

## Program Notes

### **Quartet in B-flat major, K. 458, "The Hunt"**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The subtitle of this quartet, "Hunt" (*Jagd* in the original German), is not Mozart's invention and is, in fact, a particularly poor choice. The obvious reference is to the fanfare-like opening of the quartet, despite the fact that the sound produced by the two violins is a far cry from the ringing tones of a brace of hunting horns. The notion of Mozart involved with a hunt also strains credulity; his indoors personality seems much better suited to sitting in stuffy salons than to riding off into wild forests. And if the performers bend the music, in style or tone, to conform to the nickname, it can only destroy the work's essential spirit.

The familiar opening phrase and the following episodes immediately establish the playful, good-humored mood of the first movement. The second theme, little more than a shake, a slow, measured, back-and-forth trill, is tossed from player to player in a game of four-way musical catch. As though to make up for the lack of a strong subsidiary theme in the exposition, Mozart starts the development with a new cantabile melody. After repeating this tune he engages the listener's attention in a brief argument based on the second theme shake, which leads directly to the recapitulation. Apparently still making amends, he balances the short development with a long coda, in reality a second development section.

The broad deliberate Menuetto has a certain antique air about it. The carefully measured phrases conjure up visions of bewigged nobles carefully working their way through the intricate moves of this poised, dignified dance. The light airy trio sounds like the dancers are now *sur les pointes*. It is the perfect foil for the heavier Menuetto, which is repeated to end the movement.

The fervid, even sentimental, Adagio is the slowest movement in all the "Haydn" quartets. While most of the melodic burden is borne by the first violin playing a florid, much-ornamented line, the other instruments are sometimes involved with presenting independent contrapuntal melodies; more often they play an accompanying role. The lower three voices establish a pulsating, repeated-note figure as the background for the second theme, a simple melody introduced by the first violin and repeated by the cello. Without any development Mozart brings back the two themes and adds a short quiet coda at the end.

The final movement reestablishes the cheerful mood with which the quartet started. Cast in sonata form, the movement has three winning themes: the principal one, a four-square motif that some trace back to an old Austrian folk song; a similar-sounding subsidiary theme presented by the second violin, with mercurial roulades played by the first violin at the end of each statement; and the concluding theme of the exposition, a quiet, sustained melody with significant parts of all four instruments. A succinct development, in which Mozart mixes, matches, and modifies the three tunes, is followed by an equally concentrated recapitulation and a quick conclusion.

Mozart finished the "Hunt" Quartet, probably the most popular of all the "Haydn" quartets, on November 9, 1784, less than two months after he began work.

*--note provided by MKI Artists*

## **Credo**

Kevin Puts

[Credo (krä“dÄ) first person sing. of Latin credere, to believe]

When Daniel Ching of the Mirò Quartet asked me to write a quartet for a program he was planning exploring ‘the lighter side of America’, I wasn’t sure I could deliver. It was hard to find things to sing about. The government stubbornly and arrogantly continued to pour young lives and billions of dollars into a hopeless war, one to whose protest millions at home and abroad marched with what E.L Doctorow described as “the appalled understanding that America was ceding its role as the best of hope of mankind,” that “the classic archetype of democracy was morphing itself into a rogue nation.” Also around this time, a disturbed loner finally enacted his plan to gun down a record-breaking number of his fellow students at Virginia Tech and—amazingly—this failed to prompt any heightened talks over gun control by politicians who feared they might offend their gun-loving constituents before the next election.

One day on my weekly commute from New York to teach at the Peabody Conservatory, I noticed as the train pulled into Baltimore the word believe emblazoned across a building. I later learned this was part of a campaign by the city of Baltimore to do something about the fact that ten percent of its population is addicted to either heroin or cocaine. As one who relies little if at all on blind faith, I found this to be a rather alarming approach. On the other hand, sometimes it seems all you can do is believe. For example, many of us believe we’ll find our way out of the mess. In the meantime, I have found solace in the strangest places:

*...in the workshop of a stringed instrument specialist in Katonah, New York, you can believe nothing in the world matters but the fragile art of violins and violas hanging serenely from the ceiling. He listens chin in hand as his clients play excerpts for him, then goes to work on their instruments with sage-like assuredness...*

*...on the jogging path along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh, you encounter above and below you the steel girders, asphalt and railroad ties of infrastructure, an immovable network of towering bridges and highways engineered by some deific intelligence...*

*...from my apartment, I watched in a window across 106th Street a mother teaching her daughter how to dance.*

I would like to thank Amy Anderson of Chamber Music Monterey Bay for commissioning this piece and for her belief in my work. Credo is dedicated by Lowell Figan to the memory of Janie Figan, tireless environmentalist and devoted lover of chamber music.

*--note by Kevin Puts*

## **Quartet in A minor, Op. 41, No. 1**

Robert Schumann

The life of Robert and Clara Schumann is one of the greatest love stories of classical music: their early friendship and young love, then forced separation because of Clara's father (the same man was also Robert's piano teacher) who opposed the match, and their final triumphant marriage after 6 years of lawsuits, opposition and struggle was only the first chapter of the tale; after 16 years of married life filled with mutual fame, fortune and 8 children their love story was to end in tragedy as Robert gradually succumbed to depression, mental illness, and after attempting suicide, died tragically in a mental asylum at the young age of 46. After his death, Clara, a heartbroken widow never again to marry, was to pursue a brilliant career as one of the most famous concert pianists in Europe; for more than three more decades, she toured, raised her children completely on her own, and championed the music of her beloved Robert on concert stages everywhere.

Up until their marriage in 1840, Robert had composed exclusively for the piano. But the great joy and happiness that the couple shared after their marriage unleashed a torrent of creativity for him in new genres: first songs, and then symphonies, and in 1842, "the Year of Chamber Music" almost all of the chamber works that now stand in his oeuvre. The three quartets of the Opus 41 were written in a rush of creativity during June of this year, all three pieces begun and completed in only 18 days! All three have a vernal freshness to them, as well as showing his intense study earlier in the spring of the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven.

The first quartet in A minor opens with a mysterious and lonely echoing passage, lost, wandering...only to build to tearful climax and fade into sobs. Yet in only the briefest of moments, the music changes course and we realize that all that was only a prelude; the real first movement, joyous and skipping, whisks us off our feet into a now innocent now exuberant Allegro. The second movement scherzo evokes the fairy tale seriousness of Robert's piano pieces "Kinderszenen", reminding me of little tin soldiers marching to battle; the third is a gorgeous and impassioned love song (without words of course), clearly inspired by Robert's deep love for Clara; the finale is a brilliant and virtuosic moto perpetuo that builds and builds to a brilliant conclusion—yet just before its emphatic end, the movement pauses for a timeless moment to reflect on a brief and mysterious bagpipe tune... once again an ancient and mythical spirit is evoked: behind all this raucous bravura, a delicate and timeless magic hovers. The effect is marvelously mercurial, touching, and pure Schumann.

The three quartets were first performed on September 13, 1842 as a birthday present for Clara; when published a year later in 1843 they were dedicated to Robert's friend, mentor and inspiration, the composer Felix Mendelssohn.

*--note by John Largess*