


**THE BRENTANO STRING
QUARTET**

**MARK STEINBERG, VIOLIN
SERENA CANIN, VIOLIN
MISHA AMORY, VIOLA
NINA MARIA LEE, CELLO**

**GUEST ARTIST SERIES
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2007 • 7:30 PM
KATZIN CONCERT HALL**

MUSIC

 **Herberger College
of the Arts**

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Program

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5

Franz Josef Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegretto-Allegro
Largo (Cantabile e mesto)
Menuetto (Allegro)
Finale (Presto)

String Quartet No. 6

Bela Bartok
(1881-1945)

Mesto-Vivace
Mesto-Marcia
Mesto-Burletta (Moderato)
Mesto

****There will be a 10 minute intermission****

**String Quartet in E-flat Major,
Op. 127**

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Maestoso-Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzo. Vivace - Presto
Finale: Allegro con moto

The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with

David Rowe Artists, Marblehead, MA

The Brentano String Quartet record for AEON

(distributed by Harmonia Mundi USA)

www.brentanoquartet.com

Out of respect for the performers and those audience members around you,
please turn all beepers, cell phones and watches to their silent mode. Thank you.

The Brentano String Quartet

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. "Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding," raves the London Independent; the New York Times extols its "luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism"; the Philadelphia Inquirer praises its "seemingly infallible instincts for finding the center of gravity in every phrase and musical gesture"; and the Times (London) opines, "the Brentanos are a magnificent string quartet...This was wonderful, selfless music-making." Within a few years of its formation, the Quartet garnered the first Cleveland Quartet Award and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award; and in 1996 the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center invited them to be the inaugural members of Chamber Music Society Two, a program which has become a coveted distinction for chamber groups and individuals ever since. The Quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut. That debut recital was at London's Wigmore Hall, and the Quartet has continued its warm relationship with Wigmore, appearing there regularly and serving as the hall's Quartet-in-residence in the 2000-01 season.

In recent seasons the Quartet has traveled widely, appearing all over the United States and Canada, in Europe, Japan and Australia. It has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House. The Quartet has participated in summer festivals such as Aspen, the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, the Edinburgh Festival, the Kuhmo Festival in Finland, the Taos School of Music and the Caramoor Festival.

In addition to performing the entire two-century range of the standard quartet repertoire, the Brentano Quartet has a strong interest in both very old and very new music. It has performed many musical works pre-dating the string quartet as a medium, among them Madrigals of Gesualdo, Fantasias of Purcell, and secular vocal works of Josquin. Also, the quartet has worked closely with some of the most important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Steven Mackey, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The Quartet has commissioned works from Wuorinen, Adolphe, Mackey, David Horne and Gabriela Frank. The Quartet celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2002 by commissioning ten composers to write companion pieces for selections from Bach's Art of Fugue, the result of which was an electrifying and wide-ranging single concert program. The Quartet has also worked with the celebrated poet Mark Strand, commissioning poetry from him to accompany works of Haydn and

Webern.

The Quartet has been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, pianist Richard Goode, and pianist Mitsuko Uchida. The Quartet enjoys an especially close relationship with Ms. Uchida, appearing with her on stages in the United States, Europe, and Japan.

The Quartet has recorded the Opus 71 Quartets of Haydn, and has also recorded a Mozart disc for Aeon Records, consisting of the K. 464 Quartet and the K. 593 Quintet, with violist Hsin-Yun Huang. In the area of newer music, the Quartet has released a disc of the music of Steven Mackey on Albany Records, and has also recorded the music of Bruce Adolph, Chou Wen-chung and Charles Wuorinen.

In 1998, cellist Nina Lee joined the Quartet, succeeding founding member Michael Kannen. The following season the Quartet became the first Resident String Quartet at Princeton University. The Quartet's duties at the University are wide-ranging, including performances at least once a semester, as well as workshops with graduate composers, coaching undergraduates in chamber music, and assisting in other classes at the Music Department.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved", the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

Program Notes

Haydn: String Quartet in D-Major, Op. 76, No. 5

By the time he wrote his opus 76 Quartets, Joseph Haydn was over sixty, widely traveled, and probably the most renowned living composer in Europe. After thirty years of a cloistered existence as the court composer at Esterhazy, he "went public" upon the death of his patron, Count Nicholas, in 1790; assisted by the impresario Johann Peter Salomon, he made his name enduringly in London and in Vienna. This shift had a palpable effect on his compositional style. In his last twelve symphonies, and his last four sets of string quartets, the gestures and the sound-sense are more robust and self-assured as the composer plays to the public concert-hall; while the composer sacrifices none of his capacity for innovation and surprise, we feel that we have left the arena of experimentation and discovery that characterized the Esterhazy years.

