

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

MARTIN BEAVER, VIOLIN

KIKUEI IKEDA, VIOLIN

KAZUhide ISOMURA, VIOLA

CLIVE GREENSMITH, CELLO

Thursday, September 18, 2008

~ PROGRAM ~

Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN

(1732-1809)

Allegro con spirito

Adagio sostenuto

Menuetto: Presto - Trio

Allegro ma non troppo

Quartet No. 5

BÉLA BARTÓK

(1881-1945)

Allegro

Adagio Molto

Scherzo: Alla bulgarese

Andante

Finale: Allegro vivace

~ INTERMISSION ~

Quartet in g minor, Op. 10

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

(1862-1918)

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement expressif

Très modéré; Très mouvementé

*The Tokyo String Quartet is represented exclusively by Opus 3 Artists, Ltd.
On the World Wide Web: opus3artists.com.*

*This performance by the Tokyo String Quartet has been made possible by
the generous support of The Cullen Trust for the Performing Arts.*

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN (1732-1809)
Quartet Op. 76 No. 1 in G Major (1797)

The more one speaks to chamber musicians, the more one finds that their respect for – even awe of – Haydn's string quartets grows with time. His innovations are not easy for the modern listener to spot, because so much of what he invented soon became mainstream. But if one listens to each quartet in terms of what had come before, the extent of Haydn's genius becomes apparent. In addition to setting the stage for the quartet as we know it, he peppered his music with delicious wit and with ever-changing interpretations of the harmonic vocabulary and techniques of the day. His inventiveness allowed him never to look back – yet he remained always understandable. Today, his quartets are still capable of surprising, the invention seemingly so effortless as to initially appear obvious. Yet on examination his constructs are anything but, having been carefully and ingeniously worked out. Simply put, to pay close attention is to be astonished. And there are so many quartets: eighty-three, with nary a dud among them. Bartók's innovations, by contrast, to take one example among many, cannot be missed. They are on the surface; they are what the music is all about. The folk elements cannot be missed either. Yet knowledge of the country tunes which abounded in Haydn's day will reveal how much use he too made of them, the result of having been born on the edge of Austria and then living on the Hungarian estate where he worked for the bulk of his mature life.

Haydn's day-to-day existence was unique among the great composers. He led a highly orderly, well-paid and secure life. He was physically separated from his wife, and therefore suffered little distraction from that quarter. He had the Esterházy court to support him, along with a fine chamber orchestra; later, he had Count Rasumovsky to support the Schuppanzigh Quartet, which played the quartets to his specifications, supposedly thanks in part to the understanding and guidance of the Count. Furthermore, he wrote for a highly educated and appreciative audience, which understood and was attentive to his most demanding music. These conditions are a little like those supporting life on Earth: not likely to happen again. Note that he did not start his great cycle of quartets until he was 40 years old and knew how to compose. In contrast, Mozart, Schubert and Mendelssohn were dead by this age.

In distinction from his earlier string quartets, tonight's, composed in Vienna after returning from his second trip to England, was written on a commission from one Count Erdödy, the entire Op. 76 dedicated to him.

It starts *Allegro con spirito* with one of Haydn's deceptive pseudo-sonata-form movements which, on closer examination, is really more a theme-and-variations on a spritely little tune, played individually by each instrument to start, then developed rather guilelessly for the remainder of the movement. The *Adagio sostenuto* which follows is a thoughtful, beautiful *ritornello* aria, evocative of those lovely movements he wrote into his Masses. You will note that it briefly contains a most unexpected chord progression at the beginning of the second repeat of the main theme. A throbbing-heart rhythm underlies much of the movement.

The third movement is entitled *Menuetto* but is what we would now call a *scherzo*, thanks to Beethoven, with a serenade, rather than a minuet or *Ländler* as its *Trio* section. It has something of in-your-face humor about it, taking its cue from rural folk music.

