

Thursday, October 2, 2014 at 8:00pm

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 7:00pm

Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

EMERSON STRING QUARTET

Eugene Drucker, *violin*

Philip Setzer, *violin*

Lawrence Dutton, *viola*

Paul Watkins, *cello*

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 33, No. 5, Hob III:41

Vivace assai

Largo e cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale: Allegretto

Eugene Drucker, *first violin*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95, "Serioso"

Allegro con brio

Allegretto ma non troppo

Allegro assai vivace ma serioso – Più Allegro

Larghetto espressivo – Allegretto agitato – Allegro

Philip Setzer, *first violin*

—INTERMISSION—

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

String Quartet in F Major

Allegro moderato. Très doux

Assez vif. Très rythmé

Très lent

Vif et agité

Philip Setzer, *first violin*

Please join us to celebrate the opening of our concert season at a reception with the artists in the Richardson Lounge following the performance.

The Emerson String Quartet appears by arrangement with IMG Artists and records exclusively for Sony Classical.

ABOUT THE EMERSON STRING QUARTET

The Emerson String Quartet has an unparalleled list of achievements over three decades: more than thirty acclaimed recordings, nine Grammys® (including two for Best Classical Album), three Gramophone Awards, the Avery Fisher Prize, Musical America's "Ensemble of the Year" and collaborations with many of the greatest artists of our time.

The arrival of Paul Watkins in 2013 has had a profound effect on the Emerson Quartet. Mr. Watkins, a distinguished soloist, award-winning conductor, and devoted chamber



musician, joined the ensemble in its 37th season, and his dedication and enthusiasm have infused the Quartet with a warm, rich tone and a palpable joy in the collaborative process. The reconfigured group has been greeted with impressive accolades.

The Quartet's 2014 summer season began with engagements in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and a pair of concerts in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Following a tour of Japan, the Quartet performed at the Ravinia, Tanglewood, Chamber Music Northwest, Aspen, Domaine Forget, Toronto, Austin, Norfolk, Cape Cod and Mostly Mozart Festivals. In a season of over 80 quartet performances, mingled with the Quartet members' individual

artistic commitments, Emerson highlights feature numerous concerts on both coasts and throughout North America. On October 14, Paul Watkins performs with the Emerson Quartet for the first time in Carnegie Hall. The program includes the Schumann Piano Quintet with acclaimed pianist and colleague Yefim Bronfman. Multiple tours of Europe include concerts in Austria, Ireland, Switzerland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. The Quartet continues its series at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington,

D.C. for its 35th season, and, in May 2015, is presented by colleagues cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han for the two final season concerts at The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in Alice Tully Hall. Guest artists cellist Colin Carr and violist Paul Neubauer join the Emerson in a program that also includes the New York premiere of Lowell Liebermann's String Quartet No. 5, commissioned by a consortium of presenters through Music Accord.

As an exclusive artist for SONY Classical, the Emerson recently released *Journeys*, its second CD on that label, featuring Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*. Future recordings are planned with Mr. Watkins. Formed in 1976 and based in New York City, the Emerson was one of the first quartets formed with two violinists alternating in the first chair position. In 2002, the Quartet began to stand for most of its concerts, with the cellist seated on a riser. The Emerson Quartet took its name from the American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson and is Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University. In January of 2015, the Quartet will receive the Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award, Chamber Music America's highest honor, in recognition of its significant and lasting contribution to the chamber music field.

“The cello provides the foundation of a string quartet sound. I would say that we now have a somewhat darker, rounder tone, and our approach to questions of tempo might be a bit mellower or more flexible than before. We all still desire to play with incisive articulation and drive, so I believe that listeners will recognize certain hallmark characteristics of the Emerson Quartet in its new incarnation.

