

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 quartet’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, and Athens. 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.

Artistic Director – Charles Curtis
Recording Engineer – Andrew Munsey
Program Notes – Charles Curtis
Program Associate – Rachel Beetz
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camera lucida

chamber music concerts at UC San Diego
Monday, May 9, 2016 7:30 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

String Trio in B-flat major, D. 581 (1817)

Franz Schubert

Allegro Moderato
Andante
Minuetto: Allegro
Rondo: Allegretto

Piano Trio in d minor, Opus 49 (1839)

Felix Mendelssohn

Molto allegro ed agitato
Andante con moto tranquillo
Scherzo: Leggiero e vivace
Finale: Allegro assai appassionato

intermission

Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Opus 47 (1842)

Robert Schumann

Sostenuto assai; Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo: Molto vivace
Andante cantabile
Finale: Vivace

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

The Dreamer in Spectacles: Three Early Romantic Chamber Works

Schubert's outward appearance was anything but striking or prepossessing. He was short of stature, with a full, round face, and was rather stout. His forehead was very beautifully domed. Because of his short-sightedness he always wore spectacles, which he did not take off even during sleep. Dress was a thing in which he took no interest whatever ... and listening to flattering talk about himself he found downright nauseating.

This touching snapshot of the composer at the age of 18 comes down to us courtesy of Schubert's friend Hüttenbrenner. We do not see in this description a lion of Romanticism, a glamorous Lord Byron or a mystic Novalis. Schubert worked long hours as a schoolteacher, lived in his father's house, drank in the public houses of Vienna in the evenings, took composition lessons from Salieri, and participated as violinist or violist in chamber music parties and private orchestra sessions. Somehow in the in-between spaces of his daily routines he composed tirelessly, compulsively, restlessly. Robert Winter has described his output at age 18 as “a burst of creative activity ... virtually unrivalled in the history of Western music.” He estimates a daily rate of 65 bars of new music each day, which he calls “superhuman.” And for whom, and for what? For Schubert had no public, at most a small circle of admiring, indulgent friends. When Schubert sent to Goethe an album of songs set to texts of the aging poet, in hopes of receiving permission for a dedication, *the package was sent back unopened.*

How do we resolve this image of the idealistic youth, homely, modest, and lacking in great prospects, with the god-like status now accorded him? How do we hear the music as a private spiritual practice, made in near-seclusion, not yet co-opted by a music industry or placed in the pageant of what has become “history?” We cannot, and in effect we must conclude that we also cannot now do justice to music conceived on such a personal scale. The very fact of performing Schubert in the midst of unfettered cultural saturation seems to do violence to the detail and particularity of his art. Rousseau, in the *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, stakes a claim to the creation of art not for a public, but for the maker's private use: he recasts the writer as reader, as observer of his own environment, as transparent medium “reading” and transmitting the experience of his soul. Perhaps we must find in the performance of Schubert a quality of the amateur, the lover of music, who is also “the actor of music,” as Barthes suggests in *Musica Practica*, and not “the interpreter, the grand Romantic voice,” nor “the technician, who relieves the listener of all activity... and abolishes in the sphere of music the very notion of doing.” Can we find a mode of listening which places us in the midst of the doing of music? Whatever this might mean, this would begin to bring Schubert into a sphere in which his music can speak to us again, by speaking through us, even as listeners.

The scale of the String Trio D. 581 is precisely anti-monumental. The ensemble itself, compared to the grandeur of the string quartet, is something of a stepchild in the chamber music tradition, a grouping which points even more tellingly toward music to be *used* - played with friends - rather than *performed* in concert before spectators. We are drawn in to a music that is gracious, even ingratiating, seemingly at pains to be sociable and courteous. The very shape of the violin's opening seems a gesture extended in greeting. All of the movements share a decorative richness, a fullness of ornate pattern-making, a constant filling-in with scalar serpentines and chromatic neighbor tones. We hear the graciousness of grace-notes, musical add-ons added “gratis,” a superfluity in miniature. The tragedy in all this generosity is encapsulated in the image of the unopened package.

Yet the anti-monumental does not quite hold. While the character of the music remains unostentatious, Schubert sends his themes on *Wanderungen* through precincts and regions far removed from their points of origin. In the final Rondo, the unpromising, rustic theme bears some resemblance to the famous song-melody *Die Forelle* (composed in the same year). But this melody carries out harmonic and developmental explorations that push in the direction of Schubert's late, long-duration masterpieces such as the C-major Symphony and the String Quintet. It's worth noting that in much of Schubert's late music, which one could with good reason call monumental, the character of the themes often remains modest, even homely - but transmuted, through prolongation and the need to excursion and linger, into the building blocks of grandly-dimensioned spaces.

