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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1998, 8:00 P.M.

## THE AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

Peter Winograd, Violin • Laurie Carney, Violin  
Daniel Avshalomov, Viola • David Geber, Cello

### PROGRAM

*WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)*

*Quartet in B-Flat Major, K. 458, "Hunt"*

Allegro vivace assai • Menuetto: Moderato

Adagio • Allegro assai

*DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)*

*Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 110*

Largo • Allegro • Allegretto

Largo • Largo

... *Intermission* ...

*LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)*

*Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2*

Allegro • Adagio molto

Allegretto • Finale: Presto

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QUARTET IN B-FLAT  
MAJOR, K. 458, "HUNT"

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

"To my dear friend, Haydn! A father who has concluded to send his children into the world at large thought best to entrust them to the protection and guidance of a famous man who fortunately happened to be his best friend as well. Behold here, famous man and dearest friend, my six children. They are, to be sure, the fruit of long and arduous work, yet some friends have encouraged me to assume that I shall see this work rewarded, to some extent at least, and this flatters me into believing that these children shall one day offer me some comfort. You yourself, dearest friend, have shown me your approval of them during your last sojourn in this capital. Your praise above all encourages me to recommend them to you and makes me hope that they shall not be entirely unworthy of your good will. May it please you, therefore, to receive them kindly and to be their father, their guide, and their friend. From this moment I surrender to you all rights to them, but beg you to regard with leniency the faults which may have remained hidden to the partial eye of their father, and notwithstanding their shortcomings, to preserve your noble friendship for him who loves them so dearly."

It was with these words that Mozart dedicated his six greatest string quartets to his friend and mentor, Haydn. Just a few months previously, after a soirée which included a performance of the K. 458 quartet, Haydn told Leopold Mozart, "I assure you solemnly and as an honest man that I consider your son to be the greatest composer I have ever heard." Both statements reveal the admiration of one great musician for the other—admiration that is shared by subsequent generations of music lovers.

The B-Flat Quartet begins with a short theme resembling a horn call which has inspired the name "Hunt." Such an eponym has mnemonic use but hardly describes the movement's inexhaustible subtleties, inventions, and pleasures, for which one does not have to hunt at all, but which flow in uninterrupted elegance. Fragments of the first theme are the melodic and rhythmic nidus for subsequent subjects and development, giving the movement a sense of order and unity within its grace and effortlessness. Much of the movement

is a tightly woven skein of five notes suggested by the second measure of the movement. The more straightforward *Menuetto* which follows has the vitality of Haydn and the subtlety of Mozart. The elf-dance mood of the Trio section progressively enchants more and more until its final four measures which are pure tinsel. Like some instant friend, or suddenly revealed truth, the first few measures of the *Adagio* grab the listener in a compelling attraction whose vise-like grip holds tightly to the end. This slow rhapsodic movement, marked *piano* through most of it, is full of dark brooding introspection. The transitions are built from previous melodies, often with the cello as leading voice. Echoes of the initial theme recur unexpectedly, perhaps most effectively as a whisper just before the close of the movement. The *Allegro assai* is a fast-paced finale, full of unison phrases, jocular echoes, and subjects which nudge each other forward. The movement ends with a series of eighth notes reminiscent of the first notes of the quartet.

*This is the sixth performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played by the Tokyo Quartet in April 1987.*

Program note by Jack B. Mazow

QUARTET NO. 8,  
IN C MINOR, OP. 110

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

In 1960, Shostakovich was in Dresden, East Germany, composing music for the film "Five Days, Five Nights," which dealt with the suffering and final victory of the Russian people over Fascism. Apparently deeply affected by the destruction of Dresden, he composed his Eighth String Quartet in a period of three days, and dedicated it "To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War." But Shostakovich is reported to have said that he was "protesting against any sort of Fascism." And in his autobiography, *Testimony*, Shostakovich wrote: "I quote *Lady Macbeth*, the First and Fifth Symphonies. What does Fascism have to do with these? The Eighth is an autobiographical quartet." Shostakovich's signature appears as the first four notes in the first movement in musical notes which, by German musical convention, stand for D-S-C-H. Themes from many of his earlier compositions form the matrix for organizing his musical material.



