

62nd Concert Series 2015-2016



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is pleased to present

The Pacifica Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin

Sibbi Berhardsson, violin

Masumi Per Rostad, viola

Brandon Vamos, cello

Saturday, May 14, 2016

Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York



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* as of March 25, 2016

Program

String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto: Allegro

Andante cantabile

Molto allegro

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 3

Andante

Scherzo: Agitato

Pesante

Alfred Schnittke
(1934-1998)

Intermission

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2

Allegro assai appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro di molto

Andante

Presto agitato

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)

The Pacifica Quartet appears by arrangement with Melvin Kaplan, Inc., 115 College Street, Burlington, VT 05401 www.melkap.com.

Next Concert

Saturday, October 8, 2016, 8:00 pm at Sleepy Hollow High School, Sleepy Hollow, New York

St. Lawrence Quartet; guest artist Ann-Marie McDermott, piano.

Program: Haydn: String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 33, No. 2; Mendelssohn: String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 44, No. 3; Dvořák: Quintet in A Major for piano and strings, Op. 81.

Program notes

String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The bond between Mozart and Haydn was a rare example of lasting friendship and artistic interaction between two great men. “Before God, and as an honest man,” Haydn said to Mozart’s father on February 12, 1785, after hearing three new quartets by the young composer, “I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by reputation.”

In the preceding few years, Haydn had reshaped and “modernized” the form and style of the string quartet. Mozart, watching closely, adopted each new feature, investing it with the individuality of his particular genius. The appearance of Haydn’s six “*Russian*” *Quartets*, *Op. 33*, inspired Mozart to write three new ones and, when Haydn was in Vienna in 1784 and 1785, Mozart composed three more in rapid succession. These six quartets display Mozart at the peak of his creative power. They are among the finest works in the string quartet literature, composed as a labor of love, without commission or compensation.

Mozart completed the **String Quartet in G Major, K. 387**, the first of the six, in Vienna on December 31, 1782. Mozart sometimes fully formed music in his mind before putting it down on paper, but in this, his first quartet in nine years, he painstakingly sketched, revised, and corrected the music. Although there is evidence of his protracted efforts, the ear detects nothing labored in this delightful work.

Mozart creates recurrent studies in contrasts between complex contrapuntal textures and simpler or lighter ones, between *forte* and *piano* in small groups of notes or even adjacent notes, between sliding chromatic passages and firmly diatonic ones. These contrasts show up as important stylistic features in all four movements. They are conspicuous in the very first measures of the first movement, *Allegro vivace assai*, whose marvelously malleable main subject Mozart exploits and develops with a new richness of invention.

The second movement, *Menuetto: Allegro*, is an astronomical distance away from the music of the ballroom where the dance originated, since in places Mozart’s dynamic freedom destroys the regular rhythm that was the minuet’s principal characteristic. The beautifully developed slow movement, *Andante cantabile*, is followed by a finale, *Molto allegro*, that is an extraordinary display of technical skill in which Mozart daringly combines fugal style and sonata form.

String Quartet No. 3

Alfred Schnittke

When Dmitri Shostakovich died in 1975, musicians around the world wondered who would emerge as the leading figure of the next generation of Soviet composers. Alfred Harriyevich Schnittke became the most prominent member of that new generation. He is today, by some accounts, among the most frequently performed composers in Europe.

Schnittke's mother was a school-teacher from a German family that long ago had settled on the Volga. His father, a Jewish journalist of Russian origin, was born in Frankfurt am Main. Of his cosmopolitan origins, Schnittke said, "I feel that I am a German, a Russian, and a Jew. I can understand my faith as Catholic, Jewish, or Russian Orthodox."

The Schnittke family was not musical; young Alfred's interest in music did not begin until 1946 in Vienna (when his father was the correspondent there for a German-language Soviet newspaper), and he was given an accordion. Soon after came piano lessons and his very first composition. By 1948 he was back in Moscow, training as a choir director. But by 1953 he had begun five years of study at the Moscow Conservatory, learning composition and counterpoint under Yevgeny Golubyev and instrumentation under Nikolay Rakov. In 1962 Schnittke began a ten-year teaching career there. He left to begin a career as a freelance composer, writing for the theater and for film as well as concert works. In 1989 he moved to Hamburg to teach composition at the Institute of Music and Theater.