— Eugene Drucker, *Violinist of the Emerson String Quartet*”

The Emerson String Quartet first appeared on the Princeton University Concerts series on October 9, 1979. Like tonight, their program included works by Ravel and Haydn, along with the Mendelssohn Octet with the Primavera String Quartet

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

By Peter Laki, ©2014

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (Rohrau, Lower Austria, 1732 – Vienna, 1809)
String Quartet in G Major, Op. 33, No. 5, Hob 111:41 (1781)

“They are written in a new and special way, for I have not composed any for 10 years.” With these words did Haydn introduce his most recent set of six string quartets in December 1781 to prospective buyers of the sheet music. The exact same sentence appears in three different surviving letters (and there were probably even more similar announcements that have been lost). Some musicologists have dismissed this description as a mere sales pitch while others have seen it as a sort of stylistic manifesto.

Without falling into either extreme, it cannot be denied that, if we compare the quartets of Op. 33 to Haydn’s previous set, Op. 20 (1772), the differences are enormous. The novelties include a more pervasive technique of motivic development involving sophisticated ways of thematic transformation. Another significant innovation is the appearance of a lighter tone in general, and clear signs of a delicious sense of humor that became, from this point onward, a hallmark of Haydn’s style. Op. 33 includes the quartet known as “The Joke,” where you never know exactly when the piece is over. And it is the set that used to be referred to as “Gli Scherzi,” for it was here that Haydn, for the first time, replaced the traditional minuet by a scherzo—a witty fast movement filled with musical surprises of all kinds. The great Haydn scholar H. C. Robbins Landon noted that Haydn had a special reason to be in a good mood in 1781: he was in a happy relationship with the Italian singer Luigia Polzelli. (The six quartets of Op. 33 are also occasionally called the “Russian” quartets, because they were published with a dedication to Grand Duke Paul, the future Czar Paul I.)

The very beginning of the G Major Quartet is a subtle joke: it is a closing figure in an opening position that defines the progress of the movement in a multitude of fascinating ways. Syncopations (strong notes on weak beats), unexpected harmonic changes and general rests punctuate this “Vivace assai,” which ends exactly as it began, with the closing figure now assuming its proper concluding function.

The second-movement “Largo e cantabile” is a gorgeous instrumental aria where the first violin reigns supreme throughout, with the expressive accompaniment of the other three instruments. In the “Scherzo,” the humorous effect is produced by a motif of two beats that runs counter to the triple meter, and a general rest that delays the end of the phrase. The middle section, or “Trio,” is more regular; it provides a brief respite before the return of the Scherzo proper. The last movement is a set of variations on a theme in the form of the Siciliano dance. In the course of the variations, the instruments take turns embellishing the theme; the tempo then speeds up for the coda, or concluding section.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (Bonn, 1770 – Vienna, 1827)
String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95, “Serioso” (1810)

The F Minor Quartet (or “Quartetto serioso,” as Beethoven himself called it) was written at the end of Beethoven’s extremely prolific “second period.” It was his last string quartet before the magnificent set of late quartets written in the last years of his life. It sums up, in extremely concise form, most of the qualities of the “heroic” second period: robust force, melodic poignancy, formal concentration, sudden interruptions, bold key changes and an irresistible rhythmic drive.

All four movements of the F Minor Quartet are built of melodic gestures of an astonishing simplicity—one might almost call it bluntness. The unison figure that opens the piece—repeated, in typical Beethovenian fashion, a half-step higher—is only one of many examples. That dramatic gesture sets the stage for a first movement of uncommon emotional intensity. The second movement is in D Major, a key very distant from the original F Minor—Beethoven never chose a more remote key relationship between movements than he did here. Starting with a mysterious, unaccompanied scale, the movement continues with a lyrical melody followed by a fugue, and has an open ending leading directly into the scherzo. The latter is based on a single motif consisting of a scale, heard both in descending and ascending form. The slow movement’s D Major is revisited in the quiet and expressive Trio, which moves in equal long notes with accompanying flourishes in the first violin. The finale proceeds from an introductory “Larghetto espressivo”

through a passionate “Allegretto agitato” to the extremely fast coda, in which the tonality suddenly changes from F Minor to F Major and the “serioso” character gives way to cheerfulness, even humor, for the few remaining moments. The sequence of events in this last movement runs remarkably parallel to Beethoven’s “Egmont Overture,” written in the same year 1810, and also consisting of a slow introduction and passionate Allegro in F Minor, followed by an exultant coda in F Major.

