

Sunday, February 28, 2016, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Danish String Quartet

Frederik Øland, *violin*
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen, *violin*
Asbjørn Nørgaard, *viola*
Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin, *cello*

PROGRAM

Per NØRGÅRD (b. 1932) Quartetto Breve (1952)

Leoš JANÁČEK (1854–1928) String Quartet No. 1, “Kreutzer” (1923)
Adagio; Con Moto
Con Moto
Con Moto; Vivo
Con Moto

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor,
Op. 131 (1825-1826)
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

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String Quartet No. 1, “Quartetto Breve”

PER NØRGÅRD (B. 1932)

Composed in 1952.

Per Nørgård, Denmark’s leading musical modernist, was born on July 13, 1932 in the Copenhagen suburb of Gentofte, began studying piano when he was eight and composition a few years later, and took his professional training at the Copenhagen Conservatory as a student of Vagn Holmboe. After graduating in 1955, he studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris before returning to Denmark in 1958 to teach at the Odense Conservatory and write music criticism for the Copenhagen newspaper *Politiken*. He joined the faculty of the Copenhagen Conservatory in 1960, and five years later moved to the Århus Conservatory, which he made the center of experimental composition in Denmark; he retired from the conservatory in 1994. Nørgård has been involved with several important Danish competition committees and composers’ societies, and won numerous awards for his works, which include six operas, three ballets, incidental music and film scores (including director Gabriel Axel’s Oscar-winning 1987 *Babette’s Feast*), eight symphonies, concertos for cello, harp, piano, percussion and accordion, oratorios, and many choral, chamber, piano, vocal, and tape compositions.

Danish musicologist, conductor and composer Erling Kullberg, a specialist on the country’s contemporary music and a leading authority on Nørgård, characterized that composer’s early works, from the 1950s, before he turned to more avant-garde idioms, as imbued with “The Universe of the Nordic Mind.” The seven-minute String Quartet No. 1 of 1952, the first of Nørgård’s six works in the form, confirms both Kullberg’s stylistic contention and the work’s subtitle — “Quartetto Breve.” Nørgård wrote, “My first string quartet has firm roots in the Nordic tradition and is strongly inspired by Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) and my teacher Vagn Holmboe (1909-1996). The spectrum of sound, the gesticulation — in short, the

very nature of the strings — has always had a central place in my output, demonstrated by the string quartets, concertos with string soloist, chamber, and solo works. The interest dates back to my school years, when I was fortunate to be able to compose for a cello-playing schoolmate and to accompany him on the piano. I discovered then the innumerable nuances of sound and playing varieties offered by just one bow, four strings and five fingers.” The Quartet No. 1 is in two sections played without pause, the first (*Lento, poco rubato*) spacious and intensely expressive, the second (*Allegro risoluto*) agitated and intricately conversational.

String Quartet No. 1, “After Tolstoy’s *The Kreutzer Sonata*”

LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854–1928)

*Composed in 1923.**Premiered on October 17, 1924 in Prague by the Bohemian Quartet.*

In the summer of 1917, when he was 63, Leoš Janáček fell in love with Kamila Stösslová, the 25-year-old wife of a Jewish antiques dealer from Písek. They first met in a town in central Moravia during World War I, but, as he lived in Brno with Zdenka, his wife of 37 years, and she lived with her husband in Písek, they saw each other only infrequently thereafter and remained in touch mostly by letter. The true passion seems to have been entirely on his side (“It is fortunate that only I am infatuated,” he once wrote to her), but Kamila did not reject his company, apparently feeling admiration rather than love for the man who, with the successful staging of his *Jenůfa* in Prague in 1915, eleven years after its premiere in Brno, was at that time acquiring an international reputation as a master composer. Whatever the details of their relationship, Kamila’s role as an inspiring muse during the last decade of Janáček’s life was indisputable and beneficent — under the sway of his feelings for her he wrote his greatest music, including the operas *Katya Kabanova*, *The*

Cunning Little Vixen and *The Makropoulos Affair*, the song cycle *The Diary of the Young Man Who Disappeared*, the two string quartets (the second of which he titled “Intimate Letters”), the *Glagolitic Mass* and the *Sinfonietta* for Orchestra.

