

October 13, 2016 at 8:00pm

Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

Musical Preview by Princeton student alumni of the

Royal College of Music/Princeton University Exchange program at 7:00pm

Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

2ND PERFORMANCE OF THE 123RD SEASON / HISTORY IN THE MUSIC-MAKING

BELCEA STRING QUARTET

Corina Belcea, violin

Axel Schacher, violin

Krzysztof Chorzelski, viola

Antoine Lederlin, cello

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Quartet No. 12 in C Minor, D. 703 “Quartettsatz”

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 51, No. 2

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Quasi Minuetto, moderato

Finale. Allegro non assai

—INTERMISSION—

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810 “Death and the Maiden”

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

TONIGHT'S PROGRAM: Classical Masters in the Romantic Era

By Paul Schiavo ©2016

German composers of the nineteenth century faced a unique challenge. Having been swept up in the wave of Romantic sentiment that had emerged first in literature and then in the other arts, they accepted without question the notion of music as a vehicle for conveying passions and ardent yearnings. But as taken as they were with Romantic subjectivity, they were also heirs to an imposing tradition of well-formed compositional structure and logical thematic development, a legacy they could hardly ignore. Beethoven, their great hero, had demonstrated that the classic forms of symphony, sonata, and string quartet were far from exhausted, that they could be expanded to accommodate new musical ideas expressing the spirit of the age.

Among the Austrian and German musicians of the period, those most loyal to classical precepts were Franz Schubert and Johannes Brahms. Both were deeply influenced by Beethoven. Significantly, they were also the outstanding composers of string quartets, the genre in which Beethoven had written some of his greatest music.

The music the Belcea Quartet plays this evening exemplifies the blending of Romantic content with Classical form and procedure that Schubert and Brahms so successfully achieved. All three pieces we hear deliver high musical drama and deep emotion, and the last of them entails a literary connection that places it in the Romantic tradition. Yet all three reflect the Classical convention of a four-movement string quartet design. Most significantly, each shows the lucid development of musical ideas that was always a hallmark of Classical composition, even during the Romantic nineteenth century.

Quartet No. 12 in C Minor, D. 703
“Quartettsatz” (1820)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Franz Schubert was an extraordinarily prolific composer, one whose catalog exceeds 900 works. But not all of them are finished compositions. Some exist merely as sketches, though there are also pieces the composer abandoned after investing substantial labor in them. They include half a dozen piano sonatas, choral works and operas, two symphonies (not only the famous one in B minor known as the “Unfinished,” but also an earlier piece in E minor), and several compositions for string quartet. Among the latter group is a movement in C minor that Schubert clearly intended as the opening of a full-length quartet. (A fragment of what would have been the ensuing slow movement also survives.)

Schubert composed this *Quartettsatz*, or “Quartet movement,” as it has come to be called, in December 1820. Why he failed to complete the composition that began so promisingly remains unknown. We can only regret that he did not. The thoughtful construction of the *Quartettsatz*, whose large and

small details emanate to a remarkable extent from its initial theme, as well as its handsome melodic ideas and confident traversal of far-flung harmonic terrain, place this work in the distinguished company of Schubert’s finest instrumental compositions.

Schubert builds the movement in large part on a three-note motif: an initial pitch, its lower neighbor, and a return to the original tone. A chain of this figure in descending sequence begins the first theme, which the players present in echoic counterpoint during the opening moments of the piece. Following a second subject, a broad melody assigned to the first violin, the three-note motif reappears in a dramatic passage, sounding against both furious scales and more lyrical phrases. We also hear this figure through most of the central portion of the movement, often as accompaniment to other melodic ideas. Late in the movement, Schubert reprises the initial gesture, the echoic presentation of the first theme, which we can now hear as framing the *Quartettsatz* at its start and close.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Quartet in A Minor,
Op. 51, No. 2 (1873)
JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Brahms, a ruthlessly self-critical musician, began and abandoned some twenty attempts at string quartet composition before finally completing two pieces he considered worthy to be published. These were the String Quartets in C Minor and A Minor, issued together in 1873 as the composer's Opus 51. Not unusually, they had undergone a long and painstaking gestation, one that included a series of private readings in Brahms' presence, each followed by a bout of revision.

