STREET QUARTET PROGRAM
Thursday, August 4
8:00 p.m., St. Mark's Episcopal Church

PROGRAM OVERVIEW
Brahms’s three string quartets stand among the composer’s finest creations. Composed in the early 1870s while Brahms was at the height of both his creative powers and his professional career, the melancholy Opus 51 quartets and the sunny Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 67, contain the quintessence of Romantic expression. These three expertly crafted works offer a provocative lens through which to understand the music that came before and after Brahms. Beethoven’s profound Opus 131, one of the most daunting works in the literature, represents the challenge set forth before the Romantic generation by the nineteenth century’s greatest composer, which Brahms labored throughout his life to meet. The perfect marriage in Brahms’s own quartets of passion and technique presented an equal model for the composers that followed. Arnold Schoenberg, the twentieth century’s most notorious modernist, held Brahms in the highest regard—a reverence he passed on to his students Anton Webern and Leon Kirchner.

SPECIAL THANKS
Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Joan and Allan Fisch with gratitude for their generous support.
STRING QUARTET PROGRAM II
Sunday, August 7
4:00 p.m., St. Mark’s Episcopal Church

SPECIAL THANKS
Music@Menlo dedicates this performance to Anne and Mark Flegel with gratitude for their generous support.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
String Quartet in C-sharp minor, op. 131 (1825–1826)
- Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo
- Allegro molto vivace
- Allegro moderato
- Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile
- Presto
- Adagio quasi un poco andante
- Allegro

ANTON Webern (1883–1945)
Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5 (1909)
- Heftig bewegt
- Sehr langsam
- Sehr bewegt
- Sehr langsam
- In zarter Bewegung

INTERMISSION

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

Orion String Quartet: Daniel Phillips, Todd Phillips, violins; Steven Tenenbom, viola; Timothy Eddy, cello

Johannes Brahms’s personal library, bequeathed to the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, nineteenth century, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna, Austria. Photo credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY
**Johannes Brahms**
(Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, Vienna)

**String Quartet no. 1 in C minor, op. 51, no. 1**
**String Quartet no. 2 in A minor, op. 51, no. 2**

**Composed:** 1873

**Other works from this period:** Variations on a Theme by Haydn in B-flat Major, op. 56a (1873); Fünfzehn Liebeslieder Waltzes, op. 52a (1874)

**Approximate duration:** Opus 51 Number 1: 30 minutes; Opus 51 Number 2: 34 minutes

**Johannes Brahms**

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

**Composed:** 1875

**First performance:** October 30, 1876, in Berlin

**Other works from this period:** Piano Quartet no. 3 in C minor, op. 60 (1855–1875); Symphony no. 1 in C minor, op. 68 (1855–1876)

**Approximate duration:** 35 minutes

Brahms was arguably the greatest composer of chamber music in the second half of the nineteenth century, an era that was dominated—at least in the Austro-German sphere in which he worked—by splashier, more colossal forms like music drama and the symphonic poem. Across his career, Brahms published twenty-four chamber works, which extend from the youthful, expansive B Major Piano Trio, op. 8, of 1854 to the autumnal, compact Opus 120 clarinet sonatas of 1894. Many more pieces never made it out of the workshop of this most self-critical of composers.

For Brahms, as for others of his generation, special anxiety was aroused by writing for string quartet, a genre that bore the historical weight of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. He was reported to have composed some twenty quartets before issuing his first ones in 1873. A string quartet in b minor was among the earliest works of Brahms’s that Robert Schumann and Joseph Joachim recommended for publication to the prestigious firm of Breitkopf & Härtel in 1853, but the composer never sent the score. For a number of years in the mid-1860s, Brahms was at work on a string quartet in c minor, about which Joachim and Clara Schumann inquired repeatedly and to which he himself referred in a letter to his publisher Simrock in 1869. It is not clear whether this quartet is the one in the same key that eventually appeared as Opus 51 Number 1.

From the late 1860s through the early 1870s, Brahms was occupied mainly with large choral works, including one that would bring him wide fame, A German Requiem, completed in 1868. He also turned towards purely orchestral compositions, completing the Haydn Variations, op. 56a, in 1873. In the same year, Brahms took up two string quartets that, as noted in his private catalog of compositions, had been “begun earlier” and were now “written for a second time.” These quartets, in C minor and A minor, were published as Opus 51 and dedicated to Brahms’s close friend the surgeon (and accomplished amateur violinist) Theodor Billroth.

