

Sunday, May 3, 2009, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Cypress String Quartet

Cecily Ward, *violin*
Tom Stone, *violin*
Ethan Filner, *viola*
Jennifer Kloetzel, *cello*

in

The Last Quartets of Great Composers

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) String Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2
(H. III/82) (1799)

Allegro moderato
Menuetto: Presto, ma non troppo
Andante
Finale: Vivace assai

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) String Quartet No. 6 (1939)

Mesto
Mesto; Marcia
Mesto; Burletta
Mesto

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) String Quartet in F major, Op. 135 (1826)

Allegretto
Vivace
Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo
Der schwer gefaßte Entschluß:
Grave, ma non troppo tratto; Allegro

This performance is made possible, in part, by Nicola Miner and Robert Mailer Anderson.

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Franz Joseph Haydn
String Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2
 (H. III/82) (1799)

The two Op. 77 String Quartets are Haydn's last works in this form, and were written in 1799 for the excellent amateur violinist and patron, Prince Franz Joseph Lobkowitz. Haydn was in his late 60s, and in poor health, and was crafting his great oratorio, *The Seasons*, which might explain why the set only contains two, instead of the usual six. The pieces were published by Artaria in Vienna in September 1802. Lobkowitz commissioned sets of quartets from both Haydn (his last set) and the young Beethoven (his first set, Op. 18).

The Quartet in F major, Op. 77, No. 2, is the last quartet that Haydn completed, and is a perfectly executed work, filled with the vigor of a younger composer, but with the craft of an experienced and confident composer. The theme of the first movement is graceful and simple, as Haydn unhurriedly develops his ideas thoroughly and masterfully. The inner movements reverse their usual order, with the Minuet as the second movement. Here Haydn plays jokes with rhythm with a peasant dance theme, and keeps us guessing about the meter, including a few "wrong beat" entrances. The third movement, *Andante*, begins with a stately duet between the first violin and the cello. Each instrument takes a turn with this theme as the material surrounding it becomes more complicated. The last movement, *Vivace*, borrows its spirit from the folk dance known as the polonaise.

The quartet is often identified by a nickname, "Wait Till the Clouds Roll By," which was the name of a popular song of the late 1800s. Since Haydn wrote over 80 string quartets, people often identified the quartets by nicknames that were not chosen by the composer.

Béla Bartók
String Quartet No. 6 (1939)

Hungarian composer Béla Bartók (1881–1945) wrote six string quartets. These profound works of quartet literature are often considered on a par with the quartets of Beethoven. Like Beethoven, Bartók chose the string quartet to express his innermost feelings and views of the world. Both Beethoven and Bartók were pianists, yet both displayed exceptional insight and expertise in string writing. Scholars say that Bartók's six quartets have contributed more to the technical development of string quartet writing than almost any other composer.

Bartók wrote his Sixth (and final) String Quartet in 1939 in Budapest. A sensitive man, he was deeply troubled as he watched the rise of fascism and Nazism as well as the start of World War II. The Sixth Quartet is lyrical and meditative. The overall tone of the quartet is dark; each movement begins with slow material that is marked *Mesto* ("sad or mournful"). In the first movement, the *Mesto* is an introduction played by the viola alone. In the second and third movements, the introductory material becomes increasingly longer, and by the fourth movement, the *Mesto* takes over the entire movement. The Sixth Quartet is the last piece that Bartók wrote in his beloved native country before fleeing to the United States. The work is dedicated to the Kolisch Quartet, who gave the premiere in New York in 1941.

Ludwig van Beethoven
String Quartet in F major, Op. 135 (1826)

The last year of Beethoven's life was difficult on every level. His health was poor, his finances were in shambles and his suspicious and distrustful nature had driven away all but a few friends. This made him cling desperately to his nephew (and adopted son) Karl. In August 1826, Karl attempted suicide, claiming later: "My uncle harassed me so."

Amid the chaos, Beethoven composed what was to be his last Quartet, Op. 135 in F major. His third quartet in the key of F (Op. 18, No. 1, and Op. 59, No. 1, share the key), the work was written during the two months that Karl was recovering in the hospital. Completed in October 1826, Op. 135 was written only months after Beethoven's surprising Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131. That the two share the same span of time and sprang from the same composer's imagination is mind-boggling. After stretching the form of the quartet to its very limits in Op. 131 (which is in seven movements, played without pause), the Op. 135 Quartet is in a new style, or rather, is a return to a more classical aesthetic. The brevity and "normality" of the piece makes it stand apart from the other quartets of Beethoven's late period. Scholars suggest that perhaps he intended Op. 135 to be the first of a new set of quartets.