That third movement was a bit of a surprise, but the real surprise is the final movement, which is in g minor, rather than the G Major advertised as the key of this quartet. Only at the very end of this stormy movement, in the coda, does the moody minor mode abruptly shift to the key signature of G Major, as Haydn pulls back from ending on a somber note (it happens to be the very same somber note of Mozart's most searing minor-mode compositions). Minor keys were not popular in those days – Mozart's beautiful *Piano Concerto No. 24 in c minor*, and his sublime *String Quintet in g minor*, were unpopular. But we see here the beginnings of Haydn's move to blur tonality, which he would continue to explore in later works of these opus 76 quartets, and which Schubert would carry to famous heights.

Program Note © Nora Avins Klein, July 2008

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881-1945)

Quartet No. 5 (1934)

Although well into the twentieth century German and Austrian music authorities would scoff at the idea, the truth is that by that century's beginning, Europe's musical center of gravity was swinging from west to east, while in the lighter sphere of operetta, it was following the money and waltzing across the ocean to America. Out of Hungary and Russia would come most of Europe's greatest musical talents, including a prodigious number of enormously gifted performers and conductors as well as many of the twentieth-century composers we revere today.

Bartók was a major Hungarian representative of this trend, coming of age in a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which was experiencing

intense nationalistic fervor, where the imperative to speak Hungarian, not German, was high on the agenda of the intellectual elite. To make music that represented the true Hungary was high on his personal agenda. So although schooled in the classical Austro-German tradition familiar from Bach on, early in his career he took to traversing the Hungarian countryside to record the music of the “real” Hungarians – illiterate peasants in primitive villages still living in the ancient traditions of the past, untouched by the sophistication of the Western ways which he so disdained, and whose music was instead based on the ancient harmonies and rhythms of its distant, Eastern Orthodox past. It is out of this ancient musical language that Bartók formulated his new musical language, which was as utterly different from the Germanic tradition as Hungarian is from German.

The collection of Bartók’s six string quartets forms the most succinct exposition of his life’s work. As is true for Beethoven, through the quartets one can hear the way in which his music developed; for the general audience they provide the most direct route into his musical language. Tonight’s quartet is relatively late. It is intriguingly architectural in conception, and filled with intricate classical compositional devices – canons, fugues, imitation, inversions, and the like. The underlying architecture of this five-movement quartet is symmetrical: a central *Scherzo* flanked by two slow movements which are in turn flanked by two fast outer movements. Thematically there is a relationship between the first and fifth, and between the second and fourth movements. The first movement is in sonata form, although on first hearing this might be difficult to detect. The second movement starts with muted trills and fragments of melodies. It is in three parts, with the last part working its way backwards towards the first. The central movement, *Scherzo*, has been characterized as “an essay in Bulgarian rhythms” of which Bartók made considerable use in his later works. These consist of measures of four plus two plus three eighth notes (9/8), as well as, later on, 10/8 subdivided in different permutations (no doubt to keep the musicians awake). The fourth movement begins similarly to the second in mood and is also related by its harmonic line. The rather long *Finale* is structurally quite complicated. It is also roughly in sonata form but with many irregularities. A fugue replaces the main theme, the fugue itself being a transformation of the theme of the first movement; at one point an entire section is repeated in inverted form (this is to keep the audience awake). Also in the recapitulation is a short section with the character of a trio. Suddenly, towards the end, there is a moment of comic relief – an organ-grinder is passing through. Then it’s back to the business of ending, in a burst of speed and a condensation of the theme.

While this work contains the gruff, even brutal rhythmic elements

which characterize so much of Bartók's music, it also contains endearing moments of humor—equally characteristic. There is a great deal more one could say about this exciting and masterful work, but it is technical in nature, more suited to a composition class.

Mátyás Seiber has written a succinct monograph on Bartók's string quartets (Boosey & Hawkes), which I recommend to anyone interested in knowing more.

Program Note © by Nora Avins Klein, July, 2008

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Quartet in g minor (1893)

Claude Debussy completed only one string quartet during his lifetime: his *Quartet in g minor*, finished in 1893, early in his career and shortly after *L'Après-midi d'un faune*. The style of this composition could be likened to the work of the Impressionist painters of the time: Manet, Monet, Degas, Renoir, and Pissarro. However, Debussy himself preferred to be associated with the Symbolist poets: Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Maeterlinck, whose play *Pelléas et Mélisande* he later used for an opera.

