

Sunday, March 17, 2019
3:30 pm
Beckman Auditorium, Caltech



Coleman Chamber Music Association presents

Escher String Quartet

Adam Barnett-Hart, violin **Pierre Lapointe, viola**

Danbi Um, violin **Brook Speltz, cello**

with guest artist David Speltz, cello

Ludwig van Beethoven **Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1**

(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegro

Charles Ives

(1874-1954)

Quartet No. 2

Discussions

Arguments

The Call of the Mountains

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

Quintet for Strings in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956

Allegro ma non troppo

Adagio

Scherzo (Presto) & Trio (Andante sostenuto)

Allegretto

Exclusive Management: Arts Management Group, Inc. ■ 130 W. 57th St. ■ New York, NY 10019

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Program Notes

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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

“Some excellent works by Beethoven are outstanding among recent publications,” a reviewer wrote shortly after the first three Op. 18 quartets appeared. “They give perfect proof of his art – but they need to be played well and heard often, for they are very difficult to perform and are in no sense ‘popular.’” Since then they have become very nearly the most popular works in all the string quartet literature. They can be termed “popular” in the best sense. We now hear them as Beethoven’s summation of the accomplishments of Haydn and Mozart, and his preparation for the great technical and expressive advances that were to come in his later works.

Beethoven published the six quartets of Op. 18 in two books of three, in the order in which we now know them, which is probably not the order in which they were composed. Their order of composition remains a minor mystery in the history of music, but probably No. 1 was composed second and No. 3 first. In 1799, Beethoven sent a copy of No. 1 to his friend Carl Amenda saying, “Accept this Quartet as a souvenir of my friendship, and whenever you play it, remember our shared experiences and how true and close a friend I have been and always will be.” By the time it was published in 1801, Beethoven had reworked it thoroughly, and in 1800, he wrote to Amenda, “Don’t play your Quartet any more. I have changed it greatly, because I have just now learned how to write quartets.”

The first movement of Quartet No. 1, *Allegro con brio*, is devoted principally to an intense development of its opening motive, which occurs no less than 102 times. There is a second theme, but it is of comparatively minor importance; it is usually heard only as an extension of the opening motive or as a counterpoint to it. For contrast in the

development section, Beethoven seizes on the scale passages that first appear as mere transitional material.

The second movement, *Adagio affettuoso ed appassionato*, is a rich, romantic Lied in the form of a sonata. Its long main theme with its throbbing accompaniment has a beauty that Beethoven would rarely surpass in his later works. Paganini, whose free and flashing virtuoso style is rarely associated with the Classical manner of the Viennese master, is said to have played this slow movement with an emotional intensity that brought tears to the eyes of those present. Third comes a Scherzo, *Allegro molto*, in which Beethoven, with great wit, manipulates uneven rhythms and phrases of odd lengths. The quartet closes with a playful rondo finale, *Allegro*.

Charles Ives (1874-1954) Quartet No. 2

Charles Ives was a libertarian thinker, a successful businessman, and a superlative and original composer. He had a conventional education at Yale, where he was taught composition by a German-trained professor. Although he learned his craft at Yale, he never accepted externally imposed disciplines and limitation on his creative imagination. The music he wrote was entirely individual, even idiosyncratic. He exercised his powers of invention for his own purposes, with his own ideas, always unconventionally.

Ives loved music, loved America, and loved his father; he expressed these sentiments in his work. His father, who had been a Union bandmaster in the Civil War, was his first and most influential teacher and encouraged his experimentation and invention. Ives learned to describe the life and the ideas around him by using sound; sometimes his music literally used quotations of what he experienced around him, and sometimes he expressed the ideas he gleaned imaginatively, impressionistically, or symbolically. His music was eccentric, drawing from hymns, marching band music, and popular song, all embraced

by his unusual sense of harmony, rhythm, juxtaposition, and atonality.

Ives wrote his Quartet No. 2, a complex as well as a discordant work, prior to the First World War; it was first performed in New York on May 11, 1946 by a Juilliard School student ensemble. The quartet includes many borrowed melodies: in the first movement are “Columbia, Gem of the Ocean,” “Dixie’s Land,” “Marching Through Georgia,” and “Turkey in the Straw.” In the second movement, he included “Massa in De Cold Ground” and quotations from Beethoven’s ‘Ode to Joy,’ the first movement of Brahms’s Symphony No. 2, and the third movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6. In the third movement Ives quoted “Bethany,” “Nettleton,” and “Westminster Chimes.”

Ives was aware that Quartet No. 2 would be a difficult, challenging work even though he called it “one of the best things I have, but the old ladies (male and female) don’t like it anywhere at all. It makes them mad...” (*Memos* 73-74). He explained this quartet’s origins: “It used to come over me – especially after coming from some of those nice Kneisel Quartet concerts – that music had been, and still was, too much an emasculated art. Too much of what was easy and usual to play and to hear what was called beautiful, etc. – the same old even-vibration, Sybaritic apron-strings, keeping music too much tied to the old ladies. The string quartet music got more and more trite, weak, and effeminate. After one of those Kneisel Quartet concerts in the old Mendelssohn Hall, I started a string quartet score, half mad, half in fun, and half to try out, practise, and have some fun making those men fiddlers get up and do something like men.” Ives reacted strongly to his rejection from the conservative musical establishment, but continued to write music that was confrontational and true to his commitment to Romantic Transcendentalism. (American Romantic Transcendentalism in all the arts was a nationalistic movement, following from the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and embracing an outward, expansive approach.)

Quartet No. 2 is a programmatic work in which the instrumentalists depict four men who, in the composer’s words, “converse, discuss, argue (in re ‘Politick’), fight, shake hands, shut up – then walk up the mountain side to view the firmament!” The first movement, titled “Discussions,” articulates the seriousness of these discussions in slow, occasionally passionate music, much of it in Ives’s dissonant style.

The discussion becomes more animated in the rather brief second movement, “Arguments,” which began as a 1907 sketch inspired by spirited conversations at Poverty Flat, an apartment Ives shared with friends. As the movement progresses there are several abrupt changes of tempo, and the musical “conversation” becomes frequently cacophonous. When the second violin tries to play a Romantic cadenza, it is drowned out with constant interruptions from the others. The movement ends emphatically.

Nearly static chords introduce the third (and longest) movement, “The Call of the Mountains.” The music unfolds slowly, but soon builds in strength. Tension grows, but calm always returns. Throughout, Ives establishes patterns of discontinuity that he uses as compositional elements. The instruments gradually ascend to the top of their ranges as they metaphorically ascend the mountain, and then slowly, the intensity decreases as, eventually, the quartet concludes quietly and rather mysteriously on a long sustained note.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Quintet in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956

As his short life neared its end, a furious burst of creative energy exploded in Schubert. During his last eight months he composed his Mass in E-flat Major; a large number of songs, including the fourteen collected into a cycle as his *Schwanengesang* (*Swan Song*); three great piano sonatas; and this glorious quintet. The quintet was probably written in August and September of 1828,

but otherwise it has no real history. No one knows why he wrote it, and no scholars' guesses are very convincing.

The five-part string ensemble has not had the same hold on composers' imaginations as the quartet. There are not as many quintets, and few of them, perhaps only Brahms's, Mozart's and this one, approach the greatness of the most renowned quartets. Composers seem to have been unsure of what to add as the fifth instrument to the standard quartet's two violins, viola, and cello. Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms added second violas; Dvořák, in one work, included a double bass. Only Boccherini in the 18th century and Schubert in the 19th are remembered for quintets with two cellos. Brahms tried his hand at one, which was the original version of the work we now know as his *Quintet for Piano and Strings*, but he found the medium unsatisfactory and destroyed the score.

Schubert clearly took pleasure in the enriched texture made possible by the two cellos. Their huge range gave him an extra voice to use as bass, tenor, or alto, and opportunity for noble-sounding duets for the two. In much of the slow movement, the first violin does not control the ensemble but rather it is governed by the second cello's simple but critical bass line, played *pizzicato*. At the beginning of the quintet, there are two long phrases for just four instruments: the first with a single cello and the second with only one violin. After that, all five instruments are in almost constant play.

On October 2, 1828, some six weeks before he died, Schubert wrote to a publisher about a quintet that he had composed that was to be played through sometime during the next few days. If that reading did take place, it was the only one that the work was to have for many years; after the composer's death, it simply disappeared, along with many more of his scores, into the storage trunks and attics of friends. The first public performance occurred on November 17, 1850, in Vienna at a concert of the Hellmesberger Quartet, whose first violinist was the son of

Schubert's childhood friend Georg Hellmesberger. In 1853, the quintet was published.

The quintet is a grandly spacious work with proportions very much like those of the great C Major Symphony so admired by Robert Schumann for its "heavenly length." The first movement, *Allegro ma non troppo*, opens quietly, almost mysteriously, and after a forceful buildup subsides into one of the most beautiful themes in all Schubert's works, set as a lyrical duet for the cellos. Next is an *Adagio* of transporting beauty, in a simple three-part form, the last part an enriched version of the first. In the last two movements, the character and the temper of the music change. The Scherzo, *Presto*, is not a light-spirited interlude but a kind of demonic, dark drama with heavy "horn-calls" and smashing chords. Its central Trio section offers all the contrast that Schubert could invent: a shift without transition into a remote key, duple meter, and a new slow tempo, *Andante sostenuto*.

