

FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

Elements Quartet

Jeffrey Multer, violin
Evan Mirapaul, violin
Danielle Farina, viola
Peter Seidenberg, cello

7:30 PM, November 17, 2002

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

In cooperation with the Conservatory of Music
University of Pacific
Stockton, California



Erlkönig

(Arr. Mirapaul)

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

“Snapshot” Previews

Various Composers

Excerpts from “*The Dead Man*”

John Zorn

(b. 1953)

Oriente

Alexander Glazunov

(1865-1936)

Serenata alla Spagnola

Alexander Borodin

(1833-1887)

Elegy

Glazunov

—Intermission—

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Op. 44, #1

Felix Mendelssohn

Molto allegro vivace

(1809-1847)

Menuetto

Andante espressiva ma con moto

Presto con brio



The ELEMENTS QUARTET is represented by Gurtman and Murtha Associates
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Elements Quartet

The Elements Quartet is dedicated to communicating the excitement of chamber music to contemporary audiences. Founded in 1999, the ensemble has won acclaim for its passionate performances and dynamic programs. Their repertoire is eclectic and expansive.

The musicians of the Elements have studied with the Cleveland, Tokyo, Juilliard, and Guarneri quartets.

The Elements Quartet has performed at Rutgers SummerFest, Caramoor Festival, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival/Yale School of Music, and the Kent/Blossom Music Festival. They have received grants from the Arthur Judson and Koussevitzky Foundations to commission new string quartets from David Sampson and Pulitzer Prize-winner David Del Tredici. The quartet was awarded the Norfolk/Yale Debut Prize last year for outstanding new ensemble and was featured on PBS.

Program Notes

Schubert–Erlkönig

Schubert became the romantic symbol of the artist's fate: he suffered poverty, was neglected in his lifetime, and died young. He was then enshrined among the immortals. His beautiful voice as a boy won him a place in the imperial choir in Vienna, where his musicality prompted the remark that he was "straight from heaven". A friend later remarked that with Schubert, "everything turned to song". His talent for friendship won him a band of followers from the growing class of well-to-do young intellectuals, who spent their evenings together reading poetry and listening to Schubert's songs, sung by one of the group who was a splendid baritone.

Erlkönig, a setting of Goethe's poem, was a masterpiece of Schubert's youth, composed in a few hours in 1815. Schubert successfully captured the "strangeness and wonder" of the work, based on the legend that whoever is touched by the Elf King must die. The action is a race through the forest on horseback pursued by the Elf King as a father strives to reach home with his sick child. The last verse tells the outcome:

*The father shudders, he rides swiftly,
Holding fast the moaning child,
He reaches home with pain and dread;
In his arms the child lay dead.*

To set this song for a string quartet from the piano-voice version is an intriguing undertaking. Schubert elaborated the vocal

lines of his songs with characteristic piano accompaniments. Galloping triplets over a rumbling bass figure sets the atmosphere of the poem. Characters are differentiated vividly through changes in melody, rhythm, harmony, and type of accompaniment. Clashing dissonances suggest the child's terror. The Erlkönig's cajoling is given in suavely melodious phrases. A steady rise in tension gives way to a dramatic pause before the last two words. The composing of such a work by a boy of eighteen is considered a milestone in the history of Romanticism.

"Snapshots"—Various composers

An innovation in quartet programs, the title suggests music that is contemporary and varied. Prepare to be surprised!

Zorn—Excerpts from "The Dead Man"

For several decades, performers have been increasingly experimental in finding new ways to play their instruments. Zorn's compositions highlight this ambition. He describes himself as a media-addict with a passion to absorb music, words, and images as raw material for his work.

The music, which is both strange and beautiful, is made more accessible by the composer's explanations of his motives, his methods, and the sources of his inspirations. *The Dead Man* consists of thirteen parts, each about a minute long. The common element is their abstract character. Zorn's subtexts to these miniatures are overt, and he admittedly considers his miniatures to be soundtracks for short scenes. Some of the characteristic elements are use of extremely high notes on the violins over comments in the lower registers of the cello, giving a sense of space (space music) and the percussive use of the instruments producing scratching sounds, such as that of a ratchet. Short chaotic medleys are heard. Nothing lasts long.

Glazunov—Orientale

Glazunov was the last in line of the Russian National School that began with the famous *Kutchka*, a band of five men, most of whom composed music as an avocation: Rimsky-Korsakoff, Borodin, Moussorgsky, Cui, and Balakiroff. Balakiroff was the one professional musician who inspired and held the group together. Rimsky-Korsakoff wrote, "he held us absolutely spellbound by his talents, his authority, his magnetism".

Glinka was titled "The Father of Russian Music" for in 1830 when studying with Bellini in Italy it dawned on him that he ought to be composing like a Russian. He had only his instinct to guide him and he knew the "doleful Russian songs" though the term "folk song" had not yet been invented. He worked these tunes into his opera, *A Life for the Tsar*, the music of which shocked the aristocrats of St. Petersburg but brought the Tzar to tears. The "Five" were the next generation and brought Glinka's ideas to fruition.

