

upcoming concerts

Monday, March 14, 2016

Beethoven: String Quartet in F major, Opus 95
Shostakovich (arr. Derevianko): Symphony Nr. 15 for Piano Trio and Percussion, Opus 141a

Monday, May 9, 2016

Schubert: String Trio in B-flat, D. 581
Mendelssohn: Piano Trio in d minor, Opus 49
Schumann: Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Opus 47

Artistic Director – Charles Curtis
Recording Engineer – Andrew Munsey
Program Notes – Charles Cross
Program Associate – Rachel Beetz
Promotions Design – Jennifer Bewerse
Production Manager – Jessica Flores

Pianist **REIKO UCHIDA** enjoys an active career as a soloist and chamber musician. She performs regularly throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe, in venues including Suntory Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall, the 92nd Street Y, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kennedy Center, and the White House. First prize winner of the Joanna Hodges Piano Competition and Zinetti International Competition, she has appeared as a soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Santa Fe Symphony, Greenwich Symphony, and the Princeton Symphony, among others. She made her New York solo debut in 2001 at Weill Hall under the auspices of the Abby Whiteside Foundation.

As a chamber musician she has performed at the Marlboro, Santa Fe, Tanglewood, and Spoleto Music Festivals; as guest artist with Camera Lucida, American Chamber Players, and the Borromeo, Talich, Daedalus, St. Lawrence, and Tokyo String Quartets; and in recital with Jennifer Koh, Thomas Meglitoranza, Anne Akiko Meyers, Sharon Robinson, and Jaime Laredo. Her recording with Jennifer Koh, “String Poetic” was nominated for a Grammy Award. She is a past member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Two. As a youngster, she performed on Johnny Carson’s Tonight Show. Ms. Uchida holds a Bachelor’s degree from the Curtis Institute of Music, a Master’s degree from the Mannes College of Music, and an Artist Diploma from the Juilliard School. She studied with Claude Frank, Leon Fleisher, Edward Aldwell, Margo Garrett, and Sophia Rosoff. She has taught at the Brevard Music Center, and is currently an associate faculty member at Columbia University.

Violinist **JEFF THAYER** is currently the concertmaster of the San Diego Symphony. Previous positions include assistant concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, associate concertmaster of the North Carolina Symphony, concertmaster and faculty member of the Music Academy of the West (Santa Barbara), and concertmaster of the Canton (OH) Symphony Orchestra. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Eastman School of Music, and the Juilliard School’s Pre-College Division. His teachers include William Preucil, Donald Weilerstein, Zvi Zeitlin, Dorothy DeLay, and James Lyon. He has appeared as soloist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the San Diego Symphony, the Jupiter Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, the Canton Symphony Orchestra, the Pierre Monteux School Festival Orchestra, the Spartanburg Philharmonic, the Cleveland Institute of Music Symphony Orchestra, The Music Academy of the West Festival Orchestra, the Williamsport Symphony Orchestra, the Nittany Valley Symphony Orchestra, and the Conservatory Orchestra of Cordoba, among others. He attended Keshet Eilon (Israel), Ernen Musikdorf (Switzerland), Music Academy of the West, Aspen, New York String Orchestra Seminar, the Quartet Program, and as the 1992 Pennsylvania Governor Scholar, Interlochen Arts Camp. Through a generous loan from Irwin and Joan Jacobs and the Jacobs’ Family Trust, Mr. Thayer plays on the 1708 “Sir Bagshawe” Stradivarius.

Taiwanese-American violist **CHE-YEN CHEN** has established himself as an active performer. He is a founding member of the Formosa Quartet, recipient of the First-Prize and Amadeus Prize winner of the 10th London International String Quartet Competition. Since winning First-Prize in the 2003 Primrose Competition and “President Prize” in the Lionel Tertis Competition, Chen has been described by San Diego Union Tribune as an artist whose “most impressive aspect of his playing was his ability to find not just the subtle emotion, but the humanity hidden in the music.” Having served as the principal violist of the San Diego Symphony for eight seasons, he is the principal violist of the Mainly Mozart Festival Orchestra, and has appeared as guest principal violist with Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra. A former member of Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society Two and participant of the Marlboro Music Festival, he is also a member of Camera Lucida, and The Myriad Trio. Chen is currently on faculty at USC Thornton School of Music, and has given master-classes in major conservatories and universities across North America and Asia. In August 2013, the Formosa Quartet inaugurated their annual Formosa Chamber Music Festival in Hualien, Taiwan. Modeled after American summer festivals such as Ravinia, Taos, Marlboro, and Kneisel Hall, FCMF is the product of long-held aspirations and years of planning. It represents one of the quarter’s more important missions: to bring high-level chamber music training to talented young musicians; to champion Taiwanese and Chinese music; and to bring first-rate chamber music to Taiwanese audiences.

