

FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

The Artis Quartet
Peter Schuhmayer, violin
Johannes Meissl, violin
Herbert Kefer, viola
Othmar Muller, cello

February 18, 2001
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific
Stockton, California



Program

Quartet in C Major, Op. 64, No. 1

Allegro moderato
Menuet: Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegretto scherzando
Finale: Presto

Franz Joseph Haydn

(1732-1809)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

Allegro con brio
Adagio affettuoso et appassionato
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

—Intermission—

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 19 (1915)

Allegretto
Thema mit Variationen
Romanze
Burleske. Sehr lebhaft (Allegro moderato)

Alexander von Zemlinsky

(1871-1942)



The Artis String Quartet is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.
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The Artis Quartet

The Artis Quartet brings compelling new dimensions to the rich and elegant Viennese string quartet tradition. Founded in 1980 at the *Musikhochschule* in Vienna, the Artis Quartet soon won awards at international competitions at Cambridge and Evian. Their style is described by Herbert Glass in *The Strad* as an “ability to combine an accurate reading of the text with sensual tone.”

Since 1988, the quartet has given an annual concert series at Vienna’s distinguished *Musikverein*, where they performed a complete Mozart quartet cycle during the Mozart bicentennial in 1991, and all the Schubert quartets for the Schubert bicentennial in 1997. In that season, they also performed complete Schubert cycles of five concerts in both Amsterdam (*Concertgebouw*) and Rotterdam (*De Doelen*).

The Artis Quartet’s European touring schedule this season includes concerts in the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and England, where their regular appearances at Wigmore Hall in London have attracted a loyal following. In the summers of 1998 and 1999, the Artis appeared at the Salzburg, Vienna, Berlin, Istanbul, and Lockenhaus Festivals, and served as quartet-in-residence at the Pablo Casals Festival.

The instruments played by Peter Schuhmayer (*A. Guarneri, 1690*) and Herbert Kefer (*J. B. Guadagnini, Turino, 1784*) have been lent by the Austrian National Bank, which has generously funded an instrument collection for the purpose of supporting young artists.

Program Notes

Haydn—Quartet in C, Op 64, No 1

The 1780s for Haydn were filled with quartet writing; he finished at least nineteen before he began his Opus 64, and these compositions are of the same high quality as the symphonies. The two sets of “Tost” quartets, Op. 54 and Op. 64, carry the Classical quartet to a peak. His work at this time was in the “popular” style—folk-like tunes alternating with learned contrapuntal developments and pert Austrian minuets leading to finales in the new sonata rondo form (basically: rondo form with a development section). Larsen says that Op. 64 shows a Haydn

“free of official constraints and obligations, composing simply *con amore*, drawing on the rich treasure of idiomatic style and inventive power accumulated over the past 30 years.” They contain exquisite diversity. It is believed that the Johann Tost of the dedication was violinist in the Esterhazy orchestra from 1783 to 1788, and is probably the same Tost who set up a cloth business in Vienna.

The Op. 64 quartets were written at the end of Haydn’s employment with the Esterhazy family. Prince Nicholas Esterhazy died in September of 1790 and his successors did not have his enthusiasm for music. They pensioned off the musicians and Haydn was treated generously and required to write only the occasional ceremonial piece. He was set free to follow his musical career as he wished and wrote to a friend “...how sweet this bit of freedom really is! I had a kind Prince, but sometimes I was forced to be dependent on base souls. I often sighed for release and now I have it in some measure.” He set out for his first London trip that year and the quartets of Op. 64 were published there.

With the master at the summit of his powers, each movement of every quartet reveals another facet of Haydn’s astonishing inventiveness, this spontaneity and felicity of expression, as Fairley points out. The first movement grows out of one idea only, the second subject being drawn from it. A daring move was to use parallel fifths (a no-no in previous harmony) in the recapitulation of the first movement, and this harmonic movement produces unusual force. The expansion in the harmony generates unusual excitement, as Haydn works out a climax that rivals the end of the development section in power.

The finale, Presto, involves the use of sequences (repeated patterns on new pitches) based on a sharply defined rhythm. Here is an excellent example of Haydn’s strong sense of humor. The drumming effect of the main subject is used for a little fugato with an irresistibly droll effect. The development is made up of a spectacular series of sequences. Though use of sequences had been a Baroque technique, the energy of this passage is Classical.

Beethoven—Quartet in F, Op 18, No 1

In late 1792, Beethoven’s backers in Bonn sent him to Vienna to “catch” the spirit of Mozart through Haydn. At this point in his life, Haydn was probably bored correcting harmony exercises of “the great Mogul” as he called Beethoven, and we don’t know what he thought of Beethoven’s first set of quartets, a set of six both in homage to Haydn, and perhaps as a signal of competition. Many authorities have stated that Opus 18 represented a milestone in string quartet writing. Beethoven worked from 1798 to 1800 on the set but because of his habit of constant revision, publication waited until 1801. Thus only ten years separate Haydn’s Opus 64 from Beethoven’s first quartets. Haydn was the source of many of the inventive thematic procedures, solemn slow movements, geniality, and, at times, of utter serenity.

