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74th Season

Three Hundred Forty-Sixth Concert of the Society
Jerusalem String Quartet
October 16, 2011 - 3:00 p.m.
Margaret Comstock Concert Hall

Three Hundred Forty-Seventh Concert of the Society
Metropolitan Museum Artists
November 13, 2011 - 3:00 p.m.
Margaret Comstock Concert Hall

Three Hundred Forty-Eighth Concert of the Society
Emerson String Quartet
February 5, 2012 - 3:00 p.m.
Margaret Comstock Concert Hall

Three Hundred Forty-Ninth Concert of the Society
The Morgenstern Trio
March 18, 2012 - 3:00 p.m.
Margaret Comstock Concert Hall

Three Hundred Fiftieth Concert of the Society
Euclid Quartet and Carpe Diem String Quartet
April 15, 2012 - 3:00 p.m.
Margaret Comstock Concert Hall

Jerusalem String Quartet

October 16, 2011

String Quartet in D Minor, K. 421

Allegro

Andante

Menuetto - Trio

Allegro ma non troppo

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

K. 421 is one of the six quartets composed by Mozart in the years 1782-85. These extraordinary works are the younger composer's thoughtful response to Haydn's opus 33, a set of six quartets characterized by the older master as having been "written in a new and special way." While much has been said about this comment, it is accepted as reference to the composer's emphasis on greater equality between the four instruments and the development of more balance between the character of the musical ideas and the treatment of the formal structure. In response to the technical perfection, grace and passion of Mozart's pieces, Haydn was inspired, during a performance of the works, to turn to Mozart's father and comment, "Before God, and as a man of honor, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste, and what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition." Quite simply, K. 421 in D Minor epitomizes this observation and after looking at it rather closely, one might be forgiven for thinking that it could have been this very quartet that inspired Haydn's outburst. Mozart's flexible treatment of the structures of the movements and the musical material results in an absolute balance of musical form and expression. Seemingly without effort, by easy expansion and contraction, the structural framework accommodates the musical ideas that appear to flow uninhibited incessantly in the service of inspired lyrical flights, moments of calm, glimpses of humor, drama.

The first movement—in sonata form—is a marvelous example of the composer's sense of form. It is straightforward enough: the opening idea comprises two four-measure phrases in which the first two measures of each sustain a certain tension between the dramatic gesture in the treble and the inexorable downward motion in the bass, while in the second two measures this tension abates. The melody is allowed to flow gently forward, moving somewhat more quickly to a cadence, albeit one not on the downbeat of the measure, but one that occurs in the middle of the last measure of the phrase. This opening thematic statement, *sotto voce*, comprising the first eight measures, could hardly be more perfect and self-sufficient, and it takes a long passage of sixteen measures to effectively create sufficient imbalance to set the stage for a second thematic idea in the key of F, the relative major. In fact, the rest of the movement is fluid; it never really rests at another cadence point until the end.

Along the way in this first transition, Mozart introduces a bit of contrapuntal movement, and, in doing so "brushes" ever so slightly against accidentals that veer unexpectedly toward Eb, the lowered second degree in the key of D, a pitch that appears and reappears throughout the whole work. This occurs most dramatically at the moment when the development opens with falling octaves on Eb. Once started, Mozart presses on with more of these falling octaves, including a short but striking fugal episode. By-now familiar ideas expand freely in various contrapuntal guises and eventually reach a pedal on A for the return of the tonic, D Minor.

Each idea seems to generate some aspect of the next one: the descending bass-line, the falling octave, the little triplet in the repeat of the second theme that becomes the driving energy at the closing of the exposition, recapitulation, and the last measures of the codetta, the smooth fluidity of movement when the eighth-note accompaniment of the first theme becomes the vehicle for the transitional passage between the first and second thematic areas. It is difficult to write about a work as perfect as this is in all its details, in balance and in structure. One can only indicate some of the particular characteristics that make it the miracle it is.

The second movement, an Andante in the relative key of F Major, perpetuates the somber quality

of the first movement and explores the potential for a rondo form that, in the end, has delivered much more than the promise of the opening. The abbreviated first segment is couched as a gentle question and answer, but a rising broken-chord figure from this opening segment, reappears midway in the cello, provoking dramatic falling octaves in all three instruments. The Eb that challenged the classic sense of key relationships already in the first movement reappears here and there in the middle segment, first as the minor third of the dominant, then as the fifth degree of a passage that begins—amazingly so—in the key of Ab. This is anything but a simple piece, in spite of its sustained hypnotic flow.

The opening dotted rhythm of the Menuetto sets a rather stern tone for the movement; the thematic shape rises from the tonic to the fifth above and falls in a stately dance over a steadily descending chromatic bass in the cello. Reiteration of the dotted rhythm in the three accompanying parts underscores the formality which sustains phrases of unusual lengths: ten measures in the first phrase, followed by nineteen (or, twelve + seven), in the second one. When the Trio takes off with its “Scottish snaps” (the reverse of the dotted rhythm of the Menuetto), and proceeds with regular 8-bar phases, its airiness seems almost frivolous by comparison.

The final movement, an Allegro in the form of a theme and four variations, brings along many small features of the earlier movements: the dotted rhythms of all the previous movements, the 6/8 meter of the second one, the repeated notes, the broken-chord figure (listen for it in the 3rd variation that features the viola), sudden accents, and even a very brief flash of that challenging “off-tonic,” Eb. Taking the whole into consideration, it can be seen as an unusually forceful ending for a work in a minor key. While a movement with theme and variation is less demanding than another form might have been (say, a sonata or a rondo), it is the treatment of the penultimate variation, in the parallel key of D Major, that confirms the overall seriousness of the work. Mozart does this by simplifying the texture and abbreviating it; as such it doesn’t “lighten” the end of the work as one might expect. Indeed, quite the opposite, as it seems to provoke the final extended segment, an energetic, almost furious, Più Allegro, now back in the original minor mode.

Premier Quartour en sol mineur, Op. 10

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement espressif

Très modéré; Très mouvementé et avec passion; Très animé

**Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)**

Debussy’s string quartet was his only essay in the genre, though he apparently had the intention of composing more when he designated it as the “first.” The year of composition, 1892-93, was central to an extremely important and complex period of time in the formation of the composer’s personal idiom. By 1892 he had gone on his second pilgrimage to Bayreuth, and he was still involved with Wagner’s music. But also by this time, he had been through some of the seminal experiences of his life: he had listened to the Javanese gamelans at the World Exposition, and, for the first time, he had heard choral music of the high renaissance, masses by Palestrina and Victoria. He had set poems by Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine and, inspired by Mallarmé, had begun his work on *Prélude pour l’après-midi d’un faune*. Having completed the string quartet, he launched a project that was to take many years to complete, his opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*. None of these salient facts—nor, indeed, anything else in his life at this time, a commission, for instance—seems to indicate that he would be inclined to think of composing a string quartet, a work ostensibly in traditional forms far removed from the rich imagery of Baudelaire, symbolist poetry of Mallarmé, or the operas of Wagner. More than one author presumes that his objective was just that: to compose a work with no literary base nor visual allusions.