Cellist **CHARLES CURTIS** has been Professor of Music at UCSD since Fall 2000. Previously he was Principal Cello of the Symphony Orchestra of the North German Radio in Hamburg, a faculty member at Princeton, the cellist of the Ridge String Quartet, and a sought-after chamber musician and soloist in the classical repertoire. A student of Harvey Shapiro and Leonard Rose at Juilliard, on graduation Curtis received the Piatigorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society. He has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco, National and Baltimore Symphonies, the Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, the NDR Symphony, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the BBC Scottish Symphony, the Janacek Philharmonic, as well as orchestras in Italy, Brazil and Chile. He is internationally recognized as a leading performer of unique solo works created expressly for him by composers such as La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, Éliane Radigue, Alvin Lucier, Christian Wolff, Alison Knowles and Tashi Wada. Time Out New York called his recent New York performances “the stuff of contemporary music legend,” and the New York Times noted that Curtis’ “playing unfailingly combined lucidity and poise... lyricism and intensity.” Recent seasons have included solo concerts at New York’s Issue Project Room and Roulette, the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, the Sub Tropics Festival in Miami, the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Angelica Festival in Bologna as well as solo performances in Brussels, Metz, Paris, Mexico City, Athens and Los Angeles. Last summer Curtis led four performances of the music of La Monte Young at the Dia Art Foundation’s Dia:Chelsea space in New York City.

camera lucida

chamber music concerts at UC San Diego
Monday, December 7th, 2015 7:30pm
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Late Works of Mozart

Piano Quartet in E-flat major, K. 493

Allegro
Larghetto
Allegretto

Piano Trio in C major, K. 548

Allegro
Andante cantabile
Allegro

intermission

Divertimento in E-flat major for String Trio, K. 563

Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto
Andante
Menuetto
Allegro

Reiko Uchida, piano
Jeff Thayer, violin
Che-Yen Chen, viola
Charles Curtis, violoncello

The Piano Quartet begins seemingly without a theme; in its place, an atmosphere, a sonority, a sequence of closely related harmonies, an underlying reality free of individuated identities, pure matter, pure sound. But the sound is the sound of E-flat major, a special key in the Mozartean universe, a key of pulsating, ardent, glowing presence. In Mozart's time, before instruments were tuned to the scientific exactitude of the equal temperament system, before individual keys became practically interchangeable and devoid of distinct physiological effects, the three flats of E-flat major would have bristled audibly, making a small acoustical spectacle. But even today, if we listen closely, E-flat major behaves in its own particular ways, caused in part by the non-agreement between the open strings of the string instruments - their native sonority - and the notes of the E-flat major chord. The instruments will sound less bright, less open, as if they were not ringing of their own accord; but conversely somewhat muted and covered, darker, hence more august, more serious, as if appeared in heavy ceremonial robes. It is not for naught that some have related Mozart's affinity for E-flat major with his Masonic leanings.

Violinist Jeff Thayer: *"I somehow physically relate to, or viscerally 'feel,' the key of E-flat major."*

This may sound mysterious, but for a musician, the relationship to a key is immediate, indeed visceral, tactile, haptic. And this has nothing to do with "perfect pitch." The instrument reacts differently in each key; the fingers reach for subtly different locations on the string, the vibrations coming back from the bridge and the bow transfer their energy to the fingers differently, the special resonances of a particular instrument illuminate degrees of the scale in a spectrum unique to that instrument and that key.

Much of "The Magic Flute" is in E-flat major. The famous overture too introduces not a theme, at first, but the sustained E-flat major chord. Let's not forget the 39th Symphony, and the last of the great Viola Quintets. Also the "Kegelstatt" Trio, for clarinet, viola and piano, an instrumentation certainly doubling down on darkly-hued, shaded sonorities. The famous "Masonic Funeral Music" is in c minor, also a key with three flats, with long stretches in E-flat major, the relative major of c minor. Likewise the very late Adagio and Rondo K. 617 for glass harmonica.

