno vivo - Molto Adagio  
Allegro vivace.

Béla Bartók's six string quartets were composed over a span of thirty years and it has often been observed that each one of them serves as a culmination of a phase of his compositional development. Each captures the creative ideas and technical accomplishments of a new phase of artistic growth. The two principal elements of his development—especially clear in his quartets—are first, the synthesis of eastern folk music and western art music, and second, the development of particular formal structures that suited his formal aspirations. In addition, in his works for stringed instruments, he assiduously exploited new performance techniques. A product of the composer's early maturity, elements in the First Quartet also reflect the lingering influence of the late German Romantic composers (in particular, Strauss), products of his early training co-exist here with other influences, notably his encounter with Debussy's music during Bartók's first trip to western Europe, as well as his first discovery of "true" Hungarian folk music.

The harmonic and melodic character of the quartet speaks to its Romantic heritage, as does the fact that the quartet's three movements are played without pause. To achieve continuity, Bartók composed transitional passages that adjust tempo and change the character from one movement to the next. Often, for example, he introduces small motivic moments that preview the material of the ensuing segment. Between the first and second movements the tempo increases exponentially; starting very slow at the end of the first movement (eighth note=60 mm) the transition arrives at the beginning of the second movement at a speed more than four times as fast (quarter note =138 mm). And in the interlude between the second and third movements, Bartók not only increases the tempo once again (half note = 120mm), he also adds a component that allows for sudden changes in tempo that include short recitative-like passages for the cello and the first violin (cf. the changing tempo markings listed above). Beginning with a vivacious tempo, the third movement takes on aspects of this shifting character as it moves through a number of expressive and tempo changes.

Bartók does not abandon classical forms for the individual movements but modifies these structures in the direction of open-ended closure. The first movement is a three-part form with a central segment that is also, itself, a very compact three-part form. With one segment inside the other, it is, in effect, a doubled symmetrical structure—such structural balances were to become a strong feature of Bartók's later work. The first movement opens with a slow canonic passage (reminiscent of the opening of Beethoven's Quartet, op. 131, in C# minor) heard first in the violins, and then imitated in the viola and cello, which Bartók (unlike Beethoven) continues through the section, shifting between chordal texture and full four-part counterpoint. Building continuously on motives taken from the opening measures he finally reaches a climax of wide-spread chords from which he descends into the dramatic contrasting central section. Following this, his return to the canon, *pp*, an octave higher than in the opening of the movement is now

quite tender, some of the tension having been siphoned off by the drama and climaxes of the intervening music.

The second and third movements are both sonata forms, but with singular distinctions. In the second movement we have a highly modified and compressed recapitulation that enhances its scherzo-like character. The third movement is less of a sonata form than a series of variations which serve as the development section. Here, even in this early work, Bartók is moving away from his early training; avoiding the essential “working-out” characteristic of the classical sonata form he pushes his thematic material (harmonically, melodically, expressively) with far-reaching variation treatments. Unlike his later work, in which he abandons even the idea of themes, his themes here are, as it were, thrown with abandon out into the turbulent wind. This movement clearly benefits from the composer’s early study of folk music with its clashing seconds, driving complex rhythms (additive rather than metered), and uneven, irregular phrase structures. It moves fitfully and impulsively like a wild (*friss*) *csárdás* from the regions of Ajak or Gömör.

Allegro  
Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando  
Adagio molto e mesto  
Thème russe. Allegro

Commissioned in 1806 by Count Rasoumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, the three quartets of Op. 59 come from a momentous period in Beethoven's career. In the short space of two or three years, ca.1803-1806, Beethoven produced a number of extraordinary works in which he extended the dimensions of classical form far beyond those of his predecessors. In the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata* sonatas for piano, the first version of *Fidelio*, the Fourth Piano Concerto, the Violin Concerto, and the *Eroica*. the dynamic qualities gained from his expanded treatment of harmony supported a new level of developmental techniques. The free flow of thematic and rhythmic motifs takes on an aspect that seems close to improvisation. Charles Rosen captures this moment when he writes that Beethoven combined "Haydn's technique of [creating] dynamic growth from [working out] the smallest details, with Mozart's feeling for large harmonic masses and for tonal areas."

Of the three quartets in opus 59, the first in F Major is the most expansive, its first two movements marvels of creative thought. Considered as a whole, these two movements and the third and fourth movements pair off in a manner of speaking; the first two are large and pose similar demands on the concept of how formal structure relates to the working out of compositional ideas. They do not travel the same trajectory but they are ideas that resonate with each other, complimentary expositions of materials with comparable expectations of what can be done creatively. The last two movements are closer to earlier models and thus are not quite as inventive and challenging as the first two; however, they are a unit by virtue of the trill that connects the extended written-out violin cadenza at the end of the hymnic Adagio (third movement) to the boisterous sonata Allegro (fourth movement). In this manner they can be felt to balance or complement the first two movements.

