

Sunday, October 11, 2009 ■ 4 PM  
WHITAKER CENTER

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PARKER STRING QUARTET

Daniel Chong, Violin  
Karen Kim, Violin  
Jessica Bodner, Viola  
Kee-Hyun Kim, Cello

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3

Allegro  
Andante  
Allegro  
Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Quartet No. 1, Op. 7 (1908)

Lento  
Allegretto  
Allegro vivace

Béla Bartók  
(1881-1945)

INTERMISSION

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 13, "Ist Es Wahr? "

Adagio; Allegro vivace  
Adagio non lento  
Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto  
Presto

Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809-1847)

The Parker Quartet is represented by  
Opus 3 Artists, New York  
[www.Opus3Artists.com](http://www.Opus3Artists.com)

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*The New York Times* calls the Parker Quartet "something extraordinary." *The Boston Globe* hails its "fiercely committed performances," and *The Washington Post* declares it "a quartet that deserves close attention." Just three months after winning the 2005 Concert Artists Guild Competition, the Quartet captured first prize and the Mozart Prize at the Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition, sparking international acclaim. In 2009, the Parker was named recipient of the coveted Cleveland Quartet Award by Chamber Music America.

The Parker Quartet's recent appearances include debut performances at the Mostly Mozart and Caramoor Festivals and at the Library of Congress. The group also toured Europe in connection with its victory at the Bordeaux Competition, with concerts in South Korea at the Tongyeong Festival. Other recent highlights include concerts at Lincoln Center's Great Performers Series, the Wolf Trap Discovery Series, Ravinia's Rising Stars Series, Jordan Hall and Gardner Museum in Boston.

Equally at home in a celebrated concert hall or a downtown club, the Parker Quartet embraces opportunities to bring their performances to new audiences in non-traditional venues. The ensemble challenges artificial boundaries by performing in bars and clubs nationwide, garnering media attention with features in *Time Out New York*, *The Boston Globe*, *Chamber Music Magazine* and *Musical America.com*.

Also dedicated to passing on the great chamber music tradition, the Parker Quartet spends a great deal of time each year working with young musicians through educational residency activities. The group served as the Ernst Stiefel String Quartet-in-Residence at the Caramoor Center, which featured a three-week long educational residency culminating in performances at Caramoor. The Parker was also the ensemble-in-residence at the Yellow Barn Music School and Festival. In 2008, the group became one of the first quartets-in-residence with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

The Parker Quartet's debut CD (Zig Zag), featuring Bartók's String Quartets Nos. 2 and 5, received high praise: "The Parkers' Bartók spins the illusion of spontaneous improvisation...they have absorbed the language; they have the confidence to play freely with the music and the instinct to bring it off" (*Gramophone*). The Parker has recorded the complete string quartets of the late György Ligeti on the Naxos label and an album of Haydn quartets for Zig Zag.

The Parker Quartet's members hold graduate degrees in performance and chamber music from the New England Conservatory of Music and were part of the NEC's prestigious Professional String Quartet Training Program. The Quartet was founded there and in 2002 held the post of NEC's Honors Ensemble.

## The Cleveland Quartet Award

Culminating a remarkable twenty-six-year history as an ensemble, the members of the Cleveland Quartet envisioned a lasting legacy for young musicians. They joined forces in 1995 with Chamber Music America and eight prominent chamber music presenters to found the Cleveland Quartet Award and to raise funds for the establishment of the Cleveland Quartet Endowment Fund.

Given biennially, the award honors and promotes a rising young string quartet whose artistry demonstrates that it is in the process of establishing a major career. Providing the quartet with concert appearances on chamber music series around the country, the award enriches the presenters' offerings while helping outstanding young artists gain wide recognition.

The Parker Quartet is the seventh ensemble to receive this prestigious award. Previous winners are the Brentano Quartet (1997), the Borromeo String Quartet (1999), the Miami String Quartet (2001), the Pacifica Quartet (2003), the Miró Quartet (2005) and the Jupiter String Quartet (2007). All of these ensembles have been presented by Market Square Concerts.

Cleveland Quartet Award winners perform at the following CMA member presenters:

- Buffalo Chamber Music Society (Buffalo, NY)
- Carnegie Hall (New York, NY)
- Chamber Music Society of Detroit (Detroit, MI)
- Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Washington, DC)
- Friends of Chamber Music (Kansas City, MO)
- Market Square Concerts (Harrisburg, PA)
- Krannert Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Urbana, IL)
- University of Texas at Austin (Austin, TX)

Nominations for the Cleveland Quartet Award are submitted confidentially to Chamber Music America by a national roster of chamber musicians, presenters, and educators. The winning string quartet's presentations and performances are funded by income from the Cleveland Quartet Award Endowment Fund.