Thus our piano quartet, composed in 1785 and listed in the Köchel-Verzeichnis as K. 493, greets us not with a tune or a theme or a rhythm or a melody, but with a state of mind - and with a physical, acoustical, phenomenal presence. Hypostasis.

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The Piano Trio, K. 548, written in 1788 during the summer, represents a turn to the public, possibly an attempt to make a lighter, more easily appreciated, immediately understandable music. It may be hard for us, at this remove, to fathom the resistance to Mozart's music in his own time. For example, the Piano Quartet in g minor, K. 478 (interestingly, it may have been the very first composition for this instrumentation) was submitted to Hoffmeister, one of Mozart's publishers, as the first in a series of three such pieces. Fat chance. The piece was considered too gloomy, too complex, too intense, too difficult, and the contract for the remaining two piano quartets was expunged. Mozart then composed K. 493, tonight's piano quartet, nine months later, without any prospect of publication. Fancy that, Mozart's music was considered too difficult for his public.

The trio, on the other hand, seems calculated to shine and ingratiate and endear. The key already promises this, inviting less skilled performers (or practitioners, one should add, since the probable "use" would have been at home) to swim in the unthreatening waters of no sharps and flats. And with the comforting, booming bell-tones of the violoncello's low C-string, the piece delivers on its promise. But it is not easy music. Mozart unbendingly upholds an intelligence of musical discourse; let us stress this aspect of his art, which is so often passed off as "refinement," or "elegance," or "ingenuity." All of these words apply, but the core impulse driving the music is its uncom-

promising focus, a discursive compression that takes as its source not just rhetoric, but the unfolding of complex differences and ideational relationships. Mozart honors the listener, as Adorno said of Schoenberg, with his difficulty. (One must add, he honors the musician playing his music too. The trio is not easy to play.) That this can go on without disturbing a surface of sheer pleasure and sensuous satisfaction is a particular achievement, a specialty of Mozart's, especially compared to Beethoven, for whom difficulty is an end in itself.

But we can easily forget the banal and everyday and even sordid circumstances which gave rise to this "exalted" music: Mozart scrounging for money, attempting to gain favor with the public, working against illness, family concerns, loss and debt, moving apartments. The summer of 1788 was a difficult one for Mozart, and for his family. The trio is clearly an attempt to solidify his finances, reclaim some of the public success of his youth, make a piece that will sell copies.

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The Divertimento for string trio, K. 563, was composed later the same summer. It was not published at all during Mozart's lifetime, and was performed privately at the home of Johann Michael von Puchberg, a Masonic brother and textile merchant who regularly lent Mozart money - substantial sums, it would seem. The piece was undoubtedly a token of gratitude, not explicitly a commission, but a gift to repay, in music, his friend's support. And what a gift.

Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (1970): *In 1788, the year after completing the two great quintets [in C major and g minor, K. 515 and 516], Mozart wrote no chamber music for strings except the Divertimento K. 563 for string trio. An essay in contrapuntal and harmonic richness, with a surface ease of manner that makes light of its ingenuity, this work is a distillation of Mozart's technique and experience. The mastery of the normative technique of writing for four instruments in the seven quartets of the years 1782 to 1786, and the immense expansion of scope in the two quintets of 1787 are now concentrated within the limits of the string trio. No other composer of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ever understood the demands of writing for three voices as Mozart did, except for Bach... As a string trio, this one of Mozart's stands alone, far above all other works in that form. It is also an interesting precursor of the last quartets of Beethoven, in its transference of the divertimento form, with two dance movements and two slow movements (one a set of variations), into the realm of serious chamber music, making purely intimate what had been public, and, as Beethoven was to do in so many of the short, interior movements of his late chamber works, transfiguring the 'popular' element without losing sight of its provenance. In Mozart's Divertimento the synthesis of a learned display of three-part writing and a popular genre is accomplished without ambiguity or constraint.*

And on Mozart's love for the viola:

The viola was his favorite string instrument, the one he habitually chose when playing quartets... His partiality may have come not only from the instrument's sonority but from his love for rich inner part-writing: in his music there was a fulness of sound and a complexity in the inner voices that had disappeared from music since the death of Bach. 'Too many notes' was the reproach cast at Mozart as it had been at Bach: it was not a sonority fashionable after about 1730, and the later eighteenth century preferred a drier and leaner sound.

