



Houston Friends of Music
The Shepherd School of Music

Chamber 
 *Music*
Series 

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THE COLORADO STRING QUARTET

Stude Concert Hall Alice Pratt Brown Hall Rice University

February 7, 1995

8:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Quartet in G Major, Opus 76, No. 1

Allegro con spirito
Adagio sostenuto
Menuetto: Presto
Finale: Allegro ma non troppo

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Quartet No. 10 in A-flat Major, Opus 118

Andante
Allegretto serioso
Adagio
Attacca: Allegretto - Andante

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Quintet in G Major, Opus 111

Allegro non troppo ma con brio
Adagio
Un poco allegretto
Vivace, ma non troppo presto

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PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1
Franz Joseph Haydn

When one listens to one of the late string quartets of Haydn, such as Opus 76, No. 1, and contemplates the evolution of the string quartet in Haydn's hands, a natural question arises: how did it all begin? As one might guess, the composition of the first string quartet was fortuitous. In 1775, while at Weinzierl, in the castle of Baron Fürnberg, Haydn composed a piece for four musicians who happened to be there — two violinists (Haydn was one of them), a violist, and a cellist. The amateur string player is thus assured that the very origins of the string quartet support a domestic environment and an impromptu mood. Between the earliest opus and the Opus 76, No. 1, composed in 1796, lie seventy-four of the eighty-three string quartets Haydn produced, each seemingly in a steady line of stylistic and harmonic development.

In the first movement, *Allegro con spirito*, the introductory chords, short and decisive, contrast with the flowing legato mood of nearly everything that follows. Musical introductions always seem to call attention to what follows by contrast rather than by similarity. The cello begins the first theme and soon, one by one, each instrument picks it up and relays it on. The stage soon is dominated by the first violin's uninterrupted eighth notes which lead to emphatic unison passages. The canonic intermingling of voices is prominent in the development and contrasts with the more paced and stately measures in this section.

In the elegant *Adagio sostenuto* the elegaic theme which soars in majestic chords leads to a lively dialogue between the first violin and the cello. Tension of an unusual nature is produced by prolonged periods of syncopated thirty-second notes by the first violin. Later, the second violin briefly joins in this off-beat rhythm. The tension resolves and the movement ends in a mood of resignation.

The *Menuetto* is much more like the first movement than the movement which preceded it. Marked *presto*, it is more of a scherzo than a minuet; its rapid, light quarter notes are jolted by *fortissimo* bursts of eighth notes. In the trio, the arpeggios by the first violin against a background of pizzicato accompaniment create a mood of clear, open fun.

In the *Finale*, marked *Allegro, ma non troppo*, the triplets, which are in almost every measure, create a rhythmic sense that continues from beginning to end and are used in many ways — as pick-up notes, as theme, as counter-theme, and as transitions. Against this rhythmic homogeneity, there is a constant variance between major and minor. The long coda ends the quartet decisively and happily.

This is the fifth time this work has been performed in a Friends of Music concert; it was last played by the Classical String Quartet in February of 1990.

Program note by Jack B. Mazou

String Quartet No. 10 in A-flat Major, Op. 118
Dmitri Shostakovich

Shostakovich was a mature composer before he began writing string quartets, writing his first (Op. 49) in 1938, the year after his Fifth Symphony. Perhaps he found some relief from political expectations in the more intimate form, for he completed fifteen quartets before he died. In the summer of 1964, just before the ouster of Krushchev as premier, Shostakovich composed his ninth and tenth string quartets. He had just finished his Symphony No. 13, which contained settings of poems by Yevgeni Yevtushenko, one of which was the famous "Babi Yar," which memorialized the Nazi massacre of Russian Jews. After the quartets, he wrote the symphonic poem "The Execution of Stepan Rapin," which also set a text by Yevtushenko, this one about a seventeenth-century Cossack hero. In contrast to these programmatic works, the Tenth Quartet is abstract and formally balanced. But it is dedicated to the composer Moisei Vainberg, a Polish Jew who fled to the Soviet Union after the Nazi invasion of Poland.

The first movement, an *Andante* in A-flat major, is marked *piano* throughout. V. Shirinsky, violinist of the Beethoven String Quartet who premiered the work, wrote that this movement "suggests subdued anxiety, with an undercurrent of mystery." Playing alone, the first violin states the main theme, a hesitant combination of staccato and legato motifs that manages to touch all twelve notes. The lower strings take over with quietly flowing material, until the first violin brings back the opening theme. Tentative staccato notes on the viola accompany the cello, who introduces the simple second theme. The first violin plays the twisting third theme, and we are soon back to the fluid lower strings and the recapitulation. There is no development section, but the recapitulation is spiced by the addition of triplet passages played over the bridge (*sul ponticello*).

In contrast to the first movement, the *Allegretto furioso* is loud, jagged, and later, furiously frantic. Two themes are developed with increasing aggressiveness and insistence; sometimes the upper strings join against the lower strings in competing blocks.