In the opening antecedent phrase of the first movement, an unprepossessing tune in the cello steps up four notes then returns for an elaborated turn on the note where it began. A simple tune, it is given some urgency by the accompaniment of pulsing eighth notes in the second violin and viola. In the fourth measure the cello lands on the dominant, the note where it began. In the next four measures of the phrase Beethoven continues in the same vein, pushing the cello up another four steps, to land on the supertonic. The eighth-notes continue to throb; and then in response, moving abruptly to a treble range, the first violin takes up the four-note step-wise tune, and repeats it three times, each time moving higher and higher, the last one in slow motion. The Arrival comes with a climatic cadence on the tonic F Major, *ff*, *in alt*, that is on an F more than three octaves higher than where the cello began, a full 19 measures after the opening downbeat of the first measure. This simple description of the extended opening of the work should convey some of the expectation that is built into this passage. Such an extensive opening clearly requires

equally expansive measures; harmonically it initiates an exploratory process that continues throughout the work.

What Beethoven starts in this movement, he continues. Small ideas are only small when they exist in a compressed space. The extraordinary expansion of harmonic thinking is nonrestrictive, and within the generous boundaries he forges, Beethoven opts for details, one after another, many very small, as he follows one idea with another. The three principal themes—those of the opening, of the secondary key area, and of the closing of the exposition—share common elements, among them the rising step-wise line. Some of the themes or motives that spring up, appear superficially to have no obvious relationship to the others. Yet none of them is just a willful indulgence; in an on-going developmental commentary they complement the movement's brilliant symphonic-like adventure with chamber-like intimacy and introversion. Listen especially (toward the end of the exposition and again at the end of the recapitulation) for how the music has broadened to the point of a standstill. Unable to go further the violins arrive at a simple place, an ordinary minor tenth. Poised there on a half-note they provoke an exchange of chord with the viola and cello in slow-moving half notes: wide-spread, high answered by low, back and forth in an uncertain standstill, shifting slowly to restore tonal rectitude and with it, the by-now familiar tune. A magical moment both times it happens. Effortless, expansive, conclusive.

The second movement is unusual on more than several counts. First of all, if it were to be considered a scherzo, it would not be in the key of B-flat, that is not in the key of the first movement as would be usual for a dance movement in a multi-movement work. Furthermore, unlike most scherzos it comes right after the first movement, not after the slow second movement. As for its form, while having some characteristics of a sonata, such as a certain tonal instability and an unspecified tendency to development, it is hardly one. Rather it is an odd sort of quixotic treatment of an idea that isn't really up to being a sonata allegro. As the composer indicates, it is an Allegretto, both "vivacious" and in a "scherzando" mood. To summarize: it is neither a fast allegro nor a scherzo, but something that partakes of both, something in between.

As a whole, an intricate weave of delicate ideas unfolds from the beginning of the first theme, which is subtly robust, a tuneless rhythm in a very soft cello, answered by a sweet and idyllic tune in the first violin. Always *scherzando*, it has the unexpected turns typical of a Beethoven scherzo: phrases dealt out in uneven numbers of measures, as in the minor variant of the second thematic segment. Here two three-measure phrases follow a neat eight-bar phrase, or when the cadence comes at the end of a phrase, there are only seven bars. Unexpected harmonic ideas are frequent as when the consequent phrase follows the initial statement on B-flat with one on A-flat, or when we reach the second key area we find a melancholic tune in the dominant minor instead of the major. And with respect to melodic and rhythmic ideas that are drawn from the first unpromising tune, it's as though the composer almost suffered from versatility: melodic diversions, dramatic pauses, contrapuntal combinations, a mysterious digression or two, and unexpected, lovely lyrical moments.

The third and fourth movements are united tonally (the third is in the parallel minor key, the fourth in the major mode), and temporally, for there is no break between them: the coda of the third is extended by a cadenza in the first violin and ends with a trill that connects directly to the fourth movement. For some listeners, the third movement is one of Beethoven's most sublime achievements with its slow unfolding of a tragic mood completely sustained throughout a generously proportioned movement. For others the sentiment might be considered exaggerated—or somewhat superficial. Perhaps it will depend on the performance—the time of day and the energy it embodies—as to how it is perceived.

The last movement, a sonata form, begins as the trill from the end of the violin cadenza turns into accompaniment for the Russian theme in the cello. The tune's rising interval of a fourth brings to mind the first movement's inspiring question: did this simple tune provide the starting point (even as it was a starting point for the composition of the quartet) for the shape of the quartet's first theme—and consequently all that eventually subsequently flows from it? Or (as Joseph Kerman suggests) is it the other way around, a subtle parallel, a comment—or a parody—of that first Allegro?

Energetic and brilliant, the structure of this last movement benefits from Beethoven's freedom in treating form, and, in some aspects, it can be as demonstrating connection with the first movement. But then perhaps it's only high spirits that cause the composer to twice recall the first violin's third movement cadenza; or to refer to the harmonic uneasiness at the beginning of the first movement by sliding into the wrong key at the beginning of the recapitulation; or to insert imitative and fugal writing at the end that harks lightly back to the ending fughetto of the first movement; or lastly—just before the final burst—to suddenly slow the forward motion (*Adagio man non troppo!*) for a mock-serious presentation of the theme, a move foreshadowed twice in the first movement.

- Notes by Dr. Jean Christensen

*Today's pre-concert presentation at 2 PM in Room 130, will be led by Professor Caroline Ehman of the Music History Department. Dr. Ehman completed her dissertation, "Reimagining Faust in Postmodern Opera," at the Eastman School of Music and specializes in music since 1900.*