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Dover Quartet

JOEL LINK, violin

HEZEKIAH Leung, viola

CAMDEN SHAW, cello

2:30 pm, Sunday, February 5, 2023
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

JOSEPH HAYDN **QUARTET IN E \flat MAJOR, HOB.III:38, OP. 33, No. 2** (1781)
(1732–1809) Allegro moderato
Scherzando—Allegro
Largo sostenuto
Finale: Presto

AMY BEACH **QUARTET FOR STRINGS IN ONE MOVEMENT, OP. 89** (1929)
(1867–1944)

— INTERMISSION —

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK **QUARTET NO. 10 IN E \flat MAJOR, OP. 51** (1878-79)
(1841–1904) Allegro ma non troppo
Dumka (Elegia): Andante con moto—Vivace
Romanza: Andante con moto
Finale: Allegro assai

Curtis Institute of Music, 1726 Locust St., Philadelphia, PA, (215) 717-3129
Isabel.tague@curtis.edu — doverquartet.com

Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation

ARTIST PROFILE



Named one of the greatest string quartets of the last 100 years by *BBC Music Magazine*, the GRAMMY® nominated Dover Quartet has followed a “practically meteoric” (*Strings*) trajectory to become one of the most in-demand chamber ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Dover Quartet holds residencies with the Kennedy Center, Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, Artosphere, and the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival. The group’s awards include a stunning sweep of all prizes at the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, and prizes at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. Its prestigious honors include the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award.

The Dover Quartet’s active 2021–22 season includes world premiere performances of Marc Neikrug’s Piano Quintet No. 2 at the Kennedy Center with Haochen Zhang, Chris Rogerson’s *Dream Sequence* for Santa Fe Pro Musica with Anne-Marie McDermott, and Steven Mackey’s theatrical musical work *Memoir* at Artosphere with arx duo and narrator Natalie Christa. Other artist collaborations include performances with the Escher String Quartet, Bridget Kibbey, the Pavel Haas Quartet, and Davóne Tines. The quartet has also recently collaborated with artists such as Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnaton, Ray Chen, Edgar Meyer, Anthony McGill, the late Peter Serkin, and Roomful of Teeth.

During the 2020–21 season, the Dover Quartet presented more than 25 virtual concerts recorded and produced at the Curtis Institute of Music. The virtual concerts were presented to audiences across the globe, including the quartet’s first-ever tour to Latin America, which was conducted virtually. Beyond performances, the charming documentary film *Strings Attached: On the Road with the Dover Quartet*, has delighted audiences since its release in summer 2020.

Haydn: *Quartet Op. 33, No. 2*

For excellent cause, Haydn is known as the “Father of the String Quartet.” The divertimentos of his Opp. 1 & 2 may have been chronologically the absolute first of the genre, but maybe not – it’s complex. However, none of his colleagues could match him for quantity or quality. His list today stands at 68; the number was previously thought to be eighty-three, but this includes some arrangements and spurious works. His works were widely toured, debated, and imitated by others, including Mozart.

In the early 1770s, Haydn produced further divertimentos for string quartet, three sets of six each, Opp. 9, 17, & 20. Opus 33 – another set of six – followed about a decade later, composed in 1781. These were his first string quartets that in fact used that name as a replacement for divertimento. In December of 1781, Haydn wrote a number of letters to prospective donors to or sponsors of the set explaining how they had been written in a “new and special way.” This was not just a boorish promotion: Op. 20 had been music of “sturm und drang,” full of fugues and dark minor keys; Op. 33 was in the balanced Classical style we associate with mature Haydn, in several aspects, very nearly a parody of the drama in the Op. 20 quartets.

Conceivably, the most noteworthy particular aspect of that new personal style is humor. One the nicknames that this new set picked up was “Gli scherzi” (The Jokes). This was probably because it was also Haydn’s first set in which scherzos replaced minuets; but beyond that particular bit of terminology, these works are full of the musical equals of bloopers and wisecracks.

