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ARTPOWER!

MULTI-ARTS SEASON 2013-2014

ESCHER STRING QUARTET

Friday, April 4, 2014 / 8pm
Department of Music's
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

ARTISTS

Adam Barnett, Hart
Aaron Boyd, Violin
Pierre Lapointe, Violin
Dane Johansen, Cello

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PROGRAM

MOZART

String Quartet in G Major, K. 387

Allegro vivace assai
Minuetto: Allegretto
Andante cantabile
Molto allegro

DUTILLEUX

String Quartet "Ainsi la Nuit"

Nocturne
Miroir d'espace
Litanies 1
Litanies 2
Constellations
Nocturne 1
Temps suspendu

INTERMISSION

RAVEL

String Quartet in F Major

Allegro moderato
Assez vif
Très lent
Vif et agité



PROGRAM

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)

Quartet in G major, K. 387 (1782)

After moving to Vienna, acquiring a deeper education in Bach, meeting Haydn for the first time and encountering his landmark string quartets, Op. 33, published only a year before in 1781, a twenty-six-year-old Mozart turned again to the genre of string quartet. Motivated purely by inspiration and respect rather than the dictates of patronage or the good fortune of commission, Mozart worked hard over a period of roughly two years to compose what became the set of six quartets he dedicated to Haydn. Of the twenty-three quartets he wrote, even among the celebrated last ten, the "Haydn" quartets are considered Mozart's finest. In technique, variety, ingenuity and sheer musical brilliance, they constitute an important landmark of their own, equal to if not surpassing, Haydn's models (at least up to that time). Together, the twelve quartets of Mozart and Haydn combined comprise the first great watershed of Viennese Classical chamber music. The first, and in some ways, most impressive of Mozart's set is the String Quartet in G Major, K. 387, completed in December of 1782.



The first movement sonata has two prominent themes, both sharply articulated by dynamic contrasts between loud and soft with segments that move in small chromatic steps. These qualities – frequent dynamic contrast and chromaticism – characterize themes in the other movements as well, suggesting an artistic unity to the quartet as a whole, a rare trait this early in the string quartet history. The development is a rich example of the quartet as an enlightened conversation among friends, a musical conversation much in the manner of operatic recitative, a natural inclination for Mