

Emerson String Quartet

EUGENE DRUCKER, VIOLIN (1st in Debussy)

PHILIP SETZER, VIOLIN (1st in Tower, Shostakovich)

LAWRENCE DUTTON, VIOLA

DAVID FINCKEL, CELLO

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29, 2004

— PROGRAM —

Incandescent (2003)

JOAN TOWER (b. 1938)

Quartet in G Minor, Op.10 (1893)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement expressif

Très modéré - Très mouvementé et avec passion

— INTERMISSION —

Quartet No.9 in E-flat Major, Op.117 (1964)

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Moderato con moto

Adagio

Allegretto

Adagio

Allegro

(played without pause)

JOAN TOWER (b. 1938)

Incandescent

The word "incandescent" is not one that I would usually include in a title because it seems to be more poetic than what I am thinking about. My titles are usually more upfront and visceral, and in this case I would have preferred to call it "White Heat," but was outvoted by friends who found that title carried too many associations. (Titles are not easy for composers—especially for me.)

What I try to do in my music, and particularly in this piece, is to create a heat from within, so that what unfolds is not only motivated by the architecture of the piece (which I consider the most important goal), but also that each idea or phrase contains a strong "radiance" of texture and feeling about it. In other words, the complete "action" of rhythm, texture, dynamic, harmony, and register has a strong enough profile that it creates an identity with a "temperature," one felt rather than observed.

In "Incandescent," my third string quartet, basically five actions or ideas unfold, develop, interact and gradually change their "temperatures." They are a three-note collection that initially appears as an upper and lower neighbor to a central note at the very opening of the piece and that later turns around on itself repeatedly in the first violin; a repetitive, dense, held-in-place, and narrowly registered dissonant chord; a consonant arpeggiation that creates a "melody" distributed throughout the instruments; a climbing motive that initially outlines an octatonic scale (whole steps alternating with half steps) and later shifts into both whole-tone and chromatic scales; and, finally, wide leaps that first appear in the first violin and are subsequently picked up by the viola. The extended sixteenth-note passages that occur throughout, finally arriving at a virtuosic, Vivaldi-like cello solo, include all these motives in different guises and temperatures.

"Incandescent," which is in one movement and lasts about eighteen minutes, was a joint commission between the South Mountain Concerts and Bard College for the Emerson String Quartet, to whom it is dedicated with admiration and affection.

Program note © by Joan Tower

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Quartet in G Minor, Op. 10

The period around 1890 was a crucial time in Debussy's life. The composer had just returned to Paris after a two-year *Prix de Rome* residency in Italy and was eager to rid himself of the restraints of the academicians. One of the first works in which he struck a new artistic direction was the *Quartet in G Minor*, which, along with *L'Après midi d'un faune* from the same time, established what is called the Impressionist style in music. Its varied tonal effects, soulful beauty, and freedom of form and structure provide an excellent musical counterpart to the Impressionist paintings and Symbolist poetry of the time.

The opening notes of the first movement are of overriding importance. They make up the germ, the melodic cell, from which the entire quartet unfolds and grows. This germinal motif is a rather rough-sounding motto; rhythmically complex and melodically convoluted,

it zigzags back and forth within a comparatively limited *tessitura*. A distinguishing feature is the rapid three-note ornamental fillip at the central turning point.

Following the short motif and its repetition, three other melodies are heard. They come between restatements of the motif, each time, though, in a slightly different form. The various themes, and especially the opening motto, are then heard in an imaginative procession of transformed shapes and guises—now surging with great passion, now stated in stentorian splendor, now stretched and drawn out in length, now plaintively sung—until the movement races to its climactic resolution.

The second movement offers a profusion of sparkling tonal effects, led by the viola playing an obstinately repeated, quickened version of the motif. Above, beneath, and all around this ostinato figure, the other instruments furnish brilliant pizzicato flourishes and scintillating cross-rhythms. The cello brings this section to a close and establishes the murmuring accompaniment for the first violin playing the opening motif in leisurely augmentation. Sections of new and derived melodic material follow, including a rhythmically attractive pizzicato passage in which the original motto is transformed into five-beat meter. Then, just as the cello seems to be starting the murmuring accompaniment again, the movement fades away.