The second quartet of the set, which we hear today, is unambiguously nicknamed “The Joke” because it ends with the most obvious one.

What Haydn had in mind with the “new and special way” he composed, however, was not the jokes so much as a fresh way of developing themes early on, shattering them into small pieces which

can be maneuvered and recombined in many ways. This is immediately evident in the first movement, a relatively stable, cheerful theme with the upbeat opening splintered as soon as it is stated, and its constituent motifs played with agility. The whole movement is fabricated of the elements heard in that first statement, and Haydn even ends with the same three notes that introduced the whole piece...a sort of pun?

In the slow movement, Haydn puts aside his jester’s duds to don the charmed cloak of a sorcerer. The viola and cello start with the simplest melody, derived from a horn call, from which he creates an enchantment of wonder. The consequent scherzo movement is very much similar to Haydn’s previous minuets, a dance perhaps more bucolic than genteel, but in the usual triple meter and A-B-A form, with a contrasting “Trio” section. A series of silvery sighs evaporating into the heavens ends the movement.

The beautifully sober *Largo sostenuto* slow movement also shares elements of Haydn’s Op. 20 pieces, specifically the counterpoint in instrumental pairs. Even so, there is humor present in its eccentric center section, full of syncopation and meticulously gradated dynamics. This has the unsettling effect of reversal: the emphasis is on silences and the soft sounds become their echo.

A principal theme alternates with extremely contrasting tunes, usually in another key, to introduce the *Finale presto*, a jolly frolic of a rondo, fleet and joyful. Toward the conclusion, grandiose, royal music appears. At this point, the finale takes on the role of narrator or explicator, with a last ditch effort at regal nobility. This is the ultimate, most absurd of the futile orchestral figures, filled with uncertain pauses, as though the musicians are unsure about when they have reached the culmination. The penultimate pause grows anxiously, becoming more question than answer. What happens next leads to the piece’s moniker.¹

Beach: *Quartet for Strings*

Amy Marcy Beach as she is now known—or Mrs. H.H.A. Beach as she liked to be called—was the first renowned American-trained concert pianist and a leading figure in American classical music, becoming the first woman to attain popular and serious recognition with large-scale compositions of classical music performed by worldwide major orchestras.

Born in Henniker, NH, the only child of parents from politically and culturally distinguished New England families, she showed extraordinary skills that equaled Mozart’s. She was a child prodigy who made her public debut as a pianist at 16 and performed with the Boston Symphony at 18. Her first published work appeared that same year. Premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896, her lush “Gaelic” Symphony was the first symphony composed and published by an American woman.

In 1885, the same year as her highly celebrated performance as soloist with the Boston Symphony, she married Harvard Medical School physician Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who was marginally older than her father (she was 17). She ceased performing at his wish and concentrated on composition. Beach said later that “my husband refused to allow me to study formally, which in my earlier years I sometimes wanted to do, in the belief that such instruction would rob my work of its freedom and originality.” After her husband’s death in 1910, she revived her performing career, touring in the winters, and practicing and composing during summers.

Amy Beach wanted to lead the way for other women to succeed as composers and was a founding member and first president of the Society of American Women Composers.

¹ Sorry, but I won’t reveal the punch line to “The Joke!”

In the 1890's, there was a drive in the United States to produce music that would suggest a nationalistic sound based on American roots and national identity. Amy Beach composed works inspired by folk music from Scottish, Irish, Balkan, African American, and Native-American origins, reflecting the diverse backgrounds of American people. Amy Beach's Quartet for Strings, Op. 89 was inspired by the music of the Inuit people, people from indigenous communities that live in the arctic regions of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. Three well-known Inuit songs were used by Beach, and you will hear these melodies woven into this expressive composition.

The Quartet for Strings is her single work for string quartet and did not exist in print until 1994, 50 years after her death. However, it was performed several times during her life, including her 75th birthday at a festival of her music. It is a fully modern work that weds the values of late romanticism with the Inuit themes.

