



PROGRAM

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ELIAS STRING QUARTET

Thursday, April 2, 2015 / 8pm

Department of Music's Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Sara Bitloch, violin
Donald Grant, violin
Martin Saving, viola
Marie Bitloch, cello

PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465,
"Dissonance"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Adagio - Allegro

Andante cantabile

Menuetto. Allegro - Trio

Allegro molto

Ainsi la nuit, for String Quartet

Henri Dutilleux (1916 - 2013)

Nocturne

Miroir d'espace

Litanies

Litanies II

Constellations

Nocturne II

Temps suspendu

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo

Allegro molto vivace

Allegro moderato - Adagio

Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile

- Più mosso - Andante moderato e

lusinghiero - Adagio, ma non troppo e
semplice - Allegretto

Presto

Adagio quasi un poco andante

Allegro

CHAMBER MUSIC // ELIAS STRING QUARTET



PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465, "Dissonance" (1785) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Of all the famous composer pairs — Bach and Handel, Bruckner and Mahler, Debussy and Ravel — only Mozart and Haydn were friends. Mozart first mentioned his acquaintance with Haydn in a letter to his father on April 24, 1784, but he probably had met the older composer soon after moving to Vienna three years earlier. Though his duties kept him across the border in Hungary at Esterháza Palace for most of the year, Haydn usually spent the winters in Vienna, and it is likely that he and Mozart attended or even played together at some of the many "string quartet parties" that graced the social calendars of the city's music lovers during the cold months. True friendship and mutual admiration developed between the two master musicians, despite the 24 years difference in their ages, and they took a special delight in learning from and praising each other's music.

Mozart's greatest testament to his respect for Haydn is the set of six superb string quartets composed between 1782 and 1785, and dedicated to his colleague upon their publication in September 1785. "To my dear friend Haydn," read the inscription. "A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated Man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best Friend." These works are not just charming souvenirs of personal sentiments, however, but they also represent a significant advance in Mozart's compositional style, for in them he assimilated the techniques of thematic development and thorough integration of the instrumental voices that Haydn had perfected in his Quartets, Op. 20 (1771) and Op. 33 (1781). "The 'Haydn' Quartets are models of perfection," wrote Homer Ulrich, "not a false gesture; not a faulty proportion. The six Quartets stand as the finest examples of Mozart's genius."

The last of the "Haydn" Quartets (C major, K. 465, completed on January 14, 1785) quickly gained the sobriquet "Dissonant" from its listeners for the adventurous harmonic excursions of its slow introduction. Some music dealers in Italy returned the scores to the publisher because they thought the rich chromaticisms were mistakes; the Hungarian Prince Grassalokovics was so incensed by the work's tonal audacities that he tore up the parts from which his household quartet were performing; and even Haydn expressed some initial shock, but defended the bold prefatory chords by saying, "Well, if Mozart wrote it, he must have meant it."

Actually, the introduction's heightened expression, a quality increasingly evident in the works of Mozart's later years, is simply the perfect emotional foil for setting off the sunny nature of much of the music that follows. The main body of the opening Allegro is disposed in traditional sonata form, invested with the thorough motivic working-out and instrumental interweavings that Mozart learned from Haydn. The following Andante, in sonatina form (sonata without a development section), is one of Mozart's most ecstatic inspirations. The Menuetto is not the rustic variety often favored by Haydn, but is rather an elegant dance subtly inflected with suave melodic chromaticism. The finale returns the ebullient mood and rhythmic vivacity of the opening movement.

--Program note by Dr. Richard Rodda

Ainsi la nuit (1976) Henri Dutilleux

Henri Dutilleux's work for string quartet, *Ainsi la nuit* (1976) was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and was intended for performance by the Juilliard Quartet. Before starting on the actual composition, Dutilleux spent some time studying the intricacies of string-playing techniques of the time. He had not attempted to write a work for string quartet since his days as a student at the Paris Conservatoire. The composer has stated

that Webern's *Six Bagatelles* (1913) were most beneficial in helping him get up to date. Dutilleux also looked over Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1926), as well as compositions for string quartet by Beethoven and Bartók.