Outwardly at least, the work possesses the skeletal frame of the “classic” string quartet; the four movements follow the usual plan: the first movement cursorily approaches a sonata-like form; the second scherzo-like movement in a basic rondo form with its fleet pizzicatos is followed by a pensive

third movement with suggestive muted strings. The fourth movement that begins under the dim shadow of the third, progressively brightens its 12/8 gigue-like dance to end with an extravagant flourish. Considering the traditional framework, the appealing aspect of the work is the thematic integrity and the economy of a form that is both cyclical and thematically varied, with little thematic development. Instead, the work is a brilliant mosaic, its constituent parts made up from the constant renewal of two or three basic shapes—each cut from the same material, but different in hue and design. By adopting aspects of the most distinctive of all the church modes, the Phrygian mode, Debussy avoids the polarity of the tonic-dominant axis and is able to invent new melodic harmonies by combining and recombining changed models of the same idea. Freed from the confines of classic subject-countersubject formulas of the major-minor tonal system, Debussy dispenses with the expectation of the conversational question-answer phrase structure that had characterized string quartet writing since its early development.

Though Debussy composed only one string quartet, its inspired treatment of the strings and compositional ideas were perpetuated in the quartets of Bartók who acknowledged its importance on his own development.

Quartet No. 2 in A Major, Op. 68
Overture. Moderato con moto
Recitative and Romance. Adagio
Waltz. Allegro
Theme with Variations. Adagio

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

On August 13, 1944—soon after finishing his Trio, Op. 67—Shostakovich began to compose his Second String Quartet and he completed it on September 20. At one point during his work he wrote to his friend, Vissarion Shebalin, the dedicatee in honor of their twenty years of friendship, “Today I finished the second movement . . . and started the third (penultimate) without a pause.” Apparently, he was somewhat concerned about his rate of production, for he wrote to another correspondent, “The process of musical composition gives me no little concern and unrest. What bothers me is the lightening speed with which I compose. Without a doubt it isn’t good. One shouldn’t compose as I do.” Indeed his acquaintances wondered how he had found the time to write the music because he attended all the soccer matches and was socially quite active as well. But later, in response to a questionnaire, he provided some clarification when he indicated that, with him, the compositional process always began with “an instantaneous graph of the future work, a vision of the whole.” He estimated that when involved in composing—that is, when lunch was his only distraction—he averaged 20-30 pages of score per day. To be sure the work under consideration does not labor under any serious difficulties, but neither is it shallow or mindless in the least.

The reason for calling the first movement an “Overture” is unclear, for it does not manifest the formal characteristics associated with an overture. Perhaps the stentorian character of the opening might suggest a brazen or commanding attitude, but even so, the movement does not really function like an overture. It is in sonata form with only a slight deviation from the norm. In A Major, the first bold theme is announced in the first violin with undergirding accompaniment in the other instruments. There is nothing shy about this tune, but it comes across even more forcefully when it is reiterated (now in the dominant key) in the cello. By this time, the texture has become more complex and continues to be enriched by counterpoint and counter themes. The second thematic idea (*ff*) is no less aggressive. Some relief occurs in the development section, when the dynamic recedes to piano, and the violin is given a waltz-like, smoother variant of the opening theme with a gentle accompaniment in the other instruments. But eventually the caldron heats up again with the return of the dotted motif from the second theme, pushing the development to its finish. The first theme is recapitulated in a darkened mood, this time in minor and lowered by an octave; however, after the return of the second theme in the parallel A Major

the first theme, too, reappears in its original major key and register. Darkness has been conquered—for the moment.

The second movement is quite unusual. Already the title, “Recitative and Romance,” gives notice that this is not the usual kind of slow movement. While the tempo is Adagio throughout, the first and last segments feature only dense, frozen chords in the lower instruments, over which the first violin intones extended recitatives, one after another. In the central portion, this unusual texture is abruptly replaced by a long-breathed and wistful romantic melody—again mostly in the first violin. Starting off with a subdued accompaniment, it eventually rises to some moments of intensity, before the recitatives start again.

This movement could certainly serve as an early harbinger of the works in later years where Shostakovich pursued his “inner discourse,” for it is most unusual. The first violin’s chromatically inflected monologue is like an extended lamentation. Wordless, but it spoke volumes to an audience that had experienced complex emotions—fear, loss, and loathing. As so often with this composer, he appears to examine a private, emotional state that responded to external pressures. .

The third movement is a rather grim affair, a waltz in mostly-dark keys, principally Eb Minor and F#Minor. A simple rondo form, its textures vary rapidly from simple to complex, again apparently reflecting the pressure of incidental, imposing forces.

The finale is a theme with thirteen variations. The original idea is heard clearly enough in the first three, but as the movement get more deeply into the numerous variations, the theme becomes less and less distinct. It returns in full form only at the end. The movement opens with an adagio in which the lower instruments trade off commentary with the first violin, a pattern that is broken, when the viola iterates a 14-measure thematic idea, which then is taken up by the cello and second violin. This becomes the pattern as each variation “tags” off of the preceding one; “reorderings” and revisions follow, pitting the instruments against each other in varied groupings: triplets accompanied by staccatos; deconstructions of the melodic idea; hocket-like trade-offs between instruments. One variation features running sixteenth notes, others come up with off-beat chords, or a grand statement in rhythmic augmentation, ostinatos, two-part texture followed by three-part. Finally, drawing all the activity back down to almost nothing, the Adagio reappears with a concluding grand statement of the theme and some final crunching, dissonant chords.

- Notes © Dr. Jean Christensen

Jean Christensen will be presenting a pre-concert lecture between 2 and 2:45 PM in room 125 of the School of Music. All are invited and welcome to attend.

Metropolitan Museum Artists

November 13, 2011

14 Variations in E-flat Major, Op. 44 (1804)
for piano trio on an original theme

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Though the music of Beethoven's youthful Bonn years does not bear comparison with the heaven-storming masterpieces of his later decades (he was 22 when he went to Vienna), it does show true talent for composition, a thorough understanding of the contemporary stylistic norms, and occasional flashes of the brilliance to come. The Variations for Piano, Violin and Cello in E-flat major appears to have been written in 1792, shortly before Beethoven moved to Vienna. The piece acquired its artificially high (and potentially lucrative) opus number—44—when Franz Hoffmeister published the score in Leipzig in 1804. The theme, original with Beethoven, is a skeletal affair, simply outlining the harmonic changes without providing a distinct melody. (The finale of the 'Eroica,' also in variation form, begins in a similar manner.) Beethoven worked fourteen conventional variations and a coda upon this lean material, allowing all three instruments leading moments (though the piano, his instrument, is always *primus inter pares*) and eliciting some deeper emotions with two minor-key episodes.

