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Pacifica Quartet

SIMIN GANATRA, violin
AUSTIN HARTMAN, violin
GUY BEN-ZIONY, viola
BRANDON VAMOS, cello

2:30 PM, Sunday, October 8, 2017
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

JOSEPH HAYDN **QUARTET IN G MAJOR, OP. 76, NO. 1** (1797)

(1732–1809) Allegro con spirito
Adagio sostenuto
Menuetto. Presto
Allegro ma non troppo

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH **QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 73** (1946)

(1906–1975) Allegretto
Moderato con moto
Allegro non troppo
Adagio—Attacca—
Moderato

— *INTERMISSION* —

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN **QUARTET IN C MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 3** (1805-6)

(1770–1827) Introduzione: Andante con moto—Allegro vivace
Andante con moto quasi allegretto
Menuetto grazioso—
Allegro molto

MKI Artists

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ARTIST PROFILE



Recognized for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and daring repertory choices, the Pacifica Quartet has gained international stature as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Pacifica tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's major concert halls. Named the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica was also the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012) – a position that has otherwise been held only by the Guarneri String Quartet – and received the 2009 Best Chamber Music Performance Grammy for its recording of Elliott Carter's quartets Nos. 1 and 5.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and appointment to Lincoln Center's CMS Two, and in 2006 awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber ensemble so honored.

The Pacifica Quartet has carved a niche for itself as the preeminent interpreter of string quartet cycles, harnessing the group's singular focus and incredible stamina to portray each composer's evolution. Having given highly acclaimed performances of the complete Carter cycle in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Houston; the Mendelssohn cycle in Napa, Australia, New York, and Pittsburgh; and the Beethoven cycle in New York, Denver, St. Paul, Chicago, Napa, and Tokyo, the Quartet presented the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago and New York during the 2010-2011 season and in Montreal and at London's Wigmore Hall in the 2011-2012 season.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Bloomington, IN, where they serve as quartet-in-residence and full-time faculty members at the Jacobs School of Music. Prior to this, the Quartet was on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana from 2003 to 2012. The Pacifica Quartet also serves as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago.

Haydn: *Quartet in G, Op. 76/1*

Haydn was the first of the great trio of string quartet composers that also included Mozart and Beethoven. He is called, not without excellent reason, the “father of the string quartet.” Born in lower Austria in 1732, he began his musical education as a Vienna choir boy. He wrote his first quartets, the first in this genre, well into his twenties and made them in a simple style, which he called “divertimenti” rather than something grander.

His career break occurred when he came into service of Prince Nicholas Esterházy II in 1761. This was one of the oldest, noblest, and richest families in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was instrumental in supporting his compositional growth. He was in this position for over 30 years and became Kapellmeister, the court composer and impresario. In this position, he wrote 18 additional quartets as Opp. 9, 17 and 20. The critical factor in this work was that Haydn permeated these pieces with a thoughtful and artistic weight, uncommon in instrumental music before this. As we now see, this was hugely influential: these quartets were the first to achieve a secure place in the repertory, setting a foundation for string quartets to follow.

Haydn’s Op. 76, the final set of six quartets he composed and the first of which we hear today, is the pinnacle of his composition in this genre. Dedicated to Count Georg von Erdödy who commissioned them, they were completed in 1796-7, but were not published for over 2 years as the von Erdödy family retained exclusive rights for “home” performance of Haydn’s work before publication.¹

Today’s work comes many quartets later after his ground breaking work: it is numbered variously as No. 60, No. 40 (FHE) and No. 75 (Hoboken). By this time, he had left the isolation of the Esterházy family and was enjoying great success internationally, especially for symphonies in both Paris and London. And he was engrossed in a magnificent series of religious and secular choral works like the *Oratorio* and Princess Maria Esterházy’s annual mass. Nonetheless, we are fortunate that he found time and inspiration for and dedicated energy and invention to Op. 76, one of his most ambitious chamber works.

One of the ubiquitous features of the multiple quartets within this work is the use of both major and minor modes within the same key. This quartet, for example, although marked as being in G-major, features liberal amounts of G-minor, a historically new element used as a source of tension.

