# Belcea Quartet

Corina Belcea-Fisher – violin    Laura Samuel – violin
Krzysztof Chorzelski – viola    Antoine Lederlin – cello

Tuesday, April 8, 2008

~ PROGRAM ~

*Quartet in D Major, Op. 20, No. 4 (1772)*
Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

Allegro di molto
Un poco adagio affettuoso
Menuetto: Allegretto alla zingarese
Presto e scherzando

*Quartet No. 3, Op. 94 (1975)*
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Duets: with moderate movement
Ostinato: Very Fast
Solo: Very calm
Burlesque: Fast – con fuoco
Recitative & Passacaglia (La Serenissima); slow – slowly moving

~ INTERMISSION ~

*Quartet in D Major, K. 499 ("Hoffmeister") (1786)*
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegretto
Menuetto: Allegretto
Adagio
Allegro

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37 West 26th St., Suite 403
New York, NY 10010

## Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)
### *String Quartet in D Major, Op. 20, No. 4 (1772)*

It was uncannily fitting that Haydn's Opus 20 string quartets should have been published with a rising sun on the cover (thus the sobriquet "Sun Quartets"), for with their appearance a new day dawned in the history of Western Music. These were not the world's first string quartets but they were the first great ones, and the first in a masterful series, which would give the string quartet its reputation as the most exalted expression of musical thought. It was with these Opus 20 quartets that the form of the string quartet as we know it today was established - as to overall structure (four movements), the order of the movements, and the nature of the individual movements themselves. The genius of Haydn's conception proved so flexible that despite its orderliness it would accommodate the great creations of his successors for the next two hundred and fifty years, up to the present.

For Houstonians who are almost daily treated to reflections "on how inventive minds work" it is worth noting that only one year separated this collection of quartets from Haydn's previous group (Opus 17), which, while containing music of interest, did not remotely hint of greatness. What happened? The year was 1772. Haydn had just turned forty; he was financially secure as Kapellmeister to one of the richest families in Austria-Hungary; he had, only a few years before, found himself physically removed from the distractions of Vienna having moved with his patron to the Esterhazy Estate, across the Austrian border into Hungary. For ten months of the year he was somewhat isolated; even his wife had stayed behind in Vienna. He had always been his own best teacher, and now could give full reign to his endless industry and ingenuity.

An *Allegro di molto* opens the work, announcing itself with a theme equally rhythmic and melodic. It moves softly through a false start to a more forceful and complete repeat of the opening statement, and thereafter proceeds via odd key changes from one passage to the next, in a somewhat awkward and guileless manner, providing a modal flavor in peculiar contrast to the generally refined Rococo style of the whole. The expected sonata form is evident, but the presentation of musical ideas is richly unconventional. The phrase lengths are not even, the writing is surprisingly contrapuntal, and there are stops and starts, and Haydn very quickly proceeds to confuse. The development section arrives, and just when we are surprised that it should be so short, the music takes a turn into a contrapuntal world of themes playing off one another as each of the four instruments elaborate his musical ideas. In fact, a complex, polyphonic development is well under

way, when, quite on the sly and at an unexpected moment, Haydn slips into the true recapitulation: the note-for-note restatement of the opening section. We soon realize, however, that instead of a straightforward repeat of themes, they continue to be developed, appearing with richer texture and more ornate contour, thus blurring the expected formal structure. This is "Haydn's thirty-year-long lesson on what to do instead of Sonata Form while retaining Sonata Form in the background."(Hans Keller.)

One would not know from seeing *Un poco Adagio affettuoso*, that the second movement is a beautiful serenade presented as a set of extraordinary variations—a first for Haydn. Each instrument has an opportunity to play a singing role (albeit the viola less than the others) until the end, when the voices interweave. This movement shows how with these Opus 20 quartets, conceived as music for four more-or-less equal voices, Haydn brought musical composition back to the richness of the Baroque period. For a generation in the mid 18th Century, part writing had been abandoned in favor of the more transparent *galant* style. Now it would reappear in Haydn's quartets, tempered and modified by the more crystalline sounds of the *galant*. One hears, in the fourth variation of this movement, the combining these two styles, as melody and accompaniment dissolve in the last four measures, into a completely Baroque display of counterpoint.

The *Menuetto* "in the Gypsy style" is a nod, no doubt, to the popular music of his patron's countryside. The rhythmic accents have been deliberately placed to confuse: the upper strings are in one meter, the lower in another.

