

Core Memory Music

Terra String Quartet

Harriet Langley, violin

Amelia Dietrich, violin

Chih-Ta Chen, viola

Audrey Chen, cello

Saturday, December 16, 2023

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)	String Quartet in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5, Hob.III:35 <i>1. Allegro moderato</i> <i>2. Menuetto</i> <i>3. Adagio</i> <i>4. Finale. Fuga a 2 soggetti</i>	1772
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Caroline Shaw (1982–)	Entr'acte	2011
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Intermission

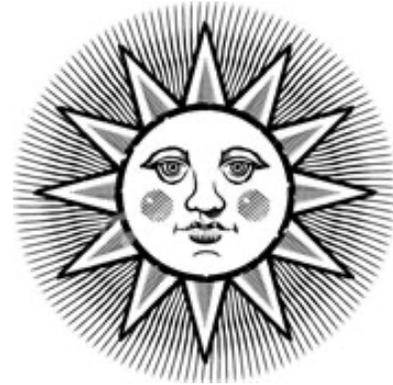
Franz Schubert (1797–1828)	String Quartet in D minor “Death and the Maiden”, D. 810 <i>1. Allegro</i> <i>2. Andante con moto</i> <i>3. Scherzo (Allegro molto)</i> <i>4. Presto</i>	1824
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Join us on Saturday, December 30, 2023 at 2:00 pm to hear pianist Maddox Realejo perform music by Mozart, Schubert, and Ravel.

Haydn: String Quartet in F minor, Op. 20 No. 5

According to a list Haydn compiled of those works he considered his "true" string quartets, Op. 20 was his third set of six quartets, preceded by Op. 17 and Op. 9. All three sets were composed between 1769 and 1772, a period of merely three years in which the pioneering Haydn produced eighteen quartets. This burst of creative effort might well be regarded as the most important in the history of the string quartet. Showing a steady progress through Op. 9 and Op. 17 that yielded more than a few outstanding early works in the form, Haydn realized the full bounty of his exploration with Op. 20, six masterpieces conceived as an integrated set immediately regarded as a towering achievement, the very first crucial landmark in the history of the string quartet. The cover of the first printed version of Op. 20 featured an illustration of the sun and so they have been known as the "Sun" quartets ever since.



The legendary British musicologist Donald Tovey referenced this nearly prescient visual symbolism by writing that Op. 20 was "a sunrise over the domain of sonata style and quartets in particular." Tovey continues with an astonishing assessment:

"Every page of the six quartets of Op. 20 is of historic and aesthetic importance; and though the total results still leave Haydn with a long road to travel, there is perhaps no single or sextuple opus in the history of instrumental music which has achieved so much or achieved it so quietly. ...With Op. 20 the historical development of Haydn's quartets reaches its goal; and further progress is not progress in any historical sense, but simply the difference between one masterpiece and the next."

The Op. 20 quartets were essentially the first to achieve a prized balance of ensemble by granting the cello a melodic role within a partnership of equals. More groundbreaking, three of the quartets end with a fugue: Op. 20 represents the first important fusion of the gallant, dramatic sonata with learned counterpoint, a blend that would further promote the equality of instruments and define a new dynamic, hybrid texture as the *sine qua non* of Viennese classicism. Finally, within a set of unusual consistency of excellence, Haydn offers a breathtaking variety of forms, styles, topics and moods such that no two movements or quartets are alike. Each quartet is a unique and complex individual within a diverse community. Unusual among Haydn's quartet sets, Op. 20 includes two in a minor key, a further example of variety and perhaps a reflection of the weight with which even Haydn regarded the set.

The String Quartet in f minor, Op. 20, No. 5 is among Haydn's most intense quartets due to its dark and occasionally violent mood and its culmination in a severe fugue based on a terse, jagged subject. Probably the most frequently played of the group, it was placed first in the ordering of the Op. 20 quartets in Haydn's original handwritten catalog of works. As such, it stands as a memorable sentinel at the portal opening unto the history of string quartet masterworks.

The finale is the first of three in Op. 20 that are fugues, one of Haydn's chief innovations in this historic set. The fugue is a technique of strict contrapuntal imitation that dates back to the mid-15th century. Culminating in the music of Bach, it subsequently fell out of favor with the new style of simplified expression that characterized the pre-Classical era. Haydn's re-introduction of fugue added new intellectual, textural and dramatic dimensions to the music, which, along with and within the sophisticated development of sonata form defined the new era of Classical music. The magnificent classical fugues of Mozart and Beethoven find their origins in this historical moment.

Schubert: String Quartet in D minor “Death and the Maiden”, D. 810

Schubert's String Quartet No.14 in D minor brings together two of the composer's extraordinary talents. Schubert had a natural instinct for melody and song. His 600 Lieder (songs) and his song cycles are among the most expressive works in all music, connecting with human emotions in a deeply profound way. It's impossible to separate Schubert's music from his own experience and, for me, this work always seems to capture his essence.



First, there's the man. The quartet was written in 1824 when his health was a cause for concern. He wrote to a friend, 'Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who, in sheer despair over this, even makes things worse instead of better. Imagine a man, I say, whose most brilliant hopes have perished...'

This music, then, is a reflection of Schubert's state of mind. It's filled with that resignation he spoke of, as well as an all-pervading anguish and yearning. Not only was his body sick – so was his soul. It's impossible to listen to all four movements of the quartet without an awareness of death's shadow stalking Schubert and emerging in the most funereal passages.

The title comes from one of Schubert's lied, “Der Tod und das Mädchen”, D. 531. A terror-stricken maiden begs death to pass her by but Death consoles her, saying 'you shall sleep gently in my arms':

The Maiden:

Oh! leave me! Prithee, leave me! thou grisly man of bone!
For life is sweet, is pleasant.
Go! leave me now alone! Go! leave me now alone!

Death:

Give me thy hand, oh! maiden fair to see,
For I'm a friend, hath ne'er distress'd thee.
Take courage now, and very soon within mine arms shalt softly rest thee!"

Musically, this is a masterwork among quartets. Using the theme from his original song and building variations upon it, Schubert creates a pattern where the dark and powerful opening is met by the soft lyrical reply of the maiden. Or is it the defiance and terror of the maiden, met by the gentle subverting caress of death? It's a dialogue which continues throughout the quartet, and there's little escape from the fear and the fury in the overall sombre tone of the music.

Can this possibly be music you'd want to listen to? I have read that sad music can make you happy. Certainly this is a deeply melancholic work but never underestimate the power of even the saddest music to enrich our own emotional make-up.

– Jane Jones