

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM
Pro Musica

Van Kuijk String Quartet

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5
Allegretto
Largo cantabile e mesto
Minuetto: Allegro; Trio
Finale: Presto

Haydn's voluminous output alone does not explain his powerful musical and cultural influence. His eighty-three string quartets and some forty-five piano trios, though daunting in number, are also overwhelming in their stylistic breadth and ingenuity. They move across the boundaries of the Baroque and the Classical, lick the edges of Romanticism, and even point the way to Modernism.

The move to a freer, more emotional expression was occasioned by the end of Haydn's 29-year tenure as *Kapellmeister* in the court of the aristocratic and wealthy Hungarian Esterházy family. That, coupled with two highly successful visits to London, gave Haydn a wider musical exposure. Freed from musical and financial obligations, Haydn went to London where, under the direction of the German violinist and impresario Johann Peter Salomon, he became an international celebrity. Fame did not ruin Haydn, however, for the London years proved to be some of the richest in his compositional life. For the first time he heard music played in public halls by professional musicians for a general audience. This more democratic approach to music freed him from the decorative style demanded by aristocratic amateur players and audiences. Prior to this, however, Haydn's music had already taken on new emotional depths as a result of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, a philosophical influence that stressed the importance of faith and the senses as opposed to the logic and reason of the Enlightenment.

If Haydn's paternity of the piano trio is sometimes overlooked, his fatherhood of the string quartet is honored universally. The number, some 83, is astonishing in itself, but the depth and breadth of his string quartets bespeak his genius even more clearly. Beethoven brought the string quartet to new dimensions with his sixteen quartets, but we must question if he would have done so had Haydn not given birth to the form.

The six "Erdödy" Quartets" of Op. 76 are so named after Count Joseph Erdödy who asked Haydn for the set in 1796 shortly after his return to Vienna from his second visit to London. To the set, Haydn brought his mature understanding of the string quartet form as well as his enlightened emotional sense of music. The result of this was a new profundity reflected especially in his slow movements. At the same time, the fast movements were more powerful and technically challenging, and even the minuets took on a more serious nature.

The first movement *Allegretto* of the Op. 76, No. 5 Quartet, despite its gracious opening, has some serious underpinnings in its quick shifts to the minor at which Haydn is so adept. A development section gives new attention to the cello but not at the expense of the other instruments. Things heat up and then, typical of Haydn, he gives a surprise moment of silence before a return to the spirit of the gracious opening—but with variations and a brief but splendid cadenza for the first violin.

Interestingly, the second movement *Largo cantabile e mesto* is the longest of the four movements, understandably so because of its profoundly touching qualities. Here we have lyricism edged with sadness and a certain strength. This is not the "Happy Haydn" he is often misrepresented to be. He does, however, offer us a gentle conclusion to this pensive movement.

The third movement *Minuetto*, with its elegant dance theme, offers a relief to the intensity of the *Largo*. A *Trio* section, however, goes well beyond the spirit of dancing with its complex counterpoint. If you must chain Haydn to the 18th century, it might be in this movement, but even then it is a tight squeeze.

The *Finale*, with its lively *Presto*, brings something of the happy spirit we often associate with Haydn. This happiness, however, carries a strong edge of the colorful Gypsy spirit that Haydn so famously caught in his work.

Edith Canat de Chizy (b. 1950)
String Quartet No. 4, “En noir et or”

French-born composer and violinist Edith Canat de Chizy studied music at the Paris Conservatoire but also art, archeology, and philosophy at the Sorbonne and electronic music at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales. She was the first female composer elected as a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts and was director of the Erik Satie Conservatory until 2006 when she joined the staff of the Regional Conservatory of Paris where she currently teaches composition. This wide-spread background is reflected in her many compositions for orchestra, chamber ensembles, solo instruments, and voice.

She composed her String Quartet No. 4 at the request of ECHO, the European Concert Halls Organization that collaborates each year to give Europe’s brightest young stars an international platform, the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, and the Philharmonie de Paris. The work was inspired by a James Whistler painting, “Night in Black and Gold,” that also inspired Debussy for his orchestral and vocal piece *Fêtes*. Edith Canat de Chizy comments that in her composition she wanted to emphasize the nocturnal shades and bursts of fireworks in the painting. Special string effects such as *sul tasto* (keeping the bow over the fingerboard to produce a soft, thin tone), *sul ponticello* (keeping the bow near the bridge to bring out higher harmonics), and *col legno* (striking the strings with the stick of the bow) abound in the work and accomplish the composer’s goals.

