



# BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

**Mark Steinbert**, violin  
**Serena Canin**, violin  
**Misha Amory**, viola  
**Nina Maria Lee**, cello

7:30 PM, November 7, 2009  
Faye Spanos Concert Hall  
In cooperation with Pacific's  
Conservatory of Music

**"Night Songs for a Desert Flower"** (2009)  
Madrigal (Allegretto grazioso ed amorooso)  
Lament (Mesto)  
Intermezzo (Lontano, dolcissimo)  
Rejouissance (Allegro vivace)

**Stephen Hartke**  
(b. 1952)

**String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94** (1975)  
I. Duets: With moderate movement  
II. Ostinato: Very fast  
III. Solo: Very calm  
IV. Burlesque: Fast—con fuoco  
V. Recitative and Passacaglia (La serenissima): Slow

**Benjamin Britten**  
(1913–1976)

*—intermission—*

**String Quartet in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3** (1805-6)  
Introduzione: Andante con moto—Allegro vivace  
Andante con moto quasi Allegretto  
Minuetto: Grazioso  
Allegro molto

**Ludwig van Beethoven**  
(1770–1827)

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*The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists*  
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## Artists

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award; and in 1996 the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center invited them to be the inaugural members of Chamber Music Society Two, a program which was to become a coveted distinction for chamber groups and individuals. The Quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut.

In recent seasons the Quartet has traveled widely, appearing all over the United States and Canada, in Europe, Japan and Australia. It has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House. The Quartet has participated in summer festivals such as Aspen, the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, the Edinburgh Festival, the Kuhmo Festival in Finland, the Taos School of Music and the Caramoor Festival.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet has a strong interest in both very old and very new music. It has performed many musical works pre-dating the string quartet as a medium, among them Madrigals of Gesualdo, Fantasias of Purcell, and secular vocal works of Josquin. Also, the quartet has worked closely with some of the most important composers of our time, among them Elliott Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Steven Mackey, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The Quartet has commissioned works from Wuorinen, Adolphe, Mackey, David Horne and Gabriela Frank. The Quartet has been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, pianist Richard Goode, and pianist Mitsuko Uchida.

The Quartet has recorded the works of Haydn, Mozart, Steven, Bruce Adolphe, Chou Wen-chung and Charles Wuorinen. In 1999, the Quartet became the first Resident String Quartet at Princeton University. The Quartet is

named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved", the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

## Program

### Hartke—*Night Song for a Desert Flower*

There's a lot to enjoy in Stephen Hartke's music: his erudition, the breadth of his experience, his unique musical voice, but not the least of which is that some of his pieces have the most engaging names.<sup>1</sup> His music communicates a sense of place: the rhythmic pulse of West Africa, the eclectic mix of essential Latin and Asian basics, his New York experiences, or the Mississippi Delta blues. One of the most remarkable influences in contemporary American music, Stephen Hartke was born in Orange, New Jersey, in 1952, and grew up in Manhattan, where he began his musical career as a professional boy chorister. He describes his personally created musical language as reflecting his experience as a fellow member of the audience.

Notes© Dr. Michael Spencer

*Night Songs for a Desert Flower* is, at heart, a book of madrigals for string quartet. I began the work thinking that I would be exploring the fundamentally abstract nature of the medium, but quickly found that its intensely focused emotional qualities pushed me towards a work in which the structure of the movements was determined much more by the emotional element in the same way that the madrigal responds to the expressive demands of the text set. As in madrigal cycles, there is a drama played out here, with the main arc contained within the first three movements. The last movement offers a dance of celebration followed by a brief envoi in a coda that disappears into the night.

