



Artemis Quartet

Vineta Sareika / *Violin*
Anthea Kreston / *Violin*
Gregor Sigl / *Viola*
Eckart Runge / *Cello*

Sunday Afternoon, April 8, 2018 at 4:00
Rackham Auditorium
Ann Arbor

83rd Performance of the 139th Annual Season
55th Annual Chamber Arts Series

Media partnership provided by WGTE 91.3 FM and WRCJ 90.9 FM.

The Artemis Quartet appears by arrangement with Arts Management Group.

The Artemis Quartet's recordings are available on the Erato label.

In consideration of the artists and the audience, please refrain from the use of electronic devices during the performance.

The photography, sound recording, or videotaping of this performance is prohibited.

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

String Quartet in F Major, K. 590

Allegro moderato
Andante — Allegretto
Menuetto: Allegretto
Allegro

Béla Bartók

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 17, Sz. 67

Moderato
Allegro molto capriccioso
Lento

Intermission

Robert Schumann

String Quartet in a minor, Op. 41, No. 1

Andante espressivo — Allegro
Scherzo: Presto
Adagio
Presto

STRING QUARTET IN F MAJOR, K. 590 (1790)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria

Died December 5, 1791 in Vienna

UMS premiere: Budapest String Quartet; January 1946 in Rackham Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1790:

- The Supreme Court of the US convenes for the first time
- Peking Opera is introduced in China
- The US patent system is established

The present quartet is the last Mozart ever wrote. Saying farewell to the genre was of course the farthest thing from his mind — he was 34 years old, at the height of his creative powers, and in good health. No one could have predicted that he had only a year and a half to live when he finished the F-Major Quartet in Vienna in June 1790.

Quartets were usually written in sets of six in those days, and the F-Major work was only the third in the series begun the previous year with the quartets in D and B-flat (K. 575 and 589). It is traditionally believed that Mozart had received a commission for six quartets from King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, an avid cello player. But there is no actual evidence that such a commission was ever given. Mozart did visit Prussia in the spring of 1789, but he never got an audience with the King. A court document dated April 26 speaks of “one named Mozart who at his ingress declared himself to be a Kapellmeister from Vienna” — hardly a very encouraging introduction. Mozart’s attempts to get work at the Prussian court were

evidently unsuccessful. He certainly never delivered any quartets to the King, and chances are that none were expected of him at Potsdam. In his biography of Mozart, Maynard Solomon suggests that the composer simply made up this commission in letters to his wife, to justify a long and expensive journey (during which, moreover, he even seems to have had an affair.)

Unconfirmed rumors aside, writing string quartets was a difficult task even for a Mozart. The composer, whose ease and speed in composing were legendary, had toiled long and hard on his six earlier quartets dedicated to Haydn, and the new set did not seem to come any more easily. In a letter written in June 1790, Mozart called his work on the quartets “exhausting labor.” The artistic difficulties were soon compounded by financial ones, and Mozart had to sell his existing three quartets to the Viennese publisher Artaria for quick cash. Afterwards, he returned to the form of string chamber music, which he clearly preferred in his later years, namely the quintet with two violas. He produced two splendid works in that

genre in 1790–91 (K. 593 and 614), but wrote no more quartets.

The first so-called “Prussian” Quartet (K. 575) featured many exposed cello solos, and Mozart’s catalog of his own works confirms that he wrote it for the King of Prussia (which doesn’t necessarily mean a commission). For K. 589 and 590, the catalog says nothing about Friedrich Wilhelm, and the cello does not predominate quite as much as it did in the earlier piece. Instead, as one commentator writes, Mozart “gave all four instruments featured roles; they shift constantly between playing the melody and collaborating in the accompaniment” — an innovation that amounts to a “complete rethinking of a quartet’s instrumental balance.”