The F major was not the first composed, but Schuppanzigh, the celebrated violinist, suggested it be published as No. 1, the biggest and most impressive work of the set. In the Allegro, the motive, more rhythmic than melodic, suffuses the whole movement, darting from voice to voice. Sometimes the cello plays it with lyricism from the violin above. This motive cost Beethoven sixteen pages in his notebooks, as he struggled to perfect this all-important motive. Kerman describes it as “a coiled spring, ready to shoot off in all directions.”

The Adagio is deeply passionate, marked with the terms *affettuoso* and *appassionato*. Beethoven declared he saw the tomb scene of Romeo and Juliet, and at the end of one sketch he wrote “the last breath.” The haunting pulsing of the lower strings supports the violin’s rising plaintive melody, and with equal pathos, the cello takes it under the upper pulsations. Weaving melodies throughout express raw emotion, heightened by dramatic gestures, such as the four chords three beats apart, laden

with suspense in the central section.

Wit, humor, and charm mark the Scherzo, quite modest after the intensity of the Adagio. The trio section features playful, ornamented octave leaps and rushing scales. The allegro in sonata-rondo form is a rather leisurely succession of melodic episodes between the repetition of the catch theme: a run of descending sixteenths caught up by three staccato eighth notes. The movement ends with a bit of a *stretto*—leaping sixths in the violin, hammering sixteenths in the middle voices, and a kind of walking bass in the cello.

Zemlinsky-String Quartet No 3

Zemlinsky is an authentic rediscovery, that of a gifted and admired composer neglected and forgotten for fifty years. In the 80's and 90's many of his works were rediscovered and made accessible to the public through recordings and performances. He was born in Vienna and his musical career involved Brahms, Mahler, and the composers of the Second Viennese School, Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg. Schoenberg, who married Zemlinsky's sister, said of him in 1949, eight years after Zemlinsky's death in oblivion: "I owe almost everything I know about composing and its problems to Alexander Zemlinsky. I always thought he was a great composer, and I still think so. Perhaps his time will come sooner than one thinks."

Zemlinsky pursued a career as conductor and teacher, with little time to establish himself as a composer. He conducted operas at the Vienna Volksoper and served as Kapellmeister. The rise of Nazism meant that his work as a Jewish composer was proscribed as "decadent" and he fled to the U.S., where it was too late to build a new career.

Among his more popular works is his symphonic poem, *The Mermaid*, with Anderson's tale as program. Two stories of Oscar Wilde were made into opera, and both carry the character of the decadent period: *Tragedy in Florence* and *The Dwarf*, renamed *The Birthday of the Infant*. The first work reveals his affinity with the angst of the *fin-de-siecle*, and the heroines of Richard Strauss, *Salome* and *Elektra*. The second is autobiographical. In *The Dwarf*, the misshapen man had never seen a mirror and unaware of his appearance, courted the princess who toyed with him and left him. When the

dwarf saw himself, he died of a broken heart. Zemlinsky thought himself ugly. One of his most passionately devoted students was Alma Schindler. She left him and married Mahler and Zemlinsky identified with his operatic character.

Among his orchestral works, his *Lyric Symphony* with parts for soprano and baritone is best known, and Berg quoted from it in his own *Lyric Suite* as a token of the esteem with which he was held by his fellow musicians.

However, Zemlinsky did not follow Schoenberg into the tonal twelve tone row techniques, and so some accused him of being reactionary. His wide-ranging works must be accepted on their own unique artistic quality and superb instrumentation.

In an early quartet, and in his four subsequent works in the genre, are found variety but always the same immaculate craftsmanship. Quartet No. 3 was composed in fall of 1924 and premiered by the Vienna String Quartet. The musical fabric evolves from intervals and rhythms of the opening theme. The theme is a quote from the *Lyric Symphony*, "Forget this night when the night is no more." The woman rejected by her lover sings the lament and it carries autobiographical context: Schoenberg never forgave Zemlinsky's sister for an affair with a painter. Double dotted rhythms in the second subject suggest masculinity. The clash is not resolved and the movement ends.

Some find Zemlinsky using parody and sarcasm to taunt the avant-garde school and in the second movement all the variations are built on a miniature three-note motive in cumulative fashion with material from each variation being reused in subsequent portions. The viola is given a wide-ranging melody in the Romance, and leaps in the cello and first violin make the mood more impassioned. Beaumont finds the ending portrays an attitude of grief.

The Burlesque is to be played *sehr lebhaft*, which means lively or vivid so the somber atmosphere is broken. In Rondo form, a distorted Spanish dance with a false bass is presented in the first episode, a minuet in the second. The climax is reached in the coda where the opening motif is caught up in a "whirlwind of cross-rhythms."

—Notes by Catherine Roche

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