TWENTY-SIXTH SEASON
EIGHTH CONCERT

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and
Shepherd School of Music

PRESENT THE

Fitzwilliam String Quartet

Daniel Zisman - violin
Jonathan Sparey - violin
Alan George - viola
Ioan Davies - cello

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 1986
Hamman Hall 8:00 P.M. Rice University
PROGRAM

THURSDAY, APRIL 3, 1986

Quartet Op. 18, No. 6 in B flat minor. ................. Beethoven
Allegro con brio
Adagio ma non troppo
Scherzo (Allegro)
La Malinconia (Adagio), leading to
Allegretto quasi Allegro

Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122. ................. Shostakovich
Introduction (Andantino)
Scherzo (Allegretto)
Recitativo (Adagio)
Etude (Allegro)
Humoresque (Allegro)
Elegy (Adagio)
Finale (Moderato)

INTERMISSION

Quartet in D minor, Op. 56 - "Voces Intimae" .......... Sibelius
Andante - Allegro molto moderato
Vivace
Adagio di molto
Allegretto (ma pesante)
Allegro

The Beethoven was last performed in this series in 1970.
The Shostakovich heard tonight is a first performance for the Houston Friends.
The Sibelius was last performed in 1980.

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England’s Fitzwilliam String Quartet has been heralded throughout the world for its exceptional quality and superior ensemble. Annual tours take the quartet to major music centers and festivals throughout Europe, Great Britain, North America and Australia. Although its repertoire is firmly based on the Viennese classics, the Fitzwilliam has garnered the greatest international recognition for its quintessential interpretations of the string quartets of Dmitri Shostakovich, both through their recordings and through their unique live performances of the Quartet Cycle in England and North America.

Recipients of the Grand Prix du Disque for its first recording, the Fitzwilliam has received further honors for subsequent recordings of Franck, Delius and Sibelius. Having also recorded the Borodin 1st and 2nd Quartets, the Brahms Clarinet Quintet and Wolf’s Italian Serenade, the quartet is scheduled to record within the next three seasons the entire Beethoven cycle, and the Shostakovich Piano Quintet, with Vladimir Ashkenazy as the soloist for the Decca label. Recent United States tours have included performances at Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Frick Collection, the 92nd St. Y, Ambassador Auditorium, San Francisco Performances and Wolf Trap, and the chamber music societies of Buffalo, Dallas, Detroit, Phoenix and Salt Lake City. Their current U. S. schedule includes performances on the Great Performers Series at Lincoln Center and at the chamber music societies of Houston, San Antonio, Vancouver and Miami. Teachers and artists-in-residence of the University of York, England, the Fitzwilliam are also affiliate artists at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania.

PROGRAM NOTES

Op. 18 No. 6 in B flat major................. LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

The first movement is a splendid example of Beethoven in a good humour. The initial theme is long and makes great play with a chirpy motif. The second subject has a slightly lilting gait destroyed by some mock-intense harmonies at the cadences. The development sees some predictable, but no less amusing, jokes in the manner of Haydn. The slow movement is also eighteenth century in attitude, decorative rather than deeply emotional. But the scherzo is an extremely sophisticated movement in its deft use of cross-rhythm (puzzle: where does the first beat come? Easier to answer with a score than without). The finale begins with a slow introduction. Its melancholy is perhaps that of the young lover (Goethe’s Werther?) who is still confident enough of eventual felicity. Certainly the succeeding quicker section is one of Beethoven’s more contented and straightforward, and no amount of melancholic interruption can do more than delay the happy ending.
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Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

The eleventh quartet was composed in 1966 and dedicated to the memory of Vassily Petrovich Shirinsky, who, as second violinist of the Beethoven String Quartet, had taken part in the first performances of virtually all this work's predecessors. Not surprisingly, the character of the music is predominantly elegiac, but in a rather different way to what one might normally expect of a memorial piece. Apart from the *Elegy* there is little trace of the sorrow or tragedy which one naturally associates with death; instead the music has a strangely withdrawn, almost whimsical feeling which in the end is deeply touching. In this way it strongly resembles the seventh quartet, which arose out of similar circumstances, and for which the composer had a special affection. Those who know Shostakovich only through his large-scale symphonies will find here an aspect of his musical personality which might mildly surprise them.

The quartet takes the form of a short suite of seven continuous movements; the texture is as simple as could be imagined, being, for the most part, no more than straightforward melody with accompaniment. The danger of diffuseness is avoided by basing the whole work on a very small number of thematic ideas, so that all the movements bear a strong relationship to each other - though in a more subtle way than is at first apparent. So although this is not a work on which Shostakovich's powers of composition should ultimately be judged, its peculiar haunting quality - and its unquestionable sincerity - make it an experience of memorable significance.

“Voces Intimae” - Quartet in D minor, Op. 56

JEAN SIBELIUS

In the light of those few works by which Sibelius is best known to the general concert-goer (e.g. “Finlandia,” Symphony No. 2, the violin concerto), it is not surprising that during his maturity he composed only one full-scale chamber work. Probably he felt most at home with the full orchestral palette at his disposal. If the string writing in “Voces Intimae” is always highly idiomatic and well-conceived (he was himself a first-rate violinist), it has to be admitted that not always is one conscious of that remote, faintly chilling atmosphere so peculiar to Sibelius. But intimate voices are a long way removed from Nordic legend, and so in composing this piece, Sibelius probably realized that he had created something unique (for him) and that having used the medium in this way he could never successfully return to it again.

One of the most striking characteristics of this work is the very real sense of inward communion between the four ‘voices,’ and this is evident right from the start as violin and cello softly ruminate on what course the music should take. The main *Allegro* is in fairly simple sonata-form, but with characteristically blurred outlines. Nonetheless, the two main subject-groups are clearly distinguishable, the first being made up of a number of short germ

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cells, while the second is more overtly lyrical. The chorale-like conclusion of this movement leads straight into the ensuing Vivace, which immediately sounds like the more familiar Sibelius, with its rustling string writing (it is built almost entirely on material from the preceding movement). This fleet, shadowy piece is over in a flash, and the Adagio quickly suggests more serious matters. The lush harmony and scoring of much of this movement looks back to the elegiac type of slow music for strings which was so common with the late nineteenth-century Scandinavian composers - e.g. Grieg, Svendsen, and the younger Sibelius himself. Yet at the same time, he seems to be striving hard towards that elevated objectivity which flowers so sublimely in the Largo of Symphony No. 4, in which the soul appears to be groping to find itself. The fourth movement sets off as a heavy-footed sherzo, but soon settles into that peculiarly hypnotic monotony which is so characteristic and which conceals the underlying build-up of tension, so that the sustained climax which results is truly menacing in its unexpected power. From first to last, the finale is a thrilling moto perpetuo, which brings to mind the last of Sibelius’ four orchestral legends (Lemminkainen’s Return), depicting the hero’s adventurous journey home from Tuonela (“the land of Death, the Hell of Finnish Mythology” - “Kalevala,” Runo XIV.

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Wednesday, January 29, 1986............. Musical Offering
Wednesday, February 19, 1986............. Kalichstein, Laredo, Robinson; Piano Trio
Tuesday, March 18, 1986.................. Muir String Quartet
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