After false starts by the second violin and viola, the third movement starts with the first violin softly singing a languid melody that rocks gently back and forth in pitch. The viola next seizes one fragment of the melody and expands it into a slightly faster theme. Another theme, also introduced by the viola, includes the three-note figure of the opening motto. It is worked up to an impassioned climax before a return of the quiet rocking theme brings the movement to a subdued conclusion.

The introduction to the final movement, also based on the original motif, continues the quiet mood. The music grows somewhat more animated as the cello starts a fugue-like passage, using a further transformation of the germinal motif. The fast part of the last movement then starts with a rapid, cluster-of-notes theme in the viola. From the final notes of this theme, Debussy spins out another melody. The shared notes of both themes become the accompaniment for the motif, this time in grandiose elongation. A reminder of the opening theme of this movement leads to a coda and conclusion that provide a final, exciting glimpse of the considerably altered germinal motto.

Completed early in 1893, the *Quartet* was dedicated to the Ysaye Quartet, which gave the first performance in Paris on December 29, 1893.

Program notes by Melvin Berger from "Guide to Chamber Music," Publisher: Anchor/Doubleday.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

String Quartet No. 9 in E-Flat Major, Op. 117

Shostakovich's *Ninth Quartet* was written in 1964 and is dedicated to Irina Supinskaya, his third wife. His beloved first wife, Nina Varzar, whom he married in 1932, died in 1954 at the age of 43 and is memorialized in the heartbreaking *Seventh Quartet*. After Nina's death came a short, unhappy marriage to Margarita Kainova, a minor Party functionary. In 1962 he met and married the much younger Irina, an editor and literary scholar, who became his devoted companion in his last years.

This is a monumental work, almost half an hour long, but its progress seems like one uninterrupted gesture, from its mysterious opening to its heroic end. Themes grow one out of another, not restricted to particular movements. Rather, they appear at key moments throughout the five movements, which are played without pause.

The first movement is in "sonatina" form—i.e. a sonata with no central development section. Rather, the development is spread throughout all of the succeeding movements.

The second movement is the first of two *adagios*—dialogs of almost operatic intensity. Here, a long, rhapsodic violin solo responds to an expressive and somber viola melody.

The third and central movement is a *scherzo* whose arch-like form (ABCBA) mirrors the overall form of the quartet. At the return of the A section, the movement's interpenetration is illustrated to to astounding effect; over the recapitulation of the bouncy opening material an eerie foreshadowing of the next movement's theme is heard, as if in slow motion. This theme, developed as it is from material we have already heard, has the feeling of both echo and anticipation. The stark contrast between these simultaneous musical streams is frighteningly effective.

The fourth movement, an *adagio* like the second, begins with a liturgical, psalmodic-sounding theme owing more than a little to Mussorgsky, a composer to whom Shostakovich felt extremely close. This melody is punctuated by disturbing episodes in which it is recast in sharp, violently plucked chords.

The fifth and last movement is massive, twice as long as any of the other ones. It seems at first like a *scherzo* in ABA form. But the second A section ultimately evolves into a frantic and wildly complex fugue whose subject seems to synthesize all the quartet's melodies. In a long coda of cumulatively rising intensity, all of the quartet's elements are swept together towards an ecstatic conclusion.

Program note ©1999 by Paul Epstein

Emerson String Quartet

Acclaimed for its insightful performances, brilliant artistry and technical mastery, the Emerson String Quartet is one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles. The Quartet has amassed an impressive list of achievements: a brilliant series of recordings exclusively documented by Universal Classics/Deutsche Grammophon since 1987, six Grammy Awards including two unprecedented honors for Best Classical Album and complete cycles of the Bartók, Beethoven and Shostakovich string quartets performed in the major concert halls of the world. Today, the ensemble is lauded globally as a string quartet that approaches both classical and contemporary repertoire with equal mastery and enthusiasm.