Schnittke's early compositions show a high order of skill within the stylistic limits that then were imposed by official policy. As government control of the arts loosened somewhat, he became the boldest of experimenters, introducing to the Soviet Union many of the most advanced musical ideas from the West as well as many of his own invention. He successfully intertwined jazz, historical, and even Romantic sonic elements of various origins. He cast them immediately into a construction based not only on contrast and discontinuity, but also on transition, juxtaposition, and superimposition. On these bases he introduced his own rich, turbulent musical spirit to the non-purist "experimental" tradition that had been begun by Mahler, Ives, Stravinsky, and Berg.

String Quartet No. 3 was composed in 1983 and is a perfect example of Schnittke's mature style. In the first movement, *Andante*, he uses bold, unusual musical quotations: from the Renaissance's Orlando de Lassus, from the central theme of Beethoven's late *Grosse Fugue* quartet, and from the musical monograms of Shostakovich. It would seem that, in addition to paying homage to masters from each of those periods, he was making an historical point about how things tend to develop and yet return to their origins, embracing all. The late Beethoven and Schnittke's contemporary Shostakovich shared a use of tonal chromaticism that is strikingly absent in the precursor of the tonal, Lassus. The second movement, *Agitato*, is a quick scherzo that has a strong emotional climax. In the final movement, *Pesante*, Schnittke knits together all of his allusions and his own contributions into a synthesis of the modal and chromatic elements that appeared earlier.

String Quartet in E minor, Op. 44, No. 2

Felix Mendelssohn

Felix Mendelssohn was one of music's great prodigies, who began composing as a little boy. His grandfather was Moses Mendelssohn, the Jewish philosopher of the Enlightenment, who had been immortalized as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's Nathan the Wise. His father was a wealthy banker who, having been assured of his son's musical gifts, spared nothing to help bring him to artistic maturity. No touring performer wanted to miss the musicales held on alternate Sunday mornings in the Mendelssohns' great house in Berlin. Chamber music was always performed, but sometimes a work for orchestra or even an opera was scheduled. The guests frequently played; on almost every occasion one of young Felix's compositions was on the program. He learned his craft, developed his skills, and polished his art in the privileged workshop.

In 1837 and 1838, Mendelssohn composed three string quartets, published in 1839 as a set, Opus 44, and dedicated to His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Sweden. By then Mendelssohn was a mature artist of great distinction, admired throughout Europe for his gifts as a composer, conductor, and pianist. In March 1837 he had married and in April, at the start of an extended honeymoon that lasted many months, he began to work on the quartets. This one, issued as the second of them, was nonetheless the first to be completed. It was performed on November 19, 1837 by Fernand David and a group of his colleagues from the Gewandhaus (Drapers' Hall) Orchestra.

The first movement, *Allegro assai appassionato*, is a feverishly hot-blooded treatment of two fluent melodies. The extension and development of the musical ideas and the full-textured writing for the few instruments define the style that Mendelssohn called "symphonic," even in his chamber music. There follows a *Scherzo: Allegro di molto*, one of his colorful, light-footed, elfin dances. The contrasting *Andante* is a relatively moderately paced movement in which the violin first sings a long, lyrical melody, like a song without words. The finale, *Presto agitato*, is a tumultuous, passionate drama in much the same spirit as the first movement.

— Notes provided by Susan Halpern

About the Artists

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and appointment to Lincoln Center's CMS Two. In 2006 it was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber music ensemble so honored in the Grant's long history. In 2009 the group was named "Ensemble of the Year" by *Musical America*, and received the Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance.

The Pacifica tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's great concert halls. Named the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Pacifica also had been quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009-2012), a position that has otherwise been held only by the Guarneri String Quartet.

In addition to tonight's concert, highlights of the group's 2015-16 season have included a performance at New York's 92nd Street Y, the start of a two-season residency at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, a residency at the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music in Tucson, and return visits to the major series in New Orleans, San Francisco, and Portland.

The members of the Pacific Quartet live in Bloomington, IN, where they are full-time faculty members at the Jacobs School of Music. Prior to their appointment, they had been on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana from 2003 to 2012. The Quartet also serves as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago.

The Pacifica Quartet is endorsed by D'Addario and proudly uses their strings.



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