University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

The American String Quartet

Peter Winograd, Violin
Laurie Carney, Violin
Daniel Avshalomov, Viola
Wolfram Koessel, Cello

Sunday, October 12, 2008, 2 p.m.

The AMERICAN STRING QUARTET is represented by
Melvin Kaplan, Inc.
115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401
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Recordings:  CRI, Musical
PROGRAM

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 18, No. 5  
Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro
Menuetto
Andante cantabile
Allegro

Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2  
Beethoven

Allegro
Adagio molto
Allegretto
Finale: Presto

INTERMISSION

Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 (Liebquartett)  
with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133  
Beethoven

Adagio ma non troppo; Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca: Allegro assai
Cavatina: Adagio molto espressivo
Grosse Fuge: Allegro (Op. 133)

PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet in A Minor, Op. 18, No. 5  
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

There seems to be little question that certain resemblances between this work and Mozart’s quartet in the same key are not entirely coincidental. As Carl Czerny wrote in 1852, “Beethoven once saw at my house the score of six quartets by Mozart dedicated to Haydn. He opened the Fifth in A and said: ‘That’s what I call a work! In it Mozart was telling the world: Look what I could create if the time were right!’” Also, we know that Beethoven became familiar with the Mozart work when he copied over the last two movements as a way of studying Mozart’s compositional technique.

The first movement of Beethoven’s A Major quartet is simpler and more direct than those found in the earlier quartets in Op. 18. The opening group of themes is made up of a number of individual phrases of varied character that go directly to the minor-key unison of the second subject without a bridge. Instead of focusing on the most important melodic material, the development is based on subsidiary and transitional motifs. The recapitulation almost literally repeats the exposition, except for the necessary adjustments in the key. And the short coda is merely a fragmented A scale, with the first violin out of synchronization with the others.
As with Mozart, Beethoven places the Menuetto next, instead of the more usual slow movement. The gentle rocking, almost waltz-like theme sets the mood for this sweet, sedate movement. The use of third beat accents in the more thickly textured trio gives the impression of a poorly played accordion. The Menuetto is repeated after the trio.

Over the theme and variations third movement, Beethoven wrote the word “pastoral,” a clue to his conception of the music’s character. The rather plain melody consists of a descending and ascending scale, with only minor deviations. But the five variations leave behind the 18th century variation concept, which tends to keep the theme’s harmonic outline while varying the details of figuration, rhythm and tonality. In his variations, Beethoven reveals different aspects of the theme’s expressive concept. Particularly striking is the contrast between the fourth and fifth variations; the fourth is hushed and almost mystical, while the fifth is rude, robust and full-voiced. In the lengthy coda, Beethoven effectively introduces the theme in its original form, pitting it against a double-time scale figure that essentially moves in contrary motion. At the very end the tempo slows down, leading to a subdued conclusion.

The nervous, agitated first theme of the final movement is in sharp contrast to the organ-like sonority of the second theme, which sounds much slower but is actually in the same tempo. The quick four-note motto that opens the movement pervades the following development section, and after a full stop, the recapitulation brings back the previously heard material. The coda, with the four-note phrase still dominant, summarizes the movement.

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**Quartet in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2**
Beethoven

Of the three “Rasumovsky” quartets, the E minor is probably programmed least often. Perhaps this is because it offers less overall bravura display than the other quartets. But for interest, appeal and musical worth, this predominantly lyrical work surely ranks as high as either of the others.

The quartet opens dramatically with two sharp, imperious chords, followed by a tense measure of silence. The subsequent tender, melodic phrase also ends abruptly. The melody, repeated one note higher, is again cut off. Then the mystery and foreboding end as phrase after energetic phrase pour forth, each one little more than a fragment, yet all seamlessly interwoven into an extended musical line that continually pulls the listener forward. While the form is somewhat obscured by the plethora of themes, Beethoven organizes them according to the standard principles of sonata form. The concluding coda, which almost seems to be another development, climaxes in an affirmative unison statement of the opening motif, after which the movement very quickly fades away to a quiet ending.