The third movement, marked *Menuetto*, seems to borrow from Austrian folk forms, especially the so-called *Ländler*, a precursor to the waltz. So much of Schubert, and of this trio, gives us the impression of a music that has always been there, untouched by mortal hands, an *Urmusik* that, through Schubert's genius, reaches us in its originary, immortal form. But this too, this myth of the composer as pure medium, serves to mythologize and degrade the reality of his

artifice. W. G. Sebald, writing movingly on Schubert in *Logis in einem Landhaus*, speaks of

... a form of composition which, in the shards of an already half-expired melody, simulates an authentic folk style which as such never even existed... The mistake that we as listeners always make lies in the assumption that in these melodic marvels, music and speech quote their own natural birthright, whereas in truth they are the most artificial instances thereof.

Not feigned, but artificial, and in two senses: fabricated for personal use, they are simulations longingly drawn from *Kulturgut*; and, as worked into the elaborate formal structures of chamber music, they are varied, manipulated, inflected and shaped beyond recognizability as regional emblems.

The String Trio builds and builds, filling in its florid curlicues, spinning out its circuitous trails. But it ends as graciously as it began, and quietly. The hours of loving labor devoted to its fabrication, hours during which Schubert communed with his muse, for his own amusement, 65 bars of music per day: perhaps this is the moment we must try to restore to the experience of his music.

Mendelssohn figures, in social terms, as a kind of inverse of Schubert: scion of a wealthy banking family, coddled and precocious, a favorite of monarchs and great poets (the meeting between Goethe and the 12-year-old Mendelssohn is legendary, and Goethe is said to have compared Mendelssohn favorably to Mozart). One sometimes must wonder, cautiously, if one can really take Mendelssohn seriously. The conspicuous drama of his music, its self-conscious emotional storms, certainly must authentically mirror his inner life, but the storms seem willed. Where Schubert slips imperceptibly from innocence to grief, with a single tonal alteration, Mendelssohn loudly proclaims his ardor, his passion, his agitation. One wonders. But the deftness with which he manipulates his material does at times recall Mozart.

Opus 49 is justly claimed as the great piano trio of its time. Schumann himself decreed it to be thus:

It is the master trio of today, as in their day were those of Beethoven in B flat and D, as was that of Schubert in E flat; a wholly fine composition, that, when years have passed away, will delight grandchildren. Mendelssohn is the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the brightest among musicians, the one who looks most clearly of all through the contradictions of time, and reconciles us to them.

It is a work calculated to impress, and with its sheer abundance of ingenuity and invention, with an unrelenting energy that pushes the sonata form to its limit without allowing it to buckle under the weight of its amassed riches: it does impress. It is breathtaking music, at a pitch of artistic ambition which might itself have been the truest source of Mendelssohn's emotional unrest. In works such as the famous Octet, the *Hebrides overture*, the incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and certainly this trio, he may in fact have outstripped Mozart - not in depth of expression, but in wherewithal and in technical resources. What this music misses is expressive ambiguity, the perpetual unknowability of the human soul, what Keats in a visionary formulation called “negative capability.” exactly that which a Schubert or a Mozart, or the late Brahms, brings us into confrontation with. But what Mendelssohn gains in exchange is a force of delivery barely ever equalled in a chamber music setting.

The opening movement (*molto agitato!*) surges in swift three-quarter time like an agitated sea chanty, the piano often interlocking her two hands in a kind of rhythmic palpitation. Rapid-fire repeated notes in the strings erupt like whitecaps under a silver-grey sky, and the music rarely pauses; even the relatively calm second theme, a simple arpeggiation over benign harmonies, continues to spin forward in ceaseless motion. By contrast, the lovely second movement, *Andante*, imagines a scene of repose, tranquil and reflective, perhaps a moment in which memory and retrospection take the place of action. Yet here too, the chain of moving sixteenth-notes, seemingly calm (the movement marking calls for *moto tranquillo*, tranquil motion), almost never comes to a halt. The third movement is a scherzo of the sort that is now universally modified with the adjective “Mendelssohnian.” Diaphanous, translucent in texture, playful, quick, darting and jabbing with unexpected syncopations: these are the attributes of this most quintessentially Mendelssohnian of all scherzi. To ensure a maximum in its buzzing and whirring effect, Mendelssohn dispenses with a trio section, allowing this scherzo to run its course straight through without interruption. And the Finale, marked *Appassionato*, takes us downward into a weary world of stone outcrops and barren spaces, the theme itself descending again and again in reluctant stepwise suspensions. But behold: a shining melody takes us from d minor to B-flat major, suddenly, almost without

preparation, temporarily relieving our foreboding sense of exile from hospitable climes. These opposing states vie against each other until, near the end, B-flat major urges upwards through a surprising modulation to D major, heralding an ending awash in blinding light, brilliant energy and a sense of release that we only then recognize as having been withheld for almost the entire duration of the movement.

