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Telegraph Quartet

ERIC CHIN, violin
JOSEPH MAILE, violin
PEI-LING LIN, viola
JEREMIAH SHAW, violincello

2:30 pm, Sunday, September 17, 2023
Faye Spanos Concert Hall
University of the Pacific

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN **QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 50 NO. 5, HOB. III/48** (1787)
(1732–1809) Allegro moderato
Poco adagio
Menuetto: Allegretto—Trio
Finale: Vivace

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ **STRING QUARTET NO. 4** (1951)
(1909–1969) Andante—Allegro molto
Andante
Allegro giocoso

— *INTERMISSION* —

BENJAMIN BRITTEN **STRING QUARTET NO. 1 IN D MAJOR, OP. 25** (1941)
(1913–1976) Andante sostenuto—Allegro vivo
Allegretto con slancio
Andante calmo
Molto vivace

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Season Sponsor: C. A. Webster Foundation

ARTIST PROFILE



The Telegraph Quartet, formed in 2013, has an equal passion for standard chamber music repertoire and contemporary, non-standard works alike. The Quartet was awarded the prestigious 2016 Walter W. Naumburg Chamber Music Award and the Grand Prize at the 2014 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet has performed in concert halls, music festivals, and academic institutions across the United States and abroad, including New York City's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, San Francisco's Herbst Theatre, the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Chamber Masters Series, and at festivals including the Chautauqua Institute, Interlochen Arts Festival, Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, and the Emilia Romagna Festival. The Quartet is currently on the chamber music faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as the Quartet-in-Residence.

Beyond the concert stage, the Telegraph Quartet seeks to spread its music through education and audience engagement. The Quartet has given master classes at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Collegiate and Pre-College Divisions, through the Morrison Artist Series at San Francisco State University, and abroad at the Taipei National University of the Arts and in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. Telegraph has also served as artists-in-residence at the Interlochen Adult Chamber Music Camp, SoCal Chamber Music Workshop, and Crowden Music Center Chamber Music Workshop.

In November 2020, the Telegraph Quartet launched ChamberFEAST!, a chamber music workshop in Taiwan. In fall 2020, Telegraph launched an online video project called TeleLab, in which the ensemble collectively breaks down the components of a movement from various works for quartet. In summer 2022, the Telegraph Quartet traveled to Vienna to work with Schoenberg expert Henk Guittart in conjunction with the Arnold Schoenberg Center, researching Schoenberg's first and second string quartets.

Haydn: *String Quartet Op. 50, No. 5*

Joseph Haydn was one of the most influential composers in the 18th century, prolific in every musical genre. However, it was the string quartet where he made one of his greatest impacts on history. It has been said that out of all the works of Haydn, the string quartets are "the most faithful mirror of his human and artistic personality" because he began writing them at a youthful age and did not finish until late in his career. Known as the "father of the string quartet," Haydn's impact on the genre has been felt by some of the most well-known composers in history, including Mozart, Beethoven, and Shostakovich.

Haydn conceived of what became Op. 50 in 1784, though he put the project on hold to complete his Paris symphonies and *The Seven Last Words of Christ*. He started actual work in February 1787. In April, Haydn received a letter from King Frederick William II of Prussia, praising Haydn for the copies of the Paris symphonies that he had sent, enclosing a golden ring. Haydn sought to return the favor by dedicating Op. 50 to the King.

This set of six string quartets was Haydn's first complete set of quartets since the Op. 33 set of 1781. While Op. 33 was readily accepted by the public, Op. 50 is more intense and cerebral. It is perhaps because of Op. 50's disposition that it among Haydn's mature quartets has been performed less.

In its resolutely single-themed outer movements, at least, this is the lightest and most amiable of the Op. 50 set. But since it is Haydn, the genial, serenade-like tone coexists with immense compositional sophistication.

With its 2/4 time signature, pulse occurring on two sets of four notes, and *Allegro moderato* tempo, the meter of the first movement is a regression to an earlier and simpler style of opening. The easy-paced opening movement starts with a relaxed duet between the two violins, leading to a second subject area that entails rapid sextuplets. The *Allegro* continues with a restrained dialogue between the violins, viola and cello that remains unresolved until the coda.