The final movement is *Presto e scherzando* – that is, fast and funny. And funny it is, with unique, peculiar, comically meaningless rhythmic gestures and asymmetrical phrase lengths. It is music which bounces its way along, turning and tumbling, flitting about without going anywhere, even including a brief passage with Baroque overtones thrown in along with some country dance music, all seemingly for the sake of passing the time and amusing the audience, until it graciously bows out like the court jester.

*Program note © Nora Avins Klein, January, 2008.*

## BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)
## *String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94 (1975)*

Benjamin Britten was born in England in 1913. His mother was an amateur singer, so it is fitting that Britten should have been most influential

as a composer of vocal music. The British scholar and conductor Peter Evans has stated: "[Britten] was the outstanding figure of the British generation that came to prominence just before World War II, at the end of which, his *Peter Grimes* laid the foundation for a revival of native opera which his works have continued to dominate." Britten also helped to revitalize music education in England.

Britten's musical language is tonal, making it accessible to a wide audience, but it is distinctly modern in the richness and density of the musical relationships. In addition, his instrumental works, as well as his vocal music, often have extra-musical connections. Philip Brett has observed: "Above all, [Britten] imbued his works with his own personal concerns, some of them hidden, principally those having to do with his love of men and boys, some more public, like his fiercely held pacifist beliefs, in ways that allowed people to sense the passion and conviction behind them even if unaware of their full implication. He also performed a fascinating, as well as problematic, assimilation of (or rapprochement with) the artistic spoils of the East, attempting an unusual integration of various non-Western musical traditions with his own increasingly linear style."

Britten composed his Third String Quartet in 1975. He had not composed music for this combination since 1945. But in 1973, suffering from heart disease, he had undergone an operation during which he suffered a stroke which permanently affected his right hand. When he complained to his friend, the musicologist Hans Keller, that he could not move his arm well enough to write a full score, Keller, half-jokingly, suggested that Britten now write the new string quartet that he had promised many years before. Thus, the Third Quartet was dedicated to Keller and written for performance by the Amadeus String Quartet. It was Britten's last major work. He died in 1976.

Keller wrote that with this Third Quartet, Britten took "that decisive step beyond—into the Mozartean realm of the instrumental purification of opera." In fact, the Quartet has a strong association with Britten's opera *Death in Venice*, based on the novel by Thomas Mann, which deals with themes of decline and death and the pathetic infatuation of a fading middle-aged writer with a beautiful young boy.

The Quartet has five movements, the first of which, "Duets" features instrumental pairings within the four-part texture. The second movement is entitled "Ostinato," the technical term for a short musical pattern that is repeated throughout a composition or throughout a section of a composition, and, indeed, this fast, brief and rhythmically vibrant movement incorporates that device. Of the third movement, music critic

Michael Kennedy has written: "*Solo*, the central slow movement, is a tribute to the special qualities of Norbert Brainin, leader of the Amadeus Quartet. The melodic line—high, calm and ethereal—is carried by the first violin, supported by triad arpeggios from the three other players, until it finds further sublimation in the concentrated rapture of a cadenza for the quartet in the central episode. When the serenity of the opening returns, the solo is accompanied by harmonics of rarified clarity." The fourth movement, aptly called "Burlesque," is satirical, and, as Kennedy has observed, invokes the spirit of Shostakovich (with whom Britten had a productive and enduring friendship). The finale (Recitative and Passacaglia ["La Serenissima"]) uses material from Britten's final opera, *Death in Venice*.

*Program note supplied by Belcea Quartet.*

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
## *String Quartet in D Major, K. 499 (1786)*

Of Mozart's last ten quartets, the first six form a set in tribute to Franz Joseph Haydn. The last three, known as the "Prussian" quartets, were dedicated to Frederick II, King of Prussia. The String Quartet in D Major, K. 499, subtitled the "Hoffmeister", was written between these two sets. It was completed in August of 1786, a good year for Mozart. *The Marriage of Figaro* had opened in May of 1786 in Vienna to high acclaim and though there is little surviving correspondence from Mozart during this period, he did appear to be enjoying much notoriety as a composer. Mozart's financial problems continued to plague him, however, and the Quartet in D Major, which was the only quartet that he wrote between 1782 and 1787, was probably composed in return for a loan granted to him by his friend Franz Anton Hoffmeister, an Austrian music publisher and composer. Hoffmeister had arrived in Vienna around 1768 to pursue a career in law but soon turned to music, ultimately composing sixty symphonies, as many concerti, and a large volume of chamber works. Mozart was familiar with Hoffmeister's compositions and mentions, through a personal entry into his sister Nannerl's diary, that some of Hoffmeister's quartets were played at the Mozarts' home in the summer of 1780. Mozart also used one of Hoffmeister's songs as the theme for a set of variations in his *Flute Quartet*, K. 298.