Three years after Mendelssohn's Opus 49, his friend and fellow Leipziger Robert Schumann embarked upon what we now call his “year of chamber music.” Like a child who eats only one sort of food at a time, Schumann in his early years tended to fasten upon one genre of music exclusively for extended stretches, probing and exploiting all its possibilities before moving on. After first publishing nearly only piano music, in 1840 he wrote over 150 *Lieder*; in 1841, orchestral music; and in 1842, after winter months of debilitating depression, the summer brought forth three string quartets, the fall the Piano Quintet, and finally in October and November the Piano Quartet. According to his *Haushaltsbücher* he sketched the entire Quartet in six days, from the 24th to the 30th of October, working it into fair copy in less than 3 weeks in November. This is creative action at an amazing heat of inspiration and inner drive.

We encounter Schumann here, in 1842, in the early rapture of his marriage with Clara Wieck. This is the period in which the couple kept their famous “marriage diaries,” a chronicle of their relationship written weekly by one or the other in alternation. The marriage diaries are tough reading; the pitch of effort expended in these communiqués seems to conceal underlying tensions, the mutual professions of love and admiration seem overdone; a certain claustrophobia sets in. A brief mention of the Piano Quartet appears in Clara's April 1843 entry:

In the evening we played Robert's E-flat Major Quartet for the first time at our house, and again I was really enchanted by this beautiful work, which is so youthful and fresh, as if it were his first.

The same entry notes that Clara cannot practice during the day because the sound disturbs Robert's composing, and in the evenings she is too tired. And a few paragraphs on we read that, only three weeks later, Clara gave birth to their second daughter, Elise.

There is nothing claustrophobic in the Quartet; it is spacious, transparent, airy. With judicious interweaving of voices, absolute equality between instruments, and a masterful balancing of textures and registers, Schumann projects a relaxed openness, even when the music becomes intensely expressive. And the music is experimental, too. The opening chord, which sounds like an ending, places us in a held sonority that sounds vaguely unresolved, voiced as it is in first inversion. The carefully-laid correspondences between small thematic gestures and full-fledged themes emerge immediately: the falling cadences of the slow introduction turn around into the jaunty Allegro theme, *sempre con molto sentimento*. In fact, the many different themes are so subtly self-similar that, even as performers working through them with our own hands, we cannot keep track of all the interrelations.

The scherzo is non-Mendelssohnian. It is insistent, digging, mining, a seeking after the ore of the earth, its mineral substrate. The first Trio descends melodically in lament, the second plays off rhythmic syncopations with immaterial wafts of harmony, interspersed with flinty echoes of the Scherzo theme. The slow movement takes as its theme a melody that unites two of Schumann's favorite devices: suspensions and sequences. Against a falling bass line, the melody poignantly reaches upward by the interval of a seventh, only to glide downward by a seventh, repeating this pattern in a slow waltz meter. Near the end of the movement, Schumann pulls a fast one on the cellist: he requests that the low C string be quickly tuned down one whole step to B-flat, the tonic key of the movement. Schumann provides sufficient time, as the viola takes the melody, for the cellist to accomplish this *scordatura* without any break in the music. And a little miracle of nineteenth-century chamber music takes place before our eyes. The last statement of the beautiful theme is played by the cello in hushed tones as the violin and viola hold dematerialized pedal notes; all motion stops, and the cello finally introduces the drone of this very low B-flat. We hear a kind of primal sound, a music of pure sonority, a different sort of *Urmusik*. Nature, primordial *materia, mater*, the mother of sound. And out of this matter new forms are born: violin and viola intone the figure of a descending fifth followed by an ascending major sixth, exactly the thematic nucleus of the Finale, which then grows and multiplies to an exuberant, ecstatic finish.

Fortunately, Schumann provides sufficient time, in the first bars of the fugal Finale, for the cellist to tune the now-B-flat string back up to C. The social order has been restored, primal sound was a fleeting dream, a dream perhaps dreamt with spectacles on. — Charles Curtis