**Chamber Music America**, the national service organization for the ensemble music profession, was founded in 1977 to promote artistic excellence and the economic stability of the field and to ensure that chamber music, in its broadest sense, is a vital part of American life. With a membership of nearly 8,000, including musicians, ensembles, presenters, artists' managers, educators, music businesses, and advocates of the art form, CMA welcomes and represents a wide range of musical styles and traditions. CMA provides its members with grant opportunities, consulting services, health and instrument insurance, conferences, seminars, print publications, and a website, [www.chamber-music.org](http://www.chamber-music.org).

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

### String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3      Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Both history and Beethoven's scrupulously kept notebooks suggest that the D Major Quartet was his first string quartet. That is not to suggest that Beethoven was a beginner in 1798 when he first turned his attention to the genre. He had already published his remarkable piano trios, a number of piano sonatas including the famous "Pathétique," string trios, his String Quintet, and two cello sonatas. He was well established in Vienna where he had arrived some eight years earlier in the shadow of Mozart's death in 1787. The Viennese aristocracy, who lavishly supported composers, smiled upon Beethoven. He caught the attention of both Count Apponyi who had commissioned Haydn's Op. 71 and 74 and Count Lobkowitz who would commission Op. 18.

Beethoven set to work, then, in the best of circumstances but not without a certain anxiety about the task before him, which he approached with great seriousness. Even Beethoven heard the tramp of genius before him in the quartets of Haydn and Mozart. This anxiety, however, took the form of great respect for the string quartet, clearly evident in Op. 18, No. 3. The work has what Joseph Kerman calls "its inner postulates of eloquence and coherence." Add to that its grace and ingenuity and we have a piece that is hardly the work of a beginner.

The eloquence and coherence of which Kerman speaks is immediately evident in the first movement. The first few bars at a slower tempo than the following *Allegro* do not have the drama of the opening of the Op. 59, No. 3 Quartet, yet they are indicative of genius and pale only because we have that later model. As grace and elegance reign in the first movement, so do charm and warmth hold sway in the second. The *Andante*, says Kerman, is "blessed and obsessed by one of the happiest lyric ideas of Beethoven's early period." The third movement *Allegro* Kerman writes off as "a spotlessly groomed little piece whose one interest seems to be in making itself inconspicuous." Perhaps it is this very "spotlessness," that makes it a small monument of perfection. The last movement *Presto* is perhaps the most satisfying of the movements if for no other reason than its virtuosic demands and its wonderful counterpoint. It teems with life.

Kerman suggests that certain things in the D Major Quartet might not "work," but this "failure" in Beethoven becomes a relative matter. What does work so magnificently in the Quartet is what Kerman calls its "chief aesthetic principle" of a main theme "dominating, permeating, or generating" the work. This notion of a kernel idea governing a whole work, as set forth by Beethoven, would shape the course of musical history from his own time through Brahms to what Arnold Schoenberg would call "the developing variation." In the D Major Quartet, Beethoven proves himself not only master of the sonata form in new perorations but also a daring harmonist, a sumptuous lyricist, a contrapuntist beyond measure, and a master of rhythmic surprise.

### Quartet No. 1, Op. 7

**Béla Bartók (1881-1945)**

Béla Bartók's place in musical history is unique since he represents no one "school." At a time when the German traditions of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Brahms were giving way to the Second Viennese School led by Arnold Schoenberg, Bartók stood alone. While his early music was fed by the Romantic traditions of Brahms and Wagner, it is his own unique exploration of dissonance and a sense of the spiritual that most govern his important work. In a 1905 letter to his mother, he said, knowingly, "I prophesy, I have foreknowledge, that this spiritual loneliness is to be my destiny." Despite that loneliness, he breathed new life into an old system without joining the serialists who would themselves ultimately suffer a kind of isolation.

With his friend Zoltán Kodály, he compiled a collection of Hungarian folk songs that was to influence his music greatly, but a word must be said about Bartók's use of folk tradition. While he ardently espoused Hungarian nationalism, he is also quoted in Ujfalussy's 1971 book, *Béla Bartók*, as having said, "The composer does not use genuine peasant melodies, but devises instead something imitating a peasant melody." For Bartók the art lay in the devising.

