

FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

The Ying Quartet

Timothy Ying, violin
Janet Ying, violin
Phillip Ying, viola
David Ying, cello

6:00 PM, February 2, 2002
Central United Methodist Church
3700 Pacific Avenue
Stockton, California



Program

Three Rags

Poltergeist
The Graceful Ghost
Incineratorag

William Bolcom

(b. 1938)

◆ Eagle at Sunrise

Augusta Read Thomas

(b. 1964)

◆ Three American Hymns for String Quartet

How Firm a Foundation
Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?
I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord

Daniel Kellogg

(b. 1976)

—Intermission—

Quartet in A-flat, Op. 105

Adagio ma non troppo, Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace
Lento e molto cantabile
Allegro, non tanto

Antonín Dvořák

(1841-1904)

◆ Works from the Ying Quartet's "LifeMusic" commissioning project, supported by the Institute for American Music



The YING QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.
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The Ying Quartet

The Ying Quartet celebrates its tenth anniversary this season continuing its quest to develop ways of making artistic and creative expression an essential part of everyday life. Their efforts include an innovative residency at Symphony Space in New York City linking music with poetry, an incipient project with Da Camera of Houston to bring chamber music into the lives of Houston working people, and an exploration, with the Turtle Island String Quartet, of jazz, improvisation, and the classical string quartet tradition. As another component of its anniversary festivities, the Ying Quartet will honor ten of its earliest presenters, including Friends of Chamber Music, by returning to those series at its original 1991 fee.

Natives of Chicago, the Ying siblings began their career as the first recipients of a National Endowment for the Arts grant to support chamber music in rural America. The Quartet's exceptional musical qualities earned it the 1993 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In the years since, the Yings have established an international reputation for excellence in performance with appearances in virtually every major American city, at numerous festivals including Tanglewood, Aspen, and San Miguel, and in Europe, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Japan, and Taiwan. They have performed in settings as diverse as Carnegie Hall, the White House, hospitals, and juvenile prisons.

The Yings are Quartet-in-Residence at the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester and in the Fall of 2001 became visiting Resident Quartet at Harvard University.

The Ying Quartet says of itself that they have "undertaken a long-term project we call 'LifeMusic' that connects the music we make with the American experience and issues of our time." They seek commissions from living American composers that reflect both life in America and the highest standards of musical excellence. They seek to make classical music a relevant and vital part of American culture in all its diversity, thus making artistic and creative expression an essential part of everyday life. In 1999, the Quartet introduced a project supported by the

Institute for American Music that aimed at the production of a distinctively American string quartet repertoire.

Program Notes

Bolcom—Three Rags

Bolcom claims three American idols: Charles Ives, Scott Joplin, and George Gershwin. His tributes to them include composition, performance, and scholarship. He regularly performs Ives' songs with his wife, the mezzo-soprano Joan Morris. His research into the work of Joplin led to the rediscovery of the opera *Treemonisha*, while his piano recordings served a large part in the Joplin revival. He has recorded the complete piano works of Gershwin.

Bolcom studied with Darius Milhaud at Mills College (as did Pacific's Dave Brubeck). Bolcom honored his teacher by recording Milhaud's *Saudades do Brasil*. He did further studies at the Paris Conservatoire, has taught at Queens College, and is full professor at the University of Michigan. Among other honors he received an honorary doctorate from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Bolcom bridged the world of jazz and classical music with ultimate success. Many of his "rags" pay homage to the older generation of composer/performer, most notably *Eubie's Lucky Day*, which was a tribute to the legendary Eubie Blake.

Chamber music lovers are not always treated to music of such fiery energy and complex syncopation.

Thomas—Eagle at Sunrise

Thomas has served on the faculty of the Eastman School of Music and is now a Professor of Music at Northwestern University. Her works have been played by symphony orchestras worldwide under leading conductors. She has been instrumental in starting a Contemporary Chamber Music Series called MUSIC NOW.

Thomas states that her favorite moment in any piece of music is "the moment of maximum risk and striving," which for her is the moment of "exquisite humanity and raw soul."

Today's selection was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, which

has sponsored a continuing output of American compositions for decades.

Eagle at Sunrise is a 7-minute work featuring the cello in its higher registers. The passionate sound of the strings and the highly wrought harmonic scheme with its counterpoint make the music immediate, bold, colorful, and dramatic.