In fact, the six opus 76 Quartets were not written for the public, but were commissioned by the Hungarian Count Erdödy, who enjoyed having them to himself for two years (in the meantime, Haydn cannily sold them to two separate publishers in London and Vienna). As a set, they are unquestionably the most popular and most often performed of his many quartets, and some would say his greatest quartet masterpieces as well. Number five follows on the heels of three giants: number two, the "Quinten", number three, the "Emperor", and number four, the "Sunrise", all relatively traditional works in regard to form and key structure.

This fifth quartet, then, is more of a maverick quartet. The first movement is cast not in the usual "sonata allegro" form, with its emphasis on momentum and drama, but rather in a kind of variation form that uses alternation between major and minor, with a fleeter, more buoyant coda. Despite some stormy, turbulent writing in the minor section, the movement as a whole gives an impression of lightness and grace.

By contrast, the extraordinary slow movement becomes the emotional and substantive center of the work. Marked "Cantabile e mesto" – songful, sad – the movement is cast in the exotic key of F-sharp major, a key that seems to lift off the ground, to occupy a separate plane quite distant from the more friendly and ordinary D major of the preceding movement. This is gliding, exalted music, hymnlike but also tender and intimate. This music evokes, partway, the world of "The Seven Last Words of Christ", Haydn's earlier masterpiece, but here there is no bowing of the head in resignation; if anything, the entire movement occupies some afterlife, free already of any restraint.

With the minuet, we are back with jolly Papa Haydn, playing his usual tricks: sudden dynamic changes and contradictions of the expected $\frac{3}{4}$ meter rule the day. The cello counters with a more shadowy texture in

the minor-key Trio. Then comes the Finale, which begins, startlingly, with movement-ending chords and pauses – a trick, perhaps, picked up from London’s unruly public spaces, a way of getting attention for what is to follow? This movement is distinguished by its accompanimental device: an rapidly repeated interval shared by a pair of instruments, over which the lighthearted main melody is played out. One of the most joyous and fun-loving finales of his entire output, there is no end to the high jinks to be heard here: games of leapfrog, passages that dwindle to almost nothing, outbursts of mock-rage, surprise arrivals, and finally a triumphant, exuberant ending.

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Bartok: String Quartet No. 6

In 1939, haunted by both the looming specter of the Second World War and burgeoning personal difficulties (first and foremost his mother’s grave illness and death), Béla Bartók produced what was to be his final string quartet, his sixth. It is a curious and powerful work, seemingly two distinct quartets amalgamated into one: a poignant lament which reveals its full dimensionality in stages as the piece progresses, and, sandwiched between occurrences of the lament, a more conventional set of tripartite movements, ranging in character from playful to bitterly sarcastic.

Although it is the music of the lament that gives this piece its truest profile, we know now that at the start of his work Bartók had not yet included it in his plan. He began with a contrapuntally alert movement (now the main, fast section of the first movement), filled with quicksilver exchanges of material, replete with clever inversions and intertwining. There is folk-like music here as well and, although the music is consistently characterful, ranging from good-natured teasing to agitated muttering, it is rather more objective than personal. The second movement is a march, reminiscent of the Recruiting Dance of the Contrasts for piano, clarinet and violin. It has a nasty, pompous edge to it, a caricature that brings to mind the military horrors growing in Europe at that time, the start of a war that was to displace Bartók from his beloved Hungary forever. Bartók sets up a foil for this rigid, sometimes oddly limping march with a wild, rhapsodic trio section. The third movement proper is a Burletta, or burlesque, distorted, ironic and sarcastic. It displays all the trappings of comedy, yet there is bile just beneath the surface (think Charlie Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, perhaps). In this case the trio section is a gentle, folk inspired, brief reprieve, a moment of innocence recalled.

The formal plan of the piece is most often described as an introduction preceding each of the first three movements, with the introductory material becoming the driving force of the entire fourth movement. The introductions explore what I have called the lament, marked *Mesto*, or sad. This starts as a solo viola (single) line. Before the second movement

it is in two parts: the ‘cello primary, colored by a quiet but richly textured contrapuntal line shared by the other three instruments. Prefacing the third movement it comes as a three part texture. The last movement then explores the material at greatest length, and with four independent lines. For me, the experience of performing the piece suggests a slightly different relationship between materials. It has never felt to me that the *Mesto* material is introductory in any sense, but rather that it is turned away from time and time again, a sadness that is temporarily pushed aside, eyes averted, by engagement with some more outer world. Upon the return to this material it feels like the real music, the true topic of the work, is found anew. Finally the last movement completely inhabits this world, as well as exploring the shadow it casts looking backward at the “real” world of the main part of the first movement. It is a feeling somewhat echoed by Bartók’s actual working process. He had originally planned for the fourth movement to have a four part version of the *Mesto* followed by another quick movement, folk inspired and dance-like, and even sketched out a good deal of music for this version. But this final time he found himself unable to turn away from the world of the *Mesto*. Whether this is due to his mother’s death, the horrors of the war, his impending exile, or to purely artistic compulsion we will probably never know. The piece is unimaginable today in any other form, so powerfully does its trajectory speak to our way of living in the midst of grief and loss.

