

Music@Menlo

CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL AND INSTITUTE

WINTER SERIES



PACIFICA QUARTET

SIMIN GANATRA, violin SIBBI BERNHARDSSON, violin

MASUMI PER ROSTAD, viola BRANDON VAMOS, cello

January 11, 2017

www.musicatmenlo.org



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About Music@Menlo

One of the world's foremost chamber music festivals and institutes, Music@Menlo promotes the enjoyment and understanding of classical music by encouraging audience members, artists, and young musicians to engage deeply with great music. Under the artistic leadership of David Finckel and Wu Han, Music@Menlo combines world-class chamber music performances, extensive audience engagement, and intensive training for young artists in its Chamber Music Institute in an effort to enrich and further build the chamber music community of Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Music@Menlo's unique approach enhances concert programs by creating an immersive experience through numerous opportunities for deepening and intensifying listeners' understanding and enjoyment of the music. With a context-rich atmosphere and powerful engagement between its audience and the music, Music@Menlo has set a new standard for chamber music festivals worldwide.

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Music@Menlo Artistic Directors David Finckel and Wu Han are among today's most influential classical musicians. Named *Musical America's* 2012 Musicians of the Year, the cellist and pianist have appeared at many of the world's most prestigious venues and music festivals. Also Artistic Directors of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York, David Finckel and Wu Han are widely recognized for their initiatives in expanding audiences for classical music and for guiding the careers of countless young musicians.

Music@Menlo

Wednesday, January 11, 2017, 7:30 p.m.

The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton

PACIFICA QUARTET

Simin Ganatra, Sibbi Bernhardsson, violins;
Masumi Per Rostad, viola; Brandon Vamos, cello

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 18, no. 6 (1798–1800)

Allegro con brio

Adagio ma non troppo

Scherzo: Allegro

La Malinconia: Adagio – Allegretto quasi allegro

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906–1975)

String Quartet no. 3 in F Major, op. 73 (1946)

Allegretto

Moderato con moto

Allegro non troppo

Adagio –

Moderato

INTERMISSION

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

String Quartet in F Major (1902–1903)

Allegro moderato

Assez vif, très rythmé – Lent – Tempo I

Très lent

Vif et agité

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(Born in Bonn, baptized December 17, 1770; died March 26, 1827, Vienna)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 18, no. 6

Composed: 1798–1800

Published: 1801, Vienna

Dedication: Prince Karl Lobkowitz (see below)

First performance: The Opus 18 quartets were all premiered at the Friday morning musicales held at Prince Lobkowitz's home.

Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below

Approximate duration: 25 minutes

The six string quartets of Beethoven's Opus 18 mark a coming of age in the composer's career. They date from his early years in Vienna, where he had arrived in 1792 from his native Bonn in order to, in the famous words of his patron Count Waldstein, "receive the spirit of Mozart from Haydn's hands." Beethoven composed the Opus 18 quartets between 1798 and 1800. These years saw the completion of numerous other important early works: in addition to the quartets, the Opus 9 string trios, the piano sonatas of Opuses 10 and 22, the Septet for Winds and Strings, the Opus 23 and Opus 24 violin sonatas, and the First Symphony, among other works.

The Opus 18 quartets may collectively be the most important of these. Not only did they forcefully announce Beethoven's arrival to Western Europe's musical capital but more importantly they represent the young composer's first attempts at what was and has since remained the quintessential chamber music genre. His eventual cycle of sixteen quartets stands, to this day, among the cornerstones of the canon of Western music.

Composing these quartets served as an important step in Beethoven's succession of Haydn and Mozart. Haydn—the father of the Classical style and Beethoven's teacher—had single-handedly defined the genre and moreover set an intimidating standard with his nearly seventy string quartets. Mozart, too, had made important contributions to the quartet literature, particularly with his set of six quartets dedicated to Haydn.

Beethoven was clearly conscious of the significance attached to his first string quartets. The choice to publish a set of six works—as opposed to a single work or his usual set of three—fell in line with several sets of six by Haydn as well as Mozart's Haydn Quartets. And as if composing these works were not pressure enough, Prince Karl Lobkowitz, the Austrian nobleman who commissioned the quartets, simultaneously commissioned a set of six from Haydn, stoking the unspoken but intensifying competition between pupil and master. Perhaps as

a symbolic passing of the torch, the aging Haydn completed only two of the six.