The eagle symbolizes the spirit of America, and at sunrise it becomes an image of hope and implicit faith in dreams and new beginnings. Thomas feels the music has a spirit of modernity that includes the transitory, the fugitive, the unexpected, and both inward turning and outward reaching.

Kellogg—Three American Hymns for String Quartet

Hymns and religious songs have been America's oldest music. The pilgrim founders of New England had at least their voices and their faith, and hymns were their music. Kellogg comments that hymns were intended to glorify God both by praising His attributes and by celebrating His love for His people. Some hymns are intensely personal and express human beings reflecting on their joys, their tragedies, or just their everyday existence; their hymns provide a source of meaning to life.

A variety of immigrant groups contributed hymns but those written in America represent a unique American quality. This composition, *Three American Hymns for String Quartet*, aims at celebrating American hymns, illustrating the power and purpose they have had in American lives. The Hanson Institute for American Music of the Eastman School of Music commissioned it for the Ying Quartet.

How Firm a Foundation can serve as a source of confidence in the strength of God and a source of sustenance through all difficult times. The melody comes from a collection of hymns called *The Sacred Harp*. Collections of hymns were America's earliest publications of music; by 1800,

more than 130 collections had been published along the Atlantic coast.

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? is a well known and much loved African American Spiritual, interpreted by all America's great Afro-American voices. It is a lamentation of the sorrow and pain endured by Christ during his passion and death and becomes personal when identified with the suffering in individual lives.

I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord, in contrast, speaks of the joy to be found in God's presence, here on earth, and hopefully in the full restoration of life in the heavenly hereafter. This melody has a slight Irish flavor, but it is an American folk tune.

Dvořák—Quartet in A-flat, Op. 105

After two years in America, Dvořák returned to Bohemia for the summer of 1894. He had misgivings about returning to New York for a third year as the conservatory he had been contracted to direct was having financial difficulties and he missed his own country, the Bohemian countryside and cities, and his family. He did return to New York, however, bringing only one of his children. Even in the midst of his homesickness he composed his remarkable cello concerto and the first hundred measures of the A-flat quartet. He left New York in 1895, a few days before his six months commitment had expired, and he never returned.

Several months after his return to his home in Vysoka, he wrote to a friend: "My muse is now quite silent. For the whole four months I have not even taken up my pen." After renewing his participation in the artistic life of Prague, however, he found that his compositional powers had regained their accustomed fluency. He completed the first movement of the quartet on December 18, the magnificent slow movement on Christmas Day, and the finale on December 30. The Rosc Quartet gave the first public performance in Vienna on November 10, 1896, though students at the Prague Conservatory had introduced it in April.

In Op. 105, we do not find Americanisms acquired from his stay in the United States, nor traces of the Slavonic character of his earlier music. All elements are integrated into a

celebration of Dvořák's joy at being home and his mastery of the quartet medium. His control of far-reaching harmonic connections, linked through parallel major and minor modes that he learned from Schubert's works, give the work a nostalgic character.

The opening of the first movement presents a turn figure heard in each instrument from lowest to highest in a sober, foreboding introduction in A-flat minor. The phrase rises and intensifies with chromatic harmonic colorations. Then it intensifies and the *Allegro appassionata* bursts forth in A-flat major. A second theme is a hunting horn call played by the two violins over rushing triplets in the lower instruments. The opening themes are featured in the development but seem to be absent at first from the recapitulation. However, they are recalled in a nostalgic way in the coda before a driving swift conclusion.

The glory of the quartet is the scherzo in F minor, a splendid *furiant* which is a Czech dance with alternative 3/2 and 3/4 patterns. This bold and vigorous dance is filled with "braggadocio." The trio, more lyrical and subdued, features a melody reminiscent of an aria from Dvořák's opera *The Jacobin*. A lyrical melody over a gentle accompaniment opens the slow movement in F major. This leads into a highly chromatic passage over throbbing triplets in the cello, and then rises to an impassioned climax. The opening melody returns with the second violin playing a rapid little decorative figure, marked *Scherzando* by Dvořák, so a light touch is added to the more serious character of most of the movement.

The fourth movement starts at the very bottom of the cello's range, returning the music to the key of A-flat major. Despite some moments of relaxation, the energy is sustained, creating a mood of warmth and geniality, with the opening sixteenth note figure recurring to build an exuberant conclusion.

—Notes by Catherine Roche

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