

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Sunday, July 26, 4 PM

Glen Allen Mill

### **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)**

#### **Concerto for Oboe d'Amore in A Major, BWV 1055**

Without question, Bach loved the oboe and the oboe d'amore (the oboe that sounds a minor third below the written notation) as indicated by his assigning some of his finest obbligato parts to them across a wide variety of his works. He also loved reworking his music in other forms—as is the case with his oboe concertos which he used for later harpsichord concertos.

Unfortunately the original oboe d'amore version of the A Major Concerto was lost, but Sir Donald Tovey turned to the harpsichord version in 1936 and recognized it as a wonderful opportunity to explore the full range of the oboe. And indeed it does that from the oboe's first note at its lowest range to the final movement where the oboe's highest register is explored. All historic considerations aside, the middle movement *Larghetto* is a moving expression of deep emotion. The entire work reflects Bach's unmatched compositional technique.

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

#### **String Quartet in G Major, Op 18, No. 2**

A zenith of Beethoven's use of the Classical style, Op. 18, No. 2 is far from an imitation of Haydn. As Joseph Kerman suggests, "It is as though Beethoven were deliberately exhuming an older, alien manner." This is quite another matter than mere imitation. With bold inventiveness, Beethoven pushed Classicism to its limits in this quartet, the third in compositional order of Op. 18. In that inventiveness lay satire.

Its gracious opening statement has earned it the nickname, the *Komplimentier Quartett* or the "quartet of bows and curtseys." On this subject, Kerman refers to the "images of courtly bowing and scraping in some never-never-land of rococo fantasy." He sees the nickname as "matched in idiocy only by English quartet players' title *How d'you do* for Haydn's Quartet in G, Op. 33, No. 5." Curiously enough, this opening statement, often compared to a curtsey, is resurrected in Op. 131, certainly one of the most complex and cryptic of Beethoven's late quartets. The ostensible lightness of Op. 18, No. 2 belies the effort Beethoven put into its composition and the fact that many musicians, including Michael Tree of the Guarneri Quartet, consider it the most difficult to perform of all Beethoven's quartets.

That said, the work does abound in graciousness, particularly in the first movement with its 18<sup>th</sup> century elegance edged, if you will, with 19<sup>th</sup> and even 20<sup>th</sup> century urgency. Sudden dark shifts to the minor suggest something beyond wigs and pantaloons as one new idea after another develops. This movement, Kerman says, "is Beethoven's clearest attempt to press his personality into the comedy of manners which Haydn had discerned as the potential essence of the classic style."

The second movement *Adagio cantabile* Kerman finds "the strangest of all." Central to this evaluation is Beethoven's sudden insertion of an almost crude allegro dance parody into a movement that is otherwise grave, formal and elegant. While there is little precedent for this, Beethoven himself would use it again and again in the later quartets.

The *Scherzo* of the third movement, Kerman feels, is "perhaps the cleverest that Beethoven had yet written, as well as one of the most amusing." A serious trio section, reminiscent of the *Adagio* movement, interrupts the musical romp momentarily.

The *Finale* is an exuberant statement of the youthful Beethoven. "It cracks violent jokes," says Kerman, "which depend squarely on Haydn's language for their understanding." The sheer brilliance and fun of it might cause us to overlook Kerman's view that the movement "makes a brutal, highly intelligent extension of Haydn's aesthetic."

And all this leads us to wonder about Beethoven's reputed statement, "Though I had some instruction from Haydn, I never learned anything from him."

### **Franz Schubert (1797-1828)**

#### **Quintet for Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello and Bass, Op. 114, D. 887,**

##### **"The Trout"**

To explain Schubert is to explain a miracle, and we should attempt it only with the reminder that he said of himself: "It sometimes seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all." Indeed, he belonged to it so briefly that the size and impact of his output is astonishing. Within his short lifespan of thirty-one years, he composed no less than nine symphonies, twenty string quartets, two piano trios, a variety of other significant chamber works such as the famous "Trout" Quintet, the sublime Cello Quintet, numerous operas, twenty-one piano sonatas as well as other solo piano works including the *Wanderer Fantasy*, two glorious sets of impromptus, and the remarkable F Minor Fantasy for four hands. Looming over all this is his vast catalogue of over 600 songs.

The impact of Schubert's work is no less astonishing than its size. Although he received little recognition within his lifetime, his works represent a profound development in music history. Schubert managed to culminate a period of music and forge another. Within the strictures of Classical form, he explored the Romantic spirit in a way foreign even to Beethoven. As musicologist Alfred Einstein points out, he was "a Romantic Classicist who takes his rightful place in the ranks of the truly great, together with Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Nor did he suffer, says Einstein, "from the impotent exaltation which Grillparzer accused the German Romantics of suffering from and which permeated their poetry and the greater part of their music."

Schubert's compelling "Trout" Quintet was composed in 1819 at the request of Sylvester Paumgartner, an amateur cellist and music patron with whom Schubert had spent part of the summer in Upper Austria. Paumgartner made only two requests, the specific instrumentation and the use of the theme of Schubert's song, "Die Fiorelle." Whatever genius lay in Paumgartner's request is speculative, but Schubert's in fulfilling it was unquestionable. The resulting "Trout" quintet pours forth all the richness of Schubert's creative power at its shining best. The Schubertian stamp clearly marks "The Trout" and surely accounts for its unerring attractiveness to listeners. That stamp is, of course, a sunny radiance juxtaposed with a darker poignancy, all stated with the easy genius that belies complexity. More specifically, the work abounds in Schubert's use of irresistible melodies, dramatic arpeggios, running triplet figures, throbbing octaves, and constantly modulating harmonies.

Those of you who love order will appreciate the strict sonata form of the first movement, and those of you who are partial to melody will be drawn to the lovely duet between viola and cello contained therein. None of us will be able to resist the singing effects of the piano. Three songs are developed in the second movement, a kind of cradle tune, a touching darker one, and a third which seems to sweep away all cares suggested by the earlier ones. The stormy *Scherzo* of the third movement gives way to a lilting Austrian dance as only Schubert can do. The theme of "Die Fiorelle" is introduced in the fourth movement with no less than six variations revealing Schubert's infinite inventiveness. The last of the variations contains the challenging piano runs suggestive of the rippling waters of the trout stream. We are brought to a happy conclusion in the last movement with its Hungarian rhythms, once again so ingeniously conceived and executed that we are reminded of Neville Cardis's statement, "Schubert was a miracle-- he did not even need brains."

In the emotional breadth of Schubert's music and specifically the "Trout" Quintet, we are transported into the better world he longed for.

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*Lucy Miller Murray is Founder of Market Square Concerts and served as director of the series from 1982 to 2009. Her book, Adams to Zemlinsky: A Friendly Guide to Chamber Music, was published by Concert Artists Guild of New York and is available at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).*