The C minor quartet is an intense, mostly dark work that shares the musical world of the First Symphony of 1876, a piece in the same key which, as may have been the case with the quartet, gestated over many years. The dimensions of the C minor quartet are compact; its performance takes almost a third less time than that of the Piano Quintet. As Brahms biographer Karl Geiringer observed, Brahms “had now achieved an economy which refused to tolerate a single superfluous note, but at the same time he had perfected a method of integration that would give an entire work the appearance of having been cast from one mold.” In the quartet, motivic concentration rarely yields up broader melodies, except perhaps in the noble, restrained lyricism of the romanze. For the most part, themes churn agitatedly in textures that remain contrapuntal, chromatic, and unsettled.

The A minor quartet, though no less densely polyphonic, is a more open, inviting work. It is also a piece of enormous contrasts, all reined in by Brahms’s technical mastery. In the lifting second theme of the first movement, marked “grazioso,” the violins sing sweetly in parallel thirds. The main theme of the Andante is built from tiny intervallic steps that gradually gain in expressive power and then give way to an episode in the Hungarian style, where the first violin spins rhapsodic, quasi-improvisatory figures over fierce tremolos. In the finale, Brahms provides two different kinds of dances: a thumping Hungarian one in an implied 3/2 meter alternates with a Viennese waltz in 3/4.

Two years separate the Opus 51 quartets from Brahms’s final effort in the genre, the B-flat Major String Quartet, op. 67, completed late 1860s, Brahms was at work on a string quartet in C minor, about which Joachim and Clara Schumann inquired repeatedly and to which he himself referred in a letter to his publisher Simrock in 1869. It is not clear whether this quartet is the one in the same key that eventually appeared as Opus 51 Number 1.

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in 1875. Here compositional struggles seem to dissolve in a work that is relaxed and Neoclassical in spirit but ultrapraculcificated in its tech-
iques. The key and the thematic content of the first movement clearly evoke Mozart’s Hunt Quartet, K. 465, but the homogeneity is accomplished by frequent shifting between 6/8 and 2/4 meters. The Andante is a “song without words” dominated by an arching, triadic theme in the first violin. In the ensuing Allegretto, melodic prominence passes to the viola, while the other instruments play with mutes. The dusky timbre of the viola, so beloved by this composer, also colors the finale. Brahms casts the last movement as a theme and variations, a traditional form which he virtually reinvents by bringing back the main themes of the first movement in the last two variations and then by superimposing the first of them over the variations theme itself in the coda. The result is an epiphany, as we suddenly realize that the themes share a latent kinship. Brahms thus puts his individual stamp on another convention, that of cyclical form.

The chamber works of Brahms are demanding for both performers and listeners. Going far beyond the tradition of Hausmusik, he made the genre a vehicle for his most advanced compositional techniques, which are, however, always cloaked in melodic, harmonic, and formal designs of great appeal. Brahms may have been the last composer in whose works beauty and craft remained in such exquisite balance.

—Walter Frisch

LEON KIRCHNER
(Born January 24, 1919, Brooklyn, New York; died September 17, 2009, Manhattan)
String Quartet no. 4
Composed: 2006
First performance: August 6, 2006, by the Orion String Quartet in La Jolla, California
Other works from this period: Duo no. 2 for Violin and Piano (2001); Piano Sonata no. 2 (2003); Piano Sonata no. 3, The Forbidden (2006)
Approximate duration: 13 minutes

During my student days, I had the privilege of studying theory with Arnold Schoenberg. He was one of the great masters of the structure and function of “the theoretical” in the music of past centuries, in its “process” in the works of Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Bach, Mozart, Mahler, Bruckner, Debussy, etc.—and yet he was the master of twelve-tone music, particularly in its practice. “Twelve-tone what? System?” He disliked this word intensely and substituted technique (twelve-tone technique).

His works have not lost their communicative power or their gestalt (the singular formal structure), and as stated by Paul Rosenfeld in the early 1920s, Schoenberg “is...one of the exquisites among musicians... Since Debussy no one has written daintier, frailer, more diaphanous music. The solo cello in Serenade is beautiful as scarcely anything in the new music is beautiful.” I remember, as well, Schoenberg himself in a class I attended saying, despite his profound involvement in twelve tone, “One can still write a masterpiece in C major, given the talent for composition.” He continues:

Composition itself has grown too difficult, desperately difficult. Where work and sincerity no longer agree, how is one to work? But so it is, my friend—the masterpiece, the one to work? But so it is, my friend—the masterpiece, which by now embraces the very means of tonality and thus all traditional music...The diminished seventh is right and eloquent at the opening of Opus 111. It corresponds to Beethoven’s general technical level, does it not?...The principle of tonality and its dynamics lend the chord its specific weight. Which it has lost—through historical process no one can reverse.

