

FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

Miró String Quartet

Daniel Ching, violin
Sandy Yamamoto, violin
John Largess, viola
Joshua Gindele, cello

6:00 PM, March 16, 2002
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of Pacific
Stockton, California



Quartet in D Major, Op. 50, No. 6 “The Frog”

Allegro
Poco adagio
Menuetto: Allegretto
Finale: Allegro con spirito

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Quartet No. 8 in c Minor, Op. 110

Largo—
Allegro molto—
Allegretto—
Largo—
Largo

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

—Intermission—

Quartet in g Minor, Op. 27

Un poco andante; Allegro molto ed agitato
Romanze: Andantino
Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato
Finale: Lento; Presto al Saltarello

Edvard Grieg
(1843-1907)



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The Miró Quartet

The Miró Quartet was founded in 1995 at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. In 1996, the Quartet sprang to national attention, winning the First Prize in the 50th Annual Coleman Chamber Music Competition, and within a month, capturing both the First and Grand Prizes at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. In 1998, the Quartet was awarded First Prize and the Pièce de Concert Prize at the 6th Banff International String Quartet Competition.

The Miró has performed to critical acclaim across the nation at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Oberlin Conservatory, and the Juilliard School, at festivals such as Aspen and Norfolk, and as the resident string quartet at the Swannanoa Chamber Music Festival. The Quartet has been heard at prestigious concert venues such as Alice Tully, Weill Recital, and Merkin Recital Halls and on National Public Radio.

The Miró is currently the recipient of the Lisa Arnhold Fellowship in String Quartet Studies at The Juilliard School where they serve as the teaching assistants to the Juilliard String Quartet.

Program Notes

Haydn—Quartet in D, Op. 50, No. 6

The Opus 50 quartets of 1787 have the central position in Haydn's entire quartet output, composed just after Mozart's six quartets dedicated to Haydn. Despite Haydn's popularity, no new series had appeared since 1783 until these "Prussian Quartets," so named because they were dedicated to King Friedrich Wilhelm II, nephew of Frederick the Great.

In these quartets, Haydn kept the manipulation of the thematic material in a concise and highly concentrated mold. Goethe had compared a quartet to the conversation of four sensible people. Haydn emerges in these quartets as a brilliant conversationalist. Whether in the manipulation of small motifs, in soulful episodes, or exuberant finales, the music has absorbing interest and appealing charm. The texture is always transparent and all instruments participate in the animated "conversation." Haydn's inventiveness

takes surprising turns and all these characteristics are audible in Quartet Number 6, "The Frog."

The opening theme of the *Allegro* is unusual in that it is really a descending passage using the harmony of a cadence. The opening motive appears again in the Finale. Haydn preferred to use the classical achievement of presenting a single theme, then manipulating and spinning out motifs from it among all the voices from top to bottom or vice-versa. Unity is thus achieved but a fine balance with infinite variety is a characteristic of Haydn's late quartets.

The *Poco adagio* is close to a sonata design and Haydn uses bold harmonies—the expression of deep feeling is intensified by unexpected excursions into remote tonalities. The continuing reiteration of a single note is echoed in the following movements.

The *Menuetto* begins with a vigorous upward leap followed by a dancing descent of appoggiaturas. The capricious use of grace notes makes the movement fresh and original.

The finale, *Allegro con spirito* in duple metre, is agile and completely dominated by the opening motif of rapid sixteenth notes. The same notes, or neighboring notes, are repeated in a rapid fashion, but are played alternately on two different strings; when used in the lower strings in the middle of the movement, it produces the "croaking" sound that won the quartet its nickname, "The Frog." The repetitive notes occur about 70 times, and appear in all the instruments. Haydn used it for humor and effective coloristic purposes. It is an important element in the process of the thematic integration.

Shostakovich—Quartet No. 8 in c, Op. 110

The Eighth Quartet was unveiled by the Beethoven Quartet at the opening chamber music concert of the new season in Leningrad on October 2, 1960, and had an extraordinary impact. Heinrich Neuhaus wrote, "It's music of absolute genius! I was shaken and cried."

At this time, Shostakovich had reached the position of unofficial grand master of Soviet music, Prokofiev having died in 1953. Of the quartets composed between 1956 and 1960, the

Eighth is undoubtedly the finest. Shostakovich had traveled to Dresden, ostensibly to work on a film that was to commemorate the devastation of that city, *Five Days and Five Nights*.

Shostakovich viewed the graphic film, toured the ruins of the devastated city, and then instead of scoring the film, wrote the quartet in three days. He wrote, "However much I tried to draft my obligations for the film, I just couldn't do it. And this devastated city reminded me of our own devastated cities that I'd been in, and of the human victims, the many lives taken away by the war that Hitler's fascism unleashed." His work is a profound description of his deep humanistic compassion of the tragedy wrought by war, and the Quartet was dedicated to "The Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War."

