



CARTE BLANCHE CONCERT II:

Quartet Connections

Escher String Quartet

JULY 23

Sunday, July 23

10:30 a.m., Stent Family Hall, Menlo School

SPECIAL THANKS

Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Iris and Paul Brest with gratitude for their generous support.

Gourmet Picnic Lunch (12:00 p.m., following the concert)

Join the Escher String Quartet, Artistic Directors, and festival musicians and friends for a picnic lunch outside on the Menlo School campus. (Tickets: \$18.)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 458, *The Hunt* (1784)

Allegro vivace assai
Minuetto: Moderato
Adagio
Allegro assai

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

String Quartet no. 3 in B-flat Major, op. 67 (1875)

Vivace
Andante
Agitato: Allegretto non troppo
Poco allegretto con variazioni

INTERMISSION

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

As Mozart responded to the quartets of Haydn with his own masterpieces, so did Dvořák challenge the high standard set by Brahms with string quartets of quintessential Bohemian spirit. The Escher String Quartet brings its dual mastery of style and technique to a program juxtaposing several immortal composers, each at the apex of his chamber music achievement.

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)

String Quartet in G Major, op. 76, no. 1, Hob. III: 75 (ca. 1797)

Allegro con spirito
Adagio sostenuto
Minuetto: Presto
Allegro ma non troppo

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841–1904)

String Quartet no. 13 in G Major, op. 106 (1895)

Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
Finale: Andante sostenuto – Allegro con fuoco

Escher String Quartet: Adam Barnett-Hart, Aaron Boyd, violins; Pierre Lapointe, viola; Brook Speltz, cello

Program Notes: Quartet Connections

Notes on the program by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria; died December 5, 1791, Vienna)

String Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 458, *The Hunt*

Composed: Completed November 9, 1784, Vienna

Published: 1785, Vienna, as Opus 10 Number 5

Other works from this period: Quintet in E-flat Major for Piano and Winds, K. 452 (1784); Violin Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 454 (1784); Piano Sonata in c minor, K. 457 (1784); Piano Concerto in d minor, K. 466 (1785); *Davidde penitente*, K. 469 (cantata) (1785)

Approximate duration: 26 minutes

Of all the famous composer pairs—Bach and Handel, Bruckner and Mahler, Debussy and Ravel—only Mozart and Haydn were friends. Mozart first mentioned his acquaintance with Haydn in a letter to his father on April 24, 1784, but he probably had met the older composer soon after moving to Vienna three years earlier. Though his duties kept him across the border in Hungary at Esterháza Palace for most of the year, Haydn usually spent the winters in Vienna, and it is likely that he and Mozart attended or even played together at some of the many “string quartet parties” that graced the social calendars of the city’s music lovers during the cold months. True friendship and mutual admiration developed between the two master musicians, despite their twenty-four-year age difference, and they took a special delight in learning from and praising each other’s music. Mozart’s greatest testament to his respect for Haydn is the set of six superb string quartets composed between 1782 and 1785 that he dedicated to his colleague upon their publication in September 1785. “To my dear friend Haydn,” read the inscription. “A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best friend.” These works are not just charming souvenirs of personal sentiments, however, but also represent a significant advance in Mozart’s compositional style, for in them he assimilated the techniques of thematic development and thorough integration of instrumental voices that Haydn had perfected in his Opus 20 (1771) and Opus 33 (1781) quartets. “They are,” Mozart noted in the dedication, “the fruit of long and laborious endeavor,” a statement supported by the manuscripts, which show more experimentation and correction than any other of his scores. “The *Haydn* Quartets are models of perfection,” wrote Homer Ulrich, “not a false gesture; not a faulty proportion. The six quartets stand as the finest examples of Mozart’s genius.”

The Quartet in B-flat Major, composed in the autumn of 1784, early on acquired the sobriquet *The Hunt* (though not from Mozart) because of its jolly opening theme in 6/8 meter, which resembles a hunting-horn **motif**. The title is hardly justified beyond the opening page, however, since the character of the music suggests nothing specifically sylvan or even vaguely programmatic—this is pure music in the most sophisticated, city-bred manner, without the least hint of rusticity. Once past the bounding main theme, the exposition moves on to the subsidiary subject, which incorporates a slow shake on neighboring notes that is first posited with some timidity by the individual instruments before being embraced by the entire ensemble. The development section, touched with just the slightest suggestion of melancholy, refers repeatedly to the slow-shake rhythm of the second theme. The movement continues with another traversal of the principal thematic elements and is concluded by an extensive coda that codifies what has preceded. The following minuet is almost becalmed in its own stately elegance, a surprisingly sedate example of the ubiquitous old dance form whose nature is, however, fully justified by the perfect transition that it provides from the breathless trot of the first movement to the rapt timelessness of the *Adagio*, the slowest movement in the *Haydn* Quartets. The sonata-form finale,

bursting with the joy of creation that marked the happiest year of Mozart’s life, exhibits a “combination of badinage and counterpoint that sounds like an affectionate parody of Haydn,” according to Ivor Keys.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany; died April 3, 1897, Vienna)

