

Chamber Music Society - November 24, 2019

Juilliard String Quartet

Areta Zhulla, violin

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String Quartet in Bb Major, K. 458

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto - Trio Moderato

Adagio

Allegro assai

K. 458 is one of six quartets composed by Mozart in the years 1782-85. These extraordinary works are the young composer's creative response to Haydn's opus 33, a set of six quartets characterized by the older master as having been "written in a new and special way." While much has been said about this comment, it is accepted as a reference to Haydn's emphasis on greater equality between the four instruments, as well as a closer relationship between the musical ideas and the formal structure. It was, in fact, a revolution in style and content. Mozart took these works to heart and in response to the new ideas in Haydn's works, composed six of his own which he dedicated to "To my dear friend Haydn" with his typical wit:

A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated Man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best Friend. Here they are then, O great Man and dearest Friend, these six children of mine. They are, it is true, the fruit of a long and laborious endeavor, yet the hope inspired in me by several Friends that it may be at least partly compensated encourages me, and I flatter myself that this offspring will serve to afford me solace one day. You, yourself, dearest friend, told me of your satisfaction with them during your last Visit to this Capital. It is this indulgence above all which urges me to commend them to you and encourages me to hope that they will not seem to you altogether unworthy of your favour. . . -- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

That he dedicated a good deal of thought to the composition of these particular scores was recognized by the older composer, who, on one occasion during a performance, turned to Mozart's father and commented, "Before God, and as a man of honor, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition."

This quartet is often referred to as the "Hunt" Quartet for several reasons. The triadic character of the first tune played by the two violins resembles a hunting call. When combined with the loping 6/8 meter of the first movement and the imitative treatment of musical material, the music provides the sense of a chase. The hunting metaphor may, in fact, extend to the first movement at large. In any case, it is perhaps the most ingratiating and most perfectly balanced of the six quartets dedicated to Haydn.

But be prepared. The first movement begins simply enough with a 4-measure tune in the two violins that ends with a half-cadence. However, these simple parts multiply: the repetition of these four measures, naturally leading to a full cadence, is extended. The extension inspires a contrasting response, and from there, each new segment extends what has gone before, until the phrase eventually comes to a brief stop on the dominant, 26 measures into the movement. Moving on, the first violin takes up a trill and initiates the consequent return of the opening tune, now in the second violin and viola, which dissolves rather quickly into a running scale elaborated with sequences and syncopations. The extended cadence that follows consists only of a series of five-note solo “shakes” that make their way down and then up through the ensemble. The new segment, now in the dominant, vividly contrasts with the cheerful tune of the opening. Whole phrases consisting of not much more than a series of those fleeting, punchy five-note shakes, move through the ensemble. These brilliant, somewhat erratic figures, build climactically until an abrupt stop with a number of broad, full-ensemble chords intervene to move the work decisively into the closing segment of the exposition.

But then, a new challenge comes with the opening of the development as Mozart takes us away from the rush of the exposition and inserts something totally unexpected and new: an idyllic rustic tune, complete with a drone. Surprise gives way to repose as the fully exposed theme appears in complimentary phrases—until, somewhat tenuously, the five-note shake returns. Now Mozart moves with a purpose, restoring the energy of the opening and moving through a full, slightly elaborated recapitulation of the opening exposition. When he comes to the final cadence, it is as though he wakes up, and abruptly averts the cadence: three big chords give way to an extended coda and a rather thorough examination of the main theme—and those five-note shakes.

It is somewhat unusual to bring the dance—here, a minuet and trio—after the first movement, but in doing so, Mozart creates an appropriate emotional transition between the forward-pushing, high energy of the first movement and the soulful meditation of the third movement. While using an utterly predictable formal dance outline (ABA) of 8 measure phrases, Mozart avoids the square division in the first section (A) of 4 + 4 measures and introduces, instead, a lilting rhythm by combining them into a phrase of 3 + 3 + 2 measures. He continues to “stretch” expectations in the Trio (again, a standard ABA) when the first segment starts with a phrase of 4 measures and continues with one of 6. But he saves the biggest surprise for last—when this A returns after the contrasting B. Listen as he briefly veers off course, suddenly inserting an extra full measure with a very large leap (f) in the solo first violin before bringing the trio to a close.