Uniquely in Op. 50, the focus of the work resides in the two middle movements. The tranquilly soothing *Poco adagio*, with its rolling chords below a lyrical violin line and tender (and sometimes not so tender) dissonances of the second movement, is in two parts: an exposition and a recapitulation. The first violin takes the lead throughout, although the movement is characterized by rich textures between all four parts. It is compositional devices such as contrary motion in this movement give Op. 50, No. 5 the nickname of "The Dream."

The *Minuet* is in F major, but it is not until well into its second half that a strong chord in the tonic arrives. Its insistent grace-note upbeats render it wiry and tonally restive, a world away from the conventional courtly dance. Haydn is disrupting harmonic conventions here and also toying with the meter towards the end of the minuet: it moves into, and concludes, essentially in duple time. The trio follows, and its theme is almost identical to that of the *Minuet*, albeit in a minor key and played by all four parts in unison. Near the end a tiny canon between the first and second violin skews the regular 3/4 meter, a disturbance which even the final cadence fails to settle. The trio increases rather than decreases the tension of the minuet with a concentrated development.

The jolly 6/8 finale, with its charming, controlled slides between notes using a single string (*una corda*), is strongly rhythmic. It builds with a vibrant energy that propels the work to a sparkling conclusion. Sutcliffe refers to the finale as the "one disappointing movement" of the Opus 50 quartets, arguing that it is "too straightforward structurally", lacks "internal tension", and might have been the product of the composer's rush to finish the work, which was holding up publication of the complete set.

Bacewicz: *String Quartet No. 4*

Grażyna Bacewicz was born into a musical Lithuanian-Polish family in Łódź, Poland. She and her brothers and sister all learned violin and piano from their father. She gave her first performance at age 7, began her musical education at

10, and composed her first piano piece at 11. She entered Warsaw Conservatory at 19, where she studied violin and piano. She then went to Paris, to study composition with Nadia Boulanger and violin with Carl Flesch.

Bacewicz quickly developed into an outstanding violinist, giving concerts throughout Europe. She was a prizewinner at the 1935 Wieniawski Competition and served for three years in the 1930s as concertmaster of the Polish Radio Orchestra. In 1954, Bacewicz was seriously injured in an automobile accident and had to give up performing; she devoted the remains of her career to composing and to teaching composition at the Łódź and Warsaw Conservatories.

Bacewicz's musical life was often disrupted by her personal life, which was difficult and complex, and by the tempestuous forces of history that ceaselessly beat and battered the Polish nation. For the sake of her career in music, she stayed in Poland. During World War II, she and her husband remained in Warsaw, where she participated in the underground movements that strove to keep Polish culture alive during the Nazi occupation. She suffered a heart attack but continued her work and died in Warsaw at age 59.

Bacewicz's attitude to music was entirely different than that of the romantics. She believed that "music does not express anything, no ordinary emotions from human life. It simply expresses itself and its own affections." She was also a pessimist and a believer in determinism, rejecting free will. Her distinctive opinions about music and life shaped her style, which is extremely aggressive and dark. In fact, Bacewicz's music expresses things opposing her own sense of herself.

As a composer Bacewicz was extremely prolific. She wrote seven violin concertos, two cello concertos, as well as concertos for piano and for viola, plus four symphonies, seven

string quartets, five violin sonatas, and a vast amount of chamber music, piano music, vocal music, and two ballets.

In 1950, the Polish Composers Union commissioned a string quartet from her that would be entered in the International String Quartet Competition the following year in Liège. Bacewicz composed her String Quartet No. 4 in 1950, and its premiere in Liège on September 21, 1951, was so successful that the quartet was awarded first prize.

The fourth string quartet is a three-movement work with two *Andantes* that join a fast *Allegro giocoso* movement. It is quite unusual and manages to hurdle beyond convention in many ways. The Polish premiere took place the following month, and the Fourth remains one of Bacewicz's most popular quartets and one of her most regularly performed compositions. The three movements of the Fourth Quartet are all in classical forms and all beautifully written.

