

FRIENDS OF
CHAMBER MUSIC
50th Anniversary

Adaskin String Trio
with **Thomas Gallant, Oboe**
Emlyn Ngai, violin
Steve Larson, viola
Mark Fraser, cello

2:30 PM, November 13, 2005
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
In cooperation with University of the Pacific
Conservatory of Music
Stockton, California

Program

String Trio in D Major, Op. 9, No. 2

Allegretto
Andante quasi allegretto
Menuetto: Allegro
Rondo: Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Divertimento No. 9 for String Trio (1998)

Murray Adaskin
(1906-2002)

Quartet in F Major for Oboe & Strings, K.370

Allegro
Adagio
Rondeau: Allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

—Intermission—

Phantasy Quartet for Oboe & String Trio, Op. 2

Andante alla marcia—Allegro giusto—Andante—Andante alla marcia

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Serenade in C Major for String Trio, Op. 10

Marcia: Allegro
Romanza: Adagio non troppo, quasi andante
Scherzo: Vivace
Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto
Rondo: Allegro vivace

Ernö Dohnányi
(1877-1960)



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The Artists

Founded in 1994, the Adaskin String Trio is the premiere ensemble of its kind in North America. The trio has performed extensively throughout the US and Canada, recorded the complete Beethoven catalog for string trio, and recorded for broadcast by CBC Radio and NPR. They are famous for a vast repertoire ranging from classic works to masterpieces by 20th century giants such as Villa-Lobos and Schnittke. As in today's concert with oboist Thomas Gallant, they have worked with other soloists including piano and accordion.

The Adaskin String Trio is named for Murray Adaskin, one of Canada's most respected composers, and two of his brothers, Harry and John, violinist and music educator respectively, in honor of their contributions to music in Canada. The members met in Montreal where they studied chamber music with founding Orford Quartet cellist, Marcel Saint-Cyr. They completed a two-year graduate ensemble-in-residence at The Hartt School under guidance of the Emerson Quartet and in 1998 were finalists for the Naumburg Award.

Emlyn Ngai, currently on faculty at The Hartt School, holds degrees from McGill, Oberlin, and Hartt. First Prize winner on baroque violin at the 1995 Locatelli Concours Amsterdam, he is also a principal member in Apollo's Fire, the Carmel Bach Festival Orchestra, and Tempesta di Mare.

Steve Larson is Professor of Viola and Chair for Strings at The Hartt School. In 1997 he won second prize at the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition. He is a founding member of Axiom Chamber Players and has guest performed with the Emerson, Arthur-Leblanc & Penderecki String Quartets.

Mark Fraser holds degrees from McGill, l'Université de Montréal, & The Hartt School. For many years he was the Artistic Director of Project Renaissance, an arts festival near Montreal. He has also taught at Connecticut Conservatory of the Performing Arts.

Thomas Gallant is one of the world's few virtuoso solo and chamber music oboists. He has been praised as a player who unites technical mastery with intentness, charm and wit. He is known for his performance style which combines American and European playing traditions. Mr. Gallant is a First Prize Winner of the Concert Artists Guild International New York Competition. He has played Carnegie and Avery Fisher Halls and throughout the United States, Canada and

Europe. He has appeared as soloist with the Kronos Quartet, collaborated with Jean-Pierre Rampal, played with the Colorado and Lark Quartets, and has been heard on BBC, Voice of America, and NPR.

The Program

Beethoven—Trio in D, Op. 9, #2

In 1792, Beethoven arrived in Vienna from his home in Bonn to study with the leading musicians Haydn, Salieri, and Johann Albrechtsberger. He also established himself as a composer and performer ending the first phase of his stay in Vienna triumphantly in 1795. In that year he finished his formal studies, made his highly successful debut as a pianist, had his Op. 1 piano trios published, was invited to compose dances for the prestigious Artists' Ball, and in December played his own piano concerto at the concert welcoming Haydn back from London.

It was following these peak experiences that Beethoven composed the three string trios of Op. 9 over the following two years. These proved to be his final works in the form although he continued to compose trios with other instrument combinations mainly with the piano. Those prone to speculate suggest that after composing his first string quartets, in 1798, he found them more satisfying.