The F-Major Quartet opens very unconventionally, with sharp contrasts in rhythm (long opening notes followed by a rapid descending scale), dynamics (soft immediately followed by loud), and texture (unison followed by four-part harmony). Moreover, the three-measure phrases are at odds with the standard four-bar units on which so much classical music is based. All these contrasts are fully exploited in a sparkling movement, full of energy and vitality. The lyrical flow of the melodies is interrupted, time and time again, by the wildly cascading descending scales from the work’s opening. Particularly noteworthy is the way Mozart “re-orchestrates” the recapitulation, giving the cello’s melodic phrases to the viola the second time around. At the end, the music simply vanishes into thin air, with the first violin playing the last

two notes alone.

In his autograph score, Mozart called the second movement an “Andante”; the first edition, printed just after Mozart’s death, changed this to “Allegretto.” Somewhat unusually for a Mozart slow movement, it is dominated by its basic rhythmic pattern more than its melodic line. There are also some highly unexpected harmonies, and a delicious new rhythmic figure added in the recapitulation. As in the first movement, the ending is extremely soft, though here all four instruments participate and a very wide range is involved.

The minuet and trio are curiously understated, though Mozart plays some sophisticated games with asymmetrical phrase structures and, in the trio, seems to recall the playful figure from the second movement. By contrast, he pulls out all the stops in the virtuosic finale, which contains several elements more readily associated with Haydn than with Mozart, such as sudden slowdowns, jumps into new keys, and hints at Hungarian Gypsy style (though the Haydn movement it sounds closest to, the rondo of the G-Major Piano Trio, was written several years later than this quartet). The conclusion of this brilliant and witty movement is, once more, soft and delicate, as if one left a party inconspicuously, through the back door.

STRING QUARTET NO. 2, OP. 17, SZ. 67 (1917)

Béla Bartók

Born March 25, 1881 in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now Sânnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died September 26, 1945 in New York City

UMS premiere: Budapest String Quartet; February 1941 in Rackham Auditorium.

Snapshots of History...In 1917:

- Jeannette Rankin of Montana becomes the first woman member of the US House of Representatives
- The US declares war on Germany
- The first Pulitzer Prizes are awarded

A decade after the First Quartet's "return to life," we find Bartók in the throes of a new crisis in his *String Quartet No. 2*. This time, the crisis had to do with the hardships of World War I, and with the vehement opposition to Bartók's music on the part of the Hungarian critics, an opposition that in 1912 had caused the composer to withdraw from the musical life of Budapest and to move to a relatively distant suburb. A mood of pessimism took hold of Bartók during these years — witness the tragic endings of the *Four Pieces for Orchestra* and the *Suite for Piano, Op. 14*, and the two dark song cycles of Opp. 15 and 16, all from the years immediately preceding *String Quartet No. 2*.

The Quartet, too, ends with a desolate slow movement, preceded by a "Moderato" filled with nostalgic longing and an extended, ferocious dance. The three movements represent wide emotional extremes, even more polarized than is the case in *String Quartet No. 1*.

The first movement contains its own inner polarity, between the

opening theme (a languid melody with ever-widening intervals) and a second, "bittersweet" idea that appears only twice, harmonized in a much more consonant way. The contrast of these two themes could correspond to an imagined contrast between a melancholy state of mind and the world of ideal dreams. Powerful surges and desperate climaxes punctuate this movement which — roughly — follows the outlines of sonata form. One of the most memorable moments occurs shortly before the end: a five-note motif, played by all four instruments in a menacing, *fortissimo* unison, turns out to be identical to the beginning of the "bittersweet" theme, which immediately follows, ushering in a coda in which both themes are united in a farewell gesture of great tenderness.

For most of its duration, the second movement has a single interval — the minor third — for its theme. It is hammered home in a relentless *ostinato* (continually repeated phrase) in which Bartók scholar János

Kárpáti sees a reflection of the Arabic drumming Bartók had heard during his visit to Biskra, Algeria in 1913. On the other hand, as Kárpáti also notes, a very similar *ostinato* can be found in Bartók's piano piece, *Allegro barbaro*, from 1911 — that is, two years before the Biskra trip. It should come as no surprise that Bartók was most receptive to external impulses that confirmed what he was already exploring in his own creative work.

