

Sunday, February 4, 2024, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Attacca Quartet

Amy Schroeder, *violin*
Domenic Salerni, *violin*
Nathan Schram, *viola*
Andrew Yee, *cello*

PROGRAM

Attacca Playlist:

Caroline SHAW (b. 1982) *Entr'acte* (2011)

Paul WIANCKO (b. 1983) "Part I: The Thousandth Encounter" from
Benkei's Standing Death (2020)

RADIOHEAD 2+2=5 (2003)
(arranged by Nathan Schram)

SHAW "Second Essay (Echo)"
from *Three Essays* (2022)

Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937) "Allegro moderato – très doux" from
String Quartet (1903)

SHAW "Root" from *The Evergreen* (2022)

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp minor,
Op. 131

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

—Played without pause between movements—

*Cal Performances is committed to fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment for all—
one that honors our venues as places of respite, openness, and respect.*

Please see the Community Agreements page on our website for more information.

The Attacca Quartet begins this afternoon's program with one of its signature "mixtapes" consisting of current favorite music from an array of genres—performed "attacca" (without pause).

Caroline Shaw

Entr'acte

Entr'acte was written in 2011 after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn's Op. 77, No. 2—with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further. I love the way some music (like the minuets of Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice's looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition.

First performed by the Brentano Quartet at Princeton University, April 2011.

—Caroline Shaw

Paul Wiancko

"Part 1: The Thousandth Encounter" from *Benkei's Standing Death*

In 12th-century Kyoto, warrior monk Saitō Musashibō Benkei wanders the night on his continual quest to claim a thousand swords from arrogant and unworthy samurai. Currently one victory shy of his goal, he heads to a shrine to pray. But while crossing Gojo Bridge, he encounters Ushiwakamaru—a diminutive boy playing the flute and wearing an impressive sword. Benkei challenges him to a duel. Ushiwakamaru seems to fly as he effortlessly defeats Benkei in an astonishing display of skill and agility. The humbled warrior monk bows down and swears loyalty to the boy, vowing to serve him for the rest of his days. The boy accepts.

Benkei's Standing Death was commissioned for the Attacca Quartet with support from the Adele and John Gray Endowment Fund. Premiered by the Attacca Quartet on February 8, 2020 at SITE Santa Fe in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Shaw

"Second Essay (Echo)" from *Three Essays*

I was reading about the echo function in PHP Hypertext Preprocessor, a scripting language used to create dynamic web pages, while creating this piece. I'm not super fluent in PHP or other computer languages, but I do enjoy reading about them and have done some HTML writing. I can't say there's an obvious analog to the music, but "Echo" has a dual meaning. As well as PHP, I was thinking about those internet echo chambers where you can feel like you and your opinions are always right. So, the title has several different meanings, none of which are very firm.

—Caroline Shaw

Shaw

"Root" from *The Evergreen*

"Root" has several meanings. It's the last part of the tree, which is the most important. And it gestures towards this idea of the basso continuo, the cello that plays its line beneath the other instruments from which something grows above. What grows sounds very different from the root below. There's also the feeling of this piece being a gesture to my roots in Baroque music, which is how I came into this world of music as a kid. At the end of the piece, the ostinato cello disappears, and this little melody just floats away and dissolves.

—Caroline Shaw

• • •

Ludwig van Beethoven

String Quartet in C-sharp minor, Op. 131

Of all his 16 string quartets, Beethoven's Opus 131 was the composer's own favorite. The work has moved commentators of all persuasions, no matter their approach, to practically stumble over themselves as they search for words to praise a work that, if we believe them, approaches the status of an icon—not in the sense that term has acquired, suggesting just about anything notable, but in its original meaning. Think of



SELECTED PROGRAM NOTES

Opus 131 as a kind of religious or mystical incarnation, and you get the idea. Writes one commentator: “What [this music] has to share with you about the very nature of existence is a priceless secret that cannot be apprehended this way in any other art form.” And that is among the more sober reflections. Of all the late quartets, I find this one the most abstract, the one that, if it is “about” anything, is about music itself, about how an apparently wayward, sprawling work reveals itself gradually as tightly put together, chaos turning almost magically into order. In other words, this is all about art and what art aspires to: to integrate divergent parts of the world, to see connections, to make sense of things.

A slow fugue opens the quartet. Listen beyond a few minutes as the music repeats, the same phrases uttered by the four strings, contrasts and contours emerging in the different ways the phrases are delivered, rhythmically and dynamically, and in where accents are placed. The flow of closely spaced intervals creates a serene sense of suspended motion. Savor the irony: motion itself

creates the illusion that motion has stopped. More than an irony, this paradox is an enigma, suggesting another enigma: eternity, at once alive but not bound by time’s rules or condemned to time’s inevitability.

The movement ends with a rising figure, a pair of the same notes spaced an octave apart. A similar pair of notes, repeating the octave interval but raised a semitone, opens the second movement (which follows without a pause, as does every movement in the quartet). Now the music’s character changes, to what seems at first a rustic and lighthearted dance. But the figures repeat themselves over and over, as obsessively as in the preceding movement, and while this allegro offers contrast, it remains tied to the world of the fugue.