Little is known of the genesis of Op. 9 except that they were published in 1798 by Traeg of Vienna, who paid 50 ducats for the rights (a princely sum for such a young composer), and they are dedicated to Count Browne-Camus, a Russian officer who had gifted Beethoven with a horse. The entertaining nature of Op. 8 and 25 is missing as Op. 9 is serious, forward-looking work. While numbers 1 and 3 of Op. 9 are solidly established in the chamber music repertoire, number 2 has found less favor and is rather infrequently performed.

It is a long work and some suggest that, for the first time in Beethoven's trios, he is somewhat handicapped by having only three instruments. Music for string trio is rare, for taking one violin away from the string quartet presents the composer with a number of problems, especially with harmony. It is no surprise that composers have shied away from the complex challenges of this instrument combination: late in life Mozart wrote a single great string trio; Schubert experimented with only two brief trios; and in the 20th century Hindemith wrote two and Schoenberg one. This may be further born

out by the fact that after Op. 9, Beethoven never returned to the string trio format.

Although there are moments of interest and charm in this piece, the writing gives the general impression of introspection. Significantly, it has a minuet whereas Nos. 1 and 3 have scherzos. Beethoven uses thematic material in the opening *Allegretto* which he transforms for the other movements, and which he finally makes the theme for the Rondo. His fixations with intellectual devices, which make little external show, lack the extremes of energy and lyricism that typify the creative Beethoven personality that we expect.

Adaskin—Divertimento #9

Adaskin's *Divertimento #9* was written for the Adaskin String Trio in 1998 and premiered by them in April 1999. It is a thank you for the trio's honoring the Adaskin family by choosing their name. The piece is an arrangement for string trio of his *Serenade Concertante for Orchestra* (written 44 years earlier), which was one of his first wife's favorite pieces. It was played so frequently that she dubbed it his "C# minor Prelude" alluding to the famous prelude by Rachmaninov. This very attractive *Divertimento* is instilled with hopefulness, humor, and honor, all qualities that strongly reflect the optimistic nature of the composer.

Mozart—Quartet in F, K. 370

Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus¹ Sigismundus Mozart was a traveling man. He spent almost half of the 30 years he composed travelling from Salzburg to various European cities, first as a performing child prodigy and then later as a mature artist. In the fall of 1777, he began a lengthy visit to Paris and then Mannheim, and it was during this travel that his mother died. Following this visit, Mozart returned home for a year and a half as violinist and court organist to the unreceptive Archbishop Colleardo. But Salzburg provided no stimulation, and consequently he felt little compulsion to compose.

Late in 1780, he was invited by the Elector Carl Theodor to Munich to compose an opera (*Idomeneo*) for the carnival celebration. Colleardo, while reluctant to permit Mozart to go, was more fearful of offending the Elector. So he granted six weeks leave which Mozart organized into four months; and it was

¹ Sometimes Amadeus, sometimes Gottlieb.

there, early in 1781 before his eventful move to Vienna, that he wrote his lone quartet for oboe and strings.

This work deserves a place of high respect in the music of that period. It embodies many of the elements that were to become so characteristic of his later ravishing and intimate chamber music style. Mozart created grand virtuosic demands in writing this piece for his friend Friedrich Ramm, the brilliant Munich Orchestra oboist, who had been "crazy with delight" over having been given some years before the C Major oboe concerto (K.314) known as "Herr Ramm's showpiece."

The quartet provides for great contrasts of expression even though it contains only three movements, the minuet omitted. The first movement, an *Allegro* in creatively redesigned sonata form, is simultaneously graceful and sturdy. It begins with a sparkling theme stated by the oboe, but with considerable melodic appeal in each of the string parts. The violin states the second theme which turns out to be a rescored first theme in a different key with an added counter melody in the oboe. This dialogue between the oboe and violin is like an exchange of lovers' intimacies. The concluding theme of the exposition begins with a series of four repeated notes. The development, adding a note of pathos with a seemingly erudite fugue, quickly turns cheerful featuring several showy passages for each performer. Defying tradition in the recapitulation, Mozart brings back only the principal theme, affords it no additional development, and then moves to the coda and a quiet ending.

The light-hearted first movement is followed by a poignant 37-measure D Minor *Adagio* in which the oboe is allowed full range of expression like the wide interval leaps he would give his later operatic heroines in their most serious moods. Mozart interweaves and varies the minimum amount of melodic material, achieving a remarkable level of emotional representation in just over three minutes of music.