Russia had always had music, that of the peasant population and perhaps the richest liturgical music in Europe. The increasingly wealthy middle class of Russia sent their children to study in Western Europe and they in turn brought the highly developed symphonic instruments home to Russia with them. The "Five" were determined to create a distinctively Russian symphonic music. Rimsky-Korsakoff hoped his pupil, Glazunov, would follow in his path.

However, Glazunov became the center of a new circle, the *Belaieff Circle*, whose aim was less militant and nationalistic in character. With Rimsky-Korsakoff, he attended the rehearsals of a traveling 'Richard Wagner Theater' in St. Petersburg presenting the four cycles of the *Ring*. They followed the score and Wagner's handling of the orchestra had an influence on them, though less pervasive than the influence of Liszt would be. A number of Rimsky-Korsakoff's ex-pupils, including Glazunov, would gather on Friday evenings to play and hear string quartets, including their own. Glazunov's biographer, Ossovsky, stated that Glazunov with his compositions had "effected reconciliation between Russian music of his time and Western music".

Among the influences in the nationalistic music was music from the Oriental melodies played by the caravans on ancient wind and primitive string instruments. Glazunov's *Orientale* suggests the atmosphere of the expanse of the Russian Steppes, similar to Borodin's tone poem, *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, which won Borodin acclaim. In Glazunov's music, life is suggested by the pulsing pizzicato, over which is heard a sinuous, repetitive violin melody. Oriental scales featuring the haunting use of minor thirds are distinctive. The use of very high registers on the violin gives a sense of space. At

intervals, a lively folk dance interrupts the peace, each time lasting a little longer. The melody is passed from one instrument to another, ending with a *riscuendo* type chord.

Borodin—Serenata alla Spagnola

Borodin was a member of "The Mighty Five" or "The Mighty Handful" as they were sometimes called. Though a chemist by profession, he composed music in-between his flights to the laboratory to check on his research. The title of this serenade suggests Spanish influence, though the most prevalent national idioms used by Borodin were oriental for he had oriental blood in him.

During the 1870s, Borodin began an increased involvement with the cello, and time spent in Germany appears to have released in him a new lyricism and interest in formal design. In 1875, Borodin began work on a first string quartet in which he admirably fused a style of quartet writing derived from Beethoven and Mendelssohn with a wholly individual and, at times, discernibly "Russian" quality.

In 1886, in spite of a difficult year marked by the illness of his wife who became an invalid, he contributed the *Serenata alla Spagnola* to a string quartet, on the theme "B-la-F" with the other movements written by Rimsky-Korsakoff, Glazunov and Lyadov. It was a name day present for M. P. Belayev, an extremely wealthy timber merchant, who had recently founded his publishing house, and the series of Russian Symphony Concerts, mainly for the sake of their works.

Glazunov—Elegy

An elegy is a poem expressing sorrow, and the musical form is melancholic in nature. Elegies were popular Romantic short compositions for solo instruments or ensembles. The romantic spirit was characterized by yearning for what had been lost or what had never been found. The arch-Romantic, Liszt, was an enthusiastic admirer of the work of the Group of Five, having told Borodin, "With you there exists a vitalizing stream". Although Wagner's music was supposed to represent the music of the future, Liszt stated, a little heretically, that he saw "nothing but lifeless stagnation all about". Belayev, who arranged the publication of Glazunov's works, took him to Weimar where he met Liszt, and from that time, he composed assiduously in all genres, along with his work as professor and Director of the Conservatory in St. Petersburg. In his

compositions, the influence of Liszt is heard in the flow of rhapsodic eloquence that places Glazunov in the Romantic School. If today's *Elegy* is not a tribute to Liszt, it is a genre attributable to him.

Mendelssohn—Quartet in D, Op. 44, #1

Mendelssohn was termed an "aristocrat" in his biography by Werner. He was taught to be conscious of the highest ideals and to live up to them through an education in the arts and sciences and through contact with the best minds of the ages on a personal level. As a youth Mendelssohn translated from Greek and Latin, wrote prose and verse, sketched and painted, played the piano with brilliant virtuosity, composed and conducted the works of the masters. His father insisted he exercise the severest self-criticism. From his youth, Mendelssohn was a perfect gentleman, conscious of his responsibility for his manners and acts.

This aristocratic upbringing colored his musical style, but was both a blessing and a handicap. The severe censorship he exercised on his works did limit the musical material of emotional content in his larger works. His biographer believes that the happiness of his childhood and the characteristics of his life style withheld from him "those sources of deep and intense emotion, the expression of which makes the music of the great masters (Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert) so dramatically moving, alternatively discordant and conciliatory, restive and resigned." Be that as it may concerning the nature of Mendelssohn's symphonies, his chamber music profited from the refinement of his forms and clarity of thematic treatment.

Mendelssohn wrote two quartets when he was 18 and 20 years old, and some find them more musically satisfying than the three later quartets, Op. 44 of 1839, of which No. 1 in D Major was really the latest composed. The two outer movements have enough polyphony, length, bulk and musical content to suggest successful orchestral treatment. The *Minuet*, far from being a mincing court dance, would be even more suggestive of a lively round dance with the addition of woodwinds. The *Andante* is not really a slow movement but is full of lyrical sentiment. The *finale* is boisterous using an elfin *perpetuum mobile* and resembling a Neapolitan dance mixed with fugatos and a double fugue.

—Notes by Dr. Catherine Roche

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