The Quartet in F major, Op. 135, is in a traditional four-movement form, but this is not to say that the piece is uninspired. It is as if Beethoven had distilled quartet writing to its very essence. The first movement (*Allegretto*) is capricious, while being gently conversational, providing the listener with an entertaining "tug of war." The scherzo movement (*Vivace*) follows with humor and brilliance, at times wild (in one section the lower three voices repeat a rhythmic figure some 50 times while the first violin interrupts with bursts of what sounds like country fiddling). For the third movement (*Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*), Beethoven returns to his beloved variation form, offering a song or hymn, with four variations. The composer's working title while sketching the movement was *Süsser Ruhesang oder Friedengesang* ("Sweet Song of Rest or Peacefulness").

For the finale movement, Beethoven provides us with a riddle as a preface. Above the music, he writes *Der Schwer gefaßte Entschluß* ("The Difficult Resolution or Decision"), and gives us two short examples of music. The first is marked *Grave* and contains the question, *Muß es sein?* ("Must it be?"). The second is marked *Allegro* and states not once, but twice: *Es muß sein! Es muß sein!* ("It must be! It must be!"). What follows is a musical discussion, going back and forth between the two, with the answer "It must be!" triumphantly claiming the end. The piece comes to a close with wit and lightheartedness. Scholars have hotly debated Beethoven's meaning of the opening question and answer, with opinions ranging from discussions of Beethoven using music to debate a range of ideas including (but not limited to): "free will versus destiny," the laundry bill, the necessity of paying the rent, and the inevitability of death.

Published posthumously and released in August 1827, Op. 135 is dedicated to Beethoven's friend, Johann Wolfmayer, a musical amateur and wealthy merchant. Beethoven did not live to see the work's publication or first performance.

Notes © Cypress Performing Arts Association

Sightlines

Cypress String Quartet
 Sunday, May 3, 2009, 2–2:30pm
 Hertz Hall

Pre-performance talk by the artists.

This *Sightlines* talk is free to event ticket holders.



Basil Childers

The **Cypress String Quartet** is poised at the leading edge of chamber music with uncompromising performances and a commitment to making meaningful connections with audiences. Formed in 1996, the members of the quartet; Cecily Ward (*first violin*), Tom Stone (*second violin*), Ethan Filner (*viola*) and Jennifer Kloetzel (*cello*) have shown an unflinching dedication to exploring the masterworks of the time-honored, classic chamber music repertoire with its unique and refreshingly open sound. Widely celebrated for its passionate dedication to the genre and the power of its performances, the Quartet combines technical precision with imaginative programming.

On top of a busy schedule of over 90 concerts each year at venues across America and internationally, including the Kennedy Center, Library of Congress, Stanford Lively Arts, Krannert Center and Ravinia Festival, the Cypress String Quartet

is a vibrant member of the San Francisco arts community and is dedicated to reflecting and enriching the city's cultural landscape. This year, in addition to several Bay Area performances, including a debut at Cal Performances, the Cypress String Quartet returns to the Montalvo Arts Center to deliver a series of eight concerts exploring the late quartets of Beethoven and the inspirational influence of visual arts on composers from Debussy to George Tsontakis.

Through its "Call & Response" commissioning and outreach program, the Cypress String Quartet has created a dialogue between the old masters and living composers, performing known and loved repertoire in a fresh context and introducing groundbreaking new works to the chamber music genre. To commemorate Felix Mendelssohn's 200th birthday in 2009, the Cypress String Quartet with the Lied Center of

Kansas, the Mendelssohn Performing Arts Center and the Library of Congress have co-commissioned a new quartet from accomplished composer Kevin Puts. Paired on a program with Mendelssohn and Beethoven quartets, Mr. Puts's new work was premiered in February 2009 in Washington, D.C., as part of the "Mendelssohn on the Mall" project in conjunction with the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Museum. Over just a decade, the Quartet has commissioned and premiered more than 25 new works, four of which are now included on *Chamber Music America's* list of "101 Great American Ensemble Works."

In January 2007, with an aim to bringing chamber music alive for new audiences, the Cypress String Quartet fused tradition with technology

in its critically acclaimed premiere of *Inspired by America*, a spirited multimedia collaboration with bestselling author Jacob Needleman and Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Michael Schwarz. *Inspired by America* combines live music, original film, spoken word and dramatic lighting to present an evocative, thought-provoking portrait of the American spirit.

The Cypress String Quartet represents the voice of the new generation of American culture, aspiring to the highest standards while mastering the broadest skills across eras. As comfortable playing Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven in recital halls as it is being the foundation of multimedia collaborations, the Quartet's artistic excellence brings enjoyment, passion and inspiration to every audience.