The third movement, an intensely beautiful Adagio, is set in the subdominant key of Eb Major. Externally it is a relatively straight-forward two-part form, each part with two main thematic areas. One might call it a sonata form without a development—because the modulation in the first part is recapitulated in the tonic in the second. But beyond formal considerations, the movement shows Mozart balancing opposites—intense warmth with unaffected coolness, symmetry and asymmetry, short abrupt bursts and long drawn-out lines, motion and stillness—and suspends time in spite of moving in it.

The last movement is an exuberant sonata with racy thematic ideas that lend themselves to brief, decisive developmental climaxes while creating irreversible forward motion. It is a fitting finale to a work that balances gracefulness, humor, surprise and beauty.

“Ainsi la nuit”/ Such is the night (1976)

Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013)

()*	Libre et souple
I. NOCTURNE	Assez lent
Parenthèse 1	Très libre
II. MIROIR D’ESPACE	Violent
Parenthèse 2	Libre et flexible
III. LITANIES	Animé
Parenthèse 3	Lent
IV. LITANIES 2	()*
Parenthèse 4	Animé
V. CONSTELLATIONS	Vif souple et libre
VI. NOCTURNE 2	Plus animé misterioso
VII. TEMPS SUSPENDU	()*

In 1971, Henri Dutilleux was commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation to compose a work for the Juilliard String Quartet to honor his friend Ernest Sussman. As it was his first composition for string quartet, he worked for several years creating many sketches and studies in order to explore the sonorities and special effects possible with an ensemble of solo stringed instruments. A number of these explorations found their way into the final work, in particular into the untitled introduction and the four short expositions that he called “Parenthèse 1-4.” Short fragments, lasting between approximately 22" and 45", they are not actually considered integrated elements of the principal movements (numbered I-VII above), but are musical renditions of what the composer calls “memory,” and working with those ideas provided musical material for the seven movements as well as sounds for the listener to recall as the work progresses. They add a dimension of sound that stimulates memory—sometimes, but not necessarily, in the very next movement. For instance, the initial chord that opens the work, a principal element, returns a number of times providing musical material and actually functions as a musical destination as well as a musical memory. Unlike a *leitmotiv* or *idée fixe*, these elements have no other function or associations than being themselves, on one hand, and part of the musical fabric on the other.

While the first untitled segment and the parentheses are all very short, the actual movements in the string quartet vary in length. Several of them are more extended (2-3 minutes) and others are less (ca. 1.5 minutes). As indicated by the titles, several are paired in some manner. Keeping track of the movements in this work is challenging as they are to be played with very little pause or interruption in between. Some follow each other without any break at all (*attacca*), and others follow after an undetermined *fermata*—or “hold”—on the last notes of the previous one. Dutilleux specifies that the only significant pause in the work is to occur between LITANIES and Parenthèse 3.

Untitled and unannounced, it is as though the work emerges out of thin air with a complex dissonant chord of two clashing fifths and two clashing seconds that starts *ppp*, swells briefly and closes *pp*. Dutilleux explores it: played again and expanded upward (crescendo) in all four instruments, it quickly falls back (*p*) leaving violin II holding a lone pitch (*pp subito*). The chord is played again, followed by flurries of pizzicato 16ths (*pp decrescendo ppp*) until finally, only one pitch remains of the chord, a lone harmonic in the cello. Enter two droning pitches (violin II and viola) and an oddly-paced

ostinato of one pitch each in violin I and cello, and NOCTURNE begins smoothly without the ceremony of a pause.

NOCTURNE is in two large segments: in the first the instruments develop their ideas starting with single pitches into more complex melodic “riffs.” Dutilleux explores more harmonics, *pizzicati*, *glissandi*, complex chords and strong dynamic contrasts. The more fluid second segment of the movement explores differing ostinatos, beginning with a single one in the viola. As things develop, ostinatos are eventually streaming simultaneously in different directions in all four instruments, but as these streams dissolve into fragmented gestures and single pitches, the movement comes to an end with a fermata (*pp*)

Parenthèse 1 is comprised of two segments: the first is played *pizzicati* and *arco ponticello* (bowing on the bridge which produces a whistling sound); the second has rich melodic statements in violin II and cello (*ppp*) accompanied by sustained chords of harmonics in violin I and viola.

