

University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

Zehetmair String Quartet

Thomas Zehetmair, 1st Violin
Kuba Jakowicz, 2nd Violin
Ruth Killius, Viola
Ursula Smith, Cello

Sunday, November 4, 2007, 5 p.m.

Exclusive North American representation by California Artists Management, working in cooperation with Mariedi Anders Artists Management.

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
1756-1791

Streichquartett KV 156 G-Dur

Presto

Adagio

Tempo di Menuetto

Paul Hindemith

Streichquartett No. 4 op. 22 (1921)

1895-1963

Fugato. Sehr langsame Viertel

Schnelle Achtel, sehr energisch, Presto

Ruhige Viertel, stets fließend

Mäßig schnelle Viertel

Rondo. Gemächlich und mit Grazie

Pause

Robert Schumann

Streichquartett op.41 No.1 a-moll

1810-1856

Introduzione. Andante espressivo

Scherzo. Presto

Adagio

Presto

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in G major, K. 156 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

To say that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) is highly regarded in music circles is an understatement. French composer Maurice Ravel said of Mozart: "He was not a human being. He was a God." Mozart only lived to age 35, but by the end of his life, the Austrian composer had created an astonishing number of works including 41 symphonies, numerous piano and violin concertos, over a dozen operas, nearly 100 religious works, and hundreds and hundreds of chamber and vocal works for just about every kind of ensemble imaginable, including over two dozen string quartets.

By age seven, Mozart had taught himself to play violin (and later, viola), and at the same age he composed his first works for violin and keyboard. In 1770 – when Mozart completed his first quartet, at age 14 – the venerable Joseph Haydn, "master" of the string quartet at the time, had finished only a few of his many quartets. This is significant because it puts their achievements in some perspective: By the time Mozart and Haydn had penned their final quartets some 25 years later, the string quartet, as a form and as a standard ensemble, was taken as seriously by composers and music aficionados as operas, symphonies or concertos.

Mozart's first set of important string quartets, numbered K. 155-160 in his catalogue of works, is from his so-called "Italian" period. In his teens, the young composer made several trips to Italy and it was during those journeys that he became fascinated by what he heard there, especially by the work of such Italian masters as Giovanni Sammartini

of Milan. Indeed, it was during a trip to Milan – in late 1772 and early 1773 – which the String Quartet in G major, Op. 156, was written.

The work is in three movements after the Italian style. Remembering that the quartets of the day were mostly performed in home concerts, often played by gifted amateur musicians, it is not surprising that the music is generally uplifting and upbeat. Indeed, the first movement, marked *Presto*, is a festive and vivacious affair. In the middle *Adagio* movement there is a hint of seriousness, perhaps even a harbinger of a more serious Mozart to come. The *Tempo Di Menuetto* is curious as a closing movement: in later quartets, it might have served as predecessor to a more dazzling finale. Here it confirms the jovial mood.

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22 Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)

Like Mozart, German composer Paul Hindemith played violin and viola. He played pretty well, too, supporting himself during his early career by performing in popular ensembles of the day – dance bands and variety shows – as well as performing in the Frankfurt Opera Orchestra, and the Amar Quartet, which Hindemith founded himself.

In 1917, Hindemith was called into service by the German military, where he was assigned to a band playing bass drum, though he later found himself on the front line, a sentry in the trenches. Hindemith formed a string quartet at the front and it was there that he had a revelation. While playing a work by Frenchman Claude Debussy, the musicians learned of his death. Hindemith was stunned. “ [I] realized for the first time that music is more than style, technique and the expression of powerful feelings. Music reached out beyond political boundaries, national hatred and the horrors of war. On no other occasion have I seen so clearly what direction music must take,” he wrote.

The Quartet No. 4, Op. 22, written after he returned from the front, certainly shows a composer finding his voice. As the work begins, each instrument has a say. By mid-movement, the ensemble is virtually exploding. The movement ends much as it began, though now an ominous dark whisper of a chord underneath the solo violin is the last thing we hear.

The second movement, marked *schnelle Achtel* (fast eighth notes), begins like a sharp knock on the door. Its intensity never wavers, and the unrelenting pulsing that began the movement carries virtually all the way through. A big, major chord ends it all.