The quartet opens with a long, slow *Andante* introduction that irregularly bursts with surprising stresses before the music takes off at the *Allegro molto*. This serves to juxtapose its intense, dynamic opening with more calm lesser material.

The central *Andante*, in a general three-part form, is dramatic and at times quite intense; Bacewicz takes some of the material through brief fugatos before the movement comes to a quiet close.

The pressures of the first two movements settle down in the last; Bacewicz brings the quartet to an end with a suitably marked *Allegro giocoso* ("happy"). This rondo-finale does indeed dance happily, its development disturbed by varying episodes, one played entirely pizzicato, another based on Polish folk music. But the rondo theme always makes a satisfying return, and at the end it drives the Quartet to a most forceful finale.

The writing is highly distinctive, is built around establishing exclusive moments, and there is a lot to understand. Ponder thoughtfully on the music as it arrives, feel for its insight, and connect with the surprise of Bacewicz's unexpected passionate turns.

Britten: *String Quartet Op. 25*

Edward Benjamin Britten, Baron Britten of Aldeburgh, was a leading British composer of the mid-20th century, best-known for his substantial operatic output, which are considered the finest English operas since those of Henry Purcell in the 17th century. He was also an outstanding pianist and conductor.

In Britten's childhood home, music was an essential part of daily life. He began composing at 5 years of age winning a scholarship to the Royal College of Music in London, where he studied with John Ireland and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Among his principal instrumental works are the Simple Symphony for strings; concerti for piano and for violin; The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra; Symphony in D Major for Cello and Orchestra; and three string quartets. Between the first private performance of his unpublished student String Quartet of 1931 and his first published Quartet Op. 25, written ten years later, Britten had established himself as a composer of worldwide reputation.

Commissioned by Mrs. Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, a wealthy American patroness of chamber music who paid the composer a sizable \$400 (~\$7000 today), the Quartet is one of several works created and performed during Britten's three war-time years in America. An ardent devotee of the genre, Mrs. Coolidge had already commissioned Bartók's Fifth Quartet and Schoenberg's Fourth. Britten's was composed in the humble surroundings of a tool shed located in a garden during the summer of 1941 in Escondido, California, near the ocean, where he must have been reminded of the gentle and deep waves of his coastal birthplace. It would later win the Library of Congress medal.

The Quartet's first movement (*Andante sostenuto*) begins with a long opening passage, striking for its shimmering sonorities and timelessness. High-voiced violins and viola are supported by pizzicato cello, a soundscape that he would return to in Peter Grimes' Dawn Sea Interlude. The arpeggio figurations lend harmonic backing portraying the

wind in the reeds around his home, Aldeburgh. A brisk *Allegro vivo* passage precedes the return of this reverie, exposing the contrast of self-assured tempo and mood that alternatively calms and revitalizes.

Perceptive rhythms, pizzicato articulation and a prevalence of triplets and trills exemplify the short second movement, a sort of scherzo. Listen for the musicians in the impish *Allegretto con slancio* (with enthusiasm) dash, leap, burst, rush, flit, and dart before the slow movement casts its nocturnal spell.

But it is in the tentative 5/4 rhythms of the moody third movement (*Andante calmo*), a calm which is interrupted by a forceful, declamatory middle section. That sequence of slowly moving chords, clearly evocative of moonlight, conveys Britten's true musical temperament. After a slow first section each instrument seems to aspire to escape from the movement's melancholy, returning to a quiet but uncertain bliss in the final bars.

The Quartet concludes with an enthusiastic and entertaining finale denoted *Molto vivace*. Further contrasting passages in the last movement include the scherzo-like rapidly running counterpoint of its opening sharp, punctuated chords, and the strong unison theme from the two violins and viola. Tensions are never quite resolved, however, and possibly indicate Britten's own feelings as he declared in a letter of June 1941: "I am homesick, and really only enjoy scenery that reminds me of England."

The last movement doesn't seem to have a great deal of relation to the rest of the piece initially, but a lot of its figures again sound like birds chirping at each other until the long sweeping melodies take over. Then the *Molto vivace* becomes something of a display piece, with virtuosic swoops and runs, until it reaches a crowd pleasing boisterous unison climax.

notes © Dr. Michael Spencer

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