Like the Adagio molto in Op. 59, No. 1, the second movement is sublimely eloquent, exhibiting a majestic calm that rises serenely above human concerns. About its genesis, Beethoven’s friend Carl Czerny wrote, “The Adagio…..occurred to him when he contemplated the starry sky and while thinking of the music of spheres.” Another possible extramusical association comes from the fact that the main theme’s first four notes are derived from a transposition of the musical spelling of Bach’s name. (In German, B,A,C,H are the notes B-flat, A,C,B.) At one point in the development section, the cello plays those exact notes. The individual sections of the sonata form are molded so unobtrusively that they flow one into another to create the impression of one extended, glorious song.

The Allegretto, falling between a scherzo and an intermezzo in character, starts quietly, as though not to disturb the lofty sentiment of the Adagio molto. Despite its surface grace, however, it is
immediately apparent that this movement is based on a quirky and highly eccentric rhythmic pattern. The middle section melody, in major, is a Theme Russe, the patriotic hymn Slava, taken from Ivan Pratsch’s collection of Russian folk songs, and was included either to honor Count Rasumovsky, or at his request. The anthem was also used by Mussorgsky in his opera, Boris Godunov, and by Rimsky-Korsakov in The Tsar’s Bride. Instead of varying or developing this theme, Beethoven repeats it a number of times, scored differently and with an assortment of countermelodies. Following the traditional scherzo form, the opening section reappears, but then, in a departure from the ordinary, Beethoven brings back both the Theme Russe and the beginning part one more time.

The brilliant finale sets off at once on a high-speed, high-spirited rhythmic gallop. The organization combines elements of rondo and sonata form, with the first violin playing the lyrical second theme, while the other instruments echo the turns of melody. A return of the opening leads to another section, which can be considered either as a third theme or a development of the first. After bringing back the various themes in a spirit of lively playfulness, Beethoven picks up the tempo for a spectacular dash to the final chords.

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Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130 (Liebquartett) with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133
Beethoven

The B-flat is the third and last of the quartets Beethoven composed for Prince Galitzin, but it was published second, between Op. 127 and Op. 132. In some ways, Op. 130 is the most appealing of the late quartets. It follows the classical order of movements, fast, scherzo, slow and finale, except that Beethoven adds an extra scherzo and slow movement just before the finale. The treatment also makes obeisance to classical concepts, even though the melodies, harmonies, rhythms and internal formal structures are handled quite freely.

Beethoven began the composition in March 1825 and was finished eight months later. The subtitle comes from the conversation books Beethoven used for daily communication in face of his total deafness, in which he affectionately referred to Op. 130 as Liebquartett (Dear Quartet). For some unknown reason Beethoven did not attend the premiere, given in Vienna by the Schuppanzigh Quartet on March 21, 1826, but waited in a nearby tavern. When Karl Holz, second violinist and Beethoven’s close companion, rushed over to tell him of the excellent reception, including the audience’s insistence on repeats of movements two and four, Beethoven reportedly replied: “Yes, these delicacies! Why not the Fugue [the original finale, which he later replaced]?” Then, after a moment’s thought, Beethoven contemptuously exclaimed, “Cattle! Asses!”