The piece's one movement form is in 5-section arch structure and begins with a slow, dissonant "grave." All four voices move along the chromatic scale, generating a shifting cycle of pressures that diminish without resolve. From the shadowy sound of the opening, the viola arises to play the first Inuit theme of the piece, *Summer Song*, as a solo. This leads into the dramatic opening of another folk song *Playing at Ball*. The first violin and cello sing this theme, which may remind you of the second movement of Dvorak's "American" String Quartet. The drama evolves when the two violins take a reflective moment prior to playing in unison over the beat of viola and cello syncopations.

After a second return of *Summer Song*, the piece accelerates in an Allegro Molto. The faster sections employ two Inuit themes: *Ititaujang's Song* is set as fugal triplets and the *Playing at Ball* theme is developed as a more swaggering dotted rhythm that swaps with the triplets in this up-tempo section. The piece recombines the various elements from the opening and Allegro

Molto sections, before returning to the meditative solemnity at the end of the piece. In the quartet, Beach created one of her most superb works: a successful combination of art and folk music and a truly "American" composition.

Dvořák: String Quartet Op. 51

Along with the "American" F major, and A \flat major quartets, Dvorak's E \flat Quartet, opus 51, is perhaps the earliest of his quartets to be truly recognized and to occupy a position in the standard repertoire. The E \flat Quartet is called the "Slavic Quartet" because of its genesis: Jean Becker of the Florentine Quartet commissioned the work, requesting a quartet "in the Slavic style."

Dvořák secured a spot as violist in a dance orchestra after graduating from the Prague Organ School, where he finished second in a class of twelve students. The group flourished, and in 1862 its members formed the founding core of the Provisional Theatre orchestra. Dvořák played principal viola in the orchestra for nine years, sitting beneath the batons of such conductors as Bedřich Smetana and Richard Wagner.

During these early years, he also polished his talents as a composer, and by 1871 he left the orchestra to devote himself to composing full-time. Between 1874 and 1877, he was awarded the Austrian State Stipendium three times, a grant newly created by the Ministry of Education to assist young, poor, gifted musicians. Fortunately, the influential music critic Eduard Hanslick took a fancy to some of his work and persuaded him to send some scores to Johannes Brahms. Brahms recommended Dvořák to his own publisher, Fritz Simrock, who at once published Dvořák's Moravian Duets, commissioned a collection of Slavonic Dances, and contracted an option on all Dvořák's new works.

Thus, was launched the career of the man who was be welcomed as the archetypal Bohemian composer, both in his native land and outside Czech borders. His operas, songs, and symphonic works met with remarkable triumph, but the most constant stream of

his first-rate creation came in the field of chamber music, which includes fourteen string quartets composed from 1862 until 1895. The Quartet in E-flat major appeared in the middle of that period, not long after his agreement with Simrock gave a boost to his career.

The opening of the first movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, is unusual in its use of a spinning, hurdy-gurdy-like texture in the lower instruments, over which the first violin knits a delicate, comfortable melody. This mood controls the whole movement; even though more energetic, pulsing elements are launched by means of contrast, the predominant feeling remains introspective and bucolic.

The second movement, *Andante con moto*, is one of Dvorak's well-known "Dumka" movements, a Czech form without a real comparison in other national customs. The primary material is mournful, as the title "Elegia" indicates, but with a clearer, canorous second theme, and a totally contrasting Scherzo-like dance segment that disrupts the movement in two locations. The effect is a pleasantly uncertain world where, in some way without struggle, anguish and pleasure are contrasted.

The third movement, also *Andante con moto* and titled "*Romanza*," lives up to its name by avoiding strict form, opting instead to meander among melancholy thoughts; the emphasis here is on variable textures, vacillation between major and minor, and a feeling of quiet contemplation.

In distinction, the *Finale: Allegro assai* is a warm, bright, folk-like rondo, whose primary sense is notable by its syncopated rhythm. Superb throughout, this movement often requires an orchestral scale of sound from the quartet, most especially in the coda, where the music initially diminishes playfully before a celebratory conclusion.

notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

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