With the first few notes of the first movement, *Largo*, one is immediately comfortable, using familiar tonalities as a criterion. However, the entire work is set firmly in the twentieth century. The sonorous first theme (taken from the First Symphony) is followed by a more chromatic, somewhat eerie melody (from the Fifth Symphony) on the violin and later on the cello. These soft, pleasing sounds are ended abruptly by the jarring, heavily accented *Allegro molto*, which follows without a break, as do all the movements. These sounds of war build to a climax which is taken from the Hebrew theme of the Piano Trio. The *Allegretto* provides contrast with a sad, ironic little waltz. It quotes the First Cello Concerto. The movement ends with a low note on the G string, without vibrato, stark and menacing. The fourth movement explodes in three loud chords which have been interpreted as bombs, gunfire, the knock on the door by the Gestapo or the KGB, or hearts breaking. Then comes the old Russian prisoner's song "Tormented by Heavy Bondage," and Katerina Izmailova's aria from Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* played high on the cello. The final *Largo* recapitulates the mood and some of the themes of the earlier movements and provides a muted elegy, which slowly dies away.

Although the Beethoven Quartet premiered the work, the Borodin quartet played this quartet in a private performance for the composer. Rostislav Dubinsky, the first violinist, wrote: "We finished the quartet and looked at Shostakovich. His head was hanging low, his face hidden in his hands. We waited. He didn't stir. We got up, quietly put our instruments away, and stole out of the room."

*This is the sixth performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played by the Tokyo String Quartet in April, 1996.*

Program note by Jack B. Mazow

## QUARTET IN E MINOR, OP. 59, NO. 2

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

In 1805 the Russian Ambassador to Vienna, Count (later to be Prince) Razumovsky, commissioned Beethoven to write a set of quartets, each of which was to incorporate music from his native country. It was probably he who supplied Beethoven with a printed collection of folk songs from Russia, the

*Sobranie Russkykh Narodnykh Pesen* for this purpose. Count Razumovsky had become Russia's ambassador to Vienna in 1790. In her account of the Congress of Vienna, Susan Alsop writes, "This remarkable man was the grandson of an illiterate Cossack peasant. His uncle, Alexsei, who had been taught to read and write by the village priest, became the lover of the Empress Elisabeth and probably married her (secretly...). A huge fortune and great estates were bestowed on him and on his brother Kyrill and these were inherited by Kyrill's sons [one of whom was the Count]. A great patron of the arts, he used his inheritance to form a fabulous collection of pictures and furniture which he housed in the palace he had bought and presented to his government to serve as the Russian embassy. A good amateur musician, he was a patron of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven." It was he who founded and supported the Schuppanzigh Quartet, first of the great string quartets, and he is said to have occasionally sat in for the second violinist.

In the six years since Beethoven had published his Opus 18 quartets, Napoleon's army had come and gone from Vienna, and Beethoven had struggled to come to terms with his deepening deafness, successfully weathering a suicidal depression. By 1805 he had completed his first version of *Fidelio*, the Fourth Symphony, and the Violin Concerto, as well as most of the "Appassionata" Sonata and the Fourth Piano Concerto. He started work on the quartets in the spring of 1806, finishing the set of three by the end of the year. They were not well received either by audience or performers. Indeed, even the most musically sophisticated were unprepared for his new vision of string quartet writing. This included increased intricacy of ensemble due in part to a much more equal distribution of material among all four instruments, as well as to the nature of the music itself, which was often fragmented, condensed, and rhythmically complex. It also included increased technical difficulties for each instrumentalist individually, partly due to an extension of the physical range employed for each instrument; and it presented the performer and audience with greatly expanded complexity of musical organization, straying ever further from the classic forms—all of which gave a symphonic scope to what had previously been a more restricted and modest *genre*. Beethoven's biographer, Thayer,



quotes several anecdotes describing the resentment inspired by these changes: a cellist who flung his score off the music stand and trampled on it; an audience that burst into laughter during a scherzo; and a musician who judged another movement to be "a patchwork by a madman." They were deemed "not generally comprehensible," "a waste of money," "not music," "crazy music." Also "very long and very difficult" as well as "deep in thought, well-worked out." Fortunately, it is the latter sentiment which ultimately prevailed.

