

*ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET*

GEOFF NUTTALL, VIOLIN  
BARRY SHIFFMAN, VIOLIN  
LESLEY ROBERTSON, VIOLA  
CHRISTOPHER COSTANZA, CELLO

WITH TODD PALMER, CLARINETS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2005

- PROGRAM -

*String Quartet in D-Major, KV 575*  
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Allegretto

Andante

Menuetto (Allegretto)

Allegretto

*String Quartet in A-minor, Op. 41, No. 1*  
ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Introduzione - Andante espressivo - Allegro

Scherzo - Presto - Intermezzo

Adagio

Presto - Moderato

- INTERMISSION -

*The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*

OSVALDO GOLIJOV (1960- )

Composed in: 1994

Prelude: Calmo, sospeso

I. Agitato - Con fuoco - Maestoso - Senza misura, oscillante

II. Teneramente - Ruvido - Presto

III. Calmo, sospeso - Allegro pesante

Postlude: Lento, liberamente

TODD PALMER, CLARINETS

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)  
*String Quartet in D major, KV 575 (1789)*

In April, 1789, Mozart set out for Berlin and Potsdam in the company of Prince Lichnowsky of Vienna, at the prince's request. The purpose of the trip was at least in part an audience with Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, the same cellist-king for whom Haydn had written his opus 50 quartets two years earlier. After a ten-day stay at court, Mozart left with a goodly sum in gold coin and a commission to write six string quartets and six piano sonatas. He started to compose immediately en route back to Vienna and by the end of the month had completed the quartet we hear tonight. Two more were completed a year later; Mozart died before getting to the last three and before sending any to the king. They are filled with gorgeous writing for the cello - uniquely so in the canon of classical string quartets - and are known as the "cello quartets" to performers, and as the "Prussian Quartets" to musicologists.

K. 575 is, overall, in concertante form, that is, essentially a duet for the first violin and the cello. That is not to say the inner voices are neglected, as indeed the viola and second violin play important roles expanding and emphasizing thematic ideas and taking part in the subtle counterpoint woven into all four movements, like a miniature string orchestral accompaniment.

The first movement, Allegretto, starts with a sunny, pastoral theme in the first violin, quickly passed off to the viola; the cello does not play at all for the first eight bars and does not have a solo for the first 22 bars. Thereafter, and for the remainder of the four movements there are a truly remarkable number of solo passages for the cello, some of these requiring a level of virtuosity which tells us a great deal about King Frederick II's aspirations.

The Andante movement is an aria in form and spirit - a lovely song for all four instruments, emphasizing cello and violin. The Menuetto provides the cellist with a respite - the two upper and two lower voices parallel each other for most of the section, while the Trio, in contrast, is entirely in the cellist's hands. The final Allegretto, which starts out with a simple melody in the cello played with unfurrowed brow, suddenly breaks out in bravura passages growing contrapuntally rich, making use of a variety of complicated techniques. Mozart clearly intended that this music be care-free and fun to play, but not simple or easy to play.

*Program note* © Nora Avins Klein, September, 2003

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)  
*String Quartet in A minor, Op. 41, No.1*

Other than receiving piano lessons from a local organist, Robert Schumann had no formal training as a musician and was, for some time, as interested in literature as he was in music. He was the youngest of five children born into a family of nonmusicians, in Zwickau, Germany. His father owned a bookstore, giving the young boy access to the great writers of the past as well as those of his own day. Schumann also became proficient at improvising on the piano and even did some composing. When the boy was fifteen years old, his father died of complications of mental illness---a malady that would later claim the son. His mother, determined that Robert should study for a career in law, sent him to Leipzig at the age of eighteen. This was perhaps the wrong thing to do, considering her goal, as there were too many musical, as well as literary enticements in Leipzig---concerts at the Gewandhaus, music services at St. Thomas (Bach's old church), performances by the choral society, etc. Summoning friends to read Goethe, Shakespeare and Byron, and discussing music, life, and aesthetics well into the night became the order of the day for Schumann. Around this time he began to lean toward a career as a pianist, studying with Friedrich Wieck, whose daughter Clara, eventually one of the best concert pianists in Europe, was to become his future wife. Several years later he sustained an injury to one of his fingers and turned to composition as a career.

Anyone who studies the life and work of Robert Schumann will be struck by the fact that, as an adult, he composed exclusively in one genre at a time. From 1831 until 1839 he wrote pieces for solo piano. The year of 1840 bore only songs, 1841 saw the completion of his first symphonies, and 1842 was the year in which he composed all of his chamber music---three string quartets, a piano quintet and a piano quartet. Schumann was in the forefront of the Romantic style. He felt strongly that, as a composer, it was important that he break away from the rules of structure inherent in eighteenth-century classical music, and he stated, "I am affected by everything that goes on in the world---politics, literature, people---I think it over in my own way, and then I long to express my feelings in music."

However, in preparing to write his string quartets, he admits to having carefully studied the quartets of Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn, as well as the contrapuntal techniques of Bach. In the string quartets of Op. 41, he stays close to traditional form. The three string quartets are dedicated to Felix Mendelssohn whom Schumann greatly admired.

The String Quartet in A minor, No.1, begins with an introduction that is highly contrapuntal though this first section was added after the rest of the movement had been completed. A brief transition leads to the Allegro, consisting of two lengthy and closely related themes. The Scherzo has the lightness of a Mendelssohn scherzo while it alternates constantly between minor and major keys. The Adagio begins with a recitative played by the cello and answered by the first violin. A ballad-like melody unfolds, with added agitation in the middle section provided by the viola accompaniment.