- Richard E. Rodda

Seven Verses of A. Blok, Op. 127
for Soprano, Violin, Cello and Piano

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

In early 1967 Shostakovich was quite unhappy. Having been plagued by ill health for many months, he began to worry that his infirmity was blocking his creativity. He wrote to a friend, "I have become disillusioned with myself. Rather, I have become convinced that I am a very dull and mediocre composer." However, in March in response to a request from the Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich, for a vocalise to perform with his wife, the soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, Shostakovich began setting "Ophelia's Song" by the Russian Symbolist poet, Alexander Blok (1880-1922). He soon realized that the instrumental resource of a solo cello was inadequate for his purposes, added a violin and piano, and finished the work in three days. Perhaps because of his recent difficult medical history, these songs mark a deep change in the composer's style, the beginning of what was to be his last phase of work. Listeners familiar with the late quartets will identify aspects of musical expression that became more pronounced as the composer turned progressively inward and focused less on communicating with the public audience and more on the inner dialogue he conducted with himself.

Ultimately this cycle is about music. Here the usual relationship between words and music is inverted: rather than the accompaniment amplifying the meaning of the text, the texts more often clarify what is expressed by the instruments. Uncanny, but true. Even when distracted by a commanding image—meeting of the lovers, the very dark city, the vicious storm—bare lines, simple counterpoint, doubled octaves never quite abandon the inner obsessive despairing and desperate thoughts of the poet. The imagery and the emotion is absorbed into the music—internalized—and it is through the music that one understands the poet's references to different voices, to the city and its mindless industrialization, to rain against a window. Using a different combination of instruments in the ensemble, each song creates a private world of reference and all together serve as evidence for the composer's growing belief in the transcendent value of art—not in the metaphysical sense, but as the only means to overcome the crushing reality of everyday life. Over the years it became more and more Shostakovich's single rationale for continued existence.

In the first song, the cello's obligato line numbly traces Ophelia's lamenting memory of Hamlet's parting, its recurring intervals capturing the reality of her premonition.

When you parted from your beloved,
my dearest, you promised to love me.
When you set out for a country you hated,
You swore you would keep your oath.

Far away from happy Denmark,
you found a mist-shrouded coast
where the waves murmur angrily,
where the rocks are washed with tears.

My beloved warrior will never return,
clad in silver armour . . .
A mourning ribbon and a black plume
flutter heavily in the grave.

Gamayun is a figure of a wounded bird with a woman's head from ancient Russian mythology, and here the fear inspired by her terrible prophesy is reflected in the piano's bare octaves. As the terror increases, so does the complexity of the music. Eventually all that is left is memory and abandonment.

Over the smooth, boundless waters
dyed purple by the setting sun
she sings her prophetic song,
too weak to raise her shattered wings . . .

She prophesies the savage Tartar invasion,
she prophesies bloody executions,
cowardice, famines, fires,
evil in power, righteousness destroyed.

Haunted by the foretold horror,
her beautiful face glows with love.
But the prophetic truth bursts out
from lips caked with blood!

The text retraces the memory of an encounter between two lovers when their beings were absorbed into a violin's textless cantilena.

We were together, I remember . . .
It was a turbulent night, a violin sang . . .
You were mine then,
and each hour you grew more beautiful.

By the murmur of some silent breeze,
by some secret in a woman's smile,
your lips invited kisses,
our hearts invited the song of a violin.

A profound silence descends. The city sleeps, and beyond the edges of the city, the distant dawn imparts a vision of the future with foreboding. Thoughts are locked in meandering phrases of double stops.

The city sleeps wrapped in darkness,
the street-lamps shine weakly.
In the far distance, beyond the Neva,

I can see a gleam of daybreak.

In that distant reflection,
in the fiery glimmer,
lurk the beginnings
of wretched days for me.

Harsh *Sul ponticello* violin gestures, impulsive piano octaves, slashing scales. Searing strikes of lightning and strident driving rain provoke fear and empathy, but mostly fear.

Oh how wildly, outside the windows,
the cruel storm howls and rages;
the driven clouds, the lashing rain,
the wind rising and falling!
Dreadful night! On a night like this
I feel for all the homeless,
and pity drives me outside—
in the cold and wet!
Fighting against the dark and the rain
to share in those poor people's suffering.
Oh how wildly, outside the window,
the wind rages and falls!

Low tones and melody on the cello and violin. Unbidden and unexpected mysterious messages and signs conjure escape in comforting images from the past. But there is no relief from the prospect of a grim destiny.

Mysterious signs blaze out
on the blank, silent walls.
Gold and crimson poppies
bend over me in my dreams.

I hide in the caverns of night
and harsh miracles flee from my memory.
At dawn, blue chimeras
Gaze from the sky's clear mirror.
I take refuge in things long past,
fearfully covering my eyes;
and in the pages of a book growing cold
I see a girl's golden tresses.

The sky weighs down upon me,
a black dream presses down on my heart
My predestined death is near,
and ahead lie wars and conflagrations.

Shostakovich provided the last song with a title: "Music." In it, the undisturbed surface of subdued melodies mirror the peace that comes when thoughts of nature drown out the fearful threats of civilization, but eventually gives way to a passionate outpouring to underscore the dramatic evocation in the last stanza of text. Is this last poem, the clearest articulation of the composer's dedication to his work in his final years? For what it's worth, just reading it, it does seem to articulate what his last, most personal, work is about. The force of the desperate oblation in the poetry is only momentarily calmed by the

postlude with its still lyricism of duetting obbligatos; peace is ultimately vulnerable to existential dread.

Music

At night, when fears are stilled
And the city is hidden in darkness—
oh, how much music there is in heaven,
what sounds are heard on earth!

What do life's storms matter, when your roses
blossom and blaze for me!
What do human tears matter,
in the red glow of a sunset!

Accept, o ruler of the universe,
with blood, with suffering, with death,
a last, foaming goblet of final passion
from an unworthy slave!

The above translations by Andrew Huth, were printed in the booklet that accompanies the recording of the work by the Beaux Arts Trio on Warner Classics.

Four Songs

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

In 1840 Robert Schumann composed a set of 26 songs under the title *Myrthen*, his opus 25. *The New Grove Dictionary* in its entry on the composer calls 1840 “the year of song” and provides the following general comments on this facet of Schumann’s work:

“The wave of creative energy gained impetus in January ... after an interval of 12 years, Schumann returned to the composition of songs. ... The great outpouring of songs in 1840 is, as Brendel said, a ‘continuation of his character pieces for piano’; but the songs are not only piano pieces with another dimension, an additional tone-colour: they are explicit, whereas the piano pieces are reserved. The lyrical element is set free and its emotional content made precise. Schumann himself acknowledged to Zuccalmaglio (letter of 31 December 1840) that ‘the *Myrthen* certainly allow a deeper insight into my inner musical workings’. Moreover, the poem (which Schumann nearly always chose with care because it answered to something in himself, and generally chose with good literary taste) acted as a lens for his musical thought, sharpening, concentrating, shaping it. In holding the balance between poem and music and between voice and piano, Schumann generally stands midway between Schubert and Wolf; there are a number of purely lyrical songs, such as *Widmung* op. 25 no. 1, in which the voice sings and the piano ‘accompanies’ ... But Schumann’s most typical songs are those in which the melody is shared by voice and piano either simply as in *Der Nussbaum* op. 25, no. 3, or more subtly ...”