The second of the Opus 51 quartets, which we hear now, is a more lyrical work than its C minor companion piece. Brahms, ever respectful of classical tradition, cast the piece in the

venerable form of four movements. The first opens with a long and complex theme that touches on a number of moods — yearning, pathos, resoluteness, and more. At length it gives way to a second subject, a dance-like melody over a pizzicato accompaniment in the cello. In an especially fine passage, Brahms immediately restates the theme in the rich voice of the viola while a violin traces running counterpoint above it. Several subsidiary ideas lead to a development passage that forms the central part of the movement. Finally the composer offers the expected reprise of his themes and concludes with further consideration of the dramatic potential of the initial subject.

There follows a soothing Andante moderato whose principal theme presents a variant of the dancing

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second subject of the previous movement. The character of this music is entirely different, however, being placid and somewhat dream-like. Only briefly, during a contrasting central episode, does Brahms inject a more vigorous note in the form of rapid passagework.

Although nominally like a minuet, the third movement is far more a Romantic intermezzo than a courtly dance. The quiet tone, luminous texture, and ethereal harmonies of its principal theme establish a mysterious, almost enchanted air at the outset, one that the more animated episodes between this theme's several recurrences cannot dispel.

The finale is based on a pair of dissimilar themes. The first gives the

impression of a peasant dance, one that Brahms imagines in a deliberately rough and clumsy vein. The composer counters this with a more lyrical melody. Brahms makes no effort to reconcile the contrasting characters of these subjects. Instead, he allows the music to alternate between them, with the more robust initial idea getting in the final word.

Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D. 810 "Death and the Maiden" (1824) FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797–1828)

In February 1817, shortly after his twentieth birthday, Schubert composed a song to a short poem entitled *Der Tod und das Mädchen* ("Death and the Maiden"). In the course of the poem's eight brief lines a chilling drama unfolds. A young woman pleads with Death

(continued on page 8)



Beethoven's 16 string quartets were written over a 27-year span of his life, and they range from the wide-eyed energy and variety of his first six quartets to the enigmatic and existential worlds of his final five quartets. It is impossible to think of a more compelling window onto Beethoven, onto the genre of the string quartet, or even onto the entire multifarious pageant of chamber music in the modern West.

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TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET

The Complete Cycle of Beethoven String Quartets

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2016, 8PM

Post-concert talk back following the concert, with the quartet and the audience, hosted by Professor Scott Burnham

- String Quartet No. 2 in G Major, Op. 18, No. 2
- String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95 "Serioso"
- String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130 with Finale

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2016, 8PM

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm

- String Quartet No. 1 in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1
- String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"
- String Quartet No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 131

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2017, 8PM

Post-concert talk back following the concert, with the quartet and the audience, hosted by Professor Scott Burnham

- String Quartet No. 5 in A Major, Op. 18, No. 5
- String Quartet No. 4 in C Minor, Op. 18, No. 4
- String Quartet No. 15 in A Minor, Op. 132

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2017, 8PM

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm

- String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3
- String Quartet No. 8 in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2
- String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat Major, Op. 127

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 2017, 8PM

Post-concert talk back following the concert, with the quartet and the audience, hosted by Professor Scott Burnham

- String Quartet No. 6 in B-flat Major, Op. 18, No. 6
- String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135
- String Quartet No. 9 in C Major, Op. 59, No. 3

THURSDAY, MARCH 16, 2017, 8PM

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7pm

- String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1
- String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130, with No. 16, Op. 133 "Grosse Fugue"

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Wednesday, November 16 at 12:30PM

A half-hour guided meditation to Beethoven played live in Richardson Auditorium by the Takács String Quartet, followed by a light lunch and a group conversation about the experience of listening to music mindfully. No prior experience necessary.

Free and open to the public.

