

March 2, 2017 at 8:00pm

Musical Preview featuring siblings Sarah and Solène Le Van '18 at 7PM
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

9TH PERFORMANCE OF THE 123RD SEASON / HISTORY IN THE MUSIC-MAKING

HAGEN STRING QUARTET

Lukas Hagen, *violin*

Rainer Schmidt, *violin*

Veronika Hagen, *viola*

Clemens Hagen, *cello*

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 125, D. 87

Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Prestissimo

Adagio

Allegro

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133

Moderato

Allegretto

—INTERMISSION—

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105

Adagio ma non troppo: Allegro appassionato

Molto vivace

Lento e molto cantabile

Allegro non tanto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

By Peter Laki, ©2017

Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major,
Op. 125, D. 87 (1813)

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797 – 1828)

In the dozen or so string quartets (not all of them completed) that the teenage Schubert wrote for “home consumption,” a genius is learning his craft before our very eyes. Only a few years after Haydn’s death and well before Beethoven had said his last words in the late quartets, Schubert worked at a time when classical music was in the process of becoming “classic.” The conventions, well established by Haydn and Mozart, were binding, yet there was nothing “old-fashioned” about following them. The music of the masters reigned supreme but it was still, in a very real sense, “new music.”

After five years at a boarding student at the Stadtkonvikt (Imperial and Royal Seminary), Schubert moved back with his family in the Vienna suburb of Lichtenthal, and began to help out his father Franz Theodor, a teacher, in his elementary school. In their spare time, the family loved to play string quartets

at home: the father played cello, his two older sons Ignaz and Ferdinand were violinists, and Franz picked up the viola. The four Schuberts were eager to try out the string quartets that flowed from young Franz’s pen. It is hard so say exactly how many quartets he composed as a teenager as some works are lost; twelve have survived from the years before 1820.

In his book *Schubert: The Music and the Man*, Brian Newbould calls Schubert’s string quartet in E-flat Major “arguably the finest” of the early quartets. Yet there is no denying that it is still a student piece. The song “Gretchen at the Spinning-Wheel,” with which the composer’s artistic maturity would arrive almost overnight at the age of seventeen, was still a whole year away. The writing is rather cautious, the melody and the texture are kept simple, and Schubert doesn’t stray too far from his models. Still, there are premonitions of what was to come: Schubert’s unique voice is already clearly present in a characteristic turn of phrase in the slow movement, or in the inimitably graceful second subject of the finale.

After the expansive melodies of the first movement, the extreme brevity of the second-movement Scherzo: Prestissimo is surprising. The double drone of the trio section, played by the cello, indicates that Schubert was well acquainted with Haydn's folk-inspired minuets. A warmly lyrical Adagio and a spirited finale round out the work.

Like many of Schubert's compositions, this quartet was not published during Schubert's lifetime. When it was finally printed, it became "Op. 125, No. 1," but that high opus number is misleading—after all, it is a very early work. It is better to use O. E. Deutsch's chronological catalog, in which the E-flat Major quartet received the number 87. Some composers don't reach their 87th work until late in life (if at all), but for Schubert, who would write almost a thousand works before his death at age 31, it was only a start.

Quartet No. 12 in D-flat Major, Op. 133 (1968)

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

Shostakovich's biography resembles nothing more than a wild roller-coaster ride with the dramatic ups and downs of highest praise and harshest condemnation. After the age of sixty, his official troubles with the Soviet regime seemed to be finally over and he could have begun to enjoy his celebrity status if his health hadn't seriously deteriorated in the meantime. Living in the shadow of death, Shostakovich turned increasingly inward and the tone of his music became more intensely personal than ever before. At the same time, he no longer felt the need for any concessions to politicians or anyone else for that matter.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The present work is the second in a cycle of four (Nos. 11-14) dedicated to each of the members of the Beethoven String Quartet, old friends of Shostakovich's who had premiered all of his quartets except for No. 1. The Twelfth Quartet was the composer's personal gift to first violinist Dmitri Tsyganov (1903-1992). It is in two extended movements, each of which further subdivides into several smaller sections. The composer himself called this quartet "symphonic" in its conception.

In commentaries of this work, one particular feature is mentioned more frequently than any other, namely the use of twelve-tone themes throughout the work. The very opening features a theme containing all twelve tones, but Shostakovich doesn't manipulate his theme the way the members of the Second Viennese School manipulated their tone rows. Shostakovich's theme remains what it is: a melody, contrasting with other melodies of a more traditional diatonic type. In a way, the entire work can be seen as a kind of struggle between these two melodic worlds.

The gloomy "Moderato" introduction soon gives way to a more dance-like "Allegretto" section in 3/4 time; the two characters consistently alternate throughout the movement. The second movement begins as a scherzo (of the sarcastic Shostakovichian variety), incorporates an extended, and extremely stark, Adagio section and concludes with a finale that integrates all the elements previously heard. The quartet ends with one of those ambivalent "resolutions" where all the tonal tensions are smoothed out yet something deeply disturbing remains.

String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105 (1895) **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK** (1841-1904)

After his return from the United States, where he had served for three years as the director of the newly-founded National Conservatory in New York City, Dvořák completed the present quartet and its companion piece in G Major. These quartets turned out to be the last works Dvořák ever composed without an explicit literary program; in the years that followed, the composer devoted himself exclusively

to operas and symphonic poems. One is tempted to see this pair of late quartets as a summing-up of a lifetime of experience; yet while they look backward in some respects, they also possess many novel features. There is no doubt that Dvořák had many new things left to say in his final quartets.