Heine’s *Du bist wie eine Blume* (You are like a flower) receives Schumann’s most ceremonial treatment and begins the group of songs performed today. Set in A-flat major, a key associated with wedding ceremonies, the song’s repeated chords provide a stately foundation for the free, almost recitative-like declamation of the brief text.

Published in October 1840, *Myrthen*, Op. 25, is dedicated to Clara Schumann. *Myrthen*, or myrtles, are European evergreen shrubs with white or rosy flowers that are often used to make bridal wreaths.

The 26 poems included in the work were presented to Clara on the occasion of their wedding.

Röselein, Röselein ("Little Rose"), is the final song of Op. 89. The narrator of the poem questions why a rose has thorns and recalls a dream of a thornless rose.

Trio in D Minor, Op. 63

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

Mit Energie und Leidenschaft (With energy and passion)

Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch (Vivace, but not too fast) - Trio

Langsam, mit inniger Empfindung (Slow, with intimate expression)

Mit Feuer (With fire)

A rather extended work from 1847, this Trio is the first and the most frequently performed of three composed by Schumann. While it bears many of the features of Schumann's youthful exuberance, the music has the quality of the composer's most characteristic and individualistic invention and poetry of the later works for piano.

The four movements in the work alternate tonalities. The first movement, with its richly singing and arching melodies, and the third, a pensive, eloquent aria, are both in the minor mode. And the second movement, a rhythmically fleet scherzo, and the joyous final fourth movement are in the parallel major mode. Schumann, the musician-poet, explores two sides of a single tonic pitch (D) as one means of capturing the emotional and psychological charge of the characterizations he has devised for each movement. He treats the two aspects of the tonic as naturally as he does opposing states of mind.

The work does not pose difficult hurdles for the listener, but there are some very interesting and arresting moments. Perhaps the most noted of these occurs when, in the first movement, the long romantic lines of the two principal themes pose difficulty in the development. Here, Schumann comes forward with an entirely new idea that moves the work into another expressive range. Instead of doggedly pushing through with developmental ideas, he changes the texture, moves all the instruments into the treble, and asks the strings to play close to the bridge (*sul ponticello*) and the pianist to apply the soft pedal (*una corda*). It's pure Schumann exercising the same fantastic and imaginative mind at play in his works with titles more whimsical than "Trio." The jagged lines that chase each other in the Scherzo—an almost-out-of-control antic capriccio—become the longitudinal lines that turn around each other in one continuous imitation in the Trio. In the Adagio, the composer lightens the yearning of the long violin line of the first segment with a pulsing syncopation, momentarily postponing the explosion of joyous passion for the Finale.

- Notes © Dr. Jean Christensen

A pre-concert commentary will be provided by Prof. Daniel Weeks of the Vocal Division, School of Music. The presentation will take place in room 125, between 2 and 2:45 PM. All interested persons are invited and are welcome to attend.

Emerson String Quartet

February 5, 2012

Adagio and Fugue, K. 546

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

The historical details of the origin of this Adagio and Fugue are simple enough: sometime in 1782, Baron van Swieten introduced Mozart to the music of J.S. and Emmanuel Bach, having discovered it while serving as an ambassador in Berlin. Mozart was intrigued by what he heard and began efforts to master the north German style. He transcribed Bach's keyboard music for stringed instruments, and, encouraged by Constanza ("who loves fugues and continuously asks me for more"), he composed vocal canons and fugal exercises. In Dec. 1783, he composed a fugue in C Minor for two pianos, K. 426.

Some years later, in June 1788, at a time when he was composing the last three symphonies (K. 543, K. 550, K. 551) that appeared in quick succession (June, July and August), he worked on K. 546, a newly-composed adagio for string quartet, which he joined to his earlier fugue for two pianos transcribed for the same ensemble. It might take a moment to associate the sustained fierceness of the Adagio and Fugue with the supple treatment of contrapuntal complexity in the Jupiter Symphony that followed less than two months later, but that was Mozart's gift: to recognize the vitality of Bach's genius and transform it with full freedom of style into the supple achievement of the last symphony.

For the fun of it, here is Mozart in a letter to his sister: "When Constanze heard the fugues [of Bach], she absolutely fell in love with them. Now she will listen to nothing but fugues, and particularly (in this kind of composition) the works of Händel and Bach. Well, as she has often heard me play fugues out of my head, she asked me if I had ever written any down, and when I said I had not, she scolded me roundly for not recording some of my compositions in this most artistically beautiful of all musical forms and never ceased to entreat me until I wrote down a fugue for her."

String Quartet No. 5 in B-flat Major, Op. 92

Allegro non troppo

Andante

Moderato

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Late in 1952 Shostakovich composed two highly contrasting works: the first was an official work to celebrate the Nineteenth Communist Party Congress, *The Sun Shines Over Our Motherland*, op. 90, a cantata for boys' choir, mixed chorus and orchestra. The second was his Fifth String Quartet, a work that he didn't expect to be published any time soon, as he anticipated negative reaction from "musical circles." This quartet marked a change in Shostakovich's compositional thinking as it was apparently the first work in which the composer began to "encode" ideas in his music, which, to all intents and purposes, were meant to convey personal concerns as well as to introduce difficult questions; this aspect of his work becomes more and more pronounced. In previous seasons we have seen, in performances of his later quartets how he explored the ability of the instruments to convey wordless texts.

The Fifth Quartet is the first work in which the composer began to use his musical "signature," in the form of the four notes that capture the essence of his name, B natural-C-D-E flat (H-C-D-Es, in German notation), if not yet in the definitive order, D-E flat-C-B natural (or D-Es-C-H, heard for the first time in this order in the much later "autobiographical" Eighth Quartet). In addition, not only does he allude to several of his earlier works in the Fifth Quartet, but in a moment of heightened drama he includes a theme from the clarinet trio of his composition student, Galina Ustvolskaya, whose music was definitely out of favor. Finally, there is also a rather new sense of ambiguity in this work, as it evokes ideas that

remain unarticulated, or, imposed from the “outside,” not worked out in any sense. Like his previous two quartets, the final marking in the Fifth is *morendo*; that is, it just fades out.

The three movements are played without any real break between them. He marks the ends and beginnings of the movements by dissolving the musical ideas of the foregoing movement and creates a “musical bridge” to connect it to the next. Only three movements might suggest a short concise work, but the first and last movements are actually quite extended and dramatic. Furthermore, some of the ideas introduced in the first movement are left for exposition and recall in the following segments. By means, then, of the “bridges” between the movements, Shostakovich creates a work that is both continuous and discontinuous, and by the simple means of the unfinished resolution at the end, he initiates a conversation that has no definitive ending, not even a temporary one.

As in much of this composer’s work, frequently some little figure heard first as being of no particular consequence, eventually grows to dominate and control, where as one would expect them to just become absorbed and disappear. A case in point is the jaunty little (three-note) figure in the two violins found already in the first measure, which immediately—that is, in the second measure—is elaborated in the viola (to include, now, the pitches, C-D-E flat-B natural-C sharp, the “signature” notes). As the ideas develop the original three-note figure takes on more and more weight. This simple idea of three rising notes, very often just as these same three, but just as often, as the first notes of a larger idea . . . always, it seems, coming to no conclusion. It simply pops up again, now as counterpoint, as accompaniment, initiating principal melodic content, perhaps extended to four notes, perhaps more, but almost always with audible reference to the three notes of the opening.

The first movement is a sonata form. As worked out, it is a complex that brims with material, all of which is worked over. Shifting textures take over in a surge of energy that boils up suddenly, or they dissolve slowly in almost passive resignation. The movement begins rather innocently, as the jaunty interplay between the three-note motive in the violins is set off by the cello’s one-note prompt that, in turn, elicits the response in the viola with its slightly extended version of the three-note figure. Two measures of a leaping figure in the first violin seem to possibly lead somewhere . . . but not far, before the picture suddenly changes precipitously. From the “outside,” it seems, comes a demanding destructive force: in stomping eighth-note octaves, viola and cello derail the innocent (mindless) musing, and force the violins to grab onto their leaping motive even as it is jolted by crunching dissonances. Rising higher and higher, doubling octaves, the violins manage to prevail, and coming down to the original register, they return to the rising three-note motive, now *ff* and driven by a (nasty-sounding) crescendo.

When the leaping figure returns it effects a transition to the second thematic area where it becomes a lilting waltz for which Shostakovich introduces a simple repeated-note figure that, remains recognizable in spite of taking on a number of guises. Everything heard thus far is revisited in the development until, at the very apex of driving force, the tune from Ustolskaya’s Trio rings out, *fff*, in the violins. At the same time, the rhythmic character alters as measures in changing and asymmetrical meters (3/4. 5/4. 3/2. 2/4, 3/4) become the norm. Repeated notes, and the three-note figure (both up and down), relate to earlier materials and the moment of tension plays out with the recapitulation of the second theme.

The second movement is played with mutes throughout. The opening is both lovely and unsettling: one tune, moving steadily along in the first violin doubled two octaves lower in the viola, seems unmindful of anything else, the second violin and then the cello entering to fill out the texture with independent lines. The form is a simple sonatina, that is a sonata with exposition and recapitulation but not much development. Scope, in this case, is supplied by the composer’s allusions to unperformed works—his and others. When the first segment returns, it is at the unexpected distance of the augmented fourth.

The third movement seems to grow out of the second, but soon enough a waltz-tune takes over and the formal structure opens out as more figures move to the fore. Some of them, like the motto theme, are fully articulated and two themes from the earlier movements chime in, often very prominently. Shostakovich revisits his earlier ideas as though urging them to change, but they resist. In the end he is only able to assemble fragments, and ends the work on a simple dying tonic chord.

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130

Adagio ma non troppo. Allegro

Presto

Andante con moto, ma non troppo.

Alla danza tedesca. Allegro assai

Cavatina. Adagio molto espressivo

Finale. Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

In its full-fledged, masterly vision in six movements, Beethoven's thirteenth string quartet was conceived originally with two comprehensive and expanded movements, one at the beginning, another at the end, enclosing four inner movements. These four are related to each other as two sets of two movements—one fast, the other slow. As the story goes, the publisher persuaded him to compose a different, less demanding finale (instead of the Grosse Fuge) and to let it stand freely on its own. It is a rare treat to be able to hear this magnificent piece as a whole.

From the very first of the opening movement, Beethoven refashioned expectations of what it meant to work through an idea in a sonata movement. In its first measures, the instruments move from the unified pitch tonic on the opening note to create a wedge shape. Beginning on the lowest note on the violins, the figure spreads out in both directions, reaching down almost to the lowest note on the cello. To answer that, the next phrase opens on a throbbing note high in the cello and begins a series of imitations that develop into a second wedge—rising even higher in the first violin—before it closes down. Suddenly, the tempo and dynamic change; a furious *non legato* flurry of sixteenth notes sends the first violin rushing downward to the bottom of the instrument prompting a statement of the utterly simple two-note theme as its accompaniment in the second violin—a kind of tattoo (*dum dum de-de dummm*). This give and take, a searching adagio that alternates with hectic allegro, *non-legato*, flurries, continues into the second thematic area, which is in the third-related key of the lowered (or flat) sub-median. So much has Beethoven's treatment of sonata form been merged with a kind of fantasy, that the contrast between the material of the first key and that of the second becomes almost incidental. However, within a few measures, prompted by the appearance of the simple two-note theme, a quite unexpected but very welcome, lilting melody opens out in the cello accompanied by a soft, rocking motive. The little two-note idea keeps returning, and as it does, it also becomes more insistent, and eventually coaxes flurries of sixteenth notes which explode in quickly shifting and complex harmonic transformations. In the recapitulation, the second thematic ideas appear first, and a condensed review of the original adagio/allegro material appears in the coda.

Listeners working with a conventional understanding of sonata form are challenged to follow Beethoven as he is exploring, even transcending its limits. The expansion of all the formal expectations in the first movement is one argument for the necessity of the very large and extended work—the great fugue—in order to balance the whole at the end. In between, the concept that pairs the four inner movements—two and two—results in two scherzos that alternate with two slow movements. The scherzos are mostly simple folk dances (Beethoven's direction for the second scherzo is "like a German dance") that offset the more intimate quality of the slow movements.

The second movement, or first Scherzo, which is in the parallel key of B-flat minor, is quick and breathless. Each upward-reaching phrase in the first violin, is answered by a similar downward phrase in the second violin, and the whole ensemble moves in tight formation, *pp*, through a regular formal eight-bar structure. In the Trio, a more effervescent character takes over as the accentuated and carefree lines in the first violin extend up into the higher regions of the instrument. At the end, the Trio almost seems to collapse by degrees as it returns to the low scurry of the Scherzo.

The slow movement that follows, "Andante con moto ma non troppo," is in the unexpected key of D-flat major. A "sunny" exposition in a sonata form is extended and varied as numerous thematic ideas—several good-natured variants of ones that have gone before—follow one another, echoing and combining freely to create an evolving structure.