PRINCETON ADULT SCHOOL CLASS #1

Wednesday, November 16 at 7PM

A 3-part class on the Beethoven String Quartets taught by Professor Scott Burnham and Ed Dusinberre, first violinist of the Takács Quartet. *Visit princetonadultschool.org to register.*

PRINCETON ADULT SCHOOL CLASS #2

Tuesday, January 17 at 7PM

A 3-part class on the Beethoven String Quartets taught by Professor Scott Burnham and Ed Dusinberre, first violinist of the Takács Quartet. *Visit princetonadultschool.org to register.*

LATE NIGHT CHAMBER JAM

Thursday, January 19, 2017

Following the concert, amateur string players of all ages and levels are invited to the stage to sight read Beethoven String Quartet Op. 18, No. 4 with members of the Takács String Quartet.

Free and open to the public. Sign up to play TBA.

OPEN REHEARSAL

January 2017, exact date TBD

Watch and listen as the Takács String Quartet discuss and rehearse the Beethoven String Quartets.

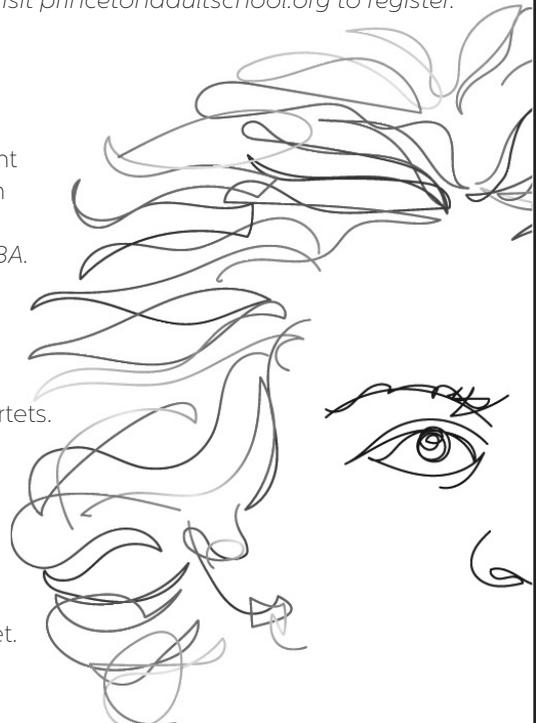
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PRINCETON ADULT SCHOOL CLASS #3

Tuesday, March 14 at 7PM

A 3-part class on the Beethoven String Quartets taught by Professor Scott Burnham and Ed Dusinberre, first violinist of the Takács Quartet.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

to pass her by. He will not relent but assures her that “I am not fierce; you will sleep softly in my arms.”

Seven years later, Schubert returned to this song and used its melody as the theme for a set of variations forming the second movement of a string quartet in the key of D minor. It was not the first time the composer had employed such a procedure. Already he had incorporated into his Piano Quintet in A Major a set of variations on another song, *Die Forelle*, or “The Trout.” Just as that work has become universally known as the “Trout Quintet,” so the D Minor String Quartet goes by the title of the song quoted in its slow movement.

Unusually, all four movements of this “Death and the Maiden” Quartet unfold in the minor mode, and despite passages of lighter harmonic complexion, a serious, even somber, feeling pervades the work. The opening Allegro presents music of stark power, with propulsive rhythms, some searing harmonies, and an expansive elaboration of thematic ideas. The second movement brings the variations on the song melody that gives the quartet its name. There follows a scherzo of considerable rhythmic energy and a finale with something of the character of a *tarantella*, the wild Italian dance. Whether Schubert intended this movement as a *Totentanz*, a “dance of death,” as some commentators have suggested, is impossible to know.



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Nor can we say with assurance that the entire quartet constitutes an extended meditation on mortality. Indeed, one Schubert biographer, Maurice Brown, finds in this music “much more ... of a healthy artist’s absorption in life than a morbid one’s portrayal of death.” Yet there are reasons for disputing Brown’s view. On musical grounds, there is the prevailing minor-mode tonality already mentioned, the dramatic power of the initial movement, and the song chosen for variation treatment in the second movement.

