TWENTY-SIXTH SEASON
NINTH CONCERT

Houston Friends of Music, Inc.

and

Shepherd School of Music

PRESENT THE

New World String Quartet

Curt Macomber - violin
Robert Dan - viola
Vahn Armstrong - violin
Ross Harbaugh - cello

GUEST ARTIST

DAVID SHIFRIN

Wednesday, May 7, 1986

Hamman Hall
8:00 P.M.
Rice University
PROGRAM

WEDNESDAY, MAY 7, 1986

Quartet in A Major, Op. 18 No. 5 .................. Beethoven
    Allegro
    Menuetto
    Andante cantabile
    Allegro

Quartet No. 2 (1928) “Intimate Letters” ............... Janáček
    Andante
    Adagio
    Moderato
    Allegro

INTERMISSION

Quintet in B minor, Op. 115. ......................... Brahms
    Allegro
    Adagio
    Andantino - Presto non assai,
    ma con sentimento
    Con moto

The Beethoven heard tonight is a first performance for the Houston Friends of Music.
The Janacek was last performed on March 13, 1974.
The Brahms was last performed on February 1, 1979.

Recordings available on many labels.
The New World String Quartet and Mr. Shifrin appear through the courtesy of IMG Artists.
Photographing and sound recording are prohibited.
We further request that audible paging devices not be used during performances.
Paging arrangements may be made with ushers.

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Empty seats are a terrible waste! Please pass this program on to a friend who might be interested in attending our series.

In its effort to present the finest chamber music, the Houston Friends of Music appreciates suggestions from the audience. If you have a suggestion regarding any aspect of the concert series, please relay it to a member of the board.
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New World String Quartet

Since its formation in 1977, the New World String Quartet has rapidly attained recognition as one of America's most prominent young quartets. In their appearances throughout the United States in prestigious chamber music and university concert series, and at festivals including Ravinia, Interlochen, "Music West" of Utah State University, and the San Louis Obispo Mozart Festival in California, they have performed repertoire ranging from the standard quartet literature to premieres of contemporary American works. Winner of the coveted 1979 Naumburg Chamber Music Award, and recently awarded a grant from the C. Michael Paul Residency Program administered by Chamber Music America, the New World Quartet enters into its fourth year as Quartet-in-Residence at Harvard University, presenting a series of concerts and master classes under the aegis of the Blodgett Chamber Music Series. Recent and current engagements include appearances in New York, Boston, Honolulu, at the Library of Congress, University of Illinois and UCLA, and on the Chamber Music Society series of Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Dallas, Houston and Phoenix. In addition, they present series of concerts at the University of Michigan and in Grand Rapids and Detroit.

DAVID SHIFRIN

Soloist, chamber musician and recording artist, David Shifrin, is quickly becoming one of America's most sought after clarinetists. He is currently professor at the University of Southern California. As a chamber musician David Shifrin frequently performs with the world's great chamber ensembles. This season includes performances with the New World Quartet in Dallas, Houston and Tulsa. He has held the position of principal clarinet with several of our great orchestras. He is currently the Music Director of Chamber Music Northwest, the nationally acclaimed chamber music festival in Portland, Oregon.

PROGRAM NOTES

QUARTET in A Major, Op. 18 No. 5.................Beethoven

Written under the very marked influence of the Master of Salzburg, this Quartet was considered by a biographer as "an homage to Mozart's ghost." Freshness and clearness are its constant qualities.

An extremely simple motif serves as a generating design for the first movement; the diatonic scale descends from A Major in which the staccato, the groupetti and sforzandi give a prancing character to the piece. A beautiful melody - happy and easy - succeeds the energetic and shining start. The development and recapitulation confirm to established conventions.

The Menuetto and Trio make up a simple movement of soft and reflective tenderness; the very expressive theme of the Trio belongs to a style of melody which Beethoven loved and used often - these styles of the variations in the Sonata Op. 26 for piano, for instance.

The Andante cantabile consists of a theme and five variations. Beethoven definitely took for models the variations of the Quartet in A by Mozart and Haydn Emperor Quartet.

The finale opens with a nonchalant and easy going charm which is neither artistically conventional nor yet in Beethoven's character. The principal motif, with no expressive value, is an excellent quartet theme. Like those of Haydn, the theme's brevity and slender vitality make it a perfectly suited subject for the lively exchange of questions and answers which constitute the
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primitive "quartet style." The second theme is completely different - it seems the artist is ashamed of having engaged in a shiny and purely exterior distraction. He recovered quickly and seasoned his mind with simple emotional inspiration.