Notes by Stephen Hartke

*This work was commissioned by The Harvard Musical Association and Carnegie Hall. The World Premiere was given by the Brentano String Quartet at the Gibson Center for the Arts, Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland, on October 4, 2009.*

<sup>1</sup> For example, "Oh Them Rats Is Mean in My Kitchen" which Hartke borrowed from "Maltese Cat Blues" by the early Texas blues singer/guitarist Blind Lemon Jefferson

### Britten—String Quartet No. 3

Many consider Benjamin Britten the greatest English musical genius since Purcell. A composer of wide-ranging talents, Britten used the human voice in a remarkable body of work, ranging from operas to song cycles to choral works. He also produced a great deal of music for orchestra and chamber ensembles, including symphonies, concerti, and chamber and solo works. Britten's formal training included studies at the Royal College of Music (1930-1933). Upon graduation from the RCM, Britten obtained a position scoring documentaries<sup>2</sup> where he learned to obtain the utmost diversity of musical efficacy from the fewest of instruments. He quickly emerged as the most talented British composer of his generation.

An unwavering pacifist, Britten left England in 1939 as war emerged over Europe. He spent four years composing in the United States and Canada. A Koussevitzky Commission allowed him to write the extremely successful opera *Peter Grimes* (1944-45), which marked the turning point in his career. Over the next several decades Britten wrote a dozen more operas, several of which — *Billy Budd* (1951), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), *Death in Venice* (1973) — became immediate and enduring fixtures of the repertoire. He also continued to produce vocal, orchestral, and chamber music, including the *Third String Quartet* (1975) we hear today.

The Third Quartet was begun in October 1975, just after he finished the score for the cantata *Phaedra*, and completed in November during his stay in Venice. Michael Kennedy sums up the situation well in his book in the 'Master Musicians' Series. He notes that "the music of this Quartet represents the essence of Britten's musical achievement over a creative span of fifty years." This work looks both back and forward over the composer's life— in the same way that *Death in Venice* had implied a new beginning in his music. Kennedy suggests that in this work Britten "achieved the clarity and the succinctness and recaptured the imaginative poetry [of his earlier works]."

When an important composer writes what is perhaps the most intimate of musical forms at the end of his life and we know the composer felt the nearness death, we anticipate a focused, personal

<sup>2</sup> On such prosaic themes as "Sorting Office" for the Royal Post Office film unit

declaration. Britten's final quartet fulfills this anticipation.

Britten had returned to Venice after he suffered a stroke during heart surgery in 1971, perhaps realizing it was his last visit. He had always loved this city and had made it the setting of his opera. Britten had made a long-standing promise that sometime he would write another quartet and it is probable that he realized that he had little time left to write it. Consequently, the quotations he takes from his Venetian opera are heavy with personal meaning. There is a sense of tranquil splendor and of acceptance of himself that perhaps was achieved through the self-examination that was inevitable in composing *Death in Venice*, and which Britten may have wanted to link to the city in the homage he gave it in this masterwork of the modern string quartet.

It is in a five-movement form: three rather developed movements separated by two scherzos. The main driving force is revealed in the two outer movements. The center of gravity – the very calm 'solo' – is framed by the two demonstrative scherzos. The last movement, the Recitative and Passacaglia, is the key to the piece. This is a slow-moving elegy that unquestionably evokes the world of Gustav von Aschenbach, the main character in *Death in Venice*, who has begun to fret about his aging. Quotation from an earlier work is very rare for Britten and is made more remarkable by the designation he gave the final movement of the quartet, which he named for the old title of the Venetian Republic, "La Serenissima."

The Third Quartet is a dark, forceful work with little joy—when it isn't making you uneasy it engenders hopelessness—but it is mesmerizing, moving, and unforgettable. The Third String Quartet is not only a respectable conclusion to the tradition of his earlier ones, but one of Britten's most excellent and honest works, a work that stands alongside Beethoven and Shostakovich's last quartets.

### **Beethoven—String Quartet in C**

Beethoven's middle period, sometimes called 'heroic', began with a massive physical and spiritual crisis around 1801: he realized (or finally admitted to himself and his close friends) that he was going deaf. This was a disability that was both professionally and socially disastrous and which caused him to virtually

withdraw from public life. His unexpected solution to this crisis was an outward turning of the style of his composition to a sequence of remarkable works for public performance that would bolster his repute as Europe's most renowned composer of instrumental music. The Eroica symphony, the 'Waldstein' and 'Appassionata' piano sonatas all come from this period and so do the three quartets of Op. 59.