The choice of key is noteworthy in itself: A-flat Major is rarely chosen in music for strings, because it offers relatively few opportunities to use open strings. (It is the only string quartet ever written by a major composer in that key.) Due to this choice of tonality, the sound tends to be somewhat dark, as if covered by a veil, even though much of the thematic material is rather serene and cheerful in nature. While Dvořák remained faithful to classical string quartet form, he moved within the established structural framework with the utmost freedom. The work abounds in sophisticated key changes, and one occasionally finds changing time signatures and polyrhythms (for instance, four against three or five against four), which were far from common at the end of the 19th century.

After a rather gloomy slow introduction, the “Allegro appassionato” first movement lives up to its tempo character by introducing a lively pair of themes, subjected to a vigorous development. A much abridged

part of the mindfulness with music program

SŌ PERCUSSION

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recapitulation is followed by a coda in which the tempo momentarily slows down and the main theme is recalled in a hesitant, pensive manner before the energetic closing chords.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The second movement revisits some elements of the *furiant*, the Czech folk dance which appears in so many of Dvořák's previous works. Yet the music feels slightly "on the edge," with some unusual harmonic twists; there seems to be a self-consciousness that doesn't allow the dance to unfold with the usual abandon. The trio section, likewise, is not as uncomplicated as it initially seems; in addition to containing the above-mentioned polyrhythms, its delicate scoring gives it an almost otherworldly aura.

The third movement is an intimate instrumental song, with some intensely dramatic moments and a mysterious, highly chromatic middle section. In the recapitulation, the opening

theme acquires a new, extremely active accompaniment with the viola and the cello playing *pizzicato* (plucking the strings) and the second violin adding a lively rhythmic figure marked *scherzando*. Eventually the music subsides and ends with a quiet, peaceful coda.

Like the scherzo, the finale turns what might have been a simple, light-hearted dance into a rather elaborate musical statement, including some passages using imitative counterpoint, some slower and darker episodes and, in general, a more complex musical structure. Yet all complexities disappear at the end, during the faster coda that joyfully reaffirms the A-flat major tonality.

PATRONS TAKE NOTE!

AN IMPORTANT UPDATE FOR THOSE ATTENDING THE TAKÁCS STRING QUARTET CONCERT ON MARCH 15...

Due to the overwhelming success of our Beethoven Cycle, we have changed the seating configuration for the performance on Wednesday, March 15, 2017. We have now opened the balcony, and there will no longer be stage seating. **Please be aware that this is a General Admission show. There is no reserved seating for this concert.** If you had expected to sit downstairs, or if you have a specific seating preference, make sure to arrive early to choose your seat. The doors will open at 7:30pm. THANKS.



The unprecedented three-decade career of the Hagen Quartet began in 1981. Its early years, marked by a series of prizes in chamber music competitions and an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon that was to produce around forty-five CDs over the following twenty years, enabled the group to work its way through the virtually unlimited quartet repertoire from which the distinctive profile of the Hagens has emerged. Collaborations with artistic personalities such as conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt and composer György Kurtág are as important to the Hagen Quartet as its concert appearances with performers including pianists Maurizio

Pollini, Krystian Zimerman and Mitsuko Uchida, clarinetists Sabine Meyer and Jörg Widmann, and cellist Heinrich Schiff.

In the 2016/ 2017 season the Quartet performs the six Haydn Quartets Op. 76 at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Cologne Philharmonic, Toppan Hall Tokyo, Konzerthaus Vienna, Teatro della Pergola Florence, at the opening of Pierre Boulez Hall in Berlin, and in Madrid, performing the long-awaited premiere of Jörg Widmann's clarinet quintet.

In 2011, the Hagen Quartet celebrated their 30th anniversary with two recordings released on Myrios Classics, of works

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

by Mozart, Webern, Beethoven, Grieg and Brahms (clarinet quintet with Jörg Widmann). The Hagen Quartet received the prestigious ECHO Klassik award as Ensemble of the Year 2011; and in 2012 the quartet was named Honorary Member of Vienna's Konzerthaus. The Hagen's most recent recording of the Mozart String Quintets K. 387 and K. 458, has been awarded the Diapason d'or and the Choc du Monde de la Musique and the Echo Klassik 2016 for the best chamber music recording of the 17th/18th Century.

The group's concert repertoire and discography feature attractive and intelligently arranged programs embracing the entire history of the string quartet, from its pre-Haydn beginnings right through to Kurtág. The Hagen Quartet also works closely with composers of its own generation, whether by reviving

existing works or by commissioning and premiering new pieces.

For many young string quartets, the Hagen Quartet is a model in terms of sound quality, stylistic plurality, ensemble playing and serious commitment to the works and composers of its chosen genre. As teachers and mentors at the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Hochschule in Basel, as well as in international masterclasses, the quartet's members pass on their wealth of experience to their younger colleagues, including Princeton students who were coached by second violinist Rainer Schmidt during this visit to Princeton.

Since mid-2013, the Hagen Quartet has been performing on instruments made by Antonio Stradivari, known as the "Paganini" quartet, generously on loan by the Nippon Music Foundation.

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