

FRANZ PETER SCHUBERT (1797- 1828)

*Quartet No. 12 in C Minor, D. 703 "Quartettsatz"*  
*OP. Posthumous (1820)*

The *Quartettsatz* ("Quartet Piece") is the first of the four great string quartets Franz Schubert wrote in the last eight years of his life. A compact powerhouse of writing, it remained, like his famous Eighth Symphony and Schubert himself, unfinished at the time of his death. Yet it set the tone for the three completed masterpieces which followed. At his death at the wrenching age of 30, Schubert was known mostly for his vocal works, dances and piano music. Even his companions knew of little more. It was Schumann, in 1839, 11 years after Schubert's death, who discovered the instrumental music in Vienna during an impulsive visit to Schubert's brother. It was Brahms and Mendelssohn who helped to introduce it to the wider public. The *Quartettsatz* was published in 1870, 50 years after Schubert wrote it down.

The opening bars pull the listener into a drama of anguish, as an urgent murmuring undertow explodes like fireworks with a "Neapolitan sixth" cascading in a descending arpeggio. The theme is immediately repeated in a more subdued color, falling this time into a less dramatic harmonic region from which it melts into a yearningly tender second theme. The driving drama of the movement, its structural unity and brevity, its swings between urgent anguish and profound tenderness, are reminiscent of the passionate quartet Beethoven wrote for himself (Op. 95 "Serioso") ten years earlier. Even its format recalls the Beethoven work - a double statement of the explosive first theme played initially in unison, immediately repeated by a single voice accompanied by the others, leading to a second theme of great sweetness. In Schubert's work, however, it is the tender second theme which dominates the movement, passing through a variety of harmonic placements as the work progresses. A third motif appears as a series of ascending, darkly-colored, windswept scales accompanied by thunderous rumbling in the lower strings briefly interrupting the calm. These second and third motifs dominate the development and recapitulation sections, while, of the fiery opening theme, subtly suggested by a replay of its harmonic coloration, there is only a hint. The explosive opening measures do reappear intact at the end, as a coda to the movement - this compact circular form contributing to the work's dramatic statement. Schubert was 40 measures into a second movement when he dropped the project for reasons unknown. What remains, then, is a sharply cut gem, infused with passion and crafted with the greatest artistry. One can point to the technical innovations in this work - the extraordinary first theme whose short rhythmic motor serves to generate the entire movement; the lovely harmonies, the use of three key centers in the exposition (c minor to start, A flat major and G major) and the originality of the recapitulation in which the themes return out of order. But in the end, no analysis explains the haunting magic of this profound work, composed by a 24 year old boy.

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN (1732-1809)

*String Quartet Op. 76# 2 in D Minor (1797)*  
*The "Quintin"*

This is the second of the six string quartets dedicated to the Countess Erdödy, written following Haydn's return to Vienna from his second stay in England. The title derives from the pair of descending fifths which open the first movement.

The work starts out in D minor, a morose key infrequently used by Haydn. The second theme moves to the relative key of F major before continuing in a dramatic voyage to other key regions. The simple four-note descending opening theme will become the most important structural and thematic feature of the movement, heard first in the upper voice but soon enough in the second violin, then the 'cello. By the development section, it is apparent that this motif is the core around which everything else revolves and evolves, sometimes stretched to longer or diminished to shorter intervals; sometimes rising, sometimes falling, but all the time serving as the actual theme or as the underpinning to a secondary theme. As is often the case in Haydn's works, one can see in it the seeds of Beethoven's craft.

Now in D major for the slow movement, Haydn writes a really beautiful, melodic and gracious serenade in the form of a set of inventive variations. In contrast, the following *Menuetto* is gruff and loud, even raucous. It is a strict two-part canon – the upper voices followed one measure later by the lower voices playing exactly the same notes in a lower register. Haydn's little joke is that the *Trio* which follows is soft and delicate, the voices mostly not in tandem but rather in unison, in an anti counter-point gesture, as it were.

The final movement, again in D minor, feels like a rondo but is closer to a sonata-form structure with a second theme in the expected relative F major. After what serves as a development section, Haydn shifts to D major for a coda so long that for the entire final third of the movement we are treated to a cheerful barrage of sound, wiping out any memory of the introspective mood lingering from the minor key. The ending to this famous quartet is as jolly as anything Haydn ever wrote.