The first movement of the D Major Quartet begins with a descending triadic motif for all four instruments in unison. This figure is soon complicated by a dotted eighth and sixteenth note rhythm. Toward the end of the exposition the dotted rhythm is reversed—a figure that is often

referred to as a "Scotch snap." Periodically the triadic motif reappears in the first violin against an inversion of that motif in the cello, both in the original and in the dotted rhythms. Running eighth notes played by the inner voices characterize the short development section. The eighth notes return in the coda, alternating between staccato and legato, and gently disappear at the end of the movement.

Placing the *Menuetto* movement second in a quartet, rather than third, gives added weight to the latter part of the composition as a whole. Mozart adopted this sequence of movements, which was used for a while by Haydn and later abandoned, in nearly half of his chamber works. Mozart's chosen order of the movements in his D Major Quartet serves to separate the complex *Allegretto* and *Adagio* movements by inserting the simpler *Menuetto* between them. The first violin carries the cheerful, somewhat martial theme of the *Menuetto*, which then frames a trio in D minor that consists of triplet figurations in all four instruments.

The *Adagio* begins with melodic duets between groups of instruments—first the two violins and then the viola and cello. This section is followed by florid passages in the first violin, interrupted occasionally by forte chords. The movement is somewhat reminiscent of an Italian opera aria.

Mozart begins the last movement with short bursts of triplets before launching into the full theme. A pause separates the triplet theme from the second theme, which abandons the triplets for bouncy eighth notes and trills. All of the motifs are developed with skillful counterpoint and modulation until the recapitulation. The original bursts of triplets in the first violin are now answered in the other instruments, and the triplet theme continues in one voice or another to the end of the piece.

Though this string quartet was published by Hoffmeister one month after its completion, nothing is known about where or when it was first performed.

*Program note © Margaret Bragg, February, 2008.*

## *Belcea Quartet*

The Belcea Quartet has gained an enviable reputation as one of the leading quartets of the new generation. They continue to take the British and international chamber music circuit by storm, consistently receiving critical acclaim for their performances. The Quartet was established at the

Royal College Music in 1994, where they were coached by the Chilingirian Quartet, Simon Rowland-Jones and the Amadeus Quartet. From 1997 to 2000, they were represented by Young Concert Artists Trust in London, during which time they were coached by the Alban Berg Quartet, won first prize at both the Osaka and Bordeaux International String Quartet Competitions in 1999 and represented Great Britain in the European Concert Halls Organization "Rising Stars" series for the 1999/2000 season. From 1999 to 2001 the Belcea Quartet was one of the selected artists for the BBC Radio 3 "New Generations" and they received the Chamber Music Award of the Royal Philharmonic Society in both 2001 and 2003. They are the Associate Ensemble at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where they also hold a teaching position.

The Belcea Quartet won the Gramophone Award for best debut recording in 2001. Subsequent recordings for EMI include Schubert quartets, Brahms' String Quartet Op. 51 No. 1 and second string quintet with Thomas Kakuska, Fauré's La Bonne Chanson with Ian Bostridge, Schubert's Trout Quintet with Thomas Ades and Corin Long, a double disc of Britten's string quartets and most recently Mozart's "Dissonance" and "Hoffmeister," quartets. Their future recording releases include the complete Bartók quartets.

Their growing collaboration with singers includes: Mahler's *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* with Ann Murray and Simon Keenlyside at Wigmore Hall; Schoenberg's 2nd String Quartet and a new commission by Joseph Phibbs for string quartet and voice with Lisa Milne at Wigmore Hall; Fauré's *La Bonne Chanson* with Anne Sofie von Otter at the Cité de la Musique, Paris and with Ian Bostridge at New York's Zankel Hall and Washington's Library of Congress; Respighi's *Il Tramonto* with Angelika Kirchschlager at the Langeland Festival.

The Belcea Quartet's international engagements take them to the Vienna Konzerthaus and Musikverein, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Brussels' Palais des Beaux Arts, Lisbon's Gulbenkian, Zurich's Tonhalle, Stockholm's Konzerthuset, New York's Carnegie Hall and the Chatelet in Paris and to festivals including Luberon, Istanbul, Trondheim, Lausanne, Salzburg, Mecklenburg, and the Schwarzenberg Schubertiade. In the UK they were Resident Quartet at Wigmore Hall from 2001 to 2006.

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