The artists and authors of his time were trying to create works that would appeal more to the senses than to the intellect. Debussy fought against the conventional in music throughout his student days and developed a style of composition which used musical forms as aural light and color—new textures of sound, exotic scales, and chords which did not resolve. In Debussy's words, "I am more and more convinced that music, by its very nature, is something that cannot be cast into a traditional and fixed form. It is made up of colors and rhythms. The rest is a lot of humbug invented by frigid imbeciles riding on the backs of the Masters—who, for the most part, wrote almost nothing but period music. Bach alone had an idea of the truth." Debussy's music helped to prepare the way for the music of the twentieth century in all of its new and varied forms.

The *Quartet in g minor* is based almost entirely on one motif, stated in the first few bars of the first movement. The motif is cast in a minor key with a flattened second step, termed the *Phrygian* mode, a scale often heard in exotic folk music. An easily recognizable feature of this motif is the quick ornamental triplet in the middle of the motif.

The rhythm and overall shape of the motif, and of the other melodies heard throughout the work, seem to be of more importance than the harmonic structure. In addition, rather than a classic exposition and development

section in each movement, one hears a continuous variation or cyclic form—a mosaic of the germinal motif and altered versions of the same. This is particularly true of the first movement.

The second movement is *scherzo*-like but uses novel rhythmic and coloristic devices. Once again the movement is derived from the first motif of the quartet, heard first in the viola, then in the first violin. Around the motif the other instruments weave cross-rhythms and *pizzicato* flourishes. In the third movement, all of the instruments are muted in order to produce gentler tone color. The movement begins in 6/8 meter, in a dreamy rocking mood much akin to a *nocturne*. False starts in the second violin and viola lead to a full statement of the theme by the first violin. Following a pause, a new variant is introduced by the viola and is later repeated in the second violin and cello playing an octave apart. The initial theme returns at the close. The fourth movement exhibits a rhapsodic use of the initial motif throughout, including a fugue-like passage, and concludes with a frantic race to the final chord.

Program note © Margaret Bragg, July 2008

Tokyo String Quartet

The Tokyo String Quartet has captivated audiences and critics alike since it was founded more than 30 years ago. Regarded as one of the supreme chamber ensembles of the world, the Tokyo Quartet—Martin Beaver and Kikuei Ikeda (violins), Kazuhide Isomura (viola) and Clive Greensmith (cello)—has collaborated with a remarkable array of artists and composers, built a comprehensive catalogue of critically acclaimed recordings and established a distinguished teaching record. Performing over a hundred concerts worldwide each season, the Tokyo String Quartet has a devoted international following that includes the major capitals of the world and extends to all four corners, from Australia to Estonia to Scandinavia and the Far East.

Officially formed in 1969 at the Juilliard School of Music, the quartet traces its origins to the Toho School of Music in Tokyo, where the founding members were profoundly influenced by Professor Hideo Saito. Soon after its formation, the quartet won First Prize at the Coleman Competition, the Munich Competition and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions. An exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon firmly established it as one of the world's leading quartets, and it has since released more than 40 landmark recordings. The ensemble now records

on the Harmonia Mundi label.

The members of the Tokyo String Quartet have served on the faculty of the Yale School of Music as quartet-in-residence since 1976. Deeply committed to coaching young string quartets, they devote much of the summer to teaching and performing at the prestigious Norfolk Chamber Music Festival. They also conduct master classes in North America, Europe and the Far East throughout the year.

The ensemble performs on the "Paganini Quartet," a group of renowned Stradivarius instruments named for legendary virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, who acquired and played them during the 19th century. The instruments have been on loan to the ensemble from the Nippon Music Foundation since 1995, when they were purchased from the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Visit the Tokyo String Quartet on the World Wide Web at tokyoquartet.com.