The opening movement of Opus 59, No. 2, marked *Allegro*, is in sonata form. It starts out with two strong chords immediately followed by silence, then by three related subjects of sharply contrasting mood from which the fragmented melodic themes and vigorously exploited rhythmic elements of the movement are derived. The energy and tension of this movement stem from the alternation of a gentle 6/8 rhythm against slashing chords, silences, changes of rhythmic accent, sudden dynamic changes, and false harmonic cadences. The concise development section focuses on rhythmic elements and harmonic modulations. The coda, too, emphasizes primarily the rhythmic and harmonic material rather than the melodic so that the arrival of the second movement, *Molto adagio*, comes as an enormous contrast in mood. This beautiful and melodious movement was marked by Beethoven "to be played with great feeling." According to Czerny, Beethoven's student, inspiration came to the composer "when contemplating the starry sky and thinking of the music of the spheres." It too, is in sonata form, opening with an elegiac chorale richly harmonized in long, sustained, archaically harmonized chords. This chorale is developed in a variety of settings—as an aria, a march, and a musette; it ultimately peters out in a long, harmonically static coda.

The third movement, a Scherzo and Trio marked *Allegretto*, starts out as a three-legged waltz, stumbling and off-balance. It leads abruptly to the famous Russian folk tune, "Slava Bogu ne nebe, Slava!" ("Glory to God in Heaven, Glory!"), later used by many another composer, most notably Moussorgsky in the Coronation Scene of *Boris Godounov*. Beethoven plays with this cheerful, dance-like theme, giving it first to the viola, then

writing a set of three variations featuring each of the other instruments. Thereafter he allows the melody to accompany itself, turning it into a canon. Thus, this simple peasant tune cleverly contorts itself into a scholarly maze of dissonance which Beethoven, with sublime indifference, allows to play out before relieving the listener by a return to traditional, familiar harmony. We can only hope that with this display of contrapuntal mastery Razumovsky, at least, felt he had gotten his money's worth!

The final movement is a *Presto* in sonata rondo form which starts out in the wrong key, settling firmly into the "right" key of E minor only after a series of dramatic shifts through a variety of harmonic regions. It provides an immensely energetic and provocative finale—a furious gallop on horseback—to this varied and richly complex quartet.

*This is the tenth performance of this work on a Friends of Music program; it was last played by the Colorado Quartet in March 1993.*  
Program note © by Nora Avins Klein

## THE AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

In the seasons since its inception, the American String Quartet has reached a position of rare esteem in the world of chamber music. Annual tours have brought the American to virtually every important concert hall in Europe and North America. Renowned for fluent and definitive interpretations of a diverse repertory, the Quartet has received critical acclaim for its presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, and Mozart, and for collaborations with a host of distinguished artists.

The American has been resident quartet at the Aspen Festival since 1974 and at the Taos School of Music since 1979. Among the first to receive a National Arts Endowment grant for their activities on college campuses, the members of the American String Quartet have also maintained a commitment to contemporary music, resulting in numerous commissions and awards, among them three prizewinners at the Kennedy Center's Friedheim Awards.

The four musicians studied at the Juilliard School, where the Quartet was formed in 1974, winning the Coleman Competition and the



## PROGRAM NOTES

Naumburg Award that same year. After ten years on the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory (where they initiated the program of quartet studies), they accepted the position of Quartet-in-Residence at the Manhattan School of Music in 1984, and in 1992 were invited to become the resident ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Their Mozart Year performances were rewarded with an invitation to record the complete Mozart quartets for MusicMasters/Musical Heritage on a set of matched Stradivarius instruments, a project the Quartet completed in November 1997. Other recordings are available on the CRI, Nonesuch, New World, and MusicMasters labels.

## - NEXT CONCERT -

**BOSTON CHAMBER  
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Tuesday, March 10, 1998

MOZART:

Trio for Clarinet, Viola, and  
Piano in E-Flat, K. 498, "Kegelstatt"

DOHNANYI:

Sextet in C Major, Op. 37 (1935)

BRAHMS:

Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25

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- CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH, PIANO  
DECEMBER 4, 1997  
Mozart, Trio in E major for Violin,  
Cello and Piano  
Brahms, Piano Quintet in F minor
- AN EVENING OF MUSICAL JOKES  
APRIL 1, 1998  
Mozart, *Ein musikalischer Spass*  
(A Musical Joke)  
P.D.Q. Bach, Schlepptet in E major
- ROBERT SPANO, PIANO  
FEBRUARY 3, 1998  
Shostakovich, Trio No. 2 for Violin,  
Cello and Piano in E minor  
Dvořák, String Quintet in G major
- CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH, PIANO  
MAY 20, 1998  
Von Bose, Paraphrase from the  
opera *The Sorrows of Young Werther*  
Faure, Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor

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