

Sunday, September 25, 2022, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Dover Quartet

Joel Link, *violin*
Bryan Lee, *violin*
Hezekiah Leung, *viola*
Camden Shaw, *cello*

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph HAYDN (1732–1809) Quartet in C major, Hob. III:77, Op. 76,
No. 3, *Emperor* (1796–97)
Allegro
Poco adagio; cantabile
Menuetto: Allegro
Finale: Presto

Amy BEACH (1867–1944) Quartet for Strings (in one movement),
Op. 89 (1921/1929)

INTERMISSION

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847) Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 44, No. 3 (1838)
Allegro vivace
Scherzo: Assai leggero e vivace
Adagio non troppo
Molto allegro con fuoco

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

COVID-19: Masking is required inside the auditorium, and is strongly recommended, though not required, for indoor lobby/waiting areas as well as outdoor spaces. Up-to-date vaccination is strongly recommended, though not required for entry. The latest information on Cal Performances' COVID-19 safety policies is available at calperformances.org/safety.

Franz Joseph Haydn
Quartet in C major, Hob. III:77, Op. 76,
No. 3, *Emperor* (1796–97)

In 1796, Franz Josef Haydn was at the peak of his musical powers, even though he was then 64 years old—an extremely advanced age for a man of his era. The year before, he had returned to the Esterházy court from the second of his two triumphant visits to London. For that great city, he had written his 12 masterly *London* Symphonies, but during the intervening periods in Austria, he had turned to the more intimate world of the string quartet. Sometime that year, he was approached by Count Josef Erdödy to write the six quartets of Opus 76, arguably his finest and most daring.

Interestingly, Haydn was also composing a much bigger work at this time, *The Creation*. And because he was so preoccupied by the oratorio, the composer did not get around to publishing Opus 76 until 1799. Soon after its publication, Charles Burney—a London friend of both Haydn and Mozart—wrote to him about an English performance: “They are full of invention, fire, good taste and new effects, and seem the production, not of a sublime genius who has written so much and so well already, but of one of the highly cultivated talents who had expended none of his fire before.”

The most popular of these quartets is the third, known as the *Emperor* Quartet for its slow second movement based on a majestic hymn Haydn had just composed in January 1797 in honor of Austria’s Emperor Franz II. That beloved melody has since been set to different texts and adopted as the national anthem of both Austria and Germany.

Since this quartet’s center of gravity is that second movement, the first-movement Allegro is made lighter and serves as a high-spirited preparation for the theme and variations to come. As was often his custom, Haydn uses only one theme to generate this sonata-form movement, and it grows from

a simple five-note motive of shining clarity. The vigorous dotted rhythms that follow give it energy. Throughout this movement, Haydn creates variations on this simple theme and moves it into different harmonic regions. The most striking variation comes late in the development section, when it is transformed into a heavy-footed peasant dance over a bagpipe drone.

All this makes for an ideal setup for the noble theme and variations in the second movement. Again, there is just one theme: the hymn tune asking for God’s protection of Emperor Franz II. And unlike many theme-and-variations, this beautiful music never disappears from view throughout the four variations that follow. Each gives the theme to another member of the quartet while the textures and harmonic treatment grow progressively richer. The final variation, with the theme soaring in the first violin’s high register, is the most beautiful and sumptuous of them all; the movement closes with a hushed, uncanny coda.

A five-note motive, related to that of the first movement, spurs the heavily accented, rather impudent Menuetto into action. Haydn then moves from the major to the minor mode for a Trio section that is the Menuetto’s polar opposite—soft, silky smooth, and wistfully melancholic.

Typically in both his symphonic and chamber works, Haydn chose to make his finales light, effervescent, and witty. However, the *Emperor*’s finale follows a different path. Though he rarely did this in his conclusions, Haydn sets this sonata-form movement in the minor mode: C minor rather than the home key of C major. And the movement’s stormy mood matches its key. It is intensified by the abrasive multi-stopped chords that open and dominate it, giving the quartet a weighty orchestral quality. The chords are followed by a new version of the five-note motive that opened the first and third movements. Frenzied triplet rhythms are added to

this turbulent brew. Even though late in the movement Haydn finally moves to C major, the drama persists to the end.

Amy Beach
Quartet for Strings (in one movement),
Op. 89 (1921/1929)

A musical prodigy from her earliest years, Amy Beach was born Amy Marcy Cheney, into a world that hardly welcomed such gifts in a young girl—particularly one belonging to a genteel New England family. Her mother initially resisted her pleas to have piano lessons, then for a time severely restricted her practice time. Nevertheless, Beach made a highly successful debut as a piano soloist in Boston's leading concert hall at age 16.

At 18, Beach married a wealthy, socially prominent Boston surgeon 24 years her senior: Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach. For the rest of their marriage, which ended with his death in 1910, her growing body of compositions were presented under the rather Victorian title of “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach.” And although Dr. Beach encouraged his wife's composing, he imposed other restrictions. Though she affirmed she was “a pianist first and foremost,” he would not allow her to play in public more than twice a year, nor could she study with a composition teacher.

Undeterred, Amy Beach developed her own rigorous program of self-education, devouring technical treatises on composition and scores by the great composers. Her *Gaelic* Symphony, introduced by the Boston Symphony in 1896 to great acclaim, was the first symphony by an American woman ever publicly performed and published. In 1900, she was the soloist with the Boston Symphony for her Piano Concerto. Striving to help other women composers win commensurate success, she was a founder and first president of the Society of American Women Composers.

In the years after her husband's death, Beach found the MacDowell Colony for artists in Peterborough, New Hampshire to be

a warmly nurturing place for her composing. There, in 1921, she began her most innovative chamber work, the Quartet for Strings (in one movement), originally intending to enter it in a competition run by the famed philanthropist Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge. Missing the competition deadline, she laid it aside until 1929 and completed it while she was staying in Rome. Strangely, its publication waited until 1994, 50 years after her death, but today it is widely performed and admired.