In the central movement of the Second Quartet, this *ostinato* theme is developed in spectacular ways, in turn serious and comic. Toward the middle of the movement, the tempo slows down for a while and a lyrical melody appears, only to be brushed aside by the returning *ostinatos* that become wilder and wilder to the end. The concluding *fortissimo* unison recalls the similar passage from the first movement mentioned above. Only this time there is no relief in a dreamlike conclusion; the third movement that follows is one of the darkest pieces of music Bartók ever wrote.

Isolated melodic fragments, played with mutes, set a desolate stage, preparing the appearance of the melody modeled after a certain type of Hungarian folk song of a mournful character. The contours of the melody, and the fact that the phrase is repeated a fifth higher, are reminiscent of folk music, but the chromatic inflections of the theme speak an intensely personal language of Bartók's own. In fact, the pitches derive from the languid opening theme of the first movement. The two kinds of sadness — the personal grief of the composer and the communal

lament of folk song — reinforce one another as the music moves through successive stages of anxiety and despair. The final sonority of the work is the same minor third that figured so prominently in the second movement — now played twice, *pizzicato* (plucked) by the viola and cello, muffled and austere.

STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR, OP. 41, NO. 1 (1842)

Robert Schumann

Born June 8, 1810 in Zwickau, Germany

Died July 29, 1856 in Eendenich, Bonn, Germany

UMS premiere: Detroit Philharmonic Club; February 1888 in Hobart Hall.

Snapshots of History...In 1842:

- The first pilsner beer is brewed in Pilsen, Bohemia (now Czech Republic)
- The New York Philharmonic and Vienna Philharmonic perform their first concerts
- The first inhaled anesthetic is administered to facilitate a surgical procedure

Schumann wrote all three of his string quartets within a space of two months in the summer of 1842 — his "chamber-music year" that also saw the birth of his Piano Quintet and Piano Quartet, among other works. This extreme productivity may have been due to a "manic" phase in the manic-depressive disorder from which he suffered; if so, the world owes to that disorder some of the finest music of the Romantic era.

Schumann and his close friend Mendelssohn (to whom these quartets were dedicated) understood the late Beethoven quartets better than anyone at the time and responded to them in their own works. For instance, Schumann's a-minor Quartet has definite connections to Beethoven's quartet in the same key (Op. 132); both begin with slow introductions using imitation among the voices, and both make the otherwise unusual first move from the home key to F Major — a descent and a darkening of the tone, instead of a rise to brighter regions. Later in

Schumann's movement, a wide array of key areas are visited, with a broad range of textures and emotions to match; yet Schumann avoided Beethoven's wild tempo fluctuations. (Unlike Beethoven, he did not bring back the slow introduction.) For Schumann, the string quartet did not involve "going to the edge" or even "over the edge" as it did for the older composer; it was, rather, an exercise in classicism, a tribute and homage to an already venerable genre of chamber music.

Schumann was to return to the main idea of the second-movement "Scherzo" in his short piano piece "The Wild Rider" from his *Album for the Youth* (1849). In the Quartet, the idea is presented in a fuller form and in a much more difficult setting. There is a middle section in a new key, meter, and tempo; Schumann called it "Intermezzo" rather than "Trio," to emphasize that this is only a brief respite after which the "wild ride" resumes.

As has often been remarked, the third-movement "Adagio" (which

revisits the key of F Major) took its first three notes from the slow movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Later, however, the melody takes a typically Schumann-esque turn when it is taken over by the cello. After a central dramatic episode, the expressive melody returns and the movement ends with a gentle coda.