String Quartet no. 3 in B-flat Major, op. 67

Composed: 1875

Published: 1876

Dedication: T. W. Engelmann

First performance: October 30, 1876, Berlin

Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below

Approximate duration: 33 minutes

In the late spring of 1875, Brahms accepted an invitation from the painter Anselm Feuerbach to spend an extended holiday at Ziegelhausen in a house nicely fronting on the right bank of the Neckar River, not far from Heidelberg. Brahms met eagerly with old and new friends in his rooms and in neighboring towns and taverns, and he enjoyed the company of the Ziegelhausen villagers—he discovered that the cook at the local inn, for example, a woman named Bertha whose girth was ample testimony to the quality of her work, made a particularly delicious variety of pancake, for which he rewarded her with a lively improvised waltz. “When he played, you couldn’t even see his hands,” Bertha reported for years after the encounter. As was his custom during his summer country retreats from the dust and heat of Vienna, Brahms composed in Ziegelhausen, working there on the Third Piano Quartet (op. 60), Third String Quartet (op. 67), and some duets (op. 66) and lieder (op. 70). The B-flat Major Quartet was largely sketched by the time he returned to Vienna in the fall of 1875.

The B-flat String Quartet, conceived under the beneficent influence of Brahms’s Ziegelhausen holiday, is the most lyrical in expression and halcyon in mood of his three examples of the genre, more closely related in spirit and form to the sunny Classical chamber works of Mozart and Haydn than to the transcendent instrumental Romanticisms of Beethoven’s last years. The opening sonata-form movement incorporates three thematic elements: a hunting-horn motive given immediately by the second violin and viola, a complementary melody initiated by the middle instruments below rustling figurations in the first violin, and a peasant-dance strain that juxtaposes its duple-meter rhythms with the galloping 6/8 phrases of the preceding music. The two meters are briefly superimposed to serve as the bridge to the development section, in which each of the three motives is given a hearty working-out. A full recapitulation of the themes rounds out the movement. The *Andante*, disposed in a simple three-part form, is lyrical and rather luxuriant in its outer sections and somewhat more rambunctious in its middle parts. The following *Agitato* is cast in the structure of a scherzo but is really more like a nostalgic **intermezzo** in its wistful expression. Much of the autumnal effect of this music arises from its unusual sound palette, in which the lead is taken throughout by the husky-voiced (unmuted) viola while the violins and cello surround it with their veiled, muted sonorities. The finale is a set of eight variations and a coda based on the curious theme (curious because it seems to end two measures early) announced at the beginning by the first violin. Brahms’s masterful ingenuity in variations technique is displayed by the seventh variation, where the hunting-horn melody from the first movement is threaded through the formal and harmonic supports of the finale’s theme.

**Bolded terms are defined in the glossary, which begins on page 92.*

JOSEPH HAYDN

(Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau, Austria; died May 31, 1809, Vienna)

String Quartet in G Major, op. 76, no. 1, Hob. III: 75

Composed: ca. 1797

Published: 1799

Other works from this period: *Missa Sancti Bernardi von Offida* in B-flat Major, Hob. XXII: 10, *Heiligmesse* (mass) (1796); *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*), Hob. XXI: 2 (oratorio) (1796–1798); Trumpet Concerto in E-flat Major, Hob. VIIe: 1 (1796); Piano Trio in E-flat Major, Hob. XV: 29 (1797)

Approximate duration: 20 minutes

Haydn was universally acknowledged as the greatest living composer upon his return to Vienna in 1795 from his second London venture; he was sixty-three. Though his international renown had been founded in large part upon the success of his symphonies and keyboard sonatas, he repeatedly refused offers to compose further in those genres and instead concentrated the creative energies of his later years on the string quartet and the vocal forms of mass and **oratorio**. Except for the majestic Trumpet Concerto, his only instrumental compositions after 1795 were the six quartets of Opus 76, the two of Opus 77, and the unfinished Opus 103, and they were the culmination of nearly four decades of experience composing in the chamber medium.