After making a series of sketches in which he practiced writing for string quartet, the composer sent three completed pieces to the Juilliard Quartet. These pieces, entitled *Nuits* (1974), have musical material which was later used in the final version of *Ainsi la nuit*. Dutilleux completed *Ainsi la nuit* in 1976 and the work was premiered on January 6, 1977, in Paris, but not by the Juilliard Quartet. Actually, the premiere was given by the Quatuor Parrenin. The Juilliard Quartet would first perform the composition in the Library of Congress at Washington, D.C., on April 13, 1978.

The final version of the piece has seven movements with four "parentheses" lying in between the first five movements. Dutilleux did not like to leave the individual movements of his works untitled. The seven movements of *Ainsi la nuit* are "Nocturne I," "Miroir d'espace," "Litanies I," "Litanies II," "Constellations," "Nocturne II," and "Temps suspendu." The "parentheses" are mostly used to recall or foreshadow musical material in the rest of the work. For this reason, *Ainsi la nuit* is often associated with the idea of memory.

Many of the characteristics of Dutilleux's later works are displayed in *Ainsi la nuit*, including "fan-shaped" writing, the outlining of a tonal triad in a seemingly atonal work, and a similarity of some melodies to the modality of Gregorian chant. Dutilleux's "fan-shaped" writing can best be described through a piano composition in which the placement of the pianist's fingers create a mirror image between the hands. In *Ainsi la nuit*, this is accomplished through the voices of the four string instruments. Many of Dutilleux's pieces from the same period as *Ainsi la nuit* also make use of "fan-shaped" writing. It has also been discovered that in some of Dutilleux's later

works, a tonal triad is outlined over the course of the piece by an emphasis on individual pitches.

This is also true in *Ainsi la nuit*, as a D major triad is outlined with each successive pitch being centered upon in a separate movement. The pitch D is emphasized in the untitled introduction, while F sharp is the most important pitch in the fourth movement, "Litanies II." Finally, in "Constellations," the climax of the piece, the pitch A is the central pitch. The Gregorian influences in "Nocturne I," as well as the opening of "Litanies II," were acknowledged in Dutilleux's own program note.

--Program note by Chris Boyes

String Quartet No. 14 in C# minor, Op. 131 (1826) Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven's late string quartets have been regarded with awe and wonder since they were written, with Op. 131 probably leading the pack. Beethoven was said to consider it his own favorite and Wagner was extravagant in his description of the piece in his 1870 essay on the composer. Beethoven completed it in May 1826, making it the penultimate of his 16 completed quartets chronologically, though not in numbering. He may have heard it in a private performance before he died, but it was apparently not played publically until 1835. Beethoven's long evolving experiments with directing the flow of an entire work towards its end find perhaps their fullest fruits in Op. 131, cast in seven sections played without pause. These seven sections, however, are basically the four conventional movements with a fugal introduction and two connecting interludes. Despite the minor mode, the shifting chromaticism, and the contrapuntal intensity (and Wagner's avowal that it is "surely the saddest thing ever said in notes"), the opening Adagio is more contemplative than sorrowing. It ends with an ascending C-sharp octave leap, which is bumped up a half-step to launch the ensuing fleet Allegro molto vivace. This sunny

and rhythmically lively section has the tempo and extroverted character of a typical first movement, but none of the tension or drama. The third section is a brief ensemble recitative that sets up the slow movement, a ravishingly expressive set of variations – in different meters and tempos – on the sequentially yearning theme presented by the violins in tandem. The whirlwind Presto that follows (jumpstarted in a seeming "mistake" by the cello) is in effect the work's scherzo, a superficially blithe movement that is constantly on the edge of technical disaster, with odd "molto poco adagio" disjunctions and a coda that begins with glassy sul ponticello (on the bridge) whistling.

The brooding Adagio sixth section introduces the furious finale, the only full sonata form in the Quartet. The second theme is derived from the subject of the opening fugue, the latent anger and energy of which now explodes. "This is the fury of the world's dance – fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion, and suffering; lightning flashes and thunder rolls; and above the tumult the indomitable fiddler whirls us on to the abyss," Wagner wrote. "Amid the clamor he smiles, for to him it is nothing but a mocking fantasy; at the end, the darkness beckons him away, and his task is done."