Even if you are soundly asleep, the first three loud, wide-spaced, double-stopped chords of this work should bring you to attention. This device would be excessive if played in a usual domestic location, but it was very useful in a concert hall as an attention getter to begin the evening’s entertainment, and it replaced the three knocks signaling the customary beginning of 17th and 18th century theater performance.

The first movement, an *alla breva* in G major, is in sonata form. After a short introduction in the cello (the exposition begins in measure 3!), we hear what might be an old-fashioned fugue. But because of Haydn’s devotion to creation, passion, and tastefulness, that quickly evolves into a repetition of exchanges in duos, and finally all four instruments together, each with its own part to play, hardly a fugue at all.

The second, an *Adagio sostenuto*, begins with a nod to the singing voice, a canticle for instruments: humble, penetrating, sincere. This interchanges with two other distinct textures, the first a duet between cello and first violin, then the violin syncopating from the others. Moods hover between sadness and solace with serenity returning to close.

Fortuitously, the third ends this melancholic meditation in the form of an allegro *Menuetto* and trio. Expect to be shaken with abrupt bursts of full sound and digressions into the parallel minor creating as an extreme a contrast as thinkable.

The *Allegro ma non troppo* has even more surprises. There is increased tension from migration into the minor and a return to the forceful unison quality of the first movement. The finale is kept at this tautness with a daring digression into chromatic harmonic variation until moving into a simple major mode melody. And finally the piece is brought to conclusion with the same three notes as used at the beginning but in an altered melodic shape.

Shostakovich: *Quartet in F, Op. 73*

Like many Soviet composers of his era, Dmitri Shostakovich had to write under the pressure of government-imposed standards of art. Following early international attention for his Symphony No. 1, his work received mixed reactions from the public and the government resulting in condemnation in 1948.

The 15 quartets by Shostakovich are actually symphonies for four instruments with a deep affecting content, expansive phrases, and passionate climaxes. The full resources of a string quartet are exploited: the highest registers of the instruments, new timbres, cross-reference between movements, and crossing of parts.

Like his 8th and 9th symphonies, Shostakovich cast his third quartet in five movements. The first movement, which he wrote after the second, is in sonata form and begins with a spry melody that bounces along like a cheerful polka. However, this *Allegretto* is quickly whipped into an enraged frenzy so that by the end it changes into a driving, angry *danse macabre*. This movement was originally entitled “*Calm Unawareness of the Future Cataclysm.*”

Viewed against the anxiety and uncertainty of the times, the *Moderato con moto* begins as a downtrodden march, which Shostakovich gave the heading “*Rumblings of Unrest and Anticipation.*” It is a rondo built from three themes. The first and second themes are resolute and astringent, with ostinato accompaniment. The third is ghostly and shimmering. The coda is a sluggish version of the first theme. Do you hear the synchronous staccato ‘tiptoeing’ of the instruments in the middle section?

The confrontation continues in the *Allegro non troppo*, a scherzo, headed “*The Forces of War Unleashed.*” It is also a rondo with three ominous themes. Listen for how the first two intensify the drive by mixing duple and triple times and the third theme sarcastically depicts goose-stepping

¹ How’s that for a home stereo system!

soldiers. The perplexing reappearance of the second theme signifies the end of this movement.

The fourth movement, "*Homage to the Dead*," an *Adagio* centering on a sorrowful and dramatic theme, is a somber meditative elegy on a recurring three-note motif. The music, a passacaglia, evolves without pause into the finale.

The final movement was initially titled "*The Eternal Question: Why? And for What?*" You can visualize this as a dance of the dead. It is a barcarolle with brooding overtones, uneasy and somewhat dark, with a melody closely interwoven among all the instruments in an increasingly forceful progression. The climax is built up from the first theme and at its height you can hear the melody from the preceding movement in canon between viola and cello. After the climax, the three themes are heard in reverse order becoming a ghostly echo of their former selves. This quartet dies away in the fading sound of a melancholy reflection on its prior themes yielding a cyclic unity.

Shostakovich withdrew all the movement headings after the premiere because he felt they were too limiting, although he probably thought them too political.

Here in the best practice of Russian art, the gloomy and hideous side of horror, oppression, and torment lead at last to a mysterious transformation into perpetual light and reconciliation.

