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AT HOME

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, December 10, 2020, 7pm

Dover Quartet

Joel Link, *violin*

Bryan Lee, *violin*

Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, *viola*

Camden Shaw, *cello*

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances
at Gould Rehearsal Hall,
Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia,
on October 15–16, 2020.

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph HAYDN (1732–1809) Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2, *The Fifths*
Allegro
Andante o più tosto allegretto
Menuetto. Allegro ma non troppo
Finale. Vivace assai

György LIGETI (1923–2006) Quartet No. 1, *Métamorphoses nocturnes*

INTERMISSION

Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841–1904) Quartet in G major, Op. 106
Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
Finale. Andante sostenuto

*The Dover Quartet is represented by the Curtis Institute of Music,
where it serves as the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence.*

www.curtis.edu

www.doverquartet.com

Recordings: Cedille Records, Azica Records

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert
will be available on demand through March 10, 2021.*

Where Medium and Genre Merge

A story that Haydn and his first biographer circulated portrays the composer hitting on the idea of the string quartet by happy chance rather than design. Near the start of his career, in the late 1750s, a music-crazed nobleman, Baron von Fürnberg, requested something new to play for a group of four musicians who liked to gather together at his castle for recreation. As it happened, this casual ensemble included two violinists, a violist, and a cellist.

The actual historical origin of the string quartet is of course not quite so charmingly simple. There already existed a rich tradition of chamber music for solo string instruments dating back to the Renaissance, and some of Haydn's contemporaries were also trying out pieces for the specific configuration that crystallized into the string quartet.

But it was Haydn who effectively transformed this medium (the quartet ensemble) into a genre (the composition we call a string quartet). Within it he discovered and exploited an ideal balance—sonically and texturally—that mirrored the stylistic priorities emerging at the time. In this sense, one can claim that Haydn was the figure responsible for establishing the genre. The case is more compelling than that for the symphony, which grew from an even more complicated family tree of preceding efforts.

Haydn's earliest works for the medium were published in the mid-1760s; the composer himself began regularly using the term "string quartet" only a bit later. His output eventually tallied 68 such works. (The total of 83 sometimes still seen includes a number of spuriously attributed quartets—further proof of the value of claiming the Haydn signature for this genre.) The first complete edition (the so-called "Bonaparte edition") was published in Paris in 1803, during the composer's final decade. It marked one of the first instances in Western classical music of a consciously curated canon, at the dawn of a century that became preoccupied with canon-making.

Beethoven had by then already published his first set of quartets, and the special privilege the genre has enjoyed since was firmly in place. The string quartet became revered as a vehicle ca-

pable of conveying profound intimacy—the composer's private soul, in contrast to the self-consciously public sense of such orchestral genres as the symphony. Alongside its lofty status as music for connoisseurs, the string quartet has maintained its role as a kind of sonic laboratory for new compositional ideas.

For its Cal Performances debut, the intrepid Dover Quartet encompasses this spectrum in the brief history of the string quartet that their program traces. Starting with one of Haydn's boldest and most perfect achievements in the genre, they jump ahead to the mid-20th century with an early but astonishingly assured work by György Ligeti. His First String Quartet uses this formation to work through adventurous new possibilities that were considered taboo in the communist Hungary from which he was about to flee. The Dovers balance out these forward-looking works with Antonín Dvořák's second-to-last contribution—a grandly proportioned, Romantic approach to the genre that, for the Czech composer, signaled an act of summing up and leave-taking.

At the Top of His Game and Fame: Haydn's Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2 (*The Fifths*)

Haydn preferred to publish his quartets in groups of six. Opus 76 comprises the last such set he completed, though he ventured on one more "six-pack" (for which he finished only two quartets, published as Op. 77). The Op. 76 quartets were commissioned in the mid-1790s, when Haydn was an international celebrity. He had just completed two enormously successful residencies in London. Dating from 1797, when Haydn was at work on his grand oratorio *The Creation*, the set was commissioned by Count Joseph Georg von Erdödy.

At the very top of his game, Haydn in his Op. 76 set synthesizes a lifetime of compositional skill with his tireless drive for invention and surprise. The string quartet here serves as a framework for juxtaposing comic and tragic poses, expanding the familiar metaphor of the genre as a conversation (later famously codified by Goethe) and mixing popular impulses with the most rarefied, "learned" composition.