The vigorous "Presto" finale keeps repeating its principal motif (a characteristic repeated note and subsequent leap) almost maniacally over and over again. Both the first and the second themes are constructed from this material, which is developed both contrapuntally and with chordal accompaniment. Then, in the final portion of the movement, the music suddenly slows down and we hear a simple melody over a drone and a series of extremely soft, long-held chords before the principal motif returns with the final dash to the finish line.

Program notes by Peter Laki.

UMS ARCHIVES

This afternoon's concert marks the **Artemis Quartet**'s third appearance under UMS auspices, following the Quartet's UMS debut in March 2013 in Rackham Auditorium. The Quartet most recently appeared under UMS auspices in April 2015 in Rackham Auditorium.

ARTISTS

The Berlin-based **Artemis Quartet** was founded in 1989 at the University of Music Lübeck and is counted among the foremost worldwide quartet formations today. Important mentors have included Walter Levin, Alfred Brendel, the Alban Berg Quartet, the Juilliard Quartet, and the Emerson Quartet.

From the beginning, collaboration with musical colleagues has been a major inspiration for the ensemble. Thus, the Artemis Quartet has toured with notable musicians such as Sabine Meyer, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Juliane Banse, and Jörg Widmann. Various recordings document the artistic cooperation with several partners; including the Piano Quintets by Schumann and Brahms with Leif Ove Andsnes, the Schubert Quintet with Truls Mørk, or Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* with Thomas Kakuska and Valentin Erben from the Alban Berg Quartet.

The Artemis Quartet records exclusively for Virgin (now Erato), and has a large discography. Their recordings have been repeatedly awarded the German Record Critics' Award, the *Gramophone Award*, and the Diapason d'Or. The entire recording of Beethoven's String Quartets was honored with the important French Grand Prix de l'Académie Charles Cros in 2011. The Quartet has received an ECHO Klassik on four occasions; the most recent in 2015 for the recording of works by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, and in 2016 for the recording of Brahms's Op. 51/1 and Op. 67 Quartets, dedicated to the Artemis Quartet's former violist Friedemann Weigle, who tragically passed away in July 2015. Their next recording of works by Shostakovich will be released in 2018, including the Piano Quintet with Elisabeth Leonskaja.

The examination of contemporary music is a significant part of the artistic work of the Quartet. Composers such as Mauricio Sotelo (2004), Jörg Widmann (2006), and Thomas Larcher (2008) wrote creations for the Artemis Quartet. In 2014, a concerto for strings and orchestra by Daniel Schnyder premiered in Frankfurt. The musicians launched their own contest for musical composition in 2015. Eduard Demetz was nominated as the awardee in November 2015 and his *String Quartet No. 2* was given a very well-received premiere in Berlin in May 2016. In addition to concertizing, the four musicians teach as professors at the University of the Arts Berlin and Chapelle Musicale Reine Elisabeth in Brussels.

MAY WE ALSO RECOMMEND...

- 4/15 Apollo's Fire: Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*
4/19-21 *Cold Blood*
4/22 Emanuel Ax

Tickets available at www.ums.org.

ON THE EDUCATION HORIZON...

- 4/13 Colin Stetson: Performance Talk
(Watkins Lecture Hall, Moore Building, 1100 Baitts Drive, 5:30 pm)
*Presented in collaboration with U-M EXCEL and the Center for World
Performance Studies*
- 4/15 UMS 101, Classical Music: Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Apollo's Fire
(Hill Auditorium Mezzanine Lobby, 2:00 pm)
Paid registration required; please visit bit.ly/UMSClasses to register.
- 4/19 UMS 101, Dance/Theater: *Cold Blood*
(Power Center Green Room, 5:30 pm)
Paid registration required; please visit bit.ly/UMSClasses to register.
- 4/19 Post-Performance Q&A: *Cold Blood*
(Power Center, 121 Fletcher Street)
Must have a ticket to that evening's performance to attend.

Educational events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.