The first two movements of the B-flat Major Quartet, op. 18, no. 6, follow straightforwardly enough the example of Haydn and Mozart. The opening *Allegro con brio* begins to demonstrate Beethoven's developing penchant for such forceful dramatic devices as jarring *sforzandi* and unexpected silences but does so within the Classical mold of Haydn's quartets. The slow second movement does likewise; its leisurely pace equals with patience what the first movement suggested of Beethoven's restless energy.

The delicious rhythmic confusion that begins the scherzo (is it in 2/4? 3/4? and who has the downbeat, the violins or lower strings?) points more decisively towards Beethoven's innovative bent. But it is on account of the remarkable final movement, titled *La Malinconia* (melancholy) by Beethoven, that many consider the B-flat Major Quartet the most powerful of the Opus 18s. The movement's slow, gripping introduction—in which Beethoven instructs the players, "*Questo pezzo si deve trattare colla più gran delicatezza*" ("This piece must be played with the greatest possible delicacy")—continues to employ shocking dynamic contrasts, here, to punctuate melancholy with outbursts of despair. Further deepening the sense of anxiety, the music wanders from one tonality to another, as if lost and searching helplessly for its way back to the home key. With Beethoven, one learns to expect the unexpected: rather than becoming darker and more anguished still, the main body of the finale responds to the gravity of its introduction with a carefree country-dance. But the gaiety of the dance remains haunted by recurrences of *La Malinconia*, even until the quartet's blazing *Prestissimo* finish.

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DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH

(Born September 12/25, 1906, St. Petersburg; died August 9, 1975, Moscow)

String Quartet no. 3 in F Major, op. 73

Composed: 1946

First performance: December 16, 1946, in Moscow by the Beethoven Quartet

Other works from this period: Symphony no. 9 in E-flat Major, op. 70 (1945); *Prostīye lyudi* (Simple People), op. 71 (film score) (1945); Violin Concerto no. 1 in a minor, op. 77 (1947–1948); *Iz yevreyskoy narodnoy poezii* (From Jewish Folk Poetry) for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Piano, op. 79 (1948)

Approximate duration: 28 minutes

In 1948, the Communist Party published a Resolution on the State of Russian Music, which officially charged Shostakovich and other leading composers with “antidemocratic tendencies that are alien to the Soviet people and its artistic tastes [and composing works] strongly reminiscent of the spirit of contemporary modernistic bourgeois music of Europe and America.” The resolution demanded that composers guilty of Western formalism reform their wayward artistry; each had no choice but to publicly prostrate themselves before the government. Shostakovich wrote in response, “I am deeply grateful for...all the criticism contained in the resolution...I shall with still more determination work on the musical depiction of the images of the heroic Soviet people.”

Though the Third Quartet was composed two years prior to the resolution, Stalin’s attack on the artistic community had already begun, affecting writers, theater directors, and filmmakers in the years prior. Like much of Shostakovich’s music, the Third Quartet has a strong narrative quality, suggesting an extramusical program—and, indeed, Shostakovich is said to have originally given subtitles to each of its five movements. The subtitles implicate the work as a reflection on the experience of Soviet life during and following World War II. But given the social climate and the scrutiny his work would have been under by the authorities, Shostakovich was probably wise to withdraw even any suggestion of a political subtext.

The Third Quartet shows the composer at the height of his creative powers, featuring a range of thematic ideas and sonic textures to match its broad emotional compass. With the individual movements’ subtitles withdrawn, the quartet comes to us as a work of absolute music and should not be understood as program music. Nevertheless, the supposed subtitles do concisely, if inadequately, suggest the character of each movement. The first movement *Allegretto* was originally subtitled “Calm unawareness of the future cataclysm.”

The exposition of the sonata-form first movement is rife with melody and elegantly wrought, with its various musical ideas closely linked. Shostakovich

presents the playful first theme and then nimbly extends it to reveal its mischievous streak; likewise the sober second theme, which Shostakovich extends to reveal a manic unpredictability. Throughout the exposition, Shostakovich's fiendish inventiveness notwithstanding, the first movement seems innocently cast in Classical sonata form, but as the development section begins, the first theme dives unexpectedly into a thorny double fugue.

The second movement was originally subtitled "Rumblings of unrest and anticipation." The music turns to the steely key of *e* minor—close in proximity to the key of the first movement, F major, but harmonically very remote. This movement, essentially a scherzo, is answered by an even more diabolical scherzo in the third movement, originally subtitled "The forces of war are unleashed." The time signature at the start of the movement alternates between 2/4 and 3/4 in almost every measure, keeping the listener on edge.

A desperately sad *Adagio* follows. Following "the forces of war," this movement was originally identified as the quartet's "Homage to the dead." The entire movement is based on the spare melodic materials introduced at the outset—but by voicing those ideas in different registers and couching them in different sonorities, Shostakovich endows the movement with great emotional weight. The movement ends with the quartet's loneliest music: the viola and cello, in their lowest registers, seem devastated, emotionally numb.

The music proceeds without pause to the final movement, which resembles Classical sonata-rondo form. Shostakovich assigned the finale the heady subtitle: "The eternal question: why and to what purpose?" Befitting the audacity of such a far-reaching question, Shostakovich develops the main theme extensively throughout the movement, while offering a kaleidoscope of timbres and expressive characters in the richly varied episodes. The work concludes in a soft, ambiguous glow—whether in peaceful repose or defeat is up to the performers' and listeners' personal responses. "The eternal question: why and to what purpose?" remains unanswered.

Many listeners consider the Third Quartet to be the finest of Shostakovich's cycle of fifteen quartets. Shostakovich himself felt very deeply about it. Violist Fyodor Druzhinin of the Beethoven Quartet told this story of a rehearsal with Shostakovich some two decades later:

Only once did we see Shostakovich visibly moved by his own music. We were rehearsing his Third Quartet. He'd promised to stop us when he had any remarks to make. Dmitry Dmitriyevich sat in an armchair with the score opened out. But after each movement ended he just waved us on, saying, "Keep playing!" So we performed the whole quartet. When we finished playing he sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face. This was the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenseless.

MAURICE RAVEL

(Born March 7, 1875, Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France; died December 28, 1937, Paris)

String Quartet in F Major

Composed: 1902–1903

Other works from this period: *Jeux d'eau* (Water Games) for Solo Piano (1901); *La nuit* (The Night) for Soprano, Mixed Choir, and Orchestra (1902); *Alyssa* for Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, and Orchestra (cantata) (1903); *Sonatine* for Solo Piano (1903–1905)

Approximate duration: 26 minutes

Ravel was admitted as a student to the Paris Conservatoire in 1889, the year in which the World Exposition introduced the Javanese gamelan orchestra and Russian music to Paris (and left the Eiffel Tower as an imposing souvenir), but his academic career proved to be somewhat less than meteoric. While gaining a reputation for such pieces as the *Pavane for a Dead Princess* and *Jeux d'eau* during the next sixteen years, he slipped in and out of the Conservatoire, auditing classes with Gabriel Fauré and other teachers and competing, never successfully, for the Prix de Rome. Despite his tenuous official association with the Conservatoire, Ravel retained an almost awed respect for Fauré, whom he regarded as his principal teacher and an important influence on and inspiration for his music.

At the end of 1902, after his second attempt to win the Prix de Rome had proven unsuccessful, Ravel felt it necessary, as had Claude Debussy a decade before, to subject the modernity of his musical speech to the rigorous discipline of one of the most demanding of all Classical genres: the string quartet. “My quartet represents a conception of musical construction, imperfectly realized no doubt, but set out much more precisely than in my earlier compositions,” Ravel said. He completed the first movement of the work in time to submit it to a competition at the Conservatoire in January 1903, but the reactionary judges, having become well entrenched in the attitude that caused them to frustrate Ravel’s every attempt to win the Prix de Rome, found this glowing specimen of musical color and light “laborious” and “lacking simplicity.” Ravel left the Conservatoire for the last time and never again set foot in one of its classrooms. More angry than discouraged, Ravel continued work on the quartet and completed the score in April 1903.

Though Fauré, whose advice and friendship Ravel continued to value despite his disappointments at the Conservatoire (he contributed a *Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré* to a tribute edition of the *Revue Musicale* in 1922), found the finale “stunted, badly unbalanced, in fact a failure” and suggested its thorough revision, both Debussy and Vincent d’Indy praised the new piece. “In the name of the gods of music, and in mine, do not touch a single note of what you have written in your quartet,” Debussy admonished; “it is a piece worthy of any

composer's work at the end of a long career," d'Indy told the twenty-eight-year-old musician. Ravel agreed with his colleagues and allowed the Heymann Quartet to premiere the work in its original form on March 5, 1904, in the auditorium of the Schola Cantorum, the institution d'Indy had founded in 1896 to offer an alternative to the Conservatoire for advanced musical instruction. Though its acceptance was not at first unanimous, the quartet was the composition that solidified Ravel's reputation as a leading creative figure, "one of the masters of tomorrow," as Jean Marnold prophesied in a review in the *Mercur de France*.

The quartet opens with a sonata-form *Allegro* whose precise Classical structure is made to accommodate effortlessly the piquant modality of its themes. The principal subject is a lovely violin melody, accompanied by scalar harmonies in the lower instruments, that rises and falls through a long arc with elegance and ease. Passages of greater animation lead to the complementary theme, a melancholy song given in octaves by the first violin and viola above the rustling background figurations of the second violin. The development section is as concerned with the rustling figurations as with the thematic materials. As in the Mozartian model, the recapitulation returns to the earlier themes to balance and complete the movement. The second movement (marked "rather fast and very rhythmic") is a modern scherzo, with snapping pizzicati and superimposed meters. The center of the movement is occupied by a wistful melody in slow tempo initiated by the cello. The third movement serves as a sort of structural foil to the carefully defined forms of the earlier movements. With its quickly changing sonorities, frequent juxtapositions of mood and tempo, and continually evolving themes, it is rather in the character of an improvisation for quartet, a free rhapsody for four instruments joined by some magical centripetalism into an extraordinarily satisfying whole. The powerful, metrically irregular motive that launches the finale is brought back as the movement proceeds, much in the manner of the old rondo form, to separate the contrasting episodes that recall musical events from the earlier movements.

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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

PACIFICA QUARTET



Recognized for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and often daring repertory choices, the **Pacifica Quartet** has gained international stature over the past two decades as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Pacifica tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's major concert halls. Named Quartet-in-Residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica was also the Quartet-in-Residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012) and received the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002, the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and an appointment to the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's CMS Two. In 2006, it was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber ensemble so honored in the grant's long history.

Highlights of the 2016–17 season include a return performance at New York's famed 92nd Street Y; the culmination of a two-season residency at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston; tours with Johannes Moser, Jörg Widmann, and Marc-André Hamelin; the debut of a new cello quintet by the acclaimed composer Julia Wolfe; and return visits to major series in Pittsburgh, Detroit, St. Paul, and Portland.

The Pacifica Quartet has carved a niche for itself as the preeminent interpreter of string quartet cycles, harnessing the group's singular focus and incredible

stamina to portray each composer's evolution, often over the course of just a few days. It has given highly acclaimed performances of the complete Carter cycle in San Francisco, New York, Chicago, and Houston; the Mendelssohn cycle in Napa, Australia, New York, and Pittsburgh; and the Beethoven cycle in New York, Denver, St. Paul, Chicago, Napa, and Tokyo (in an unprecedented presentation of five concerts in three days at Suntory Hall). The quartet also presented the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago and New York during the 2010–2011 season and in Montreal and at London's Wigmore Hall in the 2011–2012 season. It has been widely praised for these cycles, with critics calling the concerts “brilliant,” “astonishing,” “gripping,” and “breathtaking.”

In 2008, the ensemble released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter's Quartets nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of Quartets nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. Cedille Records recently released the third of four volumes of the entire Shostakovich cycle, along with other contemporary Soviet works, to rave reviews: “The playing is nothing short of phenomenal” (Daily Telegraph, London).

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Bloomington, Indiana, where they serve as Quartet-in-Residence and full-time faculty members at the Jacobs School of Music. Prior to their appointments, the musicians were on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana from 2003 to 2012. The Pacifica Quartet also serves as Resident Performing Artist at the University of Chicago.

The Pacifica Quartet is endorsed by D'Addario and proudly uses its strings. For more information on the quartet, please visit www.pacificaquartet.com.

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