The principal theme of the *Rondeau* reestablishes an elegant wittiness after the moving *Adagio*. The opening interval and the use of grace notes reflect the *Allegro's* main theme. The first contrast is a sterner feeling that softens with a shortened repeat of the first opening. The second contrast affords the most striking moments of the entire quartet and a most unusual polyrhythmic device for Mozart. The strings play in 6/8 meter while the oboe proceeds with an embellished

melody in 4/4. In one section the oboe is playing eight 16th notes against three 8th notes in the strings; this is the musical equivalent of simultaneously patting your head and rubbing your stomach! The final statement of the first theme reestablishes joy and the oboe reaches the top of its range in the coda, concluding with rising notes in bravura runs and ornaments.

Britten—Phantasy Quartet

A Phantasy (more commonly Fantasy or Fantasia) usually signifies a whimsical, inventive composition that is spontaneous and free of formal restraint. To achieve this end without producing meaningless disorder, the composer must have an impressive mastery of technique. In the 17th century, the fantasy was a one-movement polyphonic form, generally for viols, that moved through many moods. There are brilliant examples by Morley, Byrd, Purcell and others. By the 20th century, it had become a form which English composers used to demonstrate a modern sensibility derived from the roots of the great Elizabethan-to-Restoration composers, viz. Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*. Britten exhibits his talent in this Phantasy Quartet for oboe, violin, viola, and cello with a skillful control of musical elements, achieving the required freedom of spirit and absence of chaos while simultaneously showing his mastery of the old form and his completely modern sensibility.

The Phantasy was composed in the fall of 1932 while the 19-year-old Britten was still a scholarship student at the Royal College of Music. Although the quartet is in one long movement, the work may be described as two movements that become intertwined. We first hear the cello and then the other strings setting up a mysterious, peculiar, march-like setting over which the oboe sings in a voice that is the direct opposite of the string's martial nature. The oboe sweeps through wide intervals which are repeated and developed over the march in the strings reaching a climax in double and triple stops. This section closes with a series of trills. The violin and cello introduce respectively two more themes. Although different in nature, these ideas are offshoots of the first theme. After variations and expansions of the themes, the viola begins a contrasting section with a new theme derived from the oboe's first melody, but played by strings only. Immediately, the violin picks up the viola line but plays it as a little syncopated song. The rest of the piece brings back the

previous themes in modified form. The work ends as it began with the cello reiterating the enigmatic march rhythm.

Dohnányi—Serenade in C, Op. 10

Though he was a post-romantic contemporary of Fauré and d'Indy, Ernő (sometimes Ernst von) Dohnányi lived a long life which encompassed great changes in music. As was the case with Fauré, his early works were strongly influenced by Brahms, but this external force was minimized by his contrapuntal expertise and original melodic twist. The result is a quality of music that yields to no other for newness of thematic material, rhythmic significance, and pellucid formality. Dohnányi kept his melodies under control, never letting them slip into sentimentality. He wrote multi-voiced passages that remain unmatched for utter pleasantness and unabashed expressive charm.

Dohnányi picked up on Mozart's idea of a "serenade" as an instrumental rather than vocal work with a number of different movements and moods. Think of it as background music for an 18th century party.

In 1902, when the 25-year-old Dohnányi was touring the world as a virtuoso pianist and composing his *Serenade*, both old and new approaches to composition were active: Elgar wrote his first *Pomp and Circumstance March* (the one without which no graduation ceremony is complete) and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* had its world première.

The *Serenade* is an eccentric five-movement work in an idiosyncratic style. It opens with a brief, stirring *Marcia*, propelled by energetically repeated rhythms. The *Marcia* is followed by a *Romanza*, in which a quiet, almost meandering viola solo, accompanied by pizzicato violin and cello, gives way to a more passionate violin solo. Next, a gorgeous duet of violin and viola soars above cello pizzicato, and the movement fades quietly away. The *Scherzo* is a wiry little pursuit among the three strings, a scampering fugue followed by brief unisons and a broader tune reminiscent of Dvorák. The wistful, dark theme of the *Tema con Variazioni* twists immediately into increasingly dense variations, showing a marvelous diversity of string textures, then closes gently. The *Rondo* is alternately furious, volatile, or grandiose; then the opening *Marcia* themes are briefly reprised before a single closing chord.

—Notes by Dr. Mårch Yecies-Parnel

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