University of Florida Performing Arts

Presents

Ariel String Quartet

Sunday, February 26, 2012, 2 p.m.
University Auditorium
THE ARIEL QUARTET

GERSHON GERCHIKOV AND ALEXANDRA KAZOVSKY, violins
JAN GRÜNING, viola
AMIT EVEN-TOV, cello

PROGRAM

QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, Op. 33, No. 2, The Joke
Allegro moderato, cantabile
Scherzo: Allegro
Largo sostenuto
Finale: Presto

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN

QUARTET NO. 2 IN C MAJOR, Op. 36
Allegro calmo senza rigore
Vivace
Chacony: Sostenuto

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

INTERMISSION

QUARTET IN C-SHARP MINOR, Op. 131
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto espressivo
Allegro molto vivace
Allegro moderato
Andante, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Presto
Adagio quasi un poco andante
Allegro

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

The ARIEL QUARTET is represented by
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**Program Notes**


**Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)**

Haydn's Opus 33 probably has more nicknames than any other set of quartets. The most common designation, “Russian,” arose because the composer dedicated the quartets to Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and some, or perhaps all six, received their first performance on Christmas Day, 1781, at the Vienna apartment of the Duke's wife, the Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna. To some these quartets are known as *Gli Scherzi*, because they were the first chamber works in which Haydn substitutes scherzos (*scherzi* in Italian) for the traditional minuet movement. And the occasional reference to Op. 33 as the *Jungfernquartette*, or “Maiden,” Quartets stems from the drawing of an attractive young woman that appeared on the title page of an early edition.

The composition of the Op. 33 in 1781 followed a nearly 10-year hiatus after Haydn's Op. 20 quartets. It may be that after Op. 20 Haydn was searching for a new approach to the form. Or perhaps, his duty to compose five original operas and mount some 50 opera productions for Prince Nicholas Esterhazy between 1775 and 1781, in addition to all his other musical administrative tasks as Kapellmeister, left no time for quartets.

In any case, after Haydn returned to quartet writing, he regarded his Op. 33 with pleasure and satisfaction. His several letters to patrons inviting them to subscribe to the quartets say that they are “written in a new and special way.” The most striking characteristics are the themes themselves. Using quite distinctive intervals and complex rhythms, Haydn builds the melodies up out of individual phrases that are organically unified but contain contrasting elements. His treatment – he calls it “thematic elaboration” – of the subject is handled with deftness and imagination as he expands and develops individual fragments and then reassembles the parts at the end. In Op. 33, the only apparent change in calling the minuet movement a *scherzo* (which is Italian for ‘joke’) is that it tends to be faster than the minuet and occasionally has some touches of playfulness and humor.

In Op. 33, Haydn achieved a synthesis of the melodic grace of the *style galant* (“courtly style”), the contrapuntal texture and formal logic of *Der Gelehrte Style* (“the learned style”), and the emotional intensity of *Sturm und Drang* (“storm and stress”). The overall lightness in spirit and happy nature of Op. 33 are attributed, by some biographers, to Haydn's gratifying affair with singer Luigia Polyelli and his realization that he was well on his way to mastering that most intractable nature of all musical forms, the string quartet.

The first movement of the Op. 33, No. 2, is a fine illustration of Haydn's technique of “thematic elaboration,” the growth of an entire movement from several microcosmic musical gestures, in this case those introduced in the first four measures. The subject starts with a rising and falling fanfare-like motto. The opening few notes are then immediately fashioned into a dialogue among the quartet members, which Haydn spins out into a first violin figure. After a literal repeat of the motto theme, he focuses on different facets and characteristics, which he explores and uses as the material for creating new themes. The ongoing elaboration process continues in the development, and even in the recapitulation.

The next movement, although called Scherzo, closely resembles similar quartet movements that Haydn called minuets. The rustic first part is a heavy-footed peasant dance in solid three-beat time. The more relaxed misled section is light and graceful; the movement concludes with a repeat of the first part.

The weight of the quartet is focused in the third movement, with Haydn using his command of the *Gelehrte* style to create a section of great beauty and expressivity. The calm and restrained principal subject is stated at the outset as a contrapuntal duet for the viola and cello, which is then repeated by the violins.
The quartet derives its nickname, “The Joke,” from the comical conclusion of the Finale. The principal theme of the sonata-rondo is a joyous, quicksilver tune tossed off with great aplomb by the first violin. The first episode, which is an outgrowth of the original tune, is somewhat more subdued and restrained. Both sections, the opening and the episode, are then brought back somewhat changed. It is now – when one might expect a final statement of the main theme to end the movement – that Haydn decides to have some fun. The statement starts as expected, but it is soon interrupted by a slow, exceedingly sentimental interlude. Once again the melody resumes, but this time each phrase is followed by a pause, until after an unbelievably long wait the quartet ends quickly with a final whisper, an effect that always leaves listeners smiling, if not laughing out loud!