MAURICE RAVEL (Ciboure, Basses-Pyrénées, France, 1875 - Paris, 1937)
String Quartet in F Major (1902-03)

Ravel was twenty-seven years old when he wrote his only string quartet. He was still, at least nominally, a student, as he was auditing Gabriel Fauré’s composition class at the Paris Conservatoire. He had already been active as composer for years, with numerous public performances behind him. Yet he had failed to win a prize from the Conservatoire, which was a condition for graduation. In particular, the prestigious Prix de Rome continued to elude Ravel, who was eliminated from the contest no fewer than five times. Given Ravel’s growing fame, this situation became more and more ludicrous and it finally led to a much-publicized scandal in 1905. The director of the Conservatoire had to resign, and Ravel confirmed his status as one of the leading French composers of his generation, in fact the only one whose work could be compared to that of Claude Debussy.

Ravel’s string quartet, dedicated “to my dear master Gabriel Fauré,” is clearly modeled on Debussy’s celebrated *Quatuor* from 1893, yet Ravel displays a sense of color and melody that is all his own. To both composers, the string quartet as a medium suggested adherence to classical tradition. Yet nothing was farther from them than academicism of any kind. The defining moment of both works is precisely the tension that exists between the classical forms and a positively non-classical sensitivity that is manifest at every turn.

Melody, harmony and rhythm are usually thought of as the most important ingredients of music. Ravel’s string quartet, written at the beginning of the 20th century, was nothing less than prophetic in the way it added a fourth element, sound, as a factor of equal importance. The alternation of playing

techniques (*pizzicato*, *con sordino*, *arpeggio*, bow on the fingerboard) is as crucial to the unfolding of the piece as is the alternation of themes. Their succession—especially in the second and third movements—creates a musical form of its own, entirely non-traditional this time.

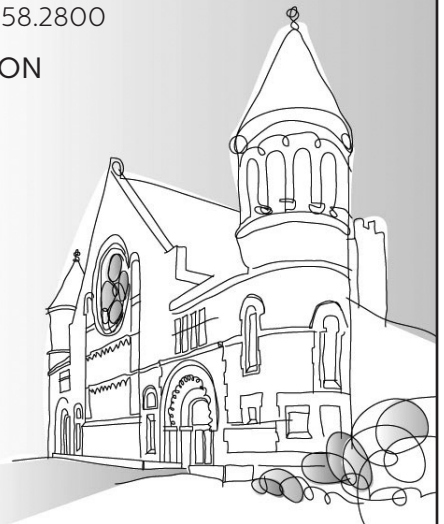
In the first movement, classical sonata form—a legacy that reached Ravel through the intermediary of Fauré—is realized with great clarity and ingenuity. The characteristic *pianissimo rallentando* (extremely soft and slow playing) at the end of the movement anticipates the analogous moment in Ravel's Piano Trio of 1914. (By contrast, the opening movement of Debussy's string quartet ends with a loud and fast coda.)

The second movement of Ravel's quartet is based on two themes of opposite character: one *pizzicato* [plucked] and one *bien chanté* [sing out!, with bow]. Again, it seems that the movement looks into the future (ahead to the Piano Trio) rather than into the past (back to the Debussy quartet). The middle section, in which all four instruments use mutes, is an expressive slow movement in miniature, with subtle variations on both scherzo themes.

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The unique beauty of the third movement evolves by fits and starts, as it were, through the sometimes abrupt juxtaposition of segments in different tempos, keys, and meters. An expressive melody, whose primary exponent is the viola, is interrupted by memories of the first movement’s opening theme. After a more animated middle section, culminating in a passionate outburst, the initial slow tempo returns with its exquisite harmonies.

The last movement (which Fauré thought unbalanced and too short) is based on an *ostinato* (“stubbornly” returning pattern) in an asymmetrical 5/8 meter. After a while, this *ostinato* yields to a more regular 3/4 which, once more, contains echoes of the first movement. A different musical character—the first aggressive, the second more lyrical—corresponds to each of these two meters. Their contrast carries the movement forward, right up to the singularly forceful conclusion.



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