The work was given its 2017 world premiere in Birmingham by the Van Kuijk Quartet.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden”

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto; Trio

Presto

To explain Schubert is to explain a miracle, and we should attempt it only with the reminder that he said of himself: “It sometimes seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all.” Indeed, he belonged to it so briefly that the size and impact of his output are astonishing. Within his short lifespan of thirty-one years he composed no less than nine symphonies, twenty string quartets, two piano trios, a variety of other significant chamber works such as the famous “Trout” Quintet and Cello Quintet, numerous operas, twenty-one piano sonatas as well as other solo piano works including the *Wanderer Fantasy*, two glorious sets of impromptus, and the remarkable F Minor Fantasy for four hands. Looming over all this is his vast catalogue of over six hundred songs.

Franz Schubert is the undisputed master of art song not only in the volume of his output, but more importantly in the artful—and artless—way in which he matched words and music. It was Schubert before Schumann, Mahler, Strauss, Reger, and Berg who chose the texts of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and Friedrich Rückert (1788-1836) from the outpouring of the Romantic poetry of his day. He lent to the art song a complexity and sophistication never before heard even in the salons of Vienna. Part of this was due to the importance he gave to the piano parts. No mere accompanist, the pianist in Schubert *lieder* has his own time in the sun and, as importantly, must know when to step back. The performance of a Schubert song is an intricate collaboration of two artists.

The impact of Schubert’s work is no less astonishing than its size. Although he received little recognition within his lifetime, his works represent a profound development in music history. Schubert managed to culminate a period of music and forge another. Within the strictures of Classical form, he explored the Romantic spirit in a way foreign even to Beethoven.

Son of a struggling schoolmaster, Schubert was born in the Vienna suburb of Lichenthal. At the age of nine he was sent to study with the local church organist Michael Holzer who commented, “If I wished to instruct him in anything fresh, the boy already knew it. So I gave him no actual tuition but merely talked to him and watched him with silent astonishment.” At seventeen he completed his first opera and a setting of Goethe’s poem, *Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel*, his first masterpiece. He left Vienna and his father’s school in 1818 to take up the position of music tutor to the daughters of Count Johann Esterházy but returned the following year to his circle of Vienna friends. Several productive years followed, but by 1823 he was suffering from the syphilis that was so rampant in Vienna.

Despite illness, depression, and persistent financial troubles, the last five years of Schubert's life were remarkably productive: the song cycles *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, the Symphony No. 9, the last three piano sonatas, the great Quintet in C Major, and the String Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden."

He served as a torchbearer at Beethoven's funeral in 1827 but was dead himself the following year. In 1888 the bodies of Beethoven and Schubert were exhumed and placed side by side in Vienna's Zentralfriedhof where they remain today. Schubert's epitaph written by his friend Franz Grillparzer reads, "Here lie rich treasure and still fairer hopes." In the emotional breadth of his music, we are transported into the better world he longed for.

The string quartet absorbed Schubert throughout his lifetime, but late in 1820 his writing in the form took a sharp turn away from the "household quartets" he composed for his family quartet in which he was the violist. Although that inspiration produced at least fourteen of his some twenty string quartets, they all suggest an ensemble far beyond the talents of amateurs.

It is tempting to give programmatic interpretations to "Death and the Maiden" since, in 1824, the same year as the Quartet's composition, Schubert wrote to Kupelwieser: "My peace is gone, my heart is sore, I shall find it never and nevermore. I may well sing every day now, for each night, on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday's grief." Programmatic interpretations of Schubert, however, are dangerous, since so much of his music was written in spite of his dire circumstances rather than as a result of them. Even the subject of death itself may have been chosen more for musical reasons than any other since he was encouraged by friends to use the theme of his beautiful song, "Death and the Maiden."

Yet there is a forcefulness, terseness, urgency, and even frenetic quality to the D Minor Quartet that does indeed suggest a race with death. Central to the work are the variations of the second movement based on Schubert's setting of Mathias Claudius's poem in which the Maid converses with Death who comforts her with the words, "Be of good cheer, I am not harsh, you shall sleep gently in my arms."

Programmatic content, however, pales in light of the work's sheer musical genius: the boldness of the first movement, the imaginative variations of the second, the brutal syncopation of the *Scherzo* with its graceful *Trio* section, and the powerful momentum of the final movement.

The "Death and the Maiden" Quartet represents the culmination of Classical style bursting, as it does, into Romanticism. It so impressed Gustav Mahler that he translated it for orchestra in a score that was discovered by his daughter after his death and published in 1984. Although the score is incomplete, it was heavily marked with notes on instrumentation, dynamics, and articulation. It seems no coincidence that Mahler chose it for orchestration since it represents Mahler's second main musical interest, the art song. That choice was also a testament to his admiration for Schubert.

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