**QUARTET NO. 2 IN C MAJOR, OP. 36**

**Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)**

1945 was a momentous year for 32-year-old Benjamin Britten. He completed *Peter Grimes*, the opera that made him famous; he composed his highly acclaimed Second String Quartet; and in December, he dashed off *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*, his most widely played and popular piece. The Second String Quartet was commissioned to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Henry Purcell’s death. Britten finished the work in October 1945, and it was first played in London in November 1945 by the Zorian String Quartet.

The quartet opens with an ascending interval of a tenth – an octave plus a third – introducing the first theme. In quick succession, two more similar themes are introduced with a rising tenth, starting on different notes and played by various combinations of instruments. Britten proceeds to develop this material, alternating sharp rhythmic passages with a gauzy nocturnal atmosphere. After a rolling arpeggio in the cello, all three themes come together and the movement ends with a quiet 23-bar C major coda.

The second movement is a rhythmic, dark C-minor scherzo on muted strings. It opens with a heavily-accented theme in the first violin and cello against shadowy undercurrents in the other voices. Britten expands and develops both these musical elements, often with sharp dynamic contrasts, weaving in other melodic material of a vaguely Eastern European character.

The last movement, longer than both previous movements combined, pays homage to Henry Purcell. Chacony was Purcell’s spelling for one of his favorite musical forms, the chaconne or passacaglia, in which a brief melody goes through many variations. Britten’s slow nine-measure melody, played by all four instruments in unison, is followed by 21 variations grouped in three sets of six and a final set of three. The first three sets vary the melody harmonically, rhythmically and melodically, and are separated by cadenzas for cello and viola. The first violin has the final cadenza, and the last variation is played over 23 repetitions of the tonic chord of C major, paralleling the coda of the first movement.

— Program note adapted from Guide to Chamber Music by Melvin Berger; used with permission.

**QUARTET IN C-SHARP MINOR, OP. 131**

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

Beethoven once confided to friend Karl Holz that, while each of his 16 quartets was unique, “each in its way,” his favorite was the C-sharp minor, Op. 131. When Schubert heard the piece, Holz reported that “He fell into such a state of excitement and enthusiasm that we were all frightened for him.” Down to our own day many people, musicians as well as listeners, consider it the greatest quartet ever written.

Lasting close to 40 minutes, the quartet is divided into seven sections that are played without pause, creating a completely organic, well-integrated whole. The burden for projecting this
underlying unity rests with the performers, who must maintain the proper relationships of tempo and mood for the work to flow smoothly from beginning to end.

Beethoven began to work on Op. 131 late in 1825, after he had completed the three-quartet commissions (Op. 127, 130, 132) for Prince Galitzin, and presented it to the publisher on July 12 of the next year. Beethoven's flippant note on the score – “Put together from pilferings this and that” – caused the publisher great concern, and the composer had to assure the publisher that the music was completely original, and his remark was only a joke. In retrospect, it now seems that his comment may have referred to the seven separate movements making up a unified work. The quartet was dedicated to Baron Joseph von Stutterheim, Field Marshal, in gratitude for accepting Beethoven's nephew Karl into the baron's regiment. Scholars believe that the first hearing was at a private concert in Vienna in December 1826, but that the initial public performance did not take place until 1835, long after Beethoven's death.

The very slow introductory Adagio, which Richard Wagner said “reveals the most melancholy sentiment in music,” is basically a fugue, followed by four episodes and a coda, all based on the sober melody originally stated by the first violin. More than sorrowful or pitying, the music is contemplative and serene, surmounting personal despair and sadness. The section ends with a quiet rising C-sharp octave leap, which finds an echo in the ascending D octave leap that opens the second section.

The fast second movement sails forth, cherry and open-faced, with none of the profundity or expressivity of the first movement. Even the thematic material contributes no striking contrasts to create dramatic tension; the same kind of warm, good spirits prevail throughout. Performers traditionally use the two soft isolated chords at the end of the movement to set the tempo for the two loud answering chords that start the Allegro moderato.

The short movement that follows, only 11 measures long, is in effect a recitative, a rhythmically free introduction to the Andante that follows without pause.