MIROIR D’ESPACE follows without pause with a violent opening gesture (*fff*), that turns immediately calm as violin I in an extremely high register and cello in its lowest register begin a long melodic excursion. In direct allusion to the “mirrored space” of the movement’s title, the cello plays the same notes as the violin but inverted, rhythmically varied, and slightly out of sync with the violin. Violin II and viola occupy the central register with short bursts of commentary. About half way through, the violent outburst returns to initiate the second half of the movement, which ends with a sputter on a dissonant chord of very high-pitched seconds (*pp*).

Coming in on the tail-end of the fermata, Parenthèse 2 is rather fragmented. In clear contrast to both the previous movement and the one that follows, here melodic statements are interspersed with brittle gestures in which *pizzicati* are joined to *tremolos*.

Indeed, LITANIES opens with forceful, strong rhythmic statements played in unison by the whole ensemble which initiates a complex movement in two large segments. Passages in strong unison movement contrast with others in delicate counterpoint. Contrasting segments change the texture and dynamics momentarily, but the whole ends with a dynamic chord (*fff*, *pizzicato*) that crowns the moment when it changes to a unison on D (*arco*, *fff*).

Parenthèse 3 is brief and delicate. Harmonics and *pizzicati* outline the delicate melodies and it ends as harmonics pile up into a chord (*pp*).

The fourth movement, LITANIES 2, overcontrasts in every way with the earlier LITANIES. Taking up the wistful melody from Parenthèse 3, the movement is essentially a series of imaginative, creative variations that ends peacefully with two sets of gently rising chords (*ppp*).

The series of brief unison statements of Parenthèse 4 serve as an animated intro to the next movement, CONSTELLATIONS, and it, in turn, serves as the large and comprehensive lead-in for the next movement. Patterns give way to short solo passages, imitative gestures, or brief expanding solos. One idea tumbles over another. Finally, having reached a grand climax (*fff*), the forward motion quickly dissipates with a series of delicate trills and tremolos, and NOCTURNE 2, movement VI, takes over and continues the interplay between delicate gestures, gently building a fitting finale. Trills dissolve into fragments and a brief silence, when the defining chord initiates the final movement, TEMPS SUSPENDU, we have essentially a series of varied extended cadences each of which are halted by growing numbers of fermatas. This happens one, two and then three times before the final statement ends with an 8-part sputtering unison chord. In stiff decline and losing power (*ff* to *pp*), the final chord represents a final resolution of the initial chord and its many appearances.

String Quartet in F Major, Op. 96, “The American”

Antonín Leopold Dvořák (1841-1904)

Allegro moderato

Adagio, ma non troppo

Molto vivace

Andante sostenuto, Allegro con fuoco

Dvořák’s life-story is quite remarkable. Born in Nelahozeves in Bohemia (now Czech Republic) a small town north of Prague, he was the first of eight (or nine) children in a poor family. His musical ability was recognized at an early age, but his training was haphazard. Without some luck he would have become an assistant to his father who was an inn keeper and butcher. But fortunately at the age of 12 he was sent to a nearby town to study with a schoolmaster who recognized the young fellow’s ability, and gave him a basic, but thorough musical foundation. From there he continued at the Organ School in Prague where strict training was grounded in the work of the classical masters and where he became acquainted with the music and ideas of the German Romantic composers. When he finished his education, the only work he could find was as a very poorly-paid orchestral musician. He taught lessons on the side, and composed for years without any recognition. Eventually he won a competition where Brahms who was one of the judge and helped him find a publisher. Through determined and persistent effort, he eventually developed an international reputation as a composer and conductor, first in England and Russia—then finally in Vienna, despite anti-Czech sentiment. Fame led to his invitation to come to America to teach at the newly-established National Conservatory of Music in New York (1892-95) after which he returned to his beloved Prague where he was a revered figure and he remained until his death. In 1898, Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria-Hungary awarded Dvořák a gold medal, *Litteris et Artibus*, in recognition of his contributions to the arts, and in 1901 named him to the Austro-Hungarian House of Lords. His 60th birthday in 1901 was declared a national holiday.

Program Notes by Dr. Jean Christensen.