Despite the positive reaction, the final movement, an exceedingly long and elaborate fugue, confounded most listeners and invited much criticism from players and audiences alike. Beethoven’s publisher, Matthias Artaria, and many others felt it should be replaced with a finale more in keeping with the rest of the quartet. Well aware of Beethoven’s strong and principled nature, Artaria designed a roundabout way to get him to write a new last movement. Claiming that the public was demanding the fugue as a separate piece, Artaria first offered to pay Beethoven for a transcription for piano for four hands, and then convinced him to compose a substitute last movement – for an additional fee. Although the extra money probably played some part in Beethoven’s acquiescence, he most likely would have refused unless he agreed that the fugue was indeed too massive and powerful for the rest of the quartet. The published version of Op. 130, therefore, includes Beethoven’s new finale, while the original, the Grosse Fuge (Great Fugue), appears separately as Op. 133.
The serene opening *Adagio* is not a prelude to what follows, but is an integral part of the thematic material; it reappears several times and binds the movements together. The high-spirited *Allegro* simultaneously flings out two striking phrases – a running 16th note pattern in the first violin, and repeated notes followed by a jump up to a held note in the second. The third motif in the first group, a figure made up of cascading three-note turns introduced in the second *Allegro* by the first violin, is an outgrowth of the cello melody from the opening *Adagio*. At one point in this *Allegro*, the music quiets for two measures of cello alone that lead to the subsidiary theme, which proves to be a transformation of notes four through seven of the introduction. The short, relaxed development includes three brief fragments of the *Adagio*. The *Adagio* does not appear again in the recapitulation, but is heard between statements of the opening theme in the coda. In his novel, *Point Counter Point*, Aldous Huxley describes the slow and fast parts of this movement as “majesty alternating with a joke.”

The very short, engaging second movement presents the outgoing, jocular side of Beethoven’s nature and offers a startling change from the complex first movement. With humor and charm, the simple opening section merely repeats one melodic cell in symmetrical four-measure phrases. The contrasting middle part is similarly built on a single measure that is heard again and again until suddenly, the four players join in an ominous ascending scale that ends with the first violin slithering down a chromatic scale. Twice more the violin goes sliding down in a devilish bit of fun, before leading a shortened reprise of the opening section.

The third movement projects a contrary air of mingled gaiety and melancholy. After two bars of introduction the viola states the somber principal theme in its darkest, lowest register, against which the other instruments contribute fresh, charming, countermelodies and accompaniment figures at the same time. The first contrasting melody is unabashedly sprightly and joyful; it is followed by a shortened, revoiced statement of the opening theme. For the second interlude, the first violin plays a singing, dropping melody; the second violin’s jaunty comments, however, prevent it from getting too sentimental or maudlin. The rest of the movement, essentially a freely varied repeat of what has come before, ends effectively with a loud, exclamatory chord.

Functioning as a second scherzo, the *Alla danza tedesca* (like a dance in the German style) is innocent and whimsical in mood. It is organized in ternary form. The first part captures the swaying rhythmic robustness of the Ländler, a three-beat German peasant dance. The middle section is also in a rustic dance style, with three repeated staccato notes serving as its most prominent melodic feature. The expanded and elaborated return of the opening includes a particularly intriguing passage near the end in which the melody is fragmented, measure for measure.

The poetic and predominantly soft *Cavatina* (Italian for “short aria”) exemplifies Beethoven’s “interior music,” spiritual and emotionally intense utterances of the utmost eloquence. His friend, violinist Karl Holz, wrote that Beethoven “composed the *Cavatina* of the quartet in B-flat amid sorrow and tears; never did his music breathe so heartfelt and inspiration, and even the memory of this movement brought tears to his eyes.” The passionate, sad movement is essentially one continuous outpouring of melody loosely organized into a three-part form. The climax comes just before the return of the opening melodic gesture, in a brief seven-bar passage marked *beklemmt* (“oppressed”), when the first violin whispers its disconnected cries of pain and anguish over pulsing repeated notes in the other instruments.

The intense and often frenzied Grosse Fuge baffles many listeners with its giant leaps, clashing dissonances and overwhelming rhythmic drive. Harold Bauer, who often performed Beethoven’s four-hand piano transcription of the Grosse Fuge, believed that the work was misinterpreted. “The Grosse Fuge is more like a glorified polkascherzo,” he said. “People play it as if it were profoundly mystical which it is not. They put philosophy into it instead of music.” Most other
interpreters and analysts disagree. They are stirred by its rage and vehemence and are awestruck by its grand proportions and symphonic elements. It is a brilliant paradigm of various fugal techniques, some harking back to the polyphony of Bach, others looking ahead to the advanced musical thinking of Liszt and Wagner.