The fourth movement is an expansive theme and variations that provides the pivotal central focus of the entire quartet. The syncopated theme, which Wagner called the “incarnation of innocence,” is shared by the two violins. Beethoven then puts the melody through a series of six variations in which it is completely shaped and fashioned to reveal fully all of its expressive potential. The two notes heard at the very end determine the speed of the next movement; they are usually made equal to a full measure of the Presto.

The Presto corresponds to the Classical scherzo movement, playful and humorous in spirit. The lightness of character, though, disguises a score that is treacherously difficult for the musicians. It requires great delicacy of touch and split-second reaction times to interweave the four parts and achieve the smooth flow that is necessary. After the abrupt four-note growl by the cello that opens the movement, the first violin picks up the dance-like tune. Passages of smooth legato articulation interrupt statements of the bright, bouncy main theme. Beethoven directs that the final return of the opening tune be played ponticello (bowed near the bridge), producing a glassy, whistle-like sound. The whirlwind motion continues until two sets of chords effectively end the movement.

The short, introspective Adagio, only 28 measures long, provides a transition between the gay flight of the preceding Presto and the rhythmic excitement of the finale. Based on a mournful, meditative melody, which is first played by the viola, the Adagio moves directly to the last section.

Two bold, angry unison phrases precede the martial main theme with its dotted (long-short) rhythm, which recalls the last movement of Beethoven's E minor quartet, Op. 59, No. 2. Forcefully, and with great thrust, the melody builds up momentum until a quiet contrasting melody, obviously derived from the melody of the opening fugue, intercedes. The second theme, a long descending line that slows down as it jumps to three high notes at the end, is heard before a shortened development, recapitulation, and full-length coda. In summarizing this movement, Richard Wagner wrote:
This is the fury of the world’s dance — fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion and suffering; lightening flashes and thunder rolls; and above the tumult the indomitable fiddler whirls us on to the abyss. Amid the clamour he smiles, for to him it is nothing but a mocking fantasy; at the end, the darkness beckons him away, and his task is done.

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ABOUT ARIEL STRING QUARTET

Characterized by its youth, brilliant playing, and soulful interpretations, the Ariel Quartet has quickly earned a glowing international reputation. Previously the resident ensemble in the New England Conservatory’s prestigious Professional String Quartet Training Program, the Quartet recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

Formed in Israel, the Quartet moved to the United States in 2004 to continue its professional studies. The Grand Prize winners of the 2006 Fischoff National Chamber Music Competition, they have also been awarded First Prize at the international competition Franz Schubert and The Music Of Modernity in Graz, Austria (2003). After they won the Székely Prize for their performance of Bartók, as well as the overall Third Prize at the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2007, the American Record Guide described the Ariel Quartet as “a consummate ensemble gifted with utter musicality and remarkable interpretive power” and called their performance of Beethoven’s Quartet Op. 132 “the pinnacle of the competition.”

The Ariel Quartet has performed extensively in Israel, Europe and North America, including such venues as the Louvre in Paris, Kaisersaal in Frankfurt (“... a tour de force,” said Frankfurter Allgemeine), Jordan Hall in Boston, and the Washington Performing Arts Society, the Corcoran Gallery and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. In the 2010-11 season, the Quartet participated in a Beethoven cycle at the National Gallery, and joined the competitors of the 13th Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition for the Chamber Music round in May 2011. The quartet spent most of the 2010-11 season in Basel, Switzerland, where they had the opportunity to work with Walter Levin, the founding first violinist of the famous LaSalle Quartet.

Highlights of the 2011-12 season include residencies for the Perlman Music Program/Suncoast and El Paso Pro Musica, and performances in Europe and throughout North America including concerts in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Gainesville, Fla. The Ariel has remained committed to performing extensively in Israel, and returns home frequently to appear in concert.

In addition to performing the traditional quartet repertoire, the Ariel Quartet regularly collaborates with many Israeli and non-Israeli musicians and composers, including pianists Roman Rabinovich, Alexander Gavrylyuk and Yaron Kohlberg; the Jerusalem String Quartet; composers Matan Porat, Matti Kovler and Menachem Wiesenberg; clarinetist Moran Katz; violist Roger Tapping; and the Zukerman Chamber Players. Additionally, the Ariel was quartet-in-residence in the Steans Music Institute at the Ravinia Festival for two consecutive years.

The Quartet received extensive scholarship support for the members’ studies in the United States from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, Dov and Rachel Gottesman and the Legacy Heritage Fund. Most recently, they were awarded a substantial grant from The A. N. and Pearl G. Barnett Family Foundation, and were named the 2011 Barnett Fellows.