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YING QUARTET

AYANO NINOMIYA, violin

JANET YING, violin

PHILIP YING, viola

DAVID YING, cello

2:30 PM, Sunday, April 6, 2014

Faye Spanos Concert Hall

University of the Pacific

SERGEI PROKOFIEV **QUARTET NO.2 IN F MAJOR, OP. 92** (1941)
(1891–1953) Allegro sostenuto
Adagio
Allegro

HOWARD HANSON **STRING QUARTET IN ONE MOVEMENT, OP. 23** (1923)
(1896–1981)

RANDALL THOMPSON **ALLELUIA** (1940)
(1899–1984) (Arr. A. Ninomiya, D. Ying, J. Ying and P. Ying)

INTERMISSION

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK **QUARTET NO. 10 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 51** (1878-9)
(1841–1904) Allegro ma non troppo
Dumka: Andante con moto—Vivace
Romanze: Andante con moto
Finale: Allegro assai

The YING QUARTET is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.
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ARTIST PROFILE



The Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today's world.

Now in its second decade as a quartet, the Quartet has established itself as an ensemble of the highest musical qualifications in its tours across the United States and abroad. Their performances regularly take place in many of the world's most important concert halls, from Carnegie Hall to the Sydney Opera House.

At the same time, the Quartet's belief that concert music can also be a meaningful part of everyday life has also drawn the foursome to perform in settings as diverse as the workplace, schools, juvenile prisons, and the White House. In fact, the Ying Quartet's constant quest to explore the creative possibilities of the string quartet has led it to an unusually diverse array of musical projects and interests.

In addition to appearing in conventional concert situations, the Ying Quartet is also known for its diverse and unusual performance projects. For several years the Quartet presented a series called "No Boundaries" at Symphony Space in New York City that sought to re-imagine the concert experience. Collaborations with actors, dancers, electronics, a host of non-classical musicians, a magician, and even a Chinese noodle chef gave new and thoughtful context to a wide variety of both traditional and contemporary string quartet music.

As quartet-in-residence at the Eastman School of Music, the Ying Quartet maintains full time faculty positions in the String and Chamber Music Departments. One cornerstone of chamber music activity at Eastman is the noted Music for All programs, in which all students have the opportunity to perform in community settings beyond the concert hall. From 2001-2008, the Ying Quartet has also been the Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University.

Prokofiev: Quartet No. 2, Op. 92

Prokofiev's music can be divided into three periods which basically coincide with his places of residence. Until age 27, his home was Czarist Russia. During these seminal, student years, he produced some of his most popular works. The second, most searching period of Prokofiev's creative life was spent away from his native land in the USA and France. From 1918-1922, he embarked on many concert tours throughout the USA. During this time, he wrote his opera *The Love of Three Oranges* and the *Third Piano Concerto*. In Paris from 1922-1936, Prokofiev experimented, restlessly searching for new musical expressions.

Prokofiev finally returned to his native Russia in 1936, which had become the USSR by that time. Happy at first, he found that the war years and the vilest period of Stalinist terror made life very demanding. In spite of the difficulties, Prokofiev was very creative during these years, composing his greatest piano sonatas (nos. 6, 7 and 8), the opera *War and Peace*, *Cinderella*, his best symphony (no. 5), the *Fifth Piano Concerto*, and many other notable works.

The second string quartet was composed in the little town of Nalchik, in the foothills of the northern Caucasus Mountains. Prokofiev and other artistic notables were transported there by the Soviet authorities to escape the Nazi blitzkrieg, which overran much of western Russia in 1942. While in Nalchik, Prokofiev was motivated by the rich folk music traditions of the region and incorporated some of these melodies and dances into his quartet. The work was well received by the majority of official critics, even though some of the plodding officials criticized his use of "barbaric and strident harmonies."