From notes by Philippe Androit

QUARTET No. 2 "Intimate Letters" .•...•..••..•.•.•.•. ·

Apart from a lost work written in 1880, the String Quartets Nos. 1 and 2 are Janáček's only works in this genre. These two late masterpieces are remarkable achievements in at least three respects: their mastery of the medium for Janáček's own purposes, which are both dramatic and contemplative and most of all intimate in expression; secondly in their wonderful fusion and synthesis of all these elements that constitute the composer's personal style (the Moravian folk idioms, the speech inflexions, the haunting reiterations, the sudden extreme); and last of all the triumphal assertion of youth in age: "Youth is eternal! It is spring. I am not afraid to live - to open the eyes! Life is young! Life is beautiful!"

The above quotation points to the driving force behind all the late works. At age 73, Janáček wrote to Kamilla Styoesslova: "...for the last eleven years, and without even suspecting it, you have been my protectress from every conceivable point of view....Wherever there is warmth of pure sentiment, sincerity, truth and ardent love in my compositions, you are the source of it!" Kamilla was 38 years younger than Janáček. He first met her in 1915; two years later a deep rapport began to develop, and by 1928 the relationship had exploded into ardent physical passion.

The Second String Quartet is a sequel to the first. The music is addressed to Kamilla and in that sense is as "personal" a quartet as has ever been written. The original subtitle was "Love Letters," but was later changed to "Intimate Letters (pages)." The original intention was to use a viola d'amore instead of a modern viola, and the frequent marking sul ponticello may be interpreted as a desire to suggest the tone of the older instrument.

One does not need to know the background to recognize that Janáček's inspiration is at its highest here. The work is rich in ideas of great poignancy, the first of which is virtually a motto, for in various forms it is presented in all four movements. The opening movement may be described as a free rondo, the second an application of the variation principle. Of the third movement, Janáček wrote to his loved one: "Today I have succeeded in writing a piece in which the earth begins to tremble....Here I can find a place for my most beautiful melodies." And of the finale, then unwritten: "It shall reflect the anguish that I feel about you."

Hugh Ottaway

CLARINET QUINTET in B minor, Op. 115 .•...•..•..••..•..••. Johannes Brahms

It is not primarily as a master tone-colorist that Brahms is regarded by most music lovers. Yet, time and again throughout his oeuvre, a gift for subtle instrumental shadings is bound to strike the listener. Revealing in itself is the fact that the three instruments Brahms most frequently favored were the horn, the clarinet and the cello, for richness rather than brilliance is the characteristic of Brahmsian sonority, and these three are the warmest in tone of the brasses, the woodwinds and the strings, respectively.

The most immediately astonishing thing about the Clarinet Quintet is its subtlety and comprehensively unified thematic structure. There is an abundance of mellifluous tunes to delight the ear, yet every one of them has its roots in the very first three measures of the work. The gently undulating 16th-note figures of the first two measures, and the more sustained dipping phrase of the third, provide starting points for at least three distinguishable but interrelated thematic networks that extend their combined influence over all four movements.

Key relations are at least as crucial an element in classical musical forms as thematic organization and in this area, too, those first few measures cast a long shadow over the entire structure of the Quintet. Melodically and harmonically, the beginning of the theme can be understood just as well in D Major as B minor. The ambiguity - far from conclusively resolved in favor of the home B minor in the course of the third and fourth measures - is reflected in the unconventional tonal treatment of the subordinate theme. This confidently flowing melody, introduced by clarinet and
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second violin in octaves, makes its first appearance normally in D, but then in the recapitulation, it
eschews the "textbook" B minor in favor of G Major, as though it existed in a cloudless tonic-
dominant world of major-key relations quite separate from the drooping minor inflections of the
home key. The pathos of this consummate touch of dramatic irony can only be heightened by the
inevitable return to B minor. But the reestablishment of the tonic comes so close to the end of the
movement that equilibrium demands the use of the same keynote for the second movement and the
sense of a pair of complementary tonal centers is again enhanced by the third movement's oscillation
between the same poles of D Major and B minor.
Sir Donald Tovey remarked that the influence of Schubert upon Brahms is far greater than
the combined influences of Bach and Beethoven. Brahms had edited Schubert's Unfinished Sym
phony for the Leipzig complete edition of Schubert's music. Schubert similarly emphasized the
keys of D Major and G Major, only the other way around, at the same junctures in its (the Un
finished) first movement. Each is a third away from the home of B minor. Brahms shares with
Schubert the lyrical predilection for keys related by a third in contrast to Beethoven's more
straightforward dynamic taste for fifth-related keys. Brahms is, however, furthest from all in
fluences in the extraordinary suppleness and freedom of his rhythm. At the end of the finale the
second phrase from the work's main theme is twice its original length. That simple blend of
rhythmic inventiveness and taut thematic organization crowns the Quintet with a sense at once of
inevitability and of mystery.

Notes from the Music of Johannes Brahms by Bernard Jacobson

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