Shostakovich had told his friend that the work was a kind of epitaph to himself. It is autobiographical, using the letters DSCH as the central motif pervading the movements obsessively. D stood for "Dimitri," the S was the German spelling of E-flat, standing for his second initial, H is the German spelling of B-natural for his second, and the CH stands for the last letters of his name. The work is intensely poignant and personal in the slow movements, bitter and driven in the fast section.

In organizing the work, he drew extensively upon his old works. All of the works used reappear as a reliving of his profound experiences during the war years. The five movements are played without interruption.

The first movement is a fugue on DSCH, followed by the initial fanfare pattern of the First Symphony, then a melody played by the first violin in a descending chromatic scale pattern; the second violin plays a series from the Fifth Symphony.

This toccata is a raging, torrential movement, reminiscent of the cruel destruction of the war. Interrupted by recurring percussion sounds representing the sound of gunfire,

the toccata theme expands into a four-voice canon. At the peak of the upward escalating movement, a mournful Hebrew theme from the Piano Trio is sounded.

The third movement is a waltz in rondo form, blending a variety of moods, irony, sorrow, and elegance. The violins play the DSCH theme in forte followed by the waltz theme. After a somewhat grotesque second theme, ascending three note turns, the music changes to duple metre and a theme from the Cello Concerto enters; the cello sings in his high register surrounded by the violins' chromatic ornaments.

Two exploding chords begin the fourth movement, and the theme of the Cello Concerto, though pianissimo, sounds like a protest. The "gunfire" continually interrupts. The violin plays the melody of *Day of Anger* from *Ten Poems*, and the theme from the Eleventh Symphony. The melody of the song of the Russian Revolution, *Kept in Heavy Chains*, is heard in broad presentation. An aria from the opera *Katerina Ismailova* is heard as a cello solo.

The fifth movement is a fugue, using the DSCH theme. At the end, it is repeated in elegiac style by all the instruments with mutes, and sounds quietly vanish completing the memorial epitaph.

Grieg-Quartet in g, Op. 27

Grieg composed his only quartet in 1877-78, as a determined effort to compose something of stature after a time of what he termed "stagnation."

The quartet cost the composer great difficulties, as is evident from his voluminous correspondence on technical details with the violinist Heckmann, to whom it was dedicated. Chamber music in the quartet tradition with its polyphonic structure did not suit the folk idiom, with its strict melodic-harmonic requirements. But Grieg wrote that the work was not planned to be "meat for small minds." It aimed at "breadth, vigor, flight of imagination, and, above all, fullness of tone for the instruments for which it is written." Full-toned as it is, it at times resembles an orchestral suite, and lacks the intimacy, which is the soul of chamber music. But he succeeded in creating a work among the best of its kind. Debussy took it as a model for his

g minor quartet ten years later. Grieg achieved a singular intensity through melody, supported by a harmony suited to it, often a string of dissonant chords. Grieg said he had discovered dark profundities in the folk songs, which contained in all their richness, unsuspected harmonic possibilities. The dramatic quality is strengthened by the animation of the rhythm.

Grieg had set six Ibsen songs and the first song of the set, *Minstrels*, supplied the motto-theme for the quartet. Ibsen's words allude to the "hulder" of Norse popular lore—the spirit of the waterfall from whom a musician can learn the most precious secrets of his art, though at the risk of losing his peace of mind forever. Grieg felt the musician was under a spell that the unending search for excellence laid upon a dedicated composer.

The theme from the *Minstrels* (also termed *Fiddlers*) is used as a "motto" theme, framing the work like two pillars, and putting its stamp on the individual parts, appearing in cyclic fashion in every movement.

After a solemn introduction, the *Allegro molto* unfolds like an elaborate mosaic, fresh and effective. The motto theme forms an effective contrast to the opening dramatic theme.

In the *Romanze*, the leading motive represents the dramatic element and disturbs the idyllic mood of the main theme three times.

The *Intermezzo* has a principal theme derived from the leading motive. Rude energy marks this movement, with a racy humor that makes it one of Grieg's most typical productions. The trio is related to folk music and suggests an animated scene.

The Finale uses the leading motive as an introduction, a broad *lento*. The music then breaks suddenly into a passionate *presto a saltarello*, with dance rhythms playing a characteristic part in this wild and long movement. The saltarello is a leaping dance from central Italy, but folk dances of all countries were part of Norwegian life long before the advent of nationalism. At last the leading motto is heard over broad chords in major key. It was Grieg's triumphant announcement of victory.

—Notes by Catherine Roche

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