The first quartet was written in a blaze of creative inspiration in a single week — October 30–November 7, 1923 — just after Janáček had returned from the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Salzburg, where his Violin Sonata was performed. For his subject (most of Janáček’s compositions, whether for voices or instruments, grew from some literary or programmatic germ), he settled on Leo Tolstoy’s 1889 short story *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which was inspired by that author’s exposure to Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47. Ian Horsbrugh summarized the tale in his biography of Janáček: “In Tolstoy’s story, the tragic events of the marriage are told by the husband to the author as they travel together on a rail journey. The man, Pózdnyshév, is cynical about love and about marriage. He recounts with passion his jealousy of the violin-playing Trukhachévski, whom, ironically, he had introduced to his wife — ‘a strange, a fatal force led me not to repulse him.’ One evening his wife and this man perform Beethoven’s *Kreutzer Sonata* to a small gathering, and, in spite of Pózdnyshév’s forebodings, the concert was a success. But the first movement of the sonata had a ‘terrible effect’ on him. ‘It was as if quite new feelings, new possibilities of which I had till then been unaware, had been revealed to me,’ and, after the intense jealousy of the previous weeks, ‘that music drew me into some world in which jealousy no longer had a place.’ However, Pózdnyshév goes away on a business trip, but returns home unannounced, finds his wife in the company of the other man, and, gripped by a terrifying frenzy, he stabs her with his ‘curved Damascus dagger.’”

Like *Katya Kabanova* (in which the heroine is also killed by her jealous husband for her infidelity) and *The Diary of the Young*

Man Who Disappeared (the true account of a Brno lad who vanished from home to run away with a Gypsy girl), Janáček’s first quartet broaches the subject of love outside accepted societal bounds — all three works seem to have been pleas to Kamila to requite his own passion for her. Jaroslav Vogel observed that in these compositions “the heroines could all be identified with Kamila. They gave Janáček — and this is a paradox of his one-sided love — the full possibility of showing the right of a woman to choose her love and happiness according to her own heart, subjects through which he became also a spokesman for a moral revolution.”

The quartet was not the first musical realization that Janáček had attempted of Tolstoy’s story. During a short period of study in Vienna in May and June 1880, he wrote three movements of a string quartet inspired by the tale, and late in 1908 he composed a piano trio on the subject for a performance by the Friends of Art Club in Brno on April 2, 1909. Since both earlier pieces are lost, it is impossible to compare them with the finished quartet, but the composer’s friend and biographer Max Brod noted that “several of the ideas were employed.” The Quartet No. 1 was premiered in Prague on October 17, 1924 by the Bohemian Quartet (which had requested the work from the composer and which received its dedication), and was later heard at the ISCM Festival in Venice in September 1925 and in New York two years later.

Though it is possible to fit Janáček’s “Kreutzer” Quartet into traditional musical forms, the power and progress of the work may also be equated with the emotional unfolding of Tolstoy’s marital tragedy. The quartet opens with a terse, rising three-note motive (short–short–long), perhaps the symbol of the heroine’s ultimate despair, which is immediately juxtaposed with a folk-like ditty that may reflect the story’s Russian setting. Contrast is provided by a lyrical theme of ambiguous rhythmic structure, evocative of the woman’s unsettled longing, and a darting figure of arching shape that is a super-heated variant of the

opening despair motive. These elements are played out to create a tonal picture of Tolstoy's character, whom the composer described to Kamila as "a pitiable woman who is maltreated, beaten and murdered." The second movement, the quartet's scherzo, is based on a theme, really not much more than a melodic fragment frequently terminated by a sour dissonance, that could depict either (or both) the foppish violin player or what Vogel called "the short-lived satisfaction of the heroine's desire." The internal regions of the movement contain an icy tremolo passage played *ponticello* ("at the bridge"), denoting, according to Vogel, "the chilling pang of temptation," and a wide-interval melody that conjures the woman's passion and her confessions of love. The third movement begins as a sentimental duet in close imitation for violin and cello whose melody was modeled on the second theme of Beethoven's 1803 "Kreutzer" Sonata (dedicated to the French violinist and composer Rodolphe Kreutzer). The duet is repeatedly broken off by slashing interjections from the other instruments, however, and the tenderness of the beginning becomes exhausted as the music proceeds. The movement ends with a tired sigh. The tragedy culminates in the finale, which bears such performance markings as "desperately," "shyly" and "as in tears." The music, largely derived from the stark motive that opened the quartet, is arranged in a steadily increasing line of tension, which, wrote Vahn Armstrong, "mirrors the pace of Tolstoy's story, in which the husband, believing himself deceived and mad with jealousy, rushes home and there murders his wife as her lover flees."

String Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

Composed in 1825–1826.