The main theme for the Presto consists of a short-short-long rhythmical figure, which is followed by a descending run. This pattern is stated and elaborated upon by all instruments in turn. A slow bagpipe-like section is followed by quiet chords, the first theme softly returns, and there is a concluding race to the finish.

All three of Schumann's string quartets were premiered as a present for his wife Clara on her twenty-third birthday, September 13, 1842.

*Program notes © by Margaret Bragg, October, 2005*

OSVALDO GOLIJOV (1960-)

*The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac The Blind (1994)*

Eight centuries ago Isaac the Blind, the great kabbalist rabbi of Provence, dictated a manuscript in which he asserted that all things and events in the universe are the product of combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. "Their root is in a name, for the letters are like branches, which appear in the manner of flickering flames, mobile, yet nevertheless linked to the coal."

Isaac's lifelong devotion to his art is as striking as that of string quartets and klezmer musicians. In their search for something that arises from tangible elements but transcends them, they are all reaching a state of communion. Gershom Scholem, the pre-eminent scholar of Jewish mysticism, says, "Isaac and his disciples do not speak of ecstasy, of a unique act of stepping outside oneself in which human consciousness abolishes itself. *Debhequth* (communion) is a constant state, nurtured and renewed through meditation." How else would one explain the strange life that Isaac led, or the way in which groups of four souls dissolve their individuality into single, higher organisms, string quartets? How else would one explain the chain of klezmer generations that, while blessing births,

weddings, and burials, were trying to discover the melody that could be set free from itself and become air, spirit, *ruakh*?

The movements of this work sound to me as if they were written in three of the different languages spoken by the Jewish people throughout our history. This somehow reflects the composition's epic nature. I hear the prelude and the first movement in the most ancient, Aramaic; the second movement is in Yiddish, the rich and fragile language of a long exile; the third movement and postlude are in sacred Hebrew.

The prelude and the first movement simultaneously explore two prayers in different ways: the quartet plays the first part of the central prayer of the High Holidays, "We will observe the mighty holiness of this day," while the clarinet dreams the motifs from "Our Father, Our King." The second movement is based on "The Old Klezmer Band," a traditional dance tune, which is surrounded here by contrasting manifestations of its own halo. The third movement was written before all the others. It is an instrumental version of *K'vakarat*, a work that I wrote a year earlier than *Dreams and Prayers* for the Kronos Quartet and cantor Misha Alexandrovich. This movement, together with the postlude, bring to conclusion the prayer left open in the first movement.

*Program notes © by Osvaldo Golijov, 2003*

### THE ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

GEOFF NUTTALL, VIOLIN    LESLEY ROBERTSON, VIOLA

BARRY SHIFFMAN, VIOLIN    CHRISTOPHER COSTANZA, CELLO

Having walked on stage together over 1600 times in the past sixteen years the St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has established itself among the world-class chamber ensembles of its generation. In 1992, they won both the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Young Concert Artists Auditions, launching them on a performing career that has brought them across North and South America, Europe and Asia.

Highlights of the 2005/06 season include their popular series Sunday's with the St. Lawrence for Stanford Lively Arts, a performance of music by Golijov and Schubert at New York's Lincoln Center, performances in Boston and Palm Beach with pianist Menahem Pressler, and appearances in Detroit, Cleveland, Atlanta, Baltimore, Houston, New Orleans, Salt Lake City, La Jolla, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Ottawa, Urbana, IL, and Dartmouth College. The quartet will visit Europe in November with concerts in Holland, Germany and Switzerland, and will

return in July for festivals in France and Germany with pianist Menahem Pressler. The season concludes with a 20 concert tour of Australia and New Zealand.

The foursome regularly delivers traditional quartet repertoire, but is also fervently committed to performing and expanding the works of living composers. Among those with whom the St. Lawrence Quartet currently has active working relationships are R. Murray Schafer, Osvaldo Golijov, Christos Hatzis, Jonathan Berger, Ka Nin Chan, and Mark Applebaum.

The SLSQ is deeply committed to bringing music to less traditional venues outside the classroom or concert hall. Whether at Lincoln Center or an elementary school classroom, the St. Lawrence players maintain a strong desire to share the wonders of chamber music with their listeners, a characteristic of the foursome that has led them to a more informal performance style than one might expect from chamber musicians. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker Magazine* writes, "the St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection."

*The St. Lawrence String Quartet is Ensemble-in-Residence at Stanford University and records exclusively for EMI/ANGEL.*

*The St. Lawrence String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists, Marblehead, MA.*

TODD DARREN PALMER  
CLARINETIST

Based in New York City, clarinetist Todd Palmer has appeared as concerto soloist, recitalist, chamber music collaborator, educator, arranger, and presenter in a variety of musical endeavors around the world. He has maintained a close and special relationship with composer Osvaldo Golijov since they were first introduced to one another in 1997. Since then, he has championed Golijov's quintet *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind* in numerous performances with the St. Lawrence Quartet in the U.S., Canada and in Europe. As editor-in-chief of the piece for its publication, Mr. Palmer has worked extensively with Golijov on the score as well as the newly orchestrated version that he will premiere in California in April with conductor Jeffrey Kahane as part of the Magnum Opus commissioning project of the San Francisco Bay area.