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BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913-1976)

*Three Divertimenti for String Quartet (1933)*

Benjamin Britten grew up in Lowestoft, Suffolk, in a home where music was very important. His mother, an amateur soprano active in local choral organizations, often held musicales in her home. Some of Britten's earliest compositions were songs written for her. While there was no music theory included in his early training, he was given piano and viola lessons and started to compose at a very young age while studying scores on his own. His first real help in composition came when he was eleven years old and was introduced to the English composer, Frank Bridge (1879-1941) while attending the 1924 Norwich Triennial Festival at which Bridge was conducting his own composition, "The Sea". Bridge continued to work with Britten throughout the young man's formal school years, which included his student days at The Royal College of Music in London. Bridge had reached a point in his

own career where he was interested in leaving behind his older, elegant, style of composition and was embracing an interest, somewhat unusual in England, in the music of Bartok and Schoenberg. However, Bridge insisted that his young pupil develop a firm foundation in classic techniques while at the same time he pushed his student to express himself in new and individualistic ways.

The Three Divertimenti were composed when Britten was twenty years old. Britten was still attending the Royal College but was disappointed in the college's conservative approach toward composition. Though there seems to be very little definitive information about the three pieces, they were composed in 1933 and were originally meant to be part of a five-movement suite for string quartet, a work to be called *Alla quartetto serio*, or "Go play, boy play". This line can be found in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Act 1, Scene 2, and apparently Britten saw something of significance in the quote. Only these three movements of the proposed suite have survived. They were revised by Britten in 1936 to stand alone.

Apparently Britten intended the three movements to be character descriptions of two schoolmates from previous days. The March and Waltz were designed to represent an athletic school boy named David Layton whom Britten knew at Gresham, the public school which Britten attended from his fifteenth through his seventeenth year. The Burlesque represented Francis Barton from a previous private school, South Lodge Preparatory School, where he spent his eighth through his fifteenth year.

The introduction to the first of the Divertimenti gives perhaps a reference to the Bartok/Schoenberg interests of Britten's mentor of that period, Frank Bridge. The piece then morphs into one of Britten's earliest marches, a form that he would later use quite frequently. Much use is made of dotted rhythms, as well as of artificial harmonics and *pizzicatti*. The March ends with a return of the introduction. The following Waltz provides a contrasting charm and, with the exception of a slightly turbulent middle section, retains its calmness throughout.

Judging from the Burlesque, Francis Barton must have been a very active, almost frenetic child. The movement is basically one of perpetual motion with an ostinato figure in the lower instruments that helps to maintain the momentum. A short accelerated coda provides a fitting way to round off the incessant activity!

These three pieces were first performed as a unit by the Stratton Quartet, later known as the Aeolian Quartet, at Wigmore Hall, on February 25, 1936.

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PAVEL HAAS (1899-1944)

*String Quartet No. 2, Op. 7* (1922)  
"From the Monkey Mountains"

The composer, for whom our performers named their group, was in the early years of a promising career when he wrote his second string quartet. He could not in his worst nightmares, have imagined the fate that would befall him 20 years later, as the Nazis closed

in. Born in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1899 to a Czech businessman and Russian mother, he was devoting himself to music full time by his mid teens and at 19, entered the Brno Conservatory where he became the most prominent composition student of Janáček. Like Shostakovich, he got his professional start producing scores for stage and film. In 1941 he was caught by the Nazis who deported him to Teresienstadt, where he stayed three years. While in Terezin, after a period of depression, he had started composing again (not all of it survived). He wrote: “Our will to create art has always been as strong as our will to survive.” In 1944 as it became clear that Germany would lose the war, large-scale deportations began and he, with other artists (including the conductor Karel Ancerl who survived to bear witness), women and children, were transported to Auschwitz. Within days of arrival he was gassed.

Tonight’s offering, an early work, depicts a summer holiday in the mountains. “Monkey Mountain” is the name of a popular resort area outside of Brno in the Czech-Moravian Highlands. Haas explained: “The whole of this carefree piece is dominated by movement – whether the rhythm of the open countryside and birdsong, or the irregular motion of village carts, or the warm song of the human heart and cool quiet play of moonbeams, or the wild abandon of a night of revelry.”

The first movement, “Landscape” – *Andante*, describes the slow approach to the hills and the rhythms of the countryside, including birdcalls, which you will hear scattered throughout. Next, “Cart, Driver and Horse” – *Andante*, mimics a rickety cart, wheezing horse “and possibly a not entirely sober driver.” Of the glissandi written into the score, Haas also wrote, “must sound like squeaking and groaning.” “The Moon and I” – *Largo e misterioso*, is a nightscape – a type of mood music which came into vogue in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mood is mysterious, desolate, then “a warm song of the human heart.” “A Wild Night” – *vivace e con fuoco* (lively and with fire) is the final movement. What better than American jazz for this? You will hear first the rickety wagon again, then a rumba straight from Tin Pan Alley followed by a swing time tune. There are fragments of folk tunes, rapid shifts of meter and mood, whorls of sound melding into melancholy, and finally glad noises allowing the suspicion that a thumping good time was had by all.

Program note by Nora Avins Klein, adapted from Chandos Records, Ltd.  
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