Roy Cox

The second of the set, the String Quartet in D minor, has become known by its nickname (not from the composer) *The Fifths* (*Quinten* in German) because of the signature role played by the interval of the fifth in the first movement. You hear it at the very top in the first violin: a descent from A to the tonic D, then from E to A, with a repetition of that pattern an octave higher soon after. That descending motion, coupled with the minor-key atmosphere, evokes the agitated, restless spirit of Haydn's proto-Romantic *Sturm und Drang* style from several decades before.

Haydn makes this gesture continually reappear in new contexts and with different shadings—as obsessively as Beethoven's treatment of the “fate” motto in his Fifth Symphony (also in a minor key). Listen, for example, to what happens to this interval in the coda, when the cello in particular takes possession of the idea. Its very simplicity allows for countless recombinations and invites the weaving together of the strings' multiple lines into denser fabrics of counterpoint.

The second movement is paced more briskly than a conventionally meditative slow movement. It offers a few extended variations on an appealing two-part theme (which encompasses a descending fifth within its span). Mark Steinberg, violinist of the Brentano Quartet, memorably imagined this as “theme music for one of Proust's society ladies, intent on appearing effortlessly gracious but transparent in her wish.”

Haydn's fascination with counterpoint's potential within the language of the Classical style is evident throughout this quartet—especially in the forceful minuet, where he aligns the two violins as one unit, the viola and cello as another, and has them play the theme as a two-part canon, the second pair following close on the heels of the first. The sense of a harried chase has resulted in another (sub)nickname—*Witches' Minuet*—for this movement. All four movements are set in the tonic D (minor or major), and the finale hurtles forward, launched by a tragicomic theme. Its apparent seriousness is upended by quirky surprises and an earthy, folklike tone.

On the Cusp of a New Life: Ligeti's String Quartet No. 1, *Métamorphoses nocturnes*

György Ligeti won a mass international audience when Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* was released in 1968. (Kubrick used the composer's music as an integral part of the film.) Despite the director's failure to ask for permission, Ligeti was impressed and allowed Kubrick to incorporate other pieces in two later films (*The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*). Many viewers likely thought of the weird new strains they encountered as the epitome of "modern music"—the sort of thing "classical composers" in general were producing at the time. But Ligeti had been forging a path uniquely his. He swerved stubbornly from the dominant trends of the postwar avant-garde in Europe.

This independent outlook had been reinforced by Ligeti's formative experiences. His genius was forged by personal encounters with apocalypse. As a Hungarian Jew born in what was then Romania, he survived the Holocaust by a twist of fate. Ligeti was conscripted into forced labor, but his father and older brother perished in the death camps. And the end of the war brought yet another form of oppression when the young Ligeti, who had settled in Budapest, was compelled to abide by the strictures of Socialist Realism.

The failed revolution of 1956 strengthened his determination to escape from Communist Hungary to the West, and he ended up at Ground Zero of the Western postwar avant-garde. An "immunity to all ideologies" prompted Ligeti to follow his own direction. As he once declared: "I avoid stylistic clichés, and know no 'single right way.' I keep myself open to new influences, as I am excessively intellectually curious. All cultures, indeed the whole wide world is the material of Art."

Ligeti was already all too familiar with particular musical choices being "forbidden" by a dominant ideology. After graduating from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, he obtained a teaching post there. Stalin-inspired cultural policies dictated the kind of music an aspiring composer should produce. Ligeti resigned himself to keeping quiet about what he really wanted to do, consigning his most ex-

perimental pieces to the "bottom drawer" while reluctantly churning out what was officially approved.

Even folk music elements had to be used in a certain way. Ligeti had spent some time in the field recording Romanian folk music—along the lines of his Hungarian predecessor, Béla Bartók, whose boldest works were banned from state radio. It goes without saying that more radical developments in the West were very difficult to access—though Ligeti on occasion managed to chance (illegally) on radio broadcasts of Stockhausen and company from West German radio.