--Program note by John Henken

BIOGRAPHY

The Elias String Quartet is internationally acclaimed as one of the leading ensembles of their generation. Known for their vibrant performances, the quartet has travelled the globe with some of the finest musicians and playing in the world's great halls.

2015 sees them complete their groundbreaking Beethoven Project: performing and recording the complete string quartets of Beethoven. Broadcast by BBC Radio 3 and performed in 11 major venues in the UK, the Quartet have also recorded the cycle for the "Wigmore Hall Live" record label. Six albums in total,



the first was released in January 2015. They have documented their journey on a dedicated website supported by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust: www.thebeethovenproject.com.

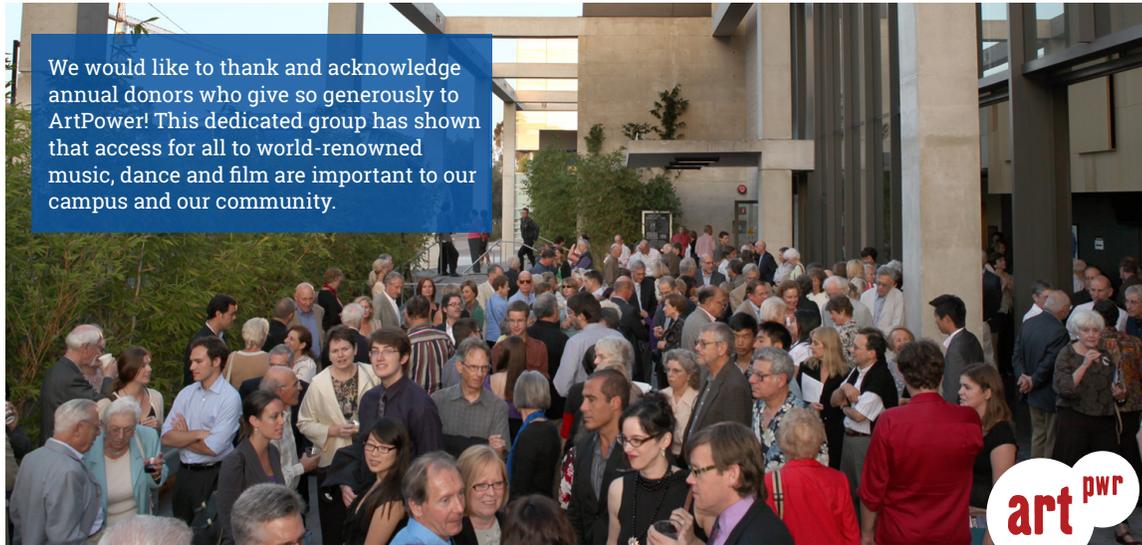
Highlights of 2014/2015 include a month long tour of the USA and Canada, their debut at the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in Paris, a return to The Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and concerts in Turkey, Holland, Belgium and Germany. They continue residencies with Glasgow Concert Halls, Turner Simms Concert Hall (Southampton) and The Brighton Festival. The Quartet will premiere a work written by young British composer Emily Howard at the Wigmore Hall and collaborate with various artists including Jonathan Biss, Francois-Rene Duchable and the Kungsbacka Trio.

The Quartet was chosen to participate in BBC Radio 3's New Generation Artists' Scheme 2009-11 and is the recipient of a 2010 Borletti-Buitoni Award. They were awarded the 2010 BBC Music Magazine's Newcomer of the Year Award and were nominated in 2013 and 2014

for an RPS Award and in 2014 for an Australian Art Music Award. In 2013 they were awarded a Mentoring Scholarship from the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn. They received 2nd prize and the Sidney Griller Prize at the 9th London String Quartet Competition.

The Quartet take their name from Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, of which *Elias* is the German form. They formed at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester where they worked closely with the late Dr. Christopher Rowland and later became Junior Fellows and Associate Quartet. They also spent a year studying at the Hochschule in Cologne with the Alban Berg String quartet. Other mentors in the quartet's studies include Peter Cropper, Hugh Maguire, Gyorgy Kurtag, Gabor Takacs-Nagy and Rainer Schmidt. For four years they were resident string quartet at Sheffield's "Music in the Round" as part of Ensemble 360, taking over from the Lindsay Quartet.

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