It is true that the string trio offers a very particular field of operation, compared to the string quartet or to the various combinations of strings and piano. It is a kind of minimum: any fewer than three voices, and the voluminousness expected of a major chamber music composition would not be attainable. The features of the string trio include: a general absence of doubling, or of filler or cushioning; an absolute equality between all three parts, entailing a departure from the melody-accompaniment style of vocal (or vocally-inspired) music; consequently an increased demand upon the performers, an increase in exposure and responsibility, and the circumstance of basically

having to play almost *all the time*.

There is not a single major string trio composed in the nineteenth century; the century is bookmarked by Beethoven's five massive string trios composed in the 1790's, and Reger's two from the beginning of the twentieth century; but the nineteenth century opted out entirely from the format.

The difficulty of Mozart's Divertimento, the almost ostentatious brilliance of the individual parts, puts it jarringly at odds with the designation of Divertimento. This Divertimento is not so diverting, as much as it is riveting, demanding, calling attention to every twist and turn of its progress. The leaning toward the descant, the placing of the cello in a high register as in the Prussian Quartets which followed directly upon the Divertimento, in combination with the spareness of this minimal instrumentation, elicit sonorities not heard in any other works of the Classical period. And again the discourse of this piece, the tortuousness of its "argument," the sheer inexhaustibility and largesse of Mozart's thought world, make it not so much an entertainment, but rather a listener's piece *par excellence*. As listeners, we must "read closely," following the inscrutable patterns of Mozart's weave.

Sheldon Nodelman, notes for Camera Lucida, 2009: *The [Divertimento for] String Trio... pretends to be a divertimento, or at least the ghost of one, while subtly deflecting its intent. The facade of decorum which it sustains is a necessary one -- it is at the same time the mask of reserve behind which its private interior life sequesters itself. The sparseness of the writing, the extreme economy of means, impart a diagrammatic weightlessness. The formulae of expression corresponding to the established canon are retained but in varying degree leached of their content as, newly inflected, they begin to elicit ideas and feelings as yet unmapped. The dematerialized gestures and empty intervals embody that turn toward abstraction, that predominance of the semiotic over the semantic dimension, of syntax over vocabulary, which Broch would identify as the hallmark of a Late Style.*

Mozart's thematic ideas are indeed formulaic, based on triads, scales, neighbor tones. Often, not very elaborate at all; simple, even simplistic. (There are exceptions. If we go back to the E-flat major Piano Quartet we find that a theme does emerge in the first movement, late, and that it is followed by a second theme, as the Classical style requires, and that this second theme is obtuse, full of leaps and awkward reaches.) In German there is an untranslatable word, *eine Floskel*, meaning something like "a flourish," or "fine words," or "an empty formality." This is Mozart's stock in trade. Somehow the simple, the not-elaborate, opens the pathway to the process of *elaborating upon*. What Charles Rosen refers to as the "popular element" is to some extent this reliance on seemingly hackneyed or unpromising thematic points of departure. And this is indeed what links our late Mozart to the late Beethoven. If ever there was a musical "*Floskel*" it would be the theme of the Diabelli Variations.

Or the childlike theme of this Divertimento's Andante movement, a set of variations strangely involuted. Within each section, indeed, already in the presentation of the theme, each phrase is stated and then *immediately varied* in a second statement. In other words, Mozart does not wait for the first variation to vary his theme, he does it already after eight bars. And then, again, after sixteen more bars (the second phrase is, for some reason, twice the length of the first), those sixteen bars are *immediately varied*. And this process of internal variation continues through every additional variation of the movement, such that *variation itself is varied*. In terms of discourse, we must ask ourselves, where is the inside and the outside of the notion of "theme and variations" - or, where does "theme" end and "variation" begin. Thus a movement with a "theme" of the self-effacing innocence turns immediately into a question about itself, and the movement achieves, through its elaborate process of elaboration, a kind of complexity, a scope, even a monumentality utterly at odds with the character of its theme. And it ends lightly, as if nothing unusual had happened. Baffling.