The middle movement also pulses insistently, albeit a bit slower, less gloomy, but somehow still slightly threatening. Melodies come and go, but seem to never find respite.

If the brief fourth movement (*Mässig schnell Viertel* = moderately fast quarter note) sounds vaguely recognizable, it is because Hindemith is recycling, culling ideas from earlier movements. The cello solo, the insistent accompaniment, and the swirling and pulsing counter melodies all seem to have a ring of familiarity.

A madcap celebration seems to be underway in the finale, a quirky rondo. It has a folk-like quality, not unlike the feeling encountered in some Bartók quartets; the work ends on

an assertive yet enigmatic unison.

String Quartet No. 1 in A minor, Op.41 Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

“Keep your love for art. Practice yourself in composition as much as possible. Hold fast to the great models and masters, especially to Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, not forgetting the present in which you live.”

– Robert Schumann, in an 1846 letter to the composer Ludwig Meinardus

When it came to writing his three string quartets, all in a flurry of activity in 1842, German composer Robert Schumann took his own advice: he studied the scores of the great masters, Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, with a little Haydn mixed in for good measure.

He was pleased with the results, unusual for a man who is said to have regularly destroyed scores in fits of pique. (It is believed that he destroyed his first two efforts at a string quartet, for example.) In a letter to his publisher, he wrote: “This past summer I worked with much ardor at three quartets...you may be sure I have spared no pains to compose something good; indeed, I sometimes think, my best.” The quartets – all three – were well received at their premiere in a private, surprise birthday party for his 23-year-old wife, Clara, on September 13, 1842. Quartet No. 1 endures as one of Schumann’s most celebrated works.

In addition to being informed by tradition, Schumann also followed his own advice to “not forget the present.” He was the ultimate modern composer of his day, as Gerald Abraham says, “the quintessential Romantic”: inspired by literature and the natural world, and interested in composition as a mode of personal expression.

Schumann the student of history and Schumann the Romantic are evident in the String Quartet No. 1 in A minor. The voice-by-voice entrances that begin the first movement harken back to the counterpoint of J. S. Bach, yet as the voices come together and a violin solo floats above the swarming accompaniment, the music sounds unmistakably expressive of its day. The movement alternates, back and forth, between these two poles, yet always maintaining a quality of four friends conversing.

One break with tradition is the second movement *Scherzo*, which would more often be the third movement in a traditional quartet. This movement is a bit of a romp, with a jaunty theme that could easily underscore a ride through the brambles on horseback. The winsome *Adagio* third movement is in three sections. (Listen for the dramatic pause marking the beginning of the second section.) The movement ends quietly, as it began. The finale, marked *Presto*, is like a mad dance perpetually in motion, interrupted only briefly late in the movement as a reverential choral briefly emerges.

—Program notes written by Dave Kopplin

BIOS

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Founded in autumn 1994, the Zehetmair Quartet embarked upon its first concert tour in spring 1998. Their success resulted in re-engagements by all the promoters, followed by invitations to the United States (2001 and 2003) and Japan (2002) to complement the Quartet's annual European tours. In the summer of 2004 the Zehetmair Quartet was guest at the Edinburgh Festival, the Helsinki Festival, the Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival and others. In 2005 the Zehetmair Quartet gave a master class in Bern for the first time and further master classes are planned for the following years. In spring 2006 a very successful concert tour led the Zehetmair Quartet throughout Europe with appearances in Vienna, Berlin, Cologne, Zurich, Madrid, Lisbon, and Manchester, among others.

Their first CD featuring Bartók's 4th and Hartmann's 1st quartet was released in 2000 on the ECM label and was awarded the Quarterly Prize by the Deutsche Schallplattenkritik. Their latest release, Schumann's 1st and 3rd string quartets (also recorded on ECM), won the Gramophone Award (Record of the Year), the Diapason d'Or of the Year, the Dutch Edison Classical Music Award 2004, the Belgian Caecilia Award and the Klara Award for the best international production of the year. The release of their latest CD with Hindemith's 4th and Bartók's 5th string quartets on ECM was released this past spring.

The Zehetmair Quartet rehearses a new program each year, under a conception that generally envisages rarely-performed masterpieces (e.g. by K. A. Hartmann, S. Veress) in combination with the more standard repertoire.