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Miró String Quartet

DANIEL CHING, violin
WILLIAM FEDKENHEUER, violin
JOHN LARGESS, viola
JOSHUA GINDELE, cello

2:30 PM, Sunday, April 7, 2019
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

FRANZ SCHUBERT **STRING QUARTET NO. 12 IN C MINOR, D. 703** (c.1820)
(1797–1828) I. Allegro assai
II. Andante (frag.)

CAROLINE SHAW **ENTR'ACTE** (2011)
(b. 1982)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN **QUARTET NO. 11 IN F MINOR, OP. 95 "SERIOSO"** (c.1810)
(1770–1827) Allegro con brio
Allegretto ma non troppo—
Allegro assai vivace ma serio
Larghetto—Allegretto agitato—Allegro

— *INTERMISSION* —

SCHUBERT **QUARTET IN G MAJOR, D. 887, OP. POSTH 161** (c.1826)
Allegro molto moderato
Andante un poco moto
Scherzo: Allegro vivace with trio: Allegretto
Allegro assai

MKI Artists, One Lawson Lane, Suite 320, Burlington, VT 05401
Please contact Kate Barnes at (802) 658-2592 kate@mkiartists.com

Miroquartet.com/

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ARTIST PROFILE



Formed in 1995, the Miró Quartet is consistently praised for their deeply musical interpretations, exciting performances, and thoughtful programming. Each season, they perform throughout the world on the most important chamber music series and on the most prestigious concert stages, garnering accolades from critics and audiences alike. Based in Austin, TX, the Miró Quartet took its name from the Spanish artist, Joan Miró, whose surrealist works — with subject matter drawn from the realm of memory and imaginative fantasy — are some of the most original of the 20th century.

Concert highlights of recent seasons include a highly anticipated and sold out return to Carnegie Hall to perform Beethoven's complete Opus 59 Quartets, and collaborations with award-winning actor Stephen Dillane as part of Lincoln Center's White Lights Festival.

Miró Quartet took first prizes at several national and international competitions including the Banff International String Quartet Competition and the Naumburg Chamber Music Competition. In 2005, the Miró Quartet became the first ensemble ever to be awarded the coveted Avery Fisher Career Grant.

The Miró Quartet regularly commissions new works from some of the most important living composers, and regularly collaborates with some of the most exciting instrumentalists in the world. Below, learn more about the Miró Quartet's wide ranging breadth of special performing and education activities. Recent commissioning projects have included a Concerto for String Quartet and Chamber Orchestra by Pulitzer Prize winning composer, Kevin Puts. Premiered in December of 2013 in Austin, TX, the work was a result of a co-commission by Texas Performing Arts, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, the Naples Philharmonic, and City Music Cleveland.

Schubert: *Quartet in C Minor*

Schubert began composing string quartets when he was thirteen, primarily to play with his family. After ten years he had written more than 500 works of almost every form of composition. Music flowed from him effortlessly; he neither labored over designs nor revised his work. An advance in his quartet skill and maturity as a chamber music composer transpired just before his 24th birthday with the first movement of this incomplete string quartet. After finishing the first movement, he wrote out 41 bars for the following *andante* before forever abandoning the work.

This exceptionally forceful and gripping piece, unquestionably astounding in its merger of external stability and inner turmoil, is described as a flawless work of art. The brilliance of the thematic fabric is remarkable: the listeners' emotions are carried by the wondrous way it grows, develops and propagates. This compact movement opens in tumultuous agitation that begins a prominent, restive theme. The introduction yields to more lyrical material that retains this momentum and yet provides a supple romanticism that is both a pleasing relief and sanctuary. The development is concise and deliberates exclusively on the motif of the first theme. A final short statement of the opening lures us into assuming it will persist but amazes us with its unanticipated close.

This feeling of wonder is buttressed by the unusual form of the piece: the stormy opening does not reappear at the commencement of the recapitulation as anticipated, but only at the very end, operating as a "closing curtain" of the performance. In the interim, we are suffused by expressions of deep melodiousness and captivating variations, intermittently intersected by arousing shifts.

There has been much speculation as to why Schubert never returned to this piece but given the grace and beauty of the *Allegro assai* as a string quartet in a single movement, it is not a stretch to consider it so self-sufficient that it does not require a continuance. The *Quartettsatz* summarizes the broadly differing features of his exceptional artistic nature.

Following Schubert's death, Johannes Brahms obtained the manuscript score and arranged for the *Quartettsatz* to receive its posthumous premiere on 1 March 1867 in Vienna. The publication (edited by Brahms) followed in 1870 listing it as string quartet No. 12, 50 years post-composition.

