



and Mr. & Mrs. William J. Rushton, III

present

Pacifica String Quartet



Reynolds-Kirschbaum Recital Hall
February 6, 2011



Pacifica String Quartet

Simin Ganatra, violin • Sibbi Bernhardtsson, violin
Masumi Per Rostad, viola • Brandon Vamos, cello



Recognized for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and often-daring repertory choices, the Pacifica Quartet has gained international stature as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. Recently named quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art – a position held for 43 years by the Guarneri String Quartet – and named Ensemble of the Year by Musical America, the Pacifica received the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance. Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music’s top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award and the appointment to Lincoln Center’s CMS Two. In 2006 the Pacifica

was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber ensemble so honored in the grant’s long history. Also in 2006 the Quartet was featured on the cover of Gramophone and heralded as one of “five new quartets you should know about,” the only American quartet to make the list.

The Pacifica Quartet tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, and performs in the world’s major concert halls. Having given highly acclaimed performances of the complete Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Carter string quartets in recent seasons, the Quartet will present the monumental Shostakovich cycle in Chicago and New York during the 2010-2011 season. In the summer of 2011, the Quartet will present the complete Beethoven cycle at Tokyo’s famous Suntory Hall, in an unprecedented presentation of five concerts in three days. And in 2011-2012, the Quartet will take the Shostakovich cycle to London’s Wigmore Hall and will also perform the complete Beethoven cycle at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

An ardent advocate of contemporary music, the Pacifica Quartet commissions and performs many new works. It has been widely praised for its single-concert performances of Elliott Carter’s five-quartet cycle, performed in New York, San Francisco, and abroad. Critics have called these groundbreaking concerts “brilliant,” “astonishing,” and “breathtaking.” In 2008 the Quartet released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter’s quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. The Quartet’s other recordings, including Mendelssohn’s complete string quartets and *Declarations: Music Between the Wars*, both on the Cedille label, have also attracted international acclaim.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, where they were appointed to the faculty of the University of Illinois in 2003 and serve as quartet-in-residence. In addition to their recent appointment as quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Pacifica Quartet also serves as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago and Visiting Artists in Chamber Music at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The Pacifica Quartet is represented by Melvin Kaplan, Inc.,
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
www.melkap.com • www.pacificaquartet.com
Recordings: Cedille Records, Naxos

Program

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1

Allegro con brio

Adagio affettuoso et appassionato

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Allegro

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

Introduction: Andantino

Scherzo: Allegretto

Recitative: Adagio

Etude: Allegro

Humoresque: Allegro

Elegy: Adagio

Conclusion: Moderato

(played without pause)

Intermission

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Quartet in D minor, D. 810, "Death and the Maiden"

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven • Quartet in F, Op. 18, No. 1

Beethoven most likely chose the *F major* as the first quartet, even though it was composed second, because it is the biggest and most impressive work of the group. The particularly brilliant opening and closing movements, as well as its unequalled dramatic sweep and emotional tension, distinguish the *F major* from the other quartets in *Op. 18*.

Five pages in one Beethoven notebook and eleven pages in another bear witness to the composer's titanic struggle to bring the all-important motif, which starts and dominates the first movement, to its final form. The process was largely one of simplifying and concentrating his original musical idea into the most terse and pithy statement that one writer, Joseph Kerman, describes as a "coiled spring, ready to shoot off in all directions." Although he introduces a subsidiary subject, a charming, light, syncopated melody, and casts the two themes in sonata form, the opening motto clearly maintains its ascendancy throughout the movement, even as it changes its character from laconic to prolix, from tender to aggressive, from somber to joyful. In the summary coda, Beethoven surprises the listener with a completely new theme, an ascending scale passage that he then combines with the main motif, which reasserts its dominance in the closing measures.