Announced by an aggressive gesture by all four players in unison, just two stabbing *fortissimo* chords followed by a little noodling before we hear it again, movement three is an 11-measure bridge between the preceding and the following movements. It has been likened to an operatic aria, probably to describe the first violin’s elaborate figuration, which harkens back to the second movement

and looks ahead to the tuneful variations that will follow. This short transition is also beautifully self-contained, ending with another *fortissimo* stab by the second violin and lower strings. This mirrors the movement's opening, but because we recall that two-chord gesture so recently heard, we believe we will now hear it again. Beethoven limits the gesture to a single chord, however, leaving us suspended in our expectations for a moment, until with the opening of the next movement the gesture is complete—not because that opening is aggressive, though, for now it is to be played *piano* and *dolce*. But it is unmistakably a continuation of what we have just heard, making for a seamless passage from one movement to the next.

As if in answer to the somber fugue that opened the quartet, the set of variations in movement five is a gloriously optimistic expanse. Only, toward the movement's end, does a five-note growl from the cello disturb the music's sweet flow. That gesture foreshadows the outburst, also in the cello, that announces the beginning of the sixth movement, a frenetic scherzo in which the music threatens to come apart and whose obsessive and repetitive phrases recall the first two movements. Toward the end, Beethoven asks the musicians to play *sul ponticello*, with the bow kept near the instrument's bridge, producing a sound such as what you hear when you rub a damp cloth across a pane of glass.

The scherzo's high spirits are put to an abrupt stop by the adagio, the sixth movement. It recalls the serious demeanor of the first movement, but without the hopefulness that movement embodied. This section of the quartet is bleak and lamenting, and mercifully brief.

Now Beethoven transforms the fugue theme from the quartet's opening, altering tempo and dynamics and phrasing and creating the introduction to a savage march. But he inserts a more literal quotation in the slow, sinuous moments that spell the relentless pounding of the march, and you will hear that quotation also in the music's final minutes, closing this great circle. The music of earlier movements may have been obsessive, but not in any way that rivals what we hear now. Without a break over almost 40 minutes, Beethoven has moved from acceptance to defiance, along the way creating a kaleidoscope of sonic images from simple materials and integrating them into one massive whole. You may look for philosophical truths in this quartet, and you may find them, even if different listeners will arrive at different conclusions about what this music may mean.

—Larry Rothe

Larry Rothe writes about music for Cal Performances and San Francisco Opera. For more information, please visit larryrothe.com.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The two-time Grammy Award-winning Attacca Quartet is recognized and acclaimed as one of the most versatile and outstanding ensembles of the moment—a true quartet for modern times. Gliding through traditional classical repertoire to electronic and video game music and contemporary collaborations, this is one of the world's most innovative and respected ensembles.

In 2021, the quartet released two albums that embody its redefinition of what a string quartet can be. The first album, *Real Life*, featuring guest artists such as Tokimonsta, Daealus, and Anne Müller, was followed by *Of all Joys*, which features works from Phillip Glass and Arvo Pärt, and music of the Renaissance period. Passionate advocates of

continued on p. 22

Attacca Quartet

continued from p. 26

contemporary repertoire, the quartet is dedicated to presenting and recording new works. *Orange*, the group's 2019 release (in collaboration with Caroline Shaw), saw the Attacca win the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music/Small Ensemble Performance, with the follow-up album *Evergreen* winning the 2023 award in the same category. The quartet continues to perform in the world's best venues and festivals.

Recent highlights include Lincoln Center's White Light Festival and Miller Theatre, Carnegie Hall, Phillips Collection, Chamber Music Detroit, Chamber Music Austin, and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston as well as the Ojai Festival, BRIC Arts, and Big Ears Festival. Outside of the US, performances include Kings Place and in Oslo at the Vertavo Haydn Festival as well as performances at Gothenburg Konserthuset, MITO Settembre Festival in Italy, Sociedad Filarmónica de Bilbao, Strijkkwartet Biennale Amsterdam, Strings of Autumn Festival Prague, Thüringer Bachwochen, Sala São Paulo in Brazil, Fundación Beethoven in Chile, National Theatre of Panamá, and Teatro Mayor in Bogotá.

The founding members of the Attacca Quartet met while all studying at the Juilliard School in the early 2000s, with the group making its professional debut at Carnegie Hall in 2003. Other accolades include First Prize at the seventh Osaka International Chamber Music Competition, the Top Prize and Listeners' Choice awards at the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, and Grand Prize of the 60th annual Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition.

The Attacca Quartet has engaged in extensive educational and community outreach projects, serving as guest artists and teaching fellows at the Lincoln Center Institute, University of Texas, Juilliard School, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, and Bravo! Vail Valley, among others. The group's members are expert programmers and communicators, beautifully combining existing works with those by living composers.