The Quartet's 2003-2004 season continues to showcase its penchant for inventive programming. The Emerson explores the boundaries of spirituality in music with a three concert series as part of Lincoln Center's Great Performers Series. Featured repertoire will be Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross* and Bach's *Art of the Fugue* interwoven with the late Beethoven string quartets. In addition to its active performance schedule in the major concert halls of North America, the Quartet embarks on two special tours: to Europe in the winter of 2004 with stops in Barcelona, Frankfurt, Manchester, Freiburg, Linz and St. Gallen, followed by a tour to Asia in the spring of 2004 with concerts in Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

The quartet also celebrates its 25th consecutive season at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. This past summer audiences enjoyed its return to the Salzburg, Lucerne and Schubertiade Festivals as well as Aspen, Tanglewood and New York's Mostly Mozart. In the fall of 2002, the Emerson joined Stony Brook University as Quartet-in-Residence, coaching chamber music, giving master classes and providing instrumental instruction. Formed in 1976, the Emerson String Quartet took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson. Violinist Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer alternate in the first chair position and are joined by violist Lawrence Dutton and cellist David Finckel. The Quartet is based in New York City.

Violinist EUGENE DRUCKER, a founding member of the Emerson String Quartet, is also an active soloist. He has appeared with the major orchestras of North America and Europe. A graduate of Columbia University and the Juilliard School, where he studied with Oscar Shumsky, Mr. Drucker was concertmaster of the Juilliard Orchestra, with which he appeared as soloist several times. He made his New York debut as a Concert Artists Guild winner in the fall of 1976, after having won prizes at the Montreal Competition and the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels. Mr. Drucker has recorded the complete unaccompanied works of Bach, recently reissued by Parnassus Records, and the complete sonatas and duos of Bartók for Biddulph Recordings.

Mr. Drucker's violin is an Antonius Stradivarius (Cremona, 1686).

Violinist PHILIP SETZER began studying violin at the age of five with his parents, both violinists in the Cleveland Orchestra. At the Juilliard School he studied with Oscar Shumsky. In 1967, Mr. Setzer won second prize at the Meriwether Post Competition in Washington, D.C., and in 1976 received a Bronze Medal at the Queen Elisabeth International Competition in Brussels. He has appeared with many orchestras in North America and Europe. Additionally, Mr. Setzer has participated in the Marlboro Music Festival and has been a regular faculty member of the Isaac Stern Chamber Music Work-shops at Carnegie Hall and the Jerusalem Music Center. He also teaches as Visiting Professor of Violin and Chamber Music at SUNY Stony Brook and has given master classes at schools around the world. In April of 1989, Mr. Setzer premiered Paul Epstein's *Matinee Concerto*. This piece was written for and dedicated to Mr. Setzer.

Mr. Setzer's violin is a Samuel Zygmuntowicz (Brooklyn, 1999).

LAWRENCE DUTTON has collaborated with many of the world's great performing artists, including Isaac Stern, Mstislav Rostropovich, Oscar Shumsky, Menahem Pressler, Lynn Harrell, Joseph Kalichstein and Misha Dichter among others. He has also performed as guest artist with numerous chamber music ensembles such as the Juilliard and Guarneri Quartets, the Beaux Arts Trio and the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio. Mr. Dutton has appeared as soloist with many American and European orchestras including those of Germany, Belgium, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. He has also appeared as guest artist at the music festivals of Aspen, Santa Fe, Ravinia and Chamber Music Northwest, and has collaborated with the late Isaac Stern in the International Chamber Music Encounters both at Carnegie Hall and in Jerusalem.

Mr. Dutton's viola is a P.G. Mantegazza (Milan, 1796).

Cellist DAVID FINCKEL's recent solo engagements have taken him to countries around the world and in the United States to distinguished series in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and other major cities. Last summer he performed complete Beethoven sonata cycles with pianist Wu Han at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and Chamber Music Northwest. In May 2000 Finckel and Wu Han made their third recital appearance at London's Wigmore Hall. This season, Finckel records John Harbison's *Cello Concerto* and performs new works composed for him by Bruce Adolphe and Augusta Read Thomas. Finckel is a cofounder of ArtistLed, the first musician-directed and Internet-based classical recording company. Mr. Finckel is a regular member of the faculty of the Isaac Stern Chamber Music workshops at Carnegie Hall and the Jerusalem Music Center. This summer he will give master classes at the Aspen Music School.

Mr. Finckel's cello is a Samuel Zygmuntowicz (Brooklyn, 1993).

The Emerson String Quartet records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon.
Visit the Emerson Quartet website at www.emersonquartet.com

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with
IMG Artists,
825 Seventh Avenue,
New York, NY 10019
www.imgartists.com