Shaw: *Entr'acte*

Caroline Shaw is a New York-based vocalist, violinist, composer, and producer who performs in solo and collaborative projects. Recent commissions include new works for Renée Fleming with Inon Barnatan, Dawn Upshaw with Sō Percussion and Gil Kalish, Orchestra of St. Luke's with John Lithgow, the Dover Quartet, the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia, the Calidore Quartet, Brooklyn Rider, the Baltimore Symphony, and *Roomful of Teeth* with *A Far Cry*. The 2018-19 season will see premieres by pianist Jonathan Biss with the Seattle Symphony, Anne Sofie von Otter with *Philharmonia Baroque*, the LA Philharmonic, and *Juilliard 415*. She has produced for Kanye West (*The Life of Pablo; Ye*) and Nas (*NASIR*), and has contributed to records by The National, and by Arcade Fire's Richard Reed Parry. Caroline has studied at Rice, Yale, and Princeton, currently teaches at NYU, and is a Creative Associate at the Juilliard School. She has held residencies at *Dumbarton Oaks*, the *Banff Centre*, *Music on Main*, and the *Vail Dance Festival*.

When Caroline Shaw's *Partita for Eight Voices*, written for the Grammy-winning *Roomful of Teeth* of which she is a member, won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2013, she was just 30 years old, the award's youngest-ever recipient¹ and was just beginning her musical career. She had never previously studied formal composition before enrolling in Princeton's doctoral composition program in 2010. The circumstance of Shaw's neophyte position seemed to be even more noticeable by her disinclination to accept the sobriquet of composer, preferring instead to be known as a musician.

Shaw describes *Entr'acte* to have been written "after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn's *Opus 77, No. 2* — with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further."

This composition passes traditional sounds of a string quartet through a kaleidoscopic filter of 21st century textures, repetitively toying with the ornamental melody that opens the piece. Without delay, the musicians diverge toward less conventional sounds, then return to the opening section fleetingly, then again abandoning it. Shaw says she wrote the piece after feeling inspired by the Haydn quartet that "suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass."

At different moments in the performance, the score² instructs the musicians to play with a sense of "granite" or to control pitch with the bow hair and play *pizzicato* with the left hand to "sound like a lute stop on the harpsichord." One section calls for the players to use light finger pressure and draw their bow across muted strings resulting in a reverberation that she describes as sounding like "sandpaper wings." Another asks the violins to accelerate independently going out of phase.

We may be accustomed to hearing composers end a piece with passion, but Shaw wraps up her composition not with bluster but with a sense of serenity. Listen for the cello to play long, plucked chords that may suggest the sound of a Spanish guitar while the other musicians play indeterminate numbers of rising arpeggios then look on in silence.

Beethoven: *Quartet in F Minor*

Beethoven's String Quartet No. 11 is the last of his "middle-period" quartets. It is clustered with the Op. 59 "Razumovsky" quartets and the Op. 74 "Harp" written between 1805 and 1810, but it is stylistically nearer to Op. 127: replete with condensed concepts, blunt appositions, and atypical structure. It is also one of a very few works for which he added his own evocative title ("Quartett Serioso"), other famous instances being his *Pathétique Sonata* and *Eroica* and *Pastoral Symphonies*. The name stems from the third movement's tempo marking but pertains broadly to the entire piece. We must believe that Beethoven probably meant to assure hesitant musicians that, yes, he meant what he wrote, and not to imply that his *Harp Quartet* that he wrote the previous year (or any of his other quartets for that matter) were not serious.

This is one of his best known and one of his shortest quartets. It encapsulates the stereotyped personality of his middle-aged years. Pithy, disturbing, fuming, impulsive, hotheaded, and histrionic describe the wild haired man himself as well as this music. Each movement is very brief and the evolutions brusque: the drama of the first movement, the magical melody of the second, the heroic wrath of the third and the suppliant apprehension of the last all rush by at precipitous speed.

¹ Beating out the previously held record of Charles Wuorinen, who was 31 at the time he received the award in 1970

² <http://carolineshaw.com/entracte/>

The first movement opens with an eruption, followed by a hiatus, followed by a rejoinder, then another pause, then an enquiry—then a more pleasing statement and a lengthened outburst. From the very beginning, there is impatience as the composition together bursts and collapses with efficient frenzied furor. As the piece continues, it grows with feverish buildups, abrupt withdrawals, and startling reappearances. The end is untroubled and all-encompassing.

The second begins gently and mystifyingly, with a musical form like the opening of the first movement. But a growing intrusion of chromaticism that crests in the middle segment's fugue dashes any idea of calm, becoming instead intertwined in an indecision between major and minor until the opening music returns. The second movement is not so much an expressive and affecting rest, but a prolongation of the forceful drive begun in the first movement. The movement closes with hushed chords that lead without pause into the third movement.

Here we are presented an additional eruption, a response, and then the instruments unite in synchrony. A second theme extends a gentle stay from the dramatics, but no escape—an oxymoronic serious scherzo. This theme is one of Beethoven's most rhythmically complex creations. The trio is a marvelous chorale led by a calm perpetual motion in the first violin.