About the deeply passionate and tragic *Adagio*, Beethoven wrote at the end of one sketch, "les derniers soupirs" ("the last breath"). It is reported that when Beethoven played the movement for Karl Amenda, his friend said, "It pictured for me the parting of two lovers." "Good!" Beethoven replied, "I thought of the scene in the burial vault in *Romeo and Juliet*." The first violin sings the first theme, a poised arching melody that floats lightly over the gently pulsating accompaniment. The second violin introduces the subsidiary subject, a one-measure descending phrase, and the viola is entrusted with the concluding subject, also one measure in length and downward in direction. Although the three themes are quiet in character, Beethoven in the ensuing development invests them with an energy and agitation that far exceeds the range of eighteenth-century quartet writing. After the emotional heights reached in the *Adagio*, the listeners, though not the performers, are allowed to relax with the modest and very charming *Scherzo*. Adding a touch of wit and humor in the middle *Trio* section, Beethoven sends the first violin on rapid flows of notes between rhythmically limping unison passages. The trio is followed by a literal repeat of the *Scherzo*.

The first subject of the final movement, a flashy run of notes ending with three concluding chords, bears a striking resemblance to the *Finale* of

the *C minor* string trio. With virtuosic parts for all four instruments, the movement is cast partly in rondo form, with a repeated theme and contrasting episodes, and partly in sonata form, with two contrasting themes that are developed and returned.

Notes from Guide to Chamber Music, by Melvin Berger ©1985 (used with permission).

Dmitri Shostakovich Quartet No. 11 in F minor, Op. 122

From the late 1950s, Shostakovich was plagued constantly by illness and physical disability. Weakness and loss of mobility in his legs and right hand (eventually diagnosed as a rare form of poliomyelitis) gradually forced him to give up performing. During long hospital stays and recuperation periods he had ample opportunity to contemplate his own frailties. The deaths of people close to him also fueled his reflections; his late works mirror his increasing preoccupation with mortality. The *Eleventh Quartet* was completed in January 1966 and dedicated to the memory of Vasily Shirinsky (1901-1965), until his death the second violinist of the Beethoven Quartet. It received its première on 28 May 1966 at a concert of Shostakovich's works in Leningrad in which, despite his nerves and misgivings, the composer accompanied some of his vocal works. The concert came off successfully, but overnight, Shostakovich suffered a heart attack.

The Eleventh is one of Shostakovich's more intimate, elusive quartets; sparse and economical, it speaks in poetry rather than prose. The number of movements notwithstanding, it is also one of the composer's briefest quartets. Played continuously, several of the seven movements slip by swiftly. Their titles suggest a suite of discrete, "mood" pieces, but the close interrelationship of motivic ideas throughout and the significance of cyclic unity—the *Epilogue*, for instance, acts as a coda weaving together strands from previous movements—recommend consideration of the quartet as a single, tightly integrated structure.

The arching melody of the solo violin that opens the *Introduction* leads to a melodic "turn" in the cello part, narrow in range and rhythmically distinguished by its initial repeated notes. This melodic motive permeates the rest of the quartet. With its rhythms evened out, the "turn" forms the basis for the fugue theme—naïve as a child's jingle—in the *Scherzo*. The *Recitative* erupts with sustained dissonances in the lower strings and dry double stops in the violin; they are pacified by a warm, chorale statement of the "turn" motive. In similar chorale form, against the agile perpetuum mobile of the violin (and later cello) it also underpins the *Etude*, as well as the subsequent *Humoresque*. With characteristic dotted rhythms, it is converted into a funeral march in the *Elegy*. The *Epilogue*, its reminiscences drawn chiefly from the first two movements, fades away peacefully.

Franz Schubert

Quartet in D Minor, D. 810, “Death and the Maiden”

The son of a poor schoolteacher, Schubert received musical instruction from his father, an amateur cellist, and piano instruction from an older brother. When he was eleven, he became a choirboy in the royal chapel of the Austrian Emperor, where he received his only formal musical training from 1808 to 1813. After a few years as a schoolteacher, which he disliked intensely, he left in 1817 and drifted into a bohemian existence in Vienna among other poor, struggling artists. During the remaining eleven years of his life, Schubert lived within a small circle of adoring friends who affectionately named him Schwammerl (“Little Mushroom”). Although Schubert’s music failed to bring in much money and his attempts to obtain a court position were unsuccessful, his friends supported him and he was able to devote himself to composing.