The main theme of the *Allegro sostenuto* is a Kabardian folk song with a menacing, forceful, and assertive nature. The second theme is a folk dance with the three lower voices repeating a two-note alternating figure over which the violin introduces the dance tune. A third, concluding theme is more cheerfully lyrical. The development is

severe, almost grotesque, and full of rough and dissonant sounds.

The *Adagio* is based on a Kabardian love song, first stated by the cello in its upper register against a susurrated, Eastern-style backdrop. The middle section is a dance, the *Islamei*, which imitates the sound of a folk instrument, the *kemange*, a three-string fiddle that is held vertically on the knees of the player and bowed. It still appears in various forms throughout the Middle East. A brief return to the opening theme ends the movement.

The viola and the cello start the final *Allegro* with an agitated passage based on a fiery mountain dance. Listen for this theme to soon accompany an impatient but lyrical melody in the violin. A cadenza for the cello begins the development, and in the recapitulation the themes appear in reverse order. Prokofiev's individual merger of contemporary, dissonant harmony and fetching folk tunes is one of this quartet's most distinguishing virtues.

Hanson: String Quartet, Op. 23

Howard Hanson was born in Wahoo, Nebraska, to Swedish immigrant parents. In his youth he studied music with his mother and by age 7 showed musical talent as pianist, cellist and composer. He later studied at Luther College in Wahoo, receiving a diploma in 1911. Then in 1914 he attended the Institute of Musical Art, the forerunner of the Juilliard School. Hanson earned his BA degree in music from Northwestern in 1916. Following graduation, Hanson was hired for his first full-time position as a music theory and composition teacher at the College of the Pacific then located in San Jose. He must have impressed for only three years later, he was appointed Dean of the Conservatory of Fine Arts. In 1924, George Eastman, inventor of Kodak film and founder of the Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, personally chose Hanson to be director of the Eastman School of Music. Hanson held that position for 40 years, during which he created one of

the most prestigious music schools in America.

The quartet in one movement is a dramatic work with a scope that encompasses dreamy phrasing and rhythmic life. You will hear uneven but robust meters that are not typical of his later work. Standout features include an almost orchestral approach to textural feel, use of tremolo, and dramatic melodies. Listen as the piece grows from a simple, pianissimo beginning that rises and falls, first in the viola, and then develops in contrapuntal rearrangements to evoke emotion and drama.

Howard Hanson was part of a set of American composers born in the last decade of the nineteenth century¹ who embodied the rise of American classical music as a cultural force to be taken seriously. He was the leading practitioner of American musical Romanticism and dedicated his professional life to the encouragement, creation and preservation of beauty in music. His only string quartet, written during the sponsored fellowship that followed his winning the Prix de Rome (the first American to do so 13 years before Barber) underscores this dedication.

Thompson: Alleluia

New England-born composer Randall Thompson studied at Harvard University before taking private lessons with Ernst Bloch in New York City. Following a grant in residence in Rome, he returned to the United States in 1925. His first true triumph as a composer came in 1932 when Howard Hanson led the premiere of Thompson's *Symphony No. 2* in Rochester, N.Y. Essentially all of his music expresses a consistent lyrical impulse and is augmented by distinct and crisp harmony with a juicy dose of spicy but still easily digested dissonance.

¹ Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, Randall Thompson, Roy Harris, Virgil Thompson and Aaron Copland

In 1940, Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and well-known for his influential promotion of music by living composers, united with the ensemble's board of trustees to commission Thomson to provide a choral work for the opening of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. *Alleluia* was the result.

Despite long-standing connotations of "alleluia" with celebratory and/or victorious events, the worsening condition of life in Europe (the Nazis had just overrun France) determined the emotional state of the new work. The anthem's tempo, *lento*, was intentionally chosen by the composer, who stated, "The music in my particular *Alleluia* cannot be made to sound joyous... here it is comparable to the Book of Job, where it is written, 'The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

The Ying Quartet was moved to make their own arrangement of the piece by its exceptional musical and vocal clarity. You may hear similarities to Barber's *Adagio* in that both employ an overall dramatic arc where a quiet opening passage builds steadily to an expressive culmination and then ebbs to conclude in quietude.