In many of her works, Beach used folk sources to inspire her themes, and she was especially drawn to Native American and Inuit melodies, which helped free her from the late-Romantic style to explore more modern harmonic paths. Based on three Inuit melodies, her only string quartet is the most potent example of this progressive style.

Following an arch shape, the quartet opens with a slow *Grave* passage without any sense of a key as the instruments dissonantly slither in melancholic half steps around each other. After a pause, the viola sings the gentle first Inuit melody, “Summer Song,” and the home key reveals itself as G minor. As the other instruments join in, the first violin ascends with the second Inuit theme, “Playing at Ball,” with its pulsing repeated notes. This slow section closes with a reprise of the viola's “Summer Song.”

Moving to a bouncy new meter, the *Allegro molto* section is based on the third Inuit theme, “Ititaujang's Song,” which is joined by fragments of the other two songs in an animated development. It culminates in an intricate high-speed fugue drawn from elements of this theme.

Harsh, dissonant chords break in to close all this contrapuntal play, and the quartet returns to the *Grave* opening with its grieving dissonances followed by the a return of the viola singing the opening theme. Rising into their icy-sounding high registers—which Beach biographer Adrienne Fried Block likens to “the frozen north of the Inuit”—the

instruments finally resolve the dissonance that has hung over the music from the beginning.

Felix Mendelssohn

Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 44, No. 3 (1838)

Felix Mendelssohn did many things early in life, but marrying was not one of them. With his career in full orbit from his early teens and plenty of eligible young ladies to flirt with, he was in no hurry. But in November 1835, his father, Abraham, died suddenly, and Mendelssohn, who was more intensely connected to his family than most sons, was plunged into depression. As a good Jewish mother should, Leah Mendelssohn began urging him to find a nice girl and settle down.

The next summer, he found her: Cécile Jeanrenaud, the daughter of a prominent French Huguenot family living in Frankfurt. Mendelssohn had gone there ostensibly to fill in for a friend as director of the Cäcilienverein, an amateur choral society, but actually to hunt for a wife. Only 19, Cécile was fairly musical and extremely beautiful, with large blue eyes and golden-brown curls framing a classically oval face. Moreover, her calm, mild temperament was just the foil the volatile, high-strung composer needed. They married on March 28, 1837 and went on a lengthy, apparently blissful honeymoon before settling down in Leipzig.

From that honeymoon came the first of the Mendelssohns' five children—a son born in February 1838—and a new quartet cycle, the three quartets of Opus 44. We will hear the String Quartet in E-flat Major—labeled as No. 3, but actually the second to be composed—which was completed the day before the baby was born.

The sonata-form *Allegro vivace* first movement sizzles with intense nervous energy that won't allow any sweeping melodic theme to emerge. Instead, Mendelssohn creates a series of striking motivic elements—a twirling four-note upbeat to a held

note, calmer scalar figures, and crisply propulsive dotted rhythms—to build his exposition. The second theme is also cryptic: just modest interjections from the three lower instruments under the spinning-wheel whirl of the first violin. All this material is grist for a high-powered development section, out of which the second violin surreptitiously leads in the recapitulation. And Mendelssohn still has excess energy left over to create a second development instead of a typical coda.

Among Mendelssohn's plethora of sparkling scherzos, the second-movement scherzo is one of his masterpieces. In C minor and a galloping meter, it does not follow the usual scherzo-with-trio form, but is instead a complex rondo with three thematic ideas intricately interwoven. The second theme is a stuttering idea that the viola turns into a humorous little fugue. When it returns later, Mendelssohn boosts it almost to a double fugue with a chromatically descending countersubject. A third idea is more smoothly melodic and is combined with the galloping first theme. A brilliant example of the composer's superior contrapuntal skills—learned from Bach!—this is music of whimsy with an edge of menace.

The *Adagio non troppo* is one of the most movingly beautiful of Mendelssohn's slow movements, full of melodic inspiration and substance. Even though it is in the key of A-flat major, it is darkened by minor-mode shadows from the very beginning.

After three such superb movements, the finale—for all its speed and brilliance—is not nearly so fine a creation. In an elaborate sonata-rondo form, it lives up to its *Molto Allegro con fuoco* (“with fire”) marking, but lacks the depth and subtlety of its wonderful siblings.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2022

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.



Named one of the greatest string quartets of the last 100 years by *BBC Music Magazine*, the Grammy-nominated **Dover Quartet** has followed a “practically meteoric” (*Strings*) trajectory to become one of the most in-demand chamber ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the 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, and the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival. The group’s awards include a stunning sweep of all prizes at the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, and prizes at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. Its prestigious honors include the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award.

The Dover Quartet’s 2022–23 season includes collaborations with Edgar Meyer, Joseph Conyers, and Haochen Zhang. The group tours Europe twice, including a return to London’s renowned Wigmore Hall and a debut performance in Copenhagen. The quartet recently premiered Steven Mackey’s theatrical-musical work *Memoir*, alongside arx duo and actor-narrator Natalie Christa. Other recent and upcoming artist collaborations include Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnaton, Ray Chen, the Escher String Quartet, Bridget Kibbey, Anthony McGill, the Pavel Haas Quartet, Roomful of Teeth, the late Peter Serkin, and Davóne Tines. In addition to two previous albums for the label, Cedille Records releases the third volume of the Dover Quartet’s *Beethoven Complete String Quartets* recording in October 2022. The quartet’s recording of *The Schumann Quartets* for Azica Records was nominated for a Grammy Award in 2020. The Dover Quartet was formed in 2008 at the Curtis Institute of Music.