So once again theory and practice have gone their separate ways, guided by “historical process.” In this case the Devil sells a new theory to a composer of genius, Adrian Leverkühn (presumably Arnold Schoenberg), in Thomas Mann’s great novel Dr. Faustus. This becomes a symbol of the breakdown of society and culture which occurred in the twentieth century. But as usual—even in the great ones, such as Palladio, Schoenberg, et al.—their theories hardly begin to “cover” their works or the misrepresentations of their works. The most recent example is the dethroned theorist Derrida: “no piece of writing is exactly what it seems” and is “laden with ambiguities, contradictions.” One can speculate interestingly on the reversal in Palladio’s heavenly derangement of his theories in his actual works, not in his drawings, leaving us with the overwhelming impression that something of the greatest importance is missing in his theories.

I decided not to take the Devil’s advice. In the Fourth Quartet I pursued further this intricate and profound connection between past and present, and, utilizing what I have learned concerning the character of Schoenberg tossed out: “One can write a masterpiece in C.” Whether this is possible or not, it is certainly a worthy trial, a pursuit whether or not this is successful in my piece is unknown to me at present. It was a seductive idea, one that I have been pursuing of late, to possibly reveal the necessary intimacies between the past and present which keep the art of music alive and well.

—Leon Kirchner

ANTON WEBERN
(Born December 3, 1883, Vienna; died September 15, 1945, Mittersill, Austria)
Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5
Composed: 1909
First performance: February 8, 1910, in Vienna
Other works from this period: Fünf Lieder nach Gedichten von Stefan George, op. 4 (1908–1909); Six Pieces for Orchestra, op. 6 (1909); Four Pieces for Violin and Piano, op. 7 (1910)
Approximate duration: 11 minutes

Anton Webern studied with Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna for the four years after 1904, writing a large number of original compositions and arrangements (the catalog of works in Hans Moldenhauer’s excellent biography lists 126 entries) before he honored one of his scores with an opus number—the Passacaglia for Orchestra, op. 1, of 1908. The Passacaglia was a sort of graduation thesis for Webern (he had received his formal doctoral degree from Vienna University two years before for a dissertation on the Renaissance composer Heinrich Isaac), and he determined, at age twenty-five, to establish himself more firmly in the Austrian musical milieu. He also had a view toward marriage, having fallen in love with Wilhelmine Mörtl, his first cousin, and needed the prospect of a steady income to support a family. During the summer of 1908, he took the job of Second Conductor at the spa town of Bad Ischl, summer residence of the emperor and many of the Viennese aristocracy, where he was responsible for directing operettas. He did not care much for the
work or the music ("If one has to deal with this stuff all day, it's enough to drive one mad," he complained to a friend) but stuck out the season before returning to Vienna and later found it again necessary to take similar posts in Teplitz, Danzig (where he finally married Wilhelmine on February 22, 1911, six weeks before their first child was due), Stettin, and Prague.

During the fall of 1908, Webern composed the Opus 2, 3, and 4 songs, but in the spring he returned to instrumental music with the Five Movements for String Quartet, op. 5. This score marked an important advance in Webern’s style since it was the first work to use the concentrated, aphoristic language that characterizes his later compositions, the music that was to have such an enormous impact on composers during the mid-twentieth century. Though it was to be fifteen years until Schoenberg devised (and Webern immediately adopted) the twelve-tone method, many of the stylistic components upon which that theory was based were first put into place in these gem-like miniatures.

Despite their modernity of harmony, rhythm, and instrumental sonority, the Five Movements are formally indebted to traditional models. The opening movement is an enormously compressed sonata structure. The tiny main theme, heard immediately, comprises just the upward leap of a minor ninth, while the second subject is a slower, legato strain in the low strings. The development begins with a pizzicato passage; the recapitulation returns a phrase reminiscent of the second theme and then the opening interval motive, inverted. The slow second movement follows an arch shape, starting at a whisper, rising through wispy melodic fragments, and ending in near inaudibility. The animated third movement is in the nature of a scherzo. The fourth movement matches the second in length and softness, though its mood is one of even greater mystery. The closing movement is divided into two parts: the first is built above an undulating melody in the low strings, while the second murmurs tiny melodic fragments until the music fades into silence.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(Born December 16, 1770, Bonn; died March 26, 1827, Vienna)
String Quartet in c-sharp minor, op. 131
Composed: 1825–1826
Other works from this period: Symphony no. 9 in d minor, op. 125 (1824); String Quartet in E-flat Major, op. 127 (1825); String Quartet in B-flat Major, op. 130 (1825); String Quartet in a minor, op. 132 (1825)
Approximate duration: 39 minutes