Schubert’s music received little public attention during his lifetime. In March 1828 he presented a concert of his own music that filled the hall to overflowing and was an artistic and financial success. Unfortunately, this high point in an otherwise uneventful career came after his health was already in serious decline. A few months later he became bedridden, and on November 14, 1828 he died at age 31.

The *String Quartet in D Minor*, “Death and the Maiden” stands out as one of the most acclaimed among the astonishing number and variety of Schubert’s compositions. The quartet is subtitled “Death and the Maiden” because he borrowed the theme for the second movement from his 1817 song of the same name. The short song tells of death coming with gentle, soothing words to claim the life of a young girl (“Be of good cheer...My arms in soft sleep shall contain you”).

The quartet opens with a tense, forceful motif. Its prominent triplet figure is a unifying element, reappearing throughout the movement in passages of forceful energy as well as briefer lyrical ones. In the somber second movement, Schubert uses the theme from his song as the foundation on which to build a set of five variations. The theme consists of a simple repeated rhythmic pattern with minimal melodic and harmonic movement, allowing the composer to add musical complexity and new expressive content in the ensuing variations.

The *Scherzo* opens with a fierce syncopation, and the rhythmic drive does not slacken through the entire first part. There is an abrupt change of character in the tranquil trio, and the *Scherzo* is repeated to end the movement. Although the *Presto* finale starts with a bleak unison, the high-speed rhythmic pattern propels the movement forward through several climaxes of increasing complexity, ending in a brilliant prestissimo coda.

Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” Quartet was composed in 1824 and first performed in the home of friends in 1826. It was published in July 1831, nearly three years after Schubert’s death.

Adapted from Guide to Chamber Music by Melvin Berger



Remaining Concert
for the 2010-11 Season

Trio Cavatina

Sunday, March 6, 2011 • 4:00 p.m.
Reynolds-Kirschbaum Recital Hall

Thanks to these donors for their gifts to BCMS in memory of Ted Tibbs:

Tony & Barbara Barnard
Jeanne S. Hutchison
Ben & Jessica Johnson

Clay & Toni Nordan
John & Anita Ranelli
Rusty & Lia Rushton

Contributions to the **Birmingham Chamber Music Society** or gifts in memory of Ted Tibbs should be sent to Dr. Anthony Barnard, Treasurer, 3037 Westmoreland Drive, Birmingham, AL 35223.

The Birmingham Chamber Music Society is especially grateful to our sponsors, supporters, and benefactors for making the 2010-2011 season possible.

Sponsors

Jeanne Hutchison, Ben and Jessica Johnson, National Endowment for the Humanities, BURR & FORMAN LLP



This program is made possible in part by a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts (ASCA) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)



The Birmingham News

90.3FM
W B H M
BIRMINGHAM

 **VIVA HEALTH®**

Birmingham Chamber Music Society Supporters

Tania Adams
Anthony & Barbara Barnard
Charles G. Brown III
Thomas R. Broker & Louise T. Chow
Charlotte & Stephen Clarkson
Irene S. Coley
Mary-Jane and Stephen Curry
Dorothy J. Day
Robert & Franciska Dyck
Rachel S. Ferguson
MaryAnne and Michael J. Freeman
Denise A. Gainey
Robert M. Gambrell, Jr.
Diane G. Gay
Wilma Geels
Ernest Hill Estate
Jane Hinds
Marilyn Hodges
Stephen F. Humphreys
Jeanne S. Hutchison
Robbie James
W. Benjamin & Jessica Johnson
Melanie Fay Johnson
Raeford B. Liles

Margaret G. Livingston
Verna & John Lyons
Charles N. Mason
John C. Mayer
Dorothy McDaniel
Frank D. McPhillips
Richard Newton
Clayton & Antoinette Nordan
Charles F. Pensinger
Charles D. Perry
Martha J. Pezrow
Karen & Joel Piassick
Anita Peters Ranelli
William J. Rushton III
Rusty & Lia Rushton
Rusty, Deke & Tunstall Rushton
Paige L. Smith
J. T. Stephens
Natalie E. Tally
Mildred Allen & Ed Taub
Harrison C. Walker
Louise A. Wrinkle
Stephen A. Yoder
Anonymous (in honor of Rusty and Lia Rushton)