The fourth movement begins unusually with a *largo* introduction—the only truly slow music in the piece—and evolves into a larger, more extensive space that looks forward to the late quartets to come fourteen years later. It begins with seven bars of the most chromatic and bleak music thinkable prefacing the disconcerted sonata-rondo finale. The movement highlights a dancelike but unsettling main theme that is modified inventively on each reappearance. Its last appearance terminates on a muted major chord that unleashes one of the most talked about endings ever. It raises an enthusiastic cadence, which finally breaks into animated double-time, moving lightly and quickly to a jubilant, heroic and shocking end.

The only commentary from Beethoven himself is that “the quartet is written for a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public.” The *Serioso* Quartet sheds the musical conventions of Beethoven's day, and opposes even the clarity of drama we regularly look for in music. Instead, it coerces us through ideas that don't connect in any accountable way, their contradictions fueling our imagination.

Schubert: *Quartet in G Major*

The first movement of “Quartettsatz” heard earlier today sets the arena for the great chamber works of Schubert's later years. Symphonic in pattern and organization, the 1826³ *Quartet in G Major* achieves a complexity of sound that makes it difficult to imagine that only four musicians are playing. In its extent and intricacy, it is representative of Schubert's later works: a stage of development presenting several core attributes of style that would dominate his remaining quartets. Principal among these qualities is a diametrically opposed pairing of agitated angst and lyrical tranquility. It is as if both Schubert and his music became positively spellbound by the stark polarity between dark and light, yin and yang, Dionysian and Apollonian. This unresolved contrast of agony and ecstasy, often employing the contrast between major and minor keys, portrays for us the persistent ambiguity between the two.

We hear this dichotomy in the first two bars: G major followed by G minor. The ensuing dotted rhythm contributes to a quiet theme attended by repeating triplets, both recurring unremittingly throughout this unsettled movement. This volatile and underlying battle between light and dark rages on until the end of the quartet. The stunning introduction soon relaxes with a telling signature: a soft, quivering tremolo of quick triplets interrupted by an original motif splinter in that dotted rhythm. Listen for a sharp rise in dynamics and the full force of the quartet as the introduction evolves into the main thematic materials that will flow throughout the movement in nonstop modification. The recapitulation of the opening material is exceptional: your impression of return is robust and obvious, yet nothing is the same. The surprising dynamic contrasts are absent, and the rough rhythms are smoothed out. In place of quivering tremolos, we have undulating triplets that seem softly to comfort. There is distinction, development and variety in a limitless atmosphere of unexpected contrasts in modality, texture, dynamics, rhythm and mood. The battle finally yields to a briefly stable victory for G Major in the last few bars of the movement.

The *Andante* is a slow movement of huge scope and expressive force. A gentle melancholic theme in the cello adds a subdued cast that climbs just momentarily in its second reprise to a brief temporary relief. Abruptly, a massive outpouring of dark fervidness intrudes into the smooth lament as if the first movement were charging back including dotted rhythms, anxious tremolos and sudden, piercing gestures.

Again, Schubert is positively transfixed with two contrasting ideas that seem to recur more often and more directly. But as in the first movement and throughout much of his body of work, Schubert never says the same thing in the same way. Each reappearance carries a change of touch, instrumentation, rhythm, key or modality, occasionally only as an elusive distinction. If you listen casually you find repetition on the surface but if you listen deeper you may uncover boundless variety developing stunning, buoyant musical designs in a relentless state of change.

A lighter-textured and briefer Scherzo interrupts the enchantment with a flexible sprightliness suggestive of Mendelssohn. The lively start yields to an agile trio, an enjoyable, waltzing folk dance in 3/4 time that seems to be the only unworried section in the entire piece. An uplifting duet, initially between cello and first violin, then first violin and viola, then again cello and first violin, frolics like a tender reverie lost swiftly in the subsequent turmoil.

The finale, featuring a rotation between a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth and groups of triplets, is nearly insufferably, unremittingly long, as if some diabolic compulsion were coercing the music to carry on. Characteristic of the quartet, the opening few measures contain an erratic, by the beat wavering of tonality between major and minor and equally as quick, edgy modulations to new keys. The first violin performs seemingly impossible arpeggios before the music briefly suspends for breath with a majestically grand theme. But almost at once the endless dance returns. Within the symphonic scope of the quartet, the finale is the most magnificent movement of all, commanding and multifaceted, incessantly growing and developing, until reaching a remarkable conclusion, ending with two loud chords and definitively in the major.

An important concept in Carl Jung's vision of the human psyche is the existence of the aspects of ourselves from which we turn away (“shadows”), which need to be reunified into our personalities if we are to remain whole and fully ourselves. A work such as Schubert's G Major Quartet addresses those qualities, exploring them and admitting them into the light. His music helps us see the totality of who we are, to work toward closure even if not all parts are beautiful.

—notes © Michael Spencer

³ 1826 was the same year that Mendelssohn would have been a teenager hard at work on his overture to a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Beethoven finished his final quartet.

64TH SEASON

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