A more peaceful mood returns with the *Adagio*, a melancholy passacaglia in A minor. The theme is repeated more or less exactly by the cello, four times in the high register, then twice in the low. After the first statement of the theme, the first violin elaborates a counter-melody while the middle voices fill in the harmony. The first violin eventually takes the theme and returns it to the cello in the major key, after which the viola just gets started on the theme before fading away as the movement subsides into sustained notes.

Without a break, the cello and the first violin still holding an A flat and C, the *Allegretto* begins with a bouncy, ironic theme in the viola. The rondo-like movement continues to a *pianissimo* passage in which the viola plays a lyric theme accompanied by droning

dissonances in the other strings. After the opening theme returns, the second violin, viola, and cello join in octaves with another quiet theme while the first violin plays pizzicato figures. Then the rondo theme returns in the cello, and the movement grows louder and more agitated. At the climactic return of the rondo theme, played *fortissimo* in the upper strings, the cello recalls the theme from the passacaglia. Eventually, the quiet mood returns, and with it themes from the first movement. The quartet ends softly after a delicate final hint of the rondo theme.

This is the first performance of this work in a Friends of Music concert.

Program note by Edward Doughtie

Quintet in G Major, Op. 111 Johannes Brahms

Melvin Berger writes that when Mozart added a viola to the string quartet, he "vastly increased the harmonic possibilities and exposed new scoring and grouping opportunities," as well as new expressive possibilities. Beethoven and Mendelssohn also explored the viola quintet, but Brahms's efforts in the form are the most successful after Mozart's.

The second of Brahms's viola quintets, the G major quintet was written in 1890. In a letter to his publisher accompanying this quintet, Brahms announced his wish to retire. Despite this stated intention, the composition contains no element of weariness. Indeed, Brahms had several more masterpieces in him, including the sonatas for clarinet or viola and the Clarinet Quintet Op. 115.

The first movement opens in a grand manner, with the violins and violas creating a dramatic background against which the cello asserts the bold first theme. Symphonic in spirit, the thematic material is actually derived from material that had originally been intended for a fifth symphony. Two themes follow, introduced, respectively, by the violas and the second violin. There is an involved and complicated development, followed, after the recapitulation, by a passionate coda.

Brahms's violinist friend Joseph Joachim characterized the *Adagio* that follows as "profound, concise." The first viola introduces the principal theme in the movement, which undergoes a number of variations. The final statement of the theme is preceded by a cadenza for the first viola.

In three-four time, the third movement, *Un poco Allegretto*, is waltz-like. Beginning in a wistful G minor, the movement modulates into G major with a middle section characterized by a gentle dialogue between the violas and the violins. There is a return to the opening thematic material followed by a delicate coda in G major.

The last movement, *Finale: Allegro energico*, is in the form of a vigorous Hungarian dance known as the *csárdás*. The first viola announces the principal theme. A motif characterized by rising and falling arpeggios is introduced by the first violin. Development of the

themes is humorous, and the work concludes with a vigorous statement of the dance-like principal theme.

This is the third performance of this work in a Friends of Music concert; it was last played by the Fine Arts String Quartet with Kim Kashkashian in December of 1987.

Program note by Kent D. Coleman

The Colorado String Quartet

In a ten-day period in 1983, the Colorado String Quartet made history with the receipt of chamber music's two highest honors: the Naumberg Chamber Music Award and First Prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition. Since that time it has been praised for its musical integrity, impassioned playing, and dynamic finesse. Currently residing in the New York area, the quartet appears regularly in major halls around the globe, including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center in Washington, and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. They have been featured on radio and television programs in Europe and America, including the National Public Radio series "Performance Today." Their recordings include CDs of Brahms, Beethoven, and Mozart. They have premiered compositions by Ezra Laderman, Karel Husa, George Tsontakis, and Jan Krzywicki. The quartet has held teaching residencies at Swarthmore and Skidmore Colleges and at Philadelphia's New School of Music. They are currently Music Directors of the Soundfest Chamber Music Festival and Institute of String Quartets in Falmouth, Massachusetts.

Guest violist Maria Lambros Kannen, a native of Missoula, Montana, has performed as a chamber musician throughout the world. She was a founding member of the prize-winning Meliora String Quartet, and was a member of the Ridge String Quartet, whose recording of the Dvorak Piano Quartet, Op. 87, with Rudolf Firkusny, won a 1993 Grammy award. She has performed with Houston's DaCamera Society, and has played as guest violist with the Brentano, Muir, and Borromeo Quartets. An active teacher, Ms. Lambros Kannen has served on the faculties of Florida State University and the Longy School of Music.

Julie Rosenfeld plays a violin made by Giovanni Baptista Guadagnini c.1750. Guadagnini began his career in Piacenza, then worked in Cremona, Milan, Parma and in Turin. Deborah Redding's violin was made by Joannes Franciscus Pressenda, a pupil of Storioni in Turin c.1840. The viola played by Francesca Martin Silos is by Marten Cornelissen in 1989. Diane Chaplin plays a Thomas Dodd cello made in London c.1800.