The subsequent fast movement—in a “homely,” or “comfortable” German style—proceeds in an unencumbered G major. Again, as in the earlier Scherzo, the formal structure is straightforward and quite regular. The Trio in E minor is about as brief as it can be: two concise 8-bar phrases does it for the needed contrast before the dance returns in varied form.

All of this becomes peripheral when the Cavatina, the next slow movement, gets underway. Even the marking, “Adagio molto espressivo,” seems inadequate to capture the heartfelt quality of the outpouring line in the first violin. In contrast to the three previous movements, it is intensely private. An inner subjectivity provokes the shape of each successive phrase, and the melody evolves as each element evokes the next one. Putting all public concerns to the side, and reaching beyond the simple pleasure of the guileless dance that preceded it, Beethoven brings us into his inner world. He has said that he composed the movement “amid sorrow and tears,” and just the memory of the short contrasting passage marked “Beklemmt” (“Anguished”) in which the violin almost seems to sob, “brought forth renewed tributes of tears.” While this episode is short-lived, the return to the opening material does not bring much relief.

It has been argued that the extraordinary character of the Cavatina provoked the composition of the intense *tour de force* of the great fugue. But when Beethoven, some time later, bowed to the argument of the publisher, he composed a finale that happens to be as uncomplicated as the fugue is dense and brooding. Constructed on clear, squarish phrases that flow along with a memorable and authoritative motif—heard at the start—the movement feeds on a seemingly infinitely-renewable source of energy and ideas. All kinds of musical devices, brought into play as variations, imitations, developmental evasions, and above all, rhythmic ingenuity, round out its remarkable and joyful intricacy.

Grosse Fuge, Op. 133
Overtura. Allegro
Meno mosso e moderato
Allegro molto e con brio

One effective means to getting the most out of listening to this immensely demanding work, is to focus on a comprehensive outline to which particulars can be referred or related. Overall it may be perceived as a set of variations in which each new segment comprises a new treatment of the subject matter, each one with a renewed and expressive character. In addition, the overall concept of the form as a sonata-allegro is germane, as there is a clear sensation of an excursion away from the exposition of the main idea followed by a return that resolves the tension. To summarize: the work begins with a very short introduction, which is called an “Overture,” itself being a kind of set of mini variations, out of which the fugue opens with its extensive variations. In turn this first Allegro is followed by a slow movement in a new key, and eventually the whole is finished off with a Scherzo-like finale.

- Notes © Dr. Jean Christensen

Dr. Jack Ashworth, Professor of Music History, will make the pre-concert presentation from 2 to ca. 2:45 PM in room 125. All are welcome to attend.

The Morgenstern Trio

Kalichstein/Laredo/Robinson International Trio Award Winner, 2009

March 18, 2012

Piano Trio in G Major (1880)
Andantino con moto allegro
Scherzo - Intermezzo
Andante espressivo
Finale: Appassionato

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

For three consecutive summers, beginning in 1880, the Russian patroness, Mme. von Meck, engaged Debussy as one of several young musicians to travel with her family as a tutor. In the first summer, they were very much on the move, stopping to visit locations in Switzerland, Italy and France. The young composer, who played four-hand arrangements with Mme von Meck, gave piano lessons, and accompanied singing, was a success with this household that exchanged witty nicknames and indulged in sarcastic commentary. In September he produced a composition, the Trio in G Major, for performance by the household musicians. Debussy, who was still a student at the Conservatoire, dedicated the work to his professor of harmony, Emile Durand.

The Trio is a very early work by a composer yet 20 years old, and might perhaps sound vaguely familiar to those acquainted with such early compositions as the *Arabesques*, or *Beau soir*. Clearly the work is by Debussy, but very Romantic in style for it was composed long before he found his own expressive means, which came in the years of the ensuing decade with his experience of Wagner's music, his encounter with Symbolism and Mallarmé, and with his exposure to the gamelan music of Southeast Asia in 1889.

The work opens with a series of parallel chords in the piano, but in spite of some Debussy-like touches, the melodic character and structure in the work as a whole do not stray from rather predictable patterns. He has not yet achieved anything approaching the *arabesque* melodic style of the mature work. As remarked by his fellow Conservatory students, the Trio is primarily interesting for its flexible treatment of harmony and tonality, and given the overall sense of harmonic modulation and thematic variation, it is clear that the young composer was quite familiar with the music of the leading French composers of the time, Jules Massenet, César Franck and Gabriel Fauré.

All four movements feature sections with contrasting thematic ideas, tempos and harmonic changes; in all of them the treatment of the three instruments is well-balanced. The first movement is modest in every aspect but the harmonic character, which is very fluid. He creates three principal thematic areas, the first of which returns the end to reaffirm the principal key which hasn't been heard since the opening exposition. Though there is nothing like a development, there are passages that use some "classical" developmental ideas (sequences, for instance) in the middle segment.

The second movement, termed "Intermezzo," is interesting for the pizzicato in the strings—a harbinger of the String Quartet—as well as some interesting harmonic movement in the central section. The third movement is an unpretentious three-part, slow lyrical work. While the melodic phrases move in predictable shapes, again the harmony is quite adventurous and helps to set up the "appassionato" marking for the Finale, a rousing movement (in 6/8) in the parallel key of G minor. The sections of the movement are defined by small changes in tune and tempo, and by interesting key relationships, beginning with the first move to the key of A-flat, only a half-step away, from which point it moves the distance of an augmented fourth, to the key of E Major. Listen for the tempo changes as clues for these adventures in harmony. Eventually Debussy returns to the opening key of the movement and closes with a cadence, *ff*, on G Major.

Piano Trio (1937)

**Adagio non troppo - Allegro vivace - Meno allegro [Fugato] - Largamente -
Tempo di marcia - Presto - Molto meno mosso - Presto come prima
Largo - Allegro vivo e molto ritmico**

**Leonard Bernstein
(1918-1990)**

Leonard Bernstein was a student at Harvard University studying with Walter Piston when he composed this Piano Trio. While he took some of the music for later works—the opening of the second movement was recycled in his first work for musical theater, *On the Town*—the Trio was not presented as a finished work until it was published in 1979, that is, after his retirement from the New York Philharmonic. In this work the young composer is clearly learning how to put a piece together and how to work with models, generating proto-elements of style that were to serve him well as a composer of theatrical works.

The first movement opens and closes with a slow segment that explores the idea of high-pitched imitation in the strings before introducing a main melodic idea in the piano. With the subsequent tempo change Bernstein brings in still another main melodic idea following a short passage in pizzicato strings. Thus it goes, figurative segments alternating more or less steadily with imitative or fugal ones until the central *Allegro vivace*, in which the principal ideas return in varying rhythmic guises, including flashy passages for all the instruments at one time or another. Predictably one of the main themes in a more pensive guise returns at the end.