The brief opening section, marked Overuta by Beethoven, resembles the introduction to an opera, but instead of presenting tunes from the opera it sets out four different statements of the main fugal subject. It is first presented in broad, loud, accented tones: the next statement is much faster and rhythmically altered. The tempo then slows for a quiet, smooth, legato statement of the same theme. A final presentation, first violin alone, reveals the melody in note-by-note fragmentation.

The Overtura is followed by the Fuga, the fugue proper, which starts with the violin flinging out a subsidiary subject, an angular, leaping melody against which the viola pounds out the fragmented main subject. For more than 125 measures of the fugue Beethoven does not drop below a relentless fortissimo ("very loud") dynamic level, with accents to add even more power to the wild music. Then suddenly the music quiets, the key changes, and another fugal episode, based on the subsidiary theme and the main subject ensues, all pianissimo ("very soft"). The third episode, faster in tempo, is based on a rhythmic transformation of the main theme. Varied sections follow, all growing from the same material though reworked and refashioned into an amazing variety of shapes and forms. The coda offers fleeting glimpses of the different subjects in a similar manner to the Overtura and then builds to still another climax and an abrupt ending.

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THE AMERICAN STRING QUARTET
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Internationally recognized as one of the world’s finest quartets, The American String Quartet recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. Highlighting the anniversary was the quartet’s debut in a new series of recordings on the Arabesque label, including quartets of celebrated composer Richard Danielpour, and the launch of the complete Brahms string chamber music featuring a stellar list of collaborative artists. The quartet was honored to be selected to represent the chamber music field in a series of retrospective concerts celebrating the Naumburg Foundation’s 80th anniversary, performed by previous winners of the Naumburg Award.

In three decades of touring, the American has performed in all 50 states and appeared in virtually every important concert hall throughout the world. Their presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartók, and Mozart have won widespread critical acclaim. The quartet performs frequently with celebrated guest artists, including clarinetist Richard Stoltzman and famed pianist Menahem Pressler, with whom the American will tour in Europe and South America during the 2008-09 season.

The American’s innovative approach to concert programming has won them a number of notable residencies in recent years, including “Beethoven the Contemporary” at the University of Michigan; The Six Mozart Viola Quintets at the Aspen Music Festival with Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree (broadcast live nationally via Chicago superstation WFMT); and a recently concluded four-year cycle titled “4-5-6...” at Princeton University, where the quartet performed the complete quintets and sextets of Mozart and Brahms, joined in each concert by renowned guest artists.

Resident quartet at the Aspen Music Festival since 1974 and the Manhattan School of Music in New York since 1984, the American has also served as resident quartet at the Taos School of Music (1979-98), the Peabody Conservatory, and the Van Cliburn International Piano
Competition. The quartet’s diverse activities have also included numerous international radio and television broadcasts, tours of Asia, and performances with the New York City Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. In the summer of 2008 the quartet returned to Beijing for its fourth residency at the Great Wall International Music Academy.

As champions of new music, the American has given numerous premieres, most recently including Richard Danielpour’s Quartet No. 4, commissioned by Kansas City Friends of Chamber Music, and Curt Cacioppo’s *a distant voice calling*, commissioned by Arizona Friends of Chamber Music. Albany Records released their recording of three quartets by Kenneth Fuchs in 2001. In January 2009, the American will premiere Tobias Picker’s String Quartet No. 2 in New York City.

Their extensive discography can be heard on the Albany, CRI, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch and RCA labels. The 1998 MusicMasters *Complete Mozart String Quartets* performed on a matched quartet set of instruments by Stradivarius are widely considered to have set the standard for this repertoire. Additionally, the quartet is popular with national radio audiences and has been featured on Minnesota Public Radio’s *St. Paul Sunday Morning*, National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered* and live broadcasts on WFMT.

Formed in 1974 when its original members were students at The Juilliard School, The American String Quartet was launched by winning both the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Award in the same year. Individually, the members devote additional time outside the quartet’s active performance and teaching schedule to solo appearances, recitals and master classes.