On November 9, 1822, Prince Nikolas Galitzin, a devotee of Beethoven's music and an amateur cellist, wrote from St. Petersburg

asking Beethoven for "one, two or three quartets, for which labor I will be glad to pay you whatever amount you think proper." After a hiatus of a dozen years, Beethoven was eager to return to the medium of the string quartet, and he immediately accepted the commission and set the fee of 50 ducats for each work, a high price but one readily accepted by Galitzin. Though badgered regularly by the Russian Prince ("I am really impatient to have a new quartet of yours. Nevertheless, I beg you not to mind, and to be guided in this only by your inspiration and the disposition of your mind"), Beethoven, exhausted by his labors on the Ninth Symphony in 1823–1824, could not complete the Quartet in E-flat major (Op. 127) until February 1825; the second quartet (A minor, Op. 132) was finished five months later; and the third (B-flat major, Op. 130) was written between July and November, during one of the few periods of relatively good health that Beethoven enjoyed in his last decade. Fulfilling the commission for Galitzin, however, did not nearly exhaust the fount of Beethoven's creativity in the realm of the string quartet. Karl Holz, the composer's amanuensis and the second violinist in Schuppanzigh's quartet, which gave the first public performances of Galitzin's quartets, recorded, "During the composition of the three works for Prince Galitzin, Beethoven was assailed with such an overwhelming flow of ideas that he went against his will, as it were, to write the Quartets in C-sharp minor and F major." Beethoven began sketching the C-sharp minor quartet in December 1825, immediately after Op. 130 was completed, and worked on it during the following months at his flat in the Schwarzspanierhaus, near the site of the present *Votiv-Kirche*. By May 1826, the piece was sufficiently advanced for him to begin offering it to publishers, and he sent inquiries to the firms of Schott in Mainz, Schlessinger in Paris and Probst in Leipzig. The quartet was finished in July and accepted by Schott the following month, but the final details of the score's publication were not fully settled until March 24, 1827, just two days before Beethoven's death.

Beethoven's last year was one of emotional and physical turmoil, occasioned not only by the declining state of his health (deafness, of course, as well as gout and a serious and painful intestinal inflammation), but also by the difficult relationship with his nephew Karl, whose custody he had won from his widowed sister-in-law in a vicious court battle in 1820. Karl had proven a continuing trial for the bachelor Beethoven, and by 1825 (he was nineteen), he had acquired an unsavory local reputation as a financial deadbeat, womanizer and general ne'er-do-well. Beethoven harangued him incessantly about his conduct (much of which was probably brought on by rebellion against his gruff and domineering uncle), and by July 1826, only days after the C-sharp minor quartet was finished, matters came to a head with Karl's attempted suicide. To spite his uncle, Karl chose to shoot himself in the head in the Helenenthal, one of the composer's favorite spots in Vienna, but he was not sufficiently dedicated to his exercise to make a complete success of it. Karl was hospitalized until September, after which he and Uncle Ludwig spent the next three months at the Gneixendorf estate of the composer's brother Johann, a successful apothecary, where it was decided to get the lad out of Vienna (where suicide was a crime) by enlisting him in the army. (While at Gneixendorf, Beethoven wrote his Op. 135 quartet and created a new finale for the Op. 130 quartet to replace the monumental *Grosse Fuge*. This was the last music he wrote.) Given the delicate nature of Karl's health and emotional constitution, finding a garrison that would accept him was no easy matter, and Beethoven appealed for help to Stephen von Breuning, a member of the Austrian War Council and his long-time friend and patron (the Violin Concerto was dedicated to him), who found a place for Karl in Field Marshal Joseph von Stutterheim's regiment in Iglau. Uncle and nephew returned to Vienna in December, staying along the way at a miserable inn whose damp, drafty rooms exacerbated Beethoven's illnesses. (Karl was sent for a doctor immediately upon their arrival in

the city, but stopped first for a game of billiards.) Karl was finally bundled off to the army on January 2, 1827. On March 10th, Beethoven wrote to Schott asking that the C-sharp minor quartet be dedicated to Field Marshal von Stutterheim in appreciation for the favor he had done for the family. Exactly two weeks later, he signed the document granting all rights to the piece to Schott — it was the final time he wrote his name. He received last rites that same day. On March 26th, two days later, Beethoven was dead. Karl served for five undistinguished years in the military, and then became a farm manager. The estates that he inherited first from Ludwig and, in 1848, from Johann allowed him to live in comfort until his death at the age of 52 in 1858.