The six Opus 76 quartets were written on commission from Count Joseph Erdödy, scion of the Viennese family that had encouraged Haydn's work since at least 1776 and whose members became important patrons of Beethoven after his arrival in the capital in 1792. The Quartet no. 1 in G Major opens with a bold summons of three emphatic ensemble chords. The movement's principal theme is a precisely etched phrase that the cello carries downward through an octave before leaping up to the starting note as a closing punctuation. The viola and then the other instruments take up the theme in companionable conversation. The formal second theme area is occupied not by a distinct melody but by a series of animated arpeggios. A reference to the main theme closes the exposition. Both themes are treated in the development section before a full recapitulation of the exposition materials rounds out the movement. The *Adagio*, the expressive heart of the quartet, is based on three motives: a hymnal melody in chordal style, a dialogue between cello and first violin supported by repeated notes in the inner voices, and a further passage of repeated chords in the lower instruments across which the first violin drapes a stream of jewel-like **after-beats**. The form is founded upon the return of the hymnal theme to give the movement the character of a slow and deeply expressive rondo. The third movement, with its one-in-a-bar rhythmic motion, quirky phrasing, and playful character, is actually more a scherzo than the *Minuetto* indicated by its title. A *concertante* passage for the violin constitutes the central trio. Rather than the good-natured romp that Haydn often used to close his instrumental works, the finale is music of considerable expressive weight whose exposition partakes of the minor tonality and tempestuous manner of the *Sturm-und-Drang* movement, heralding the encroaching Romantic era. The sonata-form movement remains largely in this agitated mood through the development section. The nominal G major brightness of the quartet returns with the recapitulation, though the music's good cheer continues to be tempered by chromatic inflections until the brilliant closing gestures.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

(Born September 8, 1841, Nelahozeves, Bohemia; died May 1, 1904, Prague)

String Quartet no. 13 in G Major, op. 106

Composed: Completed December 9, 1895

Published: 1896, Berlin

First performance: October 9, 1896, Prague, by the Bohemian Quartet

Other works from this period: Detailed in the notes below

Approximate duration: 37 minutes

Dvořák's first year in the United States as Director of the new National Conservatory of Music in New York City following his arrival on September 27, 1892, was an unmitigated success. He propounded the philosophy that the country's concert music should find thematic material and emotional inspiration in its indigenous songs and dances and then wrote the *New World* Symphony to demonstrate his point. The work created such a sensation when it was introduced by Anton Seidl and the New York Philharmonic on December 16, 1893, in Carnegie Hall that Dvořák was named an honorary member of that organization. He spent the summer of 1893 in the Czech community of Spillville, Iowa, assuaging his homesickness for Bohemia and composing his F Major String Quartet (op. 96, *American*) and E-flat Major String Quintet (op. 97). Despite the acclaim he was receiving in this country (the new quartet was played some fifty times within a year by the Kneisel Quartet after the ensemble introduced it in Boston on New Year's Day in 1894), Dvořák was increasingly unhappy about being separated from his homeland and his friends and his beloved country house at Vysoká, outside Prague.

After he had been in New York for two years, he informed Mrs. Jeanette Thurber, founder and guiding force of the conservatory, that he wanted to return to Bohemia for the summer. His leave was granted, and he spent from May until October in Prague and Vysoká. His return to New York was difficult—he missed his children desperately and was so thoroughly homesick that winter that his usually robust health was affected. He completed the masterful Cello Concerto between November 1894 and the following February but was then unable to create anything further except for some sketches for an opera on Longfellow's *Hiawatha* (never completed), which Mrs. Thurber had been pestering him to write for two years, and the first seventy measures of what became the A-flat Major Quartet (op. 105). Though there was strong incentive for him to remain in America (he boasted in a letter to one friend about his \$15,000 salary, an enormous sum in the 1890s), Dvořák had had quite enough of playing the role of the musical émigré (which he did with considerable skill) and left New York for the last time on April 16, 1895. He arrived in Prague eleven days later and went straight to Vysoká. His heart soared.

Dvořák took the summer of 1895 off—for seven months, from his arrival home in April until November, he did not put a single note on paper, the longest respite he had ever taken from creative work. He spent the warm months almost entirely at Vysoká, where the world-famous composer worked his garden and tended his pigeons. He was back in Prague by September, teaching again at the local conservatory, but he was still unwilling to resume creative work. He enjoyed spending his evenings with the musicians and stage people who gathered at a café near the National Theater, though, no matter how stimulating the company, he always left punctually at nine o'clock so as not to delay his accustomed early bedtime. By November, Dvořák was finally primed to return to composition, and his first project was the String Quartet in G Major (op. 106), which he finished in less than a month. The quartet was published by Simrock in the summer of 1896 and first played on October 9, 1896, in Prague by the Bohemian Quartet.

"All the strongest and most beautiful qualities of Dvořák's nature are combined in the G major quartet," wrote the composer's biographer Karel Hoffmeister. "Here are the poetry and freshness of youth, the virile strength belonging to his time of life, the depth and overflowing tenderness, the harmonious sweetness of approaching old age. We find the climax of sunny gladness and glowing happiness which belong to his return to his homeland." A mood of buoyant optimism informs the sonata-form first movement, which is based on three complementary themes whose short phrases are perfectly