Nevertheless, *Alleluia* is infused with an understated, internal radiant serenity. Sustained by a harmoniously sounding diatonic harmony, the piece is a natural comfort to the soul.

Dvořák: Quartet No. 10, Op. 51

Of his fourteen string quartets, Dvořák's Op. 51 is among his best work in that form. He melds the admired propensities of his Slavonic Dances, penned just a year before, with his confident use of pace, texture, and tone. Opus 51 was written for the Quartetto Fiorentino, a German-Italian ensemble active between 1865 and 1880. This group had requested a work of Slavonic feeling, and so the quartet in E-flat is more infused with nationalist manifestations than his earlier compositions, but serves as a grander outlet for the composer's

interpretation of his country's music. As a consequence, we get to experience a highly personal take on traditional dance and song structured around a Classical methodology of composition.

The E-flat quartet dates from a particularly fertile and gainful period for Dvořák. Before that time, though, he had been through a difficult personal and professional period. Dvořák was frustrated that his music was not known outside of Bohemia and had been published with difficulty. Far worse than those concerns were the family tragedies that afflicted the Dvořáks. Their first daughter had died at birth two years earlier. In 1877, their second daughter, not quite a year old, drank phosphorus, a poison used for making matches, and died in August, just weeks before the couple's three-year-old son succumbed to smallpox—on the composer's thirty-sixth birthday. In some way, the now childless Dvořák was able to continue with his work, returning to his unfinished *Stabat Mater*, a work certainly expressing sorrow for his losses.

Thankfully at the end of 1877, Dvořák's life took a sudden change for the better. In mid-December, he was informed that he had received an award from the Ministry of Education, carrying with it a cash prize. This was a significant event for Dvořák because Brahms had served on the prize committee. Also, a glowing review in an influential Berlin paper predicted worldwide success for Dvořák, and performances of his works in Germany, France, England, and the U.S. soon followed. Better than this longed-for acknowledgment was that the Dvořáks now had another daughter, born in June of 1878. His tenth string quartet followed this emotional turnabout.

In the first movement, which begins with superlatively lovely E-flat music in the purest quartet style and reflecting the happiness and tranquility that Dvořák must have been experiencing, there is a G major polka episode that blends perfectly, in terms both of harmony and of folk character, with the

rest of the quartet. Also, the reprise begins with the secondary material so that the beautiful first invention can return, as in Schubert's unfinished E minor quartet, to close the movement.

In the second movement, Dvořák delves even deeper into nationalistic territory with music in G minor and major that he titles *Dumka* and that contains a lively 3/8 dance as well as a Slavonic lament. The word "Dumka" literally means "thought" and was originally a diminutive form of the Ukrainian term *duma*, a Ukrainian epic ballad generally thoughtful or melancholic in character. It came to mean a type of instrumental music involving sudden variation between melancholy and exuberance.² Listen for the strummed cello sounding harp-like over which the violin sings the sad lament. There follows a cheeky *Furiant* section that is a rapid and fiery dance with frequently shifting accents transformed by Dvořák from the slow *Dumka* melody. The movement ends after a reprise of the opening section and a coda based on the cheeky *Furiant*.

This is an astonishingly novel substitute for the usual scherzo and mirrors and complements, rather than contrasts with, the *andante Romanze* in B-flat that follows. This brief and informal *Romanze* is the least patriotic of the movements and stems from a solitary idea that Dvořák alters, decorates and varies with prodigious creativity.

The finale is again folk-inspired, being in the rhythm of a Czech *skočná* or leaping dance. Dvořák safeguards, however that his peasant vigor, in keeping with Haydn's revered example, is entirely attuned with rondo form.

—notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

² Recall the Peabody Trio's performance earlier in our current season of Dvořák's last and best-known piano trio, Op. 90, which has six movements, each of which is a *Dumka*.

59TH SEASON 2014-2015

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