Beethoven's works from this period and later are complicated. They are not entertainment. We must study them in order to understand them. This characteristic, which is common to most of Beethoven's instrumental works, was new to the audiences of that time but gradually spread through Europe in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was further stimulated by the composer's death in 1827, an event that set in motion a huge wave of memorializing. In a nutshell, his most famous works effected enormous changes in the ways music was performed, listened to and written about. Here are just a few of these changes: the decisive emergence of quiet, conscientious listening with the parallel appearance of an opinion of instrumental music as more serious than vocal music; an increasing sense that "classical music" was morally inspiring and ethically superior; a new perception of composer and musician, one that saw the latter as merely a vehicle to express the thoughts of the former; an increased consideration of, and veneration for, the score as a repository of the 'work'; etc. Does all this sound familiar? It should because it marks the critical appearance of 'our' classical musical world, with its concert attendance, its silent listening, and all the rest; a world that saw its peak in the 1950s and 1960s, and that is now, most would admit, in slow decline.

But today, it is our opportunity to hear one of Beethoven's greatest works: the third of the 'Razumovsky' quartets, written in 1805-6, when Beethoven, aged 35, was at the height of his productivity. They are so called because they were commissioned by a Russian count of that name, who was the Tzar's ambassador in Vienna, a keen amateur violinist, and a confirmed music lover. Although the Op. 59 quartets retain some of the relaxed, communicative atmosphere of his earlier works, they also bear the stamp of the symphonic grandeur and breadth that was so characteristic of Beethoven's music during this period.

The concept of the string quartet and its unparalleled prestige in the Western canon is manifestly linked with Beethoven, who dedicated himself to this format with an amazing passion at three separate periods of his life, and who in the process created a corpus of work that successive composers felt they were compelled to emulate. The Beethoven quartets have long been regarded, by listeners and players alike, as the pinnacle of the repertoire. Beethoven's quartets are inspirational; they cause us to rise above our normal existence; they are eternally germane, beyond history.

Listen in the beginning for the lively and decorative theme (almost Mozartian in nature) that will permeate from the first declamatory figure, encroach on the exposition and development, and persevere throughout the movement. The second movement is the balance point of the work. Count Razumovsky insisted that the commission be based on actual or invented Russian songs, so listen for the characteristic sad moods and shadowy nooks supported by the pizzicato cello. Mozart style returns in the third movement with an straightforward complex minuet that helpfully resolves that somber Russian mood. There is a curiously long trio and coda that anticipate the work's substantial culmination. The fourth movement is a animated, jovial fugue that is complex and noisy.

This is, as you will hear, not for the fainthearted performer. Count Rasumovsky the part-time violinist probably paid generously for these quartets, but it is difficult to imagine him reaching for his instrument when he saw what Op. 59 called for. This is emphatically professionals' music: first violin's part is as demanding as a concerto; the second violin forced to lunge feverishly between the modes of soloist and accompanist; the viola part as out in the open and challenging as any in the repertoire; and a cello part that can make even the surest technician hesitate when obliged to scuttle up and down the fingerboard, scampering as though an upper string.

This is one of Beethoven's most affecting, vigorous string quartets. It reflects with fondness past styles and manners while simultaneously embarking on an astonishing musical journey that led to the future of the string quartet.

## FIFTY-FOURTH SEASON

2009-2010

*Presented in Cooperation with  
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(Supported in part by a SAC Grant)

2:30 PM Sunday, October 11, 2009

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

RECEPTION FOLLOWING

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7:30 PM Saturday, November 7, 2009

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

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2:30 PM Sunday, March 14, 2010

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2:30 PM Sunday, April 18, 2010

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- The use of cameras and recording devices of any kind is forbidden.
- There is no smoking in the lobby or auditorium.
- Please turn off cellular phones and disengage audible alarms on pagers and watches.
- Students are admitted free on a space-available basis.
- Concert programs are subject to change without notice.
- Seating is unreserved for the current Season.
- Contributions, including memorials, are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Tickets are available at the door:

General Admission: \$25  
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