The last movement, *Allegretto*, is a complex combination of rondo and sonata form with a main theme whose syncopated accompaniment gives it the Hungarian gypsy flavor that was a popular finale formula in Austria for a century and a half.

Escher Quartet

The Escher String Quartet has received acclaim for its profound musical insight and rare tonal beauty. A former BBC New Generation Artist, the quartet has performed at the BBC Proms at Cadogan Hall and is a regular guest at Wigmore Hall. In its home town of New York, the ensemble serves as Season Artists of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where it has recently performed quartet cycles of Beethoven and Zemlinsky.

The 2018-2019 season finds the Escher Quartet touring the U.S. extensively, performing in numerous cities and venues including New York's Alice Tully Hall, Washington D.C.'s Kennedy Center, the Segerstrom Center for the Arts in Costa Mesa, Chicago's Harris Hall, and many others. Internationally, the Escher returns for a season-long residency at London's Wigmore Hall, where it will present three self-curated programs highlighting American and American-influenced compositions.

The Escher Quartet has made a distinctive impression throughout Europe, with recent debuts including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Konzerthaus, London's Kings Place, Slovenian Philharmonic Hall, Les Grands Interprètes Geneva, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, and Auditorium du Louvre. With a strong collaborative approach, the group has appeared at festivals such as the Heidelberg Spring Festival, Budapest's Franz Liszt Academy, Dublin's Great Music in Irish Houses, the Risør Chamber Music Festival in Norway, the Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival and the Perth International Arts Festival in Australia.

Recordings of the complete Mendelssohn Quartets, released on the BIS label in 2015-2017, were received with the highest critical acclaim. The Escher's most recent recording, quartets of

Dvořák, Borodin, and Tchaikovsky, was met with equal enthusiasm. The quartet has also recorded on the Naxos label, the complete Zemlinsky String Quartets in two volumes to accolades including five stars in *The Guardian* with "Classical CD of the Year," a Recommendation in *The Strad*, "Recording of the Month" on MusicWeb International, and a nomination for a BBC Music Magazine Award.

David Speltz

Cellist David Speltz began his formal studies with Eleanore Schoenfeld after being introduced to the cello by his father. Later he joined the Gregor Piatigorsky Master Class at USC.

He earned a master's degree in mathematics from UCLA, but soon realized that the cello was the path to follow. During this period, he co-founded the Arriaga Quartet, which went on to win the first prize in the Coleman Competition.

As a member of the ensemble Musical Offering, he performed at the Library of Congress, Lincoln Center, the Casals Festival in Puerto Rico, Coleman, and recorded for the Nonesuch label. He has been active for years on many Los Angeles chamber music series, and has participated in summer festivals throughout the United States.

David was a member of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra under Sir Neville Marriner, and served as principal cellist of the California Chamber Orchestra under Henri Temianka. In 1989, he served as principal cellist for the German conductor Helmuth Rilling at the Bach Collegium Stuttgart.

He has been active in the motion picture industry in Los Angeles for more than 44 years, playing in the studio orchestras for over 1,000 movies - from the *Godfather* series to *Star Wars*.

Some of today's repertoire have been performed previously in the Coleman series:

Beethoven Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

March 1904	Krauss String Quartet
April 1927	New York String Quartet
January 1930	Roth String Quartet
February 1967	Quartetto Italiano
January 1977	New Hungarian String Quartet
January 2003	Emerson String Quartet
October 2009	Enso String Quartet
April 2014	Parker Quartet

Schubert Quintet for Strings in C Major, Op. 163, D. 956

April 1908	Krauss String Quartet with Charles Stewart
November 1924	Philharmonic String Quartet with Fritz Gaillard
November 1930	Bartlett-Frankel String Quartet with May Mukle
April 1945	San Francisco String Quartet with Stanislas Bem
February 1946	London String Quartet with Lysbeth LeFevre
November 1954	Quintetto Boccherini
October 1961	Fine Arts String Quartet with Kurt Reher
April 1969	New York String Sextet
October 1987	Boston Chamber Music Society
November 1997	Ysaye Quartet with Janos Starker
February 2005	Cavani String Quartet with Alisa Weilerstein
April 2016	Enso String Quartet with Clive Greensmith

Premiere performance at Coleman Chamber Music Association Concerts:

Ives Quartet No. 2