Schubert’s biography offers other, and perhaps more compelling, arguments that the D Minor Quartet is shaped by a concern with death. In the autumn of 1823, not long before he began composing this piece, Schubert was hospitalized with second-stage syphilis, a disease he had contracted some years earlier. Although his symptoms abated around the end of the year, they returned several months later. In March 1824, around the time he wrote the D Minor Quartet, Schubert penned a

letter containing a passage of deepest despair. “I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world,” he told his correspondent. “Imagine a man whose health will never be right again ... ; imagine a man whose best hopes have come to naught ... whose enthusiasm for all that is beautiful threatens to vanish, and ask yourself, Is he not a miserable, joyless being? ... Each night I go to bed hoping not to wake, and each morning only reminds me of yesterday’s sorrow.”

The contemporaneous appearance of this letter and the D Minor Quartet makes a strong case for the proposition that death was very much in Schubert’s thoughts as he composed the work. Yet even if we accept that idea, we still cannot say definitively what the music meant to its author, or what personal significance the “Death and the Maiden” melody may have had for him. Music of the kind Schubert wrote does not yield certain answers to such questions. Rather, it leaves the judgment to each listener.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



BELCEA STRING QUARTET

The musicians of the Belcea Quartet are not confined by traditional boundaries. It is perhaps the very fact of their diverse cultural backgrounds that is behind their dynamic and free interpretative style. Founded at the Royal College of Music in London in 1994, the quartet is based in Great Britain. However, the Romanian violinist Corina Belcea and the Polish violist Krzysztof Chorzelski, the two founder members, bring a very different artistic provenance to the ensemble while drawing from the best traditions of string quartet playing received from the quartet's mentors: the members of the Alban Berg

and Amadeus Quartets. This spectrum is extended by the French musicians Axel Schacher (violin) and Antoine Lederlin (cello). The Belcea Quartet blends its diverse influences into a common musical language.

This diversity is reflected in the Belcea Quartet's repertoire. Regular world premieres - among them Mark-Anthony Turnage's string quartets *Twisted Blues with Twisted Ballad* in 2010 and *Contusion* in 2014, as well as Thomas Larcher's *lucid dreams* in 2015, go hand-in-hand with its profound connection with the great works of the Classical and Romantic periods. The quartet's open-minded approach to

music enables it to find its own unique, elegant and refined interpretations of the main string quartet repertoire. The quartet's regular partners include pianists Piotr Anderszewski and Till Fellner, and tenor Ian Bostridge.

The Belcea Quartet has shared a residence at the Vienna Konzerthaus with the Artemis Quartet, who appeared on the Princeton University Concerts series in 2013, since 2010. The musicians recently created their very own Belcea Quartet Trust, whose main aims are to support and inspire young string quartets through series of intensive coaching sessions organized according to the needs of each selected ensemble, as well as to support commissioning of new works from today's leading composers to be premiered by the quartet in the future.

The Belcea Quartet has an impressive discography. During its long-term association with EMI Classics, the quartet recorded the complete Britten and Bartók quartets as well as works by Schubert, Brahms, Mozart, Debussy, Ravel and Dutilleux, among others. In 2012 and 2013, the quartet recorded the complete Beethoven quartets live in the Benjamin

Britten Studio in Snape (England). This recording was released under ZigZag Territories, the quartet's new label. As with its predecessors, this CD has been met with critical acclaim: it has been recognized with such prizes as the ECHO Klassik Award. In 2015, the quartet released its highly acclaimed recording of works by Webern, Berg and Schoenberg to coincide with its 20th anniversary. This fall 2016 sees the release of the quartet's recording of the complete Brahms string quartets and piano quintet.

The Belcea Quartet's performances of the complete Beethoven string quartets at Vienna's Konzerthaus in 2012 were broadcast by Mezzo TV and were released - on DVD and Blue Ray disc - by the label Euroarts in fall 2014. The release was accompanied by Jean-Claude Mocik's documentary of the entire project, "On the Trail of Beethoven's String Quartets".

In 2016/2017, the quartet will perform in London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie Hall, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Brussels' Flagey and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. This concert marks the Belcea String Quartet's Princeton University Concerts debut.