The second movement is again an initially imitative movement, essentially a march-flavored scherzo in a quick rondo form featuring a bit of fiddling character in contrasting sections. The atmospheric opening of the third movement, with its quietly-flowing undulations, serves as the foundation for recalling melodic motives from the first movement, although the change to a vivacious *allegro* pretty much leaves all that behind and the work finishes with quite a flash. Of the three movements the last one has the most varied style, several segments of which are reminiscent of the musical theater—the steady cello pizz, a folkish quality in the fiddling, the asymmetrical rhythmic passages, and, the soft modal elements that reflect some interest in Eastern European traditional music, perhaps a bit of Klezmer style?

All in all the work explores simple ideas, uses imitative textures for both slow and fast passages and moves through the forms and textures with a certain homogeneity in the thematic material. Certainly already in this early work Bernstein reveals the sure talent for composing works with effective rhythmic vitality that was to be a fundamental characteristic of his style. I can imagine Piston thinking that this student had learned his lessons quite well.

**Trio in B Major, op. 8
Allegro con brio
Scherzo. Allegro molto
Adagio
Allegro**

**Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)**

In 1891, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann: “You can’t imagine what childish nonsense has occupied me on these beautiful summer days. I have rewritten my B Major Trio and can now call it op. 108 instead of op. 8.” Brahms was by then a very experienced composer with many works behind him, as well as an artist who had permanently removed many items from his work list. When she first heard the piece many years before, Clara Schumann—a discerning critic if ever there was one—had identified the problem simply and directly as “Romantic absentmindedness.” One has to remember that Brahms was barely 21 when the work was published and about 58 when he returned to it. In his thorough revision of the work, he was able to reign in some of his youthful indiscretions, but without sacrificing the elements that made it a vital work of a young and ambitious composer. Because both versions are available, this particular composition gives us a unique insight into the composer’s workshop.

While he retained many features in three of the movements—the Scherzo with its waltz-like Trio

remained the same—he completely removed one of the three themes in the original first movement, and replaced a fugal segment in the development with varied rhythmic and thematic elements. His good friend, Heinrich von Herzogenberg wrote, “The facility with which the old Brahms adapts himself to the younger . . . is simply astonishing . . . It is a joint composition of two masters, who give the impression that they are inwardly no longer quite in harmony.” Hopefully, this brief introduction can draw listeners’ attention to this dualistic aspect of the work; it is possible to hear some of the positive tension between the broadly emotional indulgence of the youthful composer and the polish and intricate thematic and rhythmic craftsmanship of the older skilled one.

From the onset, the whole work seems to refer to Schumann’s Trio (also in this season’s programming) in as much as all the movements are all based in a single tonic, here, B, with movements one and three being in tonic major, and two and four in tonic minor. In a sense, the first movement “belongs” to the cello and its glorious melody. Noble and broad lines trace a vigorous treatment of the sonata form, and though one could hardly expect anything less than some sort of fugal episode in the development as was in the original version. But Brahms wisely excised it in favor of varied treatment of rhythmic and thematic ideas—not fugal, but still quite contrapuntal in nature.

The Adagio is a dialogue between the piano and strings, it opens with a rapt melancholy followed by an agitated mid-section. The furtive Scherzo is Schumann-like in its restless movement; indeed, it is quite North German in character. The forward motion is enhanced by Brahms’s characteristic rhythmic play with the basic steady pulse: two groups of three alternate with three groups of two, and eventually come to a satisfying rhythmic resolution. Syncopation plays a role here also, leading to surges springing out of clever motion-filled play.

There is hardly any more vigorous finale in a work by Brahms than this one in B Minor. A robust Allegro in triple meter, it revisits important key relationships heard earlier in the work, including unusual relationships to the tonic such as G# Minor and C# Minor.

- Notes © Dr. Jean Christensen

Preceding the concert, Dr. Krista Wallace-Boaz, a member of the faculty of the Piano Division and accomplished performer of chamber music, will make the pre-concert presentation beginning at 2 and ending ca. 2:45 PM in room 125. All are welcome to attend.

Octets for Strings

Euclid Quartet and Carpe Diem String Quartet

April 15, 2012

Euclid Quartet

String Quartet No.1, At the Octoroon Balls
"Hellbound Highball"

Wynton Marsalis
(b. 1961)

"Hellbound Highball" is the fifth of seven movements from Wynton Marsalis's String Quartet. Commissioned by The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center for Jazz at Lincoln Center, and premiered in 1995, the movements in the work reflect African-American forms and style, specifically, fiddling and dance types, blues and ragtime. The fifth movement, essentially a scherzo, clearly takes off from the boogie woogie style sometimes associated with the poly-rhythms of the trains referred to as "honky tonk train blues." Always a driving, compelling, and often humorous display of technical prowess and sound, the boogie woogie is often evoked when jazz wants to get down, have fun and show off. Like many of the boogie train pieces, this one comprises quite an extended series of variations on a repeating idea.

Octet for Strings in C Major, Op. 7

Très modère

Très fougueux

Lentement - Mouvement de Valse bien rythmé

George Enescu
(1881-1955)

In his lifetime, the Romanian, George Enescu, was highly respected for his inspired performance as a violinist, conductor, and pianist, as well as for his perceptive and visionary teaching, whereas his work as a composer was overshadowed by that of several of his East European contemporaries, notably Szymanowski, Janáček, and Bartók. This situation has changed a bit since the centennial festival celebrations of his birth in 1981, helped by the increased availability of recordings of his music.

As the opus number indicates, the Octet for Strings is an early work, but it represents a big step beyond that of Enescu's previous published work, a Sonata for Piano and Violin. The Octet is a large, demanding composition, especially considering the fact that the composer was not yet nineteen when he finished it. Its most remarkable feature is the cyclic form in which all four movements have common thematic material are organized into one large sonata. (It would seem quite likely that he was inspired by Beethoven's Grosse Fuge, heard earlier in the season.) The first movement is the exposition, the next two constitute the development and the final movement embraces the recapitulation. All the movements incorporate the usual tempo and expressive changes expected in a full-scale four-movement sonata. In the course of working out this grand scheme, Enescu introduced an abundance of themes—by one count, a dozen of them—some of which are long and structural with contrasting and repeated segments (think Berlioz), while others are less profiled and can occur initially disguised as mere accompaniment to another theme. As the ideas develop, these themes either maintain that secondary role, or emerge later as important factors in carrying out the formal ideas. The continuous flow of thematic inventiveness enlivened by contrapuntal or counter-melodic ingenuity results in the sense of continuous movements that barely cadence internally—and then, only for hardly more than a brief moment. In short, it's a case of overflowing vitality, and one that perhaps can be best compared to a large baroque form in which the simplest succession of intervals can be invested with thematic significance.