Bartók's life was not a happy one. Always outside the mainstream of the European avant-garde of his time, he emigrated to New York in 1940 to become a research fellow at Columbia University working on Serbo-Croatian music. For his last five years, precarious finances, a sense of alienation, and poor health plagued him. Serge Koussevitsky, one of his few champions, went to Bartók's hospital room to offer a much-needed check for \$500, which represented half the commission for the *Concerto for Orchestra*. Harvard, where he was to deliver a series of lectures but was too ill to do so, and later the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) sponsored medical examinations for Bartók after his weight sank to 87 pounds. He rallied enough to write the *Concerto for Orchestra* but, less than a year later, died of leukemia in New York's West Side Hospital.

The string quartet pervaded Bartók's compositional life from the first one in 1908 to the sixth and last written in 1939. The second came in 1917, the third in 1927, the fourth in 1928, and the fifth in 1934. Like other composers, he made his most intimate statements in the string quartet form as well as his most serious, inventive, and powerful. Today Bartók's string quartets are ranked with no less than those of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only those of Shostakovich approach Bartók's.

Bartók's first quartet is not only a herald of important things to come but also stands on its own as a monumental piece of music. From its sad opening to the rhythmic power of its conclusion, the work is everywhere marked with greatness. Its cohesiveness, inventiveness, and emotional impact are no less than astonishing.

The sadness of the opening statement with its downward leaps pervades the entire work motivically and emotionally. It is this pervasive sadness that caused Bartók to call the movement his "funeral dirge," a remark made to violinist Stefi Geyer at the end of their love affair that coincided with its composition. Bartók's friend, Zoltán Kodály, called it "the return to life of a man who has reached the shores of nothingness." Certainly this refers to the sense of struggle and hope that also

pervades the movement. The mounting tension that begins in this movement will persist to the end of the work.

Without interruption we are led into the second movement with a simple but effective five-note motto, again in downward intervallic leaps. A frantic intensity finds some relief in a poignant song, perhaps more of a crying out than a singing. Were it not for its elegant compositional method—true sonata form—the movement could almost be called barbaric, a kind of civilized barbarism, if you will.

The *Allegro vivace* of the last movement slows for a moment to allow for dramatic solos by the cello and violin, but the movement continues with a pervading sense of perpetual motion. The later Minimalists would learn much from this third movement of Bartók's first quartet. The repeated note reigns in the powerful conclusion with its Hungarian dance that is no simple folk tune. Subtle harmonic changes occur as the upper strings move from unison playing to only one interval away, an astringent second. Astonishing dissonances occur before the ending on three powerful chords.

### Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13

**Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)**

Mendelssohn accomplished some of his most inventive composing in chamber music, with the A Minor Quartet being a superb example. Written in 1827 before Op. 12 but published later, the work reveals Mendelssohn's close study of the late Beethoven quartets. The motto Mendelssohn employs for the quartet, *Ist Es Wahr?* ("Is it true?"), is not so much a suggestion of Beethoven's motto *Muss es sien?* (Must it be?) from Op.135, but rather a device that accomplishes the cyclical form which Mendelssohn so admired in Beethoven. Mendelssohn's three note motto links all four movements of the A Minor Quartet and lends to it a wonderful cohesiveness that we identify with the earlier master. The programmatic content of the motto is quite different, however, from Beethoven's more anguished thought. Mendelssohn's idea comes from "Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arboreal walk?"—a line by Johann Gustav Droysen from a poem that Mendelssohn had already set to music. It is the sense of this more romantic notion that pervades the quartet. Beyond poetry, or in addition to it, Mendelssohn himself had fallen in love in the spring of 1827. So it is that this quartet, relying heavily on compositional techniques of late Beethoven, links Classical form to Romantic expression.

In the first movement, the motto is put forward in the slow introduction before the typically Mendelssohnian filigree of the *Allegro*. The interesting development section shows Mendelssohn at his most inventive with fine use of dissonance and counterpoint before he moves to the free-form recapitulation. The second movement *Adagio* is emotional yet still compositionally interesting with its *fugato* for the viola. The *Intermezzo* of the third movement is a return to the ingenuous Mendelssohn of simpler works. The dramatic opening of the finale *Presto* reflects the fourth movement of Beethoven's Op. 132 and then emerges into a movement rich with motifs before it closes with a restatement of the opening song-cycle theme.

Because of its first movement in A major, the work is often listed in that key although A minor is clearly predominant throughout.

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