On November 9, 1822, Prince Nikolas Galitzin, a devotee of Beethoven’s music and an amateur cellist, wrote from St. Petersburg asking Beethoven for “one, two, or three quartets, for which labor I will be glad to pay you whatever amount you think proper. “ After a hiatus asking Beethoven for “one, two, or three quartets, for which labor I will be glad to pay you whatever amount you think proper. “ After a hiatus...

Though Beethoven told Karl Holz that he considered the Quartet in c-sharp minor his greatest achievement in the form, perhaps because it was his most daring such work in terms of its formal concept (“Art demands of us that we not stand still,” he counseled Holz), he never heard it in performance. The piece was tried out at the offices of the Viennese publisher Artharia in September 1826 and (perhaps) given a private reading in December, but it did not receive its formal public premiere until 1835, eight years after the composer’s death. The quartet was played privately for Franz Schubert, an ardent admirer of Beethoven, in November 1828, only five days before he died. Holz
reported that when Schubert heard the work, “He fell into such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that we were all frightened for him.” As with all of Beethoven’s late quartets, Opus 131 gained performances and understanding only slowly, but it has come to be regarded by many as peerless in the chamber repertory. Joseph de Marliave wrote:

This quartet, musically, is unanimously recognized as the richest, the most significant of this art form, of which it is probably the summit. We find in its sumptuous efflorescence the most striking qualities of Beethoven’s last works: originality; free form that is always plastic yet rigorously logical; and an intellectual spirituality within every bar and every note. We recognize here, as in most of the last quartets, a psychological concept. It is the elevation of the soul—filled with the nobility of a suffering man tested by grief—out of the most irremediable melancholy into joyful struggle and victory over his adversaries—toward the innermost reconciliation.

Martin Cooper, in his fascinating study of Beethoven’s last decade, concluded that this is “the purest stuff of music, exquisitely and logically constructed and finished to the highest degree.”

The c-sharp minor quartet may well be Beethoven’s boldest piece of musical architecture—seven movements played without pause, six distinct main key areas, thirty-one tempo changes, and a veritable encyclopedia of Classical formal principles. So adventurous and unprecedented was this structural plan that Maynard Solomon allowed, “Beethoven may be regarded as the originator of the avant-garde in music.” Though it passes beyond the Fifth Symphony, Fidelio, and Egmont in its harmonic sophistication and structural audacity, this quartet shares with those earlier works the sense of struggle to victory, of subjecting the spirit to such states of emotional unrest as strengthen it for the winning of ultimate triumph. “Music should strike fire in the heart of man,” Beethoven told his student and patron Archduke Rudolph in 1823. “There is no loftier mission than to approach the Divinity nearer than other men and to disseminate the divine rays among mankind.” This supreme masterwork is music of transcendent vision.

The opening movement is a spacious, profoundly expressive fugue which, according to Richard Wagner, “reveals the most melancholy sentiment in music.” John N. Burk found that here “the process of the intellect is always subservient to that of the heart,” and J. W. N. Sullivan waxed almost metaphysical in concluding that this is “the most superhuman piece of music that Beethoven ever wrote. It is the completely unfaultering rendering into music of what we can only call the mystic vision. It has that serenity which, as Wagner said, passes beyond beauty and makes us aware of a state of consciousness surpassing our own.” The following Allegro offers emotional respite as well as structural contrast. A tiny movement (Allegro moderato), just eleven measures in the style of a ruminative recitative, serves as the bridge to the expressive heart (and formal center) of the quartet, an expansive set of variations that seems almost rapt out of quotidian time. The fifth movement, “the most childlike of all Beethoven’s scherzos,” according to Joseph Kerman, alternates two strains of buoyantly aerial music: a feather-stitched arpeggiated theme previewed by the cello and stated in full by the first violin and a more lyrical motive first given in octaves by the violins above the playful accompaniment of the lower strings. The short, introspective Adagio in chordal texture is less an independent movement than an introduction and foil for the finale, whose vast and densely packed sonata form (woven with references to the fugue theme of the first movement) summarizes the overall progress of this stupendous quartet in its move from darkness and struggle toward light and spiritual renewal.

—Richard Rodda