Such discoveries therefore had an even more electric impact on young Ligeti than they might have had in a less-oppressive environment. The String Quartet No. 1, for example, shows how thoroughly Ligeti had absorbed the far-reaching language of Bartók's Third and Fourth Quartets, as well as of Alban Berg and Igor Stravinsky. His colleague György Kurtág later observed that the piece "resonates inside me as if it were the [Quartet] no. 7 Bartók never completed. After the six String Quartets by Bartók, this work stays at least for a long time the most significant genre piece written in Hungary."

Ligeti had earlier composed a pair of quartet movements as part of his conservatory graduation exam. He completed another quartet in 1968 and returned to the genre between the 1980s and 2000, planning two more quartets that he never completed. The First Quartet dates from 1953–54, but Ligeti knew it could not be performed in the Hungary of the era; the premiere had to wait until after he fled to exile in the West and took place in Vienna in 1958.

The work is cast in one uninterrupted movement, but Ligeti's frequently changing tempo indications break this span into many smaller sections. The composer himself wrote that "the quartet can be considered as having just one movement or also as a sequence of many short movements that melt into one another without pause or which abruptly cut one another off."

Binding all this variety together is Ligeti's continual variation on a simple motivic idea: the interval of a pair of ascending major seconds, each pair separated by a semitone. Listen

for its first statement by the first violin after a few measures of introductory chromatic scales: G–A–G–sharp–A–sharp. The variation also occurs with great invention on the level of rhythmic articulation.

The Ligeti scholar Bianca Țiplea Temeș has traced this idea to a piano piece by Bartók. Some commentators try to parse its varying metamorphoses as a characteristically Bartókian arch form. Ligeti's title, *Métamorphoses nocturnes*, also alludes to Bartók, making this more explicit with gestures that recall that composer's "night music" idiom. At the same time, the First Quartet is hardly a derivative work. Even if we knew nothing of the later Ligeti, it would stand out as a boldly original statement, both in form and musical substance. "It is a kind of variation form," notes the composer, "only there is no specific 'theme' that is then varied. It is, rather, that one and the same musical concept appears in constantly new forms—that is why 'metamorphoses' is more appropriate than 'variations.'"

The First Quartet marks the end of Ligeti's Hungarian period and foreshadows developments to come in the 1960s. Ligeti rather modestly remarked that "there are certainly some characteristics of my later music, but the writing is totally different, 'old-fashioned'; there are still distinct melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic patterns and bar structure. It is not tonal music, but it is not radically atonal, either." In short, he hoped that this quartet would still be regarded as a "personal work."

A Farewell to Absolute Music:

Dvořák's String Quartet in G major, Op. 106
Antonín Dvořák's experience of the United States in the first half of the 1890s inspired some of his best-loved works and spurred his creativity on to new heights. He encountered new sources of inspiration, and his US residency expanded his fortune (and fame). But the distance and an enduring homesickness intensified Dvořák's love for his native Bohemia. He welcomed an opportunity to leave New York City behind during his first American summer in 1893, which he spent in the charming town of Spillville in northeast Iowa. (Spillville's website

proclaims itself today "the most historical Czech village in America.")

The getaway provided a blissful oasis that sparked Dvořák's first essay in the string quartet after a hiatus of a dozen years. He embarked on another quartet while in the New World, which he could complete after returning to his cherished homeland in 1895 (the String Quartet No. 14, Op. 105). And he continued to explore his reawakened interest in the genre near the end of the year, composing the Quartet No. 13 within a month in November and early December. (It was completed before No. 14 but published with a higher opus number, 106, because No. 14 appeared in print before the G major Quartet.)

The year 1895 held special significance for the composer. Only a month after he found himself back in Bohemia, Dvořák's beloved sister-in-law Josefina Kaunitzová died. For decades he had harbored a deep though unrequited love for her. His feelings about Josefina are reflected in revisions he made to his Cello Concerto, the first version of which he had completed during his final months in New York.

As was the case with the works written in Spillville, Dvořák followed a large orchestral piece with chamber music, completing his last two string quartets within a month of each other by the end of 1895. While these works celebrate the composer's return homeward, they also mark his farewell to the world of "absolute" chamber music—to the purely instrumental genres, then associated, above all, with Brahms, that were idealized as music for the sake of music alone, with no overt connection to extramusical narratives. Dvořák devoted himself in his last decade to writing operas and programmatic tone poems inspired by non-musical sources.