Beethoven: *Quartet in C, Op. 59/3*

Beethoven's middle period, sometimes called 'heroic', began with a massive physical and spiritual crisis around 1801: he realized (or finally admitted) that he was going deaf. This was a disability that was both professionally and socially disastrous and which would cause him essentially to end public life. His unexpected solution was an outward turning of his composition style to a sequence of amazing works for public performance to bolster his reputation as Europe's most renowned composer of instrumental music. The '*Eroica*' symphony and the '*Waldstein*' and '*Appassionata*' piano sonatas all come from this period, and so do the three quartets of Op. 59.

Beethoven's works from this time and later are complicated. They are definitely not entertainment (although they are

entertaining); they must be studied for thorough understanding. This characteristic, which is common to most of Beethoven's instrumental works, was new to the audiences of the 19th century. This change in others' compositional style was further encouraged by the composer's death, an event that began a huge surge of honor. In a nutshell, his most famous works effected enormous changes in the ways music was performed, listened to, written, and written about. Here are just a few:

- Emergence of diligent, thoughtful listening
- Opinion of instrumental music as more serious than vocal music
- Sense that "classical music" was morally inspiring and ethically superior
- Perception of musician as merely a vehicle to express the thoughts of the composer
- Increased consideration of, and veneration for, the score as a repository of the 'work'

Sound familiar? It should; it marks the arrival of the modern classical musical scene, with its formal concert attendance, its silent listening, and the "rule" of when to applaud. This peaked in the 1960s, and now most acknowledge is in slow decline. Can we each do something about that?

Today, it is our opportunity to hear one of Beethoven's greatest works: the third of the 'Razumovsky' quartets, written in 1805-6 when Beethoven was at the height of his productivity. They are so termed because they were commissioned by an affluent Russian count of that name, who was the Tzar's ambassador in Vienna, an ardent amateur violinist, and a confirmed music lover. Although the three Op. 59 quartets retain some of the relaxed, communicative atmosphere of his earlier works, they also bear the stamp of the symphonic grandeur and breadth that was so characteristic of Beethoven's music during this middle period.

The *Introduzione* is significant for how it begins in obscurity and discord with brooding chords that seem to lead nowhere (mindful of Mozart's *Dissonance* quartet). But listen for the lively, decorative two-chord progression that rebounds off C-Major and that will pervade from the first declamatory figure, invade the exposition and development, and endure throughout the movement. The ensuing harmonic motion of flowing scales and arpeggiated chords are so glorious you may fail to notice that Beethoven has made

magnificent music without using a single distinctive theme! Listen for this to pervade the remainder of the quartet.

The *Andante con moto* is the fulcrum of the work, balancing the excitement of the first movement with the melancholy of the second's long passages of static harmony. The exposition reprises the themes in reverse order. Count Razumovsky had insisted that the commission be based on actual or invented Russian songs, but Beethoven topped that and composed a complete 'Russian' movement. Listen for the characteristically sad moods and shadowy nooks throughout supported by the pizzicato cello.

Beethoven reprises Mozart's style in the third movement, not with his typical scherzo, but with a straightforward *Menuetto grazioso* that helpfully resolves that somber Russian mood. This is moderate and suave, with a curiously long trio, also with heroic arpeggios that may remind you of the first movement, and a dark coda that anticipates the work's substantial culmination.

The fourth movement emerges seamlessly from the bridge-like coda as an animated, jovial but formal fugue in the viola. There is a light, driving perpetual motion, the fugue-like theme of which is assumed in turn by each of the other instruments. The *Allegro molto* is complex and noisy, the perfect foil for the dark tension of that sardonic, intimidating, and menacing but inconclusive coda. Like a sunny day, this bright energy appears to dispel that tension. You may have memories of the first movement until the onslaught of the finale brings us to an extroverted, boisterous C-major conclusion.

No. 3 has the nickname of '*Eroica*' because of its splendid, joyful finale. Initially it was the most well received of the three quartets and remains the most frequently performed. This is one of Beethoven's most touching, dynamic string quartets. It fondly echoed historical styles and manners but simultaneously departed on an amazing musical excursion that led to the future of the string quartet.

—notes ©Michael Spencer

62ND SEASON

2017-2018

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2:30 PM Sunday, September 24, 2017

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