In the first movement—essentially the sonata exposition—the two main thematic areas comprise two and five entities, respectively. The first theme is quite clearly inspired by the subject of Beethoven's Great Fugue, but given its length, inner design and extension it has more of the "spinning-out" character of a baroque melodic idea. Another of the important themes heard early in the first movement is again greatly

extended with elements of sequential repetition and inner design that shift back and forth, accidentals creating maj/minor contrast. An important theme in the second thematic area (heard in the viola) is striking with its stepwise descending elements reminiscent of Brahms. Its importance is reinforced by later appearances at structural high point. Most of the major thematic ideas are first heard with a throbbing undercurrent of either a pedal tone, or a more developed ostinato—some times both—and is treated with imitations that rise out of the instrumental complex. This is such a prevalent texture that the few instances of homophony in the second portion of the movement seem all together remarkable.

Almost as soon as the second movement starts, Enescu moves into a developmental mode. Taking both old and a few new themes he quickly builds a thorough-going contrapuntal texture and builds to a climax. Here brilliant string writing comes to the fore and pushes the soft musing of the first movement into the background. By mid-movement he has addressed some of the emotive features of the viola theme from the first movement, recalled several others, and taken the opening theme to a new level of tension. Still in a developmental mode with the opening of the third movement, but now emphasizing the simple side of the tunes and rhythms in order to create the slow thoughtful kind of movement needed for the large formal outline. As this progresses, the limitations of the simple song form are broached, and as themes from the earlier movements reappear, a new rhythmic character intrudes. Eventually he turns to creating a passionate transition to the last movement, an ecstatic waltz in which familiar themes are again renewed, this time on the basis of the new meter.

Carpe Diem Quartet
Fiddle Suite, Montana
“Cherry Blossom”
“Peasebottom”

Korine Fujiwara

Fiddle Suite: Montana is a piece about family, about traditions, and about the state in which I was born and raised. It is a work in five movements, written in a jazzy/bluesy/fiddle style.

The fourth movement, “Cherry Blossom,” honors the traditions from my father’s side of the family. My father is half Japanese. One tradition his family kept and he also shared with us was: in the spring, we would sing the Japanese folk song “Sakura” (which means “Cherry Blossom”) when the cherry trees would start to bloom in our yard, in our own family’s celebration of the Cherry Blossom festival. He taught us the words in both Japanese and in English. I have taken the melody of *Sakura*, slightly manipulated it into a major key, used it as the basis of the movement, and have woven it throughout the piece.

The fifth movement, “Peasebottom,” honors the traditions from my mother’s side of the family. Music has always been an important part of family gatherings. I grew up surrounded by music, but this was not the music of Mozart or of Beethoven. It was fiddle music. At every reunion, wedding, birth, funeral, holiday, or similar occasion when people were likely to gather, my relatives would show up with guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, and/or a bass in hand, and there was always a piano wherever we gathered. Those who didn’t play, always sang. We would seat ourselves in a circle and make music, learn music, share music, create music, and commune with music. One place this happened was at my grandmother’s very modest cattle ranch, located in an area known by the locals as Pease Bottom. [It] is in the Yellowstone River Valley, surrounded by rolling hills and sandstone cliffs, and will forever be a special place for me. The piece “Peasebottom” is a hoedown in which I tried to capture the joy and exuberance of these family gatherings.

- Korine Fujiwara

Octet for Strings in Eb Major, Op. 20

Allegro moderato, ma con fuoco

Andante

Scherzo. Allegro leggierissimo

Presto

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

(1809-1847)

Mendelssohn's early works were composed for performance at the regular sessions of music making that took place on Sundays at his parents' home. Apparently the idea of combining two quartets into an ensemble of eight stringed instruments was the young composer's innovative attempt to find a suitable alternative for a full orchestra for these encounters, and so he writes the following instruction in his manuscript: "This octet must be played by all instruments in symphonic orchestral style. Pianos and fortes must be strictly observed and more strongly emphasized than is usual in pieces of this character." The earliest performances took place in private; the parts were published in 1832, but the score was not available until 1848, the year after Mendelssohn's death.

The Octet, one of Mendelssohn's best-known and certainly one of his most accomplished works, was composed when he was barely 16 years of age. As the title indicates, it is for eight instruments which are always treated as a single body (as opposed to two groups of four). Although the first three movements, which feature the first violin, frequently have quite a bit of doubling or accompaniment figures, the last movement is richly contrapuntal. No doubt, the young composer's skill in treating the stringed instruments, creating a flexible and varied texture, is the single most remarkable aspect of the work. The next notable aspects are its clarity and youthful charm.

The theme of the first movement is an impetuous, rising figure, unfurled upward like a banner, then falling back. In an extension it rises again and falls, this time, extending to fall even lower—to the violin's lowest note. When the theme passes to the cellos, a little tattoo is heard in the violin, a signal for the entrance of the second theme, a smooth melody in parallel sixths heard from within the group and one that contrasts completely with the first. Mendelssohn is both economical and clear in the development of this movement.

The second movement, in the key of C Minor, is perhaps less striking in style with its lilting *siciliano* rhythm. Its most interesting feature is the use of an arch form, a shape—often referred to as a *Bogen-Form*, or bow form—in which the first themes return after the central sections in an order opposite to the one in which they first appeared. They are also quite elaborated on this return. The middle section, in the tonic major (Eb) is very lovely.

Mendelssohn is known to have mentioned to his sister that the inspiration, or motto, for the scherzo in the Octet came from the chorus in Goethe's *Faust*:

Wolkenzug und Nebelflor / Erhellen sich von oben;
Luft im Laub, und Wind im Rohr, /- Und alles ist zerstorben.

Cover of clouds and dense mist, / light breaking through from above;
Breezes in the leaves, wind in the reeds,/-And everything is dispelled.

An exquisite movement in sonata form with two delightful tunes seem to correspond to these lines, particularly at the end when the extended sequence of chords, gets ever lighter and simply disappears in the end.

The Presto Finale might have been inspired by the last movement of Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony, for more than one commentator has suggested that its perpetual motion and several fugal expositions might be a young boy's response to an unspoken challenge. Early in the movement, complex counterpoint and a theme that strides in regular half-notes up a fourth and down a sixth, together with masterly modulating sections seem to partake of a Mozartian delight in form and movement. But the real accomplishment in this Finale is the teasing return of the scherzo theme—a fragmentary interruption—surprising by its

reappearance, and the more so as it is difficult to precisely discern when it exactly happens. Here the young composer outdoes himself as he ingeniously matches both tempo and structure of the theme from the scherzo with the two themes of the finale, and achieves, simultaneously, the sense of renewal and the creation of something new.

- Notes © Dr. Jean Christensen

Mr. John Hausmann will be giving the pre-concert presentation from 2-2:45 P.M. in room 125. Mr. Hausmann has been teaching in the Music History Division as a part-time faculty member since he received his master's degree with a thesis on Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony in 2010.