The abundant confidence that informs the Quartet in G major gives the work at times a retrospective quality and finds Dvořák dipping lovingly into the well of the quartet literature. The shades of his great Viennese predecessors (Haydn and Beethoven above all) flit through the score, filtered through Dvořák's own inimitable voice.

Generously proportioned and melody-rich in a way that could have come from no one else but Dvořák, the work begins with energetic gestures: rippling triplets and bold chordal strokes. A remarkable rhythmic vitality features prominently in the score. The main theme comprises multiple elements that are dissected and then reassembled, while the second theme—a graceful, dancing figure initially spelled by the first violin—will play an important role later in the quartet. Dvořák's lively writing for the four players sustains a spirit of dialogue and alluring textural variety throughout.

The sense of seriousness with which Dvořák invests the genre is apparent in the Adagio, which achieves a Beethovenian profundity of feeling. The movement unfolds as a series of varied reconsiderations of two themes, the first in a yearning E-flat minor, the second in E-flat major. The variety of accompanying figures and harmonic wanderings adds a tremendous range of color. A sudden blaze of light at the climax gives way to a serene conclusion. The first violin's seraphically soaring flight near the end leads to

a restatement of the theme in which the sense of farewell is at its most touchingly heartfelt.

The B minor scherzo (note the composer does not label this movement as such) is unusual for including two different trios—the first, a shorter section in A-flat major, the second, more elaborate, in D major.

The finale also introduces a novel structural idea. Dvořák begins with a brief slow introduction, giving the strings in unison a simple, hymnlike figure that descends stepwise. It quickly mutates into the main rondo theme, which presses forward with unbridled high spirals. Later, Dvořák slows the tempo to bring back the brief introductory music but extends it into a lengthy interlude. This includes a reminiscence of the second theme from the first movement. Its varied insistence becomes more intrusive before one of the finale's themes edges its way back in. This link back to the first movement returns several times, detouring the rondo with still more reflections. At last, the quartet rouses itself, as it were, to shake off any lingering nostalgia and hurries to the finish with a jubilant coda.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Hailed as “the next Guarneri Quartet” (*Chicago Tribune*) and “the young American string quartet of the moment” (*The New Yorker*), the Dover Quartet catapulted to international stardom in 2013, following a stunning sweep of all prizes at the Banff Competition; it has since become one of the most in-demand ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the inaugural Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Dover Quartet holds residencies with the Kennedy Center, Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, Artosphere, the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival, and Peoples' Symphony Concerts in New York. Among the group's honors are the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center's Hunt Family Award. The Dover Quartet has also won top prizes at the Wigmore Hall International

String Quartet Competition and the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition.

Pending developments in the current pandemic, the quartet's 2020–21 season includes a debut at New York's 92nd Street Y; performances in venues in London and Copenhagen; and the group's first-ever tour of Latin America, which will be conducted using virtual technology. Upcoming tour performances also include collaborations with the Escher Quartet, bass-baritone Davóne Tines, and harpist Bridget Kibbey. The Dover's first volume of the complete Beethoven string quartet cycle, which focuses on the composer's Op. 18 quartets, was released earlier this year by Cedille Records, which previously released the ensemble's *Voices of Defiance: 1943, 1944, 1945* in 2017 and an all-Mozart debut recording during the 2016–17 season, featuring the late Michael Tree, violist of the Guarneri Quartet. *Voices of Defiance*,

which explores works written during World War II by Viktor Ullman, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Simon Laks, was lauded as “undoubtedly one of the most compelling discs released this year” (*Wall Street Journal*).

The Dover Quartet draws from the lineage of the distinguished Guarneri, Cleveland, and Vermeer quartets. Its members studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, where they were

mentored extensively by Shmuel Ashkenasi, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. It was at Curtis that the Dover Quartet formed; its name pays tribute to *Dover Beach* by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber.

The Dover Quartet proudly endorses Thomastik-Infeld strings.

CREDITS

The Curtis Institute of Music is committed to ensuring the health and safety of the entire community. Musicians and crew adhered to Curtis’s health and safety guidelines throughout the filming of this performance, including completing a health screening, wearing face coverings, and practicing proper social distancing whenever possible, and thoroughly sanitizing rooms and equipment.

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