Though Beethoven told Karl Holz that he considered the C-sharp minor quartet his greatest achievement in the form, perhaps because it was his most daring such work in terms of its formal concept ("Art demands of us that we not stand still," he counseled Holz), he never heard it in performance. The piece was tried out at the offices of the Viennese publisher Artaria in September 1826, and (perhaps) given a private reading in December, but it did not receive its formal public premiere until 1835, eight years after the composer's death. The quartet was played privately for Franz Schubert, an ardent admirer of Beethoven, in November 1828, only five days before he died. Holz reported that when Schubert heard the work, "He fell into such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that we were all frightened for him." As with all of Beethoven's late quartets, Op. 131 gained performances and understanding only slowly, but it has come to be regarded by many as peerless in the chamber repertory. Joseph de Marliave wrote, "This quartet, musically, is unanimously recognized as the richest, the most significant of this art form, of which it is probably the summit. We find in its sumptuous efflorescence the most striking qualities of Beethoven's last works: originality; free form that is always plastic yet rigorously logical; and an intellectual spirituality

within every bar and every note. We recognize here, as in most of the last quartets, a psychological concept. It is the elevation of the soul — filled with the nobility of a suffering man tested by grief — out of the most irremediable melancholy into joyful struggle and victory over his adversaries — toward the innermost reconciliation.” Martin Cooper, in his fascinating study of Beethoven’s last decade, concluded that this is “the purest stuff of music, exquisitely and logically constructed and finished to the highest degree.”

The C-sharp minor quartet may well be Beethoven’s boldest piece of musical architecture — seven movements played without pause, six distinct main key areas, 31 tempo changes, and a veritable encyclopedia of Classical formal principles. So adventurous and unprecedented was this structural plan that Maynard Solomon allowed, “Beethoven may be regarded as the originator of the avant-garde in music.” Though it passes beyond the Fifth Symphony, *Fidelio* and *Egmont* in its harmonic sophistication and structural audacity, this quartet shares with those earlier works the sense of struggle to victory, of subjecting the spirit to such states of emotional unrest as strengthen it for the winning of ultimate triumph. “Music should strike fire in the heart of man,” Beethoven told his student and patron Archduke Rudolph in 1823. “There is no loftier mission than to approach the Divinity nearer than other men, and to disseminate the divine rays among mankind.” This supreme masterwork is music of transcendent vision.

The opening movement is a spacious, profoundly expressive fugue which, according to

Richard Wagner, “reveals the most melancholy sentiment in music.” John N. Burk found that here “the process of the intellect is always subservient to that of the heart,” and J.W.N. Sullivan waxed almost metaphysical in concluding that this is “the most superhuman piece of music that Beethoven ever wrote. It is the completely unflinching rendering into music of what we can only call the mystic vision. It has that serenity which, as Wagner said, passes beyond beauty and makes us aware of a state of consciousness surpassing our own.” The following *Allegro* offers emotional respite as well as structural contrast. A tiny movement (*Allegro moderato — Adagio*), just eleven measures in the style of a ruminative recitative, serves as the bridge to the expressive heart (and formal center) of the quartet, an expansive set of variations that seems almost rapt out of quotidian time. The fifth movement, “the most childlike of all Beethoven’s scherzos,” according to Joseph Kerman, alternates two strains of buoyantly aerial music: a feather-stitched arpeggiated theme previewed by the cello and stated in full by the first violin, and a more lyrical motive first given in octaves by the violins above the playful accompaniment of the lower strings. The short, introspective *Adagio* in chordal texture is less an independent movement than an introduction and foil for the finale, whose vast and densely packed sonata form (woven with references to the fugue theme of the first movement) summarizes the overall progress of this stupendous quartet in its move from darkness and struggle toward light and spiritual renewal.

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EMBODYING THE QUINTESSENTIAL ELEMENTS of a chamber music ensemble, the **Danish String Quartet** has established a reputation for their integrated sound, impeccable intonation, and judicious balance. With their technical and interpretive talents matched by an infectious joy for music-making and “rampaging energy” (Alex Ross, *The New Yorker*), the quartet is in demand worldwide by concert and festival presenters alike. Since making their debut in 2002 at the Copenhagen Festival, the group of musical friends has demonstrated a passion for Scandinavian composers, who they frequently incorporate into adventurous contemporary programs, while also proving skilled and profound performers of the classical masters. In 2012 the *New York Times* selected the quartet’s concert as a highlight of the year, saying the performance featured “one of the most powerful renditions of Beethoven’s Op. 132 String Quartet that I’ve heard live or on a recording.” This scope of talent secured them a three-year appointment in the coveted Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s CMS Two Program that began in the 2013–14 season. The quartet was also named as a BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist for 2013–15.

The Danish String Quartet’s 2015–16 season includes a release of their debut disc on ECM Records, a first-time tour of China as well as summer performances at the Mostly Mozart Festival, Maverick Concerts, Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival, Toronto Summer Music Festival, and Ottawa Chamberfest. International highlights include concerts in Berlin, Copenhagen, Glasgow, and London, and a debut at the Louvre Museum in Paris. Their repertoire is diverse, from Nielsen, Abrahamsen, Adès, and Shostakovich to Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Debussy, and Haydn. Currently in their third season with the CMS Two program, they will perform all four of the Nielsen string quartets in the Rose Studio and the final concert of a six-concert Beethoven cycle at Alice Tully Hall. This past November, the quartet launched their recording of Danish folksongs entitled *Wood Works*, released by the Dacapo label and distributed by Naxos, at SubCulture in New York. It was selected by NPR as one of the best classical albums of 2014, and the Quartet was featured on an NPR Tiny Desk Concert performing works from the highly acclaimed album.

In addition to their New York performances, the quartet’s robust North American

schedule takes them to Ann Arbor, Seattle, Orange County, Santa Barbara, Phoenix, Buffalo, Durham, Humboldt, Cedar Falls, and Calgary this season, as well as two weeks of residency activities and performances at Cal Performances. The quartet will make their début at the Savannah Music Festival in spring 2016. Last season, the quartet presented the U.S. première of Danish composer Thomas Agerfeldt Olesen's Quartet No. 7, "The Extinguishable," at the University of Chicago Presents series and subsequently performed the work in St. Paul, Santa Barbara, Pasadena, New Haven, Gainesville, Jacksonville, and Laramie. In addition to its commitment to highlighting Scandinavian composers, the Danish String Quartet derives great pleasure in traditional Scandinavian folk music.

The Danish String Quartet made their West Coast début in summer 2013 at Music@Menlo. They returned to Menlo in 2014 to perform programs of Haydn and Beethoven quartets as part of a busy summer festival schedule that also included performances in Ireland, France, and at home in Denmark.

Since winning the Danish Radio P2 Chamber Music Competition in 2004, the Quartet has been greatly desired throughout Denmark, and in October 2015 they presented the ninth annual DSQ-Musikfest, a four-day event held in Copenhagen that brings together musical friends the quartet has met on its travels. In 2009 the quartet won First Prize at the eleventh London International String Quartet Competition, as well as four additional prizes from the same jury. This competition is now called the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition, and the Danish String Quartet has performed at the famed hall on several occasions. They returned to Wigmore Hall in March 2015 to perform a program of Haydn and Shostakovich.

The Danish String Quartet was awarded First Prize in the Vagn Holmboe String Quartet Competition and the Charles Hennen International Chamber Music Competition in Holland, and the Audience Prize in the Trondheim International String Quartet Competition in 2005. They were awarded the 2010 Nordmetall Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany and, in 2011, received the prestigious Carl Nielsen Prize.

In 2006 the Quartet was Danish Radio's Artist-in-Residence, giving them the opportunity to record all of Carl Nielsen's string quartets in the Danish Radio Concert Hall, subsequently released to critical acclaim on the Dacapo label in 2007 and 2008. In 2012 the quartet released an equally acclaimed recording of Haydn and Brahms quartets on the German AVI-music label. They recorded works by Brahms and Fuchs with award-winning clarinetist Sebastian Manz at the Bayerische Rundfunk in Munich, released by AVI-music in 2014, and recently signed with ECM Records for future recording projects.

Violinists Frederik Øland and Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen and violist Asbjørn Nørgaard met as children at a music summer camp, where they played both football and music together, eventually making the transition into a serious string quartet in their teens and studying at Copenhagen's Royal Academy of Music. In 2008 the three Danes were joined by Norwegian cellist Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin. The Danish String Quartet was primarily taught and mentored by Professor Tim Frederiksen and have participated in master classes with the Tokyo and Emerson string quartets, Alasdair Tait, Paul Katz, Hugh Maguire, Levon Chilingirian, and Gábor Takács-Nagy. Visit the quartet online at www.danishquartet.com.