It is telling to examine the final three notes of the *Mesto* theme as first stated by the viola, for they give us a quotation from Beethoven’s final quartet, Op. 135, under which Beethoven writes “es muß sein:” “it must be.” And so it must; despite all that is to follow, it is the *Mesto* material that reveals the genuine soul of the piece, the truest and only possible worldview at that moment. A further Beethoven reference follows, when the full quartet responds in unison to the alienated solo viola line. For anyone who is familiar with the earlier work, this response will inevitably bring to mind the Overture of the *Große Fuge*, that monumental final movement of the original version of Beethoven’s Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130. Not only does this Beethoven movement represent mighty wrestling with the forces of chaos we encounter in the world, but it shatters the world of the previous movement, the famous *Cavatina*, the movement Beethoven claimed he couldn’t recall without its summoning a tear to his eye. Thus in retrospect the opening of the Bartók may take on the emotional resonances of the *Cavatina*, an exploration of immense vulnerability and, quite significantly, the inability fully to give voice to our very most significant and intense emotions. (For those familiar with the Beethoven, I refer to the “beklemmt” section of that movement.) Ultimately the *Mesto* music gives us not passionate wailing, but sadness beyond comprehension and beyond expression. It cries out not to another soul, but into the abyss,

speaking of immeasurable loss but without loss of dignity.

For all its contrasts, the Sixth Quartet is not a dramatic, narrative piece (like the Second Quartet, with which it shares the idea of a slow, emotionally difficult final movement). Instead it has the aspect of a villanelle (such as Dylan Thomas' *Do not go gentle into that good night*), circling around its central idea until its most direct and potent revelation at the close of the work. There is continual reclaiming of and reengaging with the powerful opening mood. In this case the fullest unveiling of the Mesto material, in four voices and significantly extended in length, is followed by a reflecting back upon the material of the first movement proper. This last movement then becomes also an expression of memory in the midst of despair, the games of the first movement now muted and transformed by mature reflection, disengaged yet arrestingly poignant. Any trace of artifice is now dissolved.

At the very close of the work, following the introduction of eerie, otherworldly gasps and whispers, the viola, lonely once again, sings out the opening of the Mesto theme, still where it was at the start of the piece. Finally, under a hollow sustained fifth the 'cello gives only the first five notes of the theme, pizzicato, in chords. Strangely, the device is most akin to the ending of Haydn's *Joke Quartet*, where we are conditioned to expect a certain continuation and are left in the lurch, as it were. Here, however, we are left with infinite expectation and a sense that the Mesto theme cannot, in fact, be complete. Its resonance trails off into memory, into emptiness.

2007 by Mark Steinberg

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet in Eb-Major, opus 127

Stylistic evolution is a major theme in any discussion of Beethoven's oeuvre, as it is with artists such as T.S. Eliot and Picasso. For a man whose uncanny perception of the profundities of the human condition shone through his music from the very start, from a larger-than-life soul and intellect, it is deeply meaningful to see how life experience and philosophical questioning over time comes to be reflected in the art work. Beethoven is in fact the quintessential example of the idea of a late style in music, of a broadening of insight and the willful manipulation of form and rhetoric to accommodate that insight.

Coming out of his "middle" period, the so-called heroic style epitomized by works such as the *Eroica Symphony* or the *Op. 59* quartets, Beethoven's vision of the world and of his, and by extension mankind's, place in it underwent a radical metamorphosis. Ego, the primacy of effort and the battle of ideas begin to dissolve and make way for a vision of wholeness, of a sacred order. All that he had explored with the sense of a human protagonist in his music shifts so that the composer no longer seems so much in the world as of it. Beethoven was deeply interested in Hindu and Brahman philosophy at this point in his life (as

was fashionable at the time) and copied into his notebooks numerous statements from their sacred texts. The relationship with time, will and vision all move in new directions in the late quartets.

In the E-flat Major quartet, *Op. 127*, in particular we find a spiraling inwards, a refutation of earlier models of drama and struggle. There is an omnipresent sense of dissolving into acceptance and clarity, and for Beethoven it is an uncommonly tender and introverted work. The quartet opens with a curious framing device. It begins with a grand chordal announcement (marked *Maestoso*), one which, due to the key, it is hard not to associate with the *Eroica Symphony*. As the phrase reaches upwards it comes to rest not on the expected dominant harmony but on the sub-dominant. In emotional terms this means that instead of reaching up toward a chord that will validate the strength of the home key the phrase falls gently back into a more subjective, even subjunctive, key area which is a release from the key in which we begin. It is a pulling back, a turning away from the expected outer triumph toward self-acceptance and a ruminative kind of exploration. This first harmonic move very much sets the stage for the way the piece will operate as a whole, and in fact turns out to point also to the key of the otherworldly slow movement as well as to a central pitch of the finale. The main theme of the first movement appears at this moment, dissolved into with all the voices either keeping their previous pitch or actually sustaining through the moment of arrival. The boundary is a watery one, that of entering into a meditative state, and the flow of the music is simplicity itself, with tenderly falling phrases. At the moment of expected dramatic contrast, the second theme, Beethoven thwarts these expectations and gives us a theme of a sadder cast but refusing to engage in dialectic with the first theme. The opening *Maestoso* music returns two more times in the movement, the first announcing the development section. But the second comes early in the structure of the whole and then fails to appear to announce the recapitulation, the moment when we should feel a true sense of arrival and coming to terms with built up conflict. Instead the music subsides into the return of the first theme in a way that suggests a refusal to wrestle with the material and instead melts into serenity. The coda of the movement could hardly be more filled with intimate tenderness, the public music of the *Maestoso* having been left far in the past.

The second movement is a set of variations on a prayerful theme introduced with hesitant half gasps that echo the harmonic ploy of the opening of the piece, once again gently descending into the subdominant. A theme of infinite patience and grace opens up into an extraordinary set of transformations. Already in the first variation the climaxes, looking forward and somehow prescient, give us a pre-echo of the climax of the entire work in the coda of the *Finale*. The second variation enters the world of play, evoking the natural joy and wonder in children's games,

in this case an acrobatic game of leapfrog between the violins. The center of the movement rises up to a distant, unexpected and radiant key area where the theme achieves a sense of religious ecstasy sung out in operatic style. It is a simple shift, and yet it reveals an entire world tangential to the one in which we typically dwell, as if Beethoven is able to lift us out of the plane of our existence. I am reminded of the moment in Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* where a sphere lifts the protagonist, a square, out of the plane in which he lives and suddenly, with dizzying and overwhelming insight, our hero can see the insides of seemingly impenetrable figures from his world. The sense of clarification from a distance is as if we been privileged to see into the beyond. As we are gently placed back in the mortal sphere the illumination of this insight continues to glow; the beauty of our world glimmers and grows more rarefied. Despite a dark interlude, the theme eventually gets spun out into a gossamer line, initially in the first violin, accompanied by undulating pulsations derived from the introductory gesture of the movement. The coda of the movement recalls the parallel universe shift of the middle of the movement within the space of three measures, a final reminder both of Elysium and of the reflection of its splendor in our own world.

The Scherzo again has an introductory gesture, but this one is finally straightforward and playfully announces a movement which is filled with clever contrapuntal games and serves as a foil to the depth of the previous movements. Lines that skip upwards are answered by others that flip them upside down, reminiscent of the leapfrog variation in the previous movement. The music gallops and flirts with the idea of a more graceful dance without ever giving in to it. Again in this movement we find a boundary dissolving device, a single chord that stutters, changes to minor, then begins to pulsate and whirl, leading into a tornado-like torrent, transporting us to an Oz where there is a folkish, perhaps pagan stomping dance. This whirling music teases with a brief reappearance at the end of the movement, just enough almost to throw the main rhythm of the movement off course, but all is righted at the final moment for an enthusiastic ending.

The Finale begins with a curious opening gesture, vigorously emphasizing the A-flat sub-dominant that has been so important earlier in the piece. It is an arresting moment, rich with personal struggle and striving; it wends its way downwards in curious curves, tempted in many directions at once. Yet when it lands at the bottom it is in the home key of the piece, with a melody that is both gentle and folk-like in its quiet yodling. The theme itself emphasizes the A-flat twice before lifting it upwards so that it can gently topple over and find its way back home. This rising idea of A-flat to A-natural to a B-flat dominant that can release into the home key is an encapsulation of the function of this movement, a lifting out of contemplation back into the world with a renewed sense of harmony with what is. The most touching and exalted

boundary dissolution comes in the coda of this final movement, where Beethoven holds time prisoner with an ellipsis that blossoms into a trill. The trill contains the A-flat once again and then releases that pitch, and with it the tether of self-hood, into a visionary reflection of the perfection that surrounds us. The great painter Mark Rothko said "all teaching about self-expression is erroneous in art...knowing yourself is valuable so that the self can be removed from the process." For Beethoven in the late quartets, as evidenced in Op. 127 and particularly in this lustrous coda (and like in Rothko's mature paintings), the self is dissolved into a broader and more inclusive vision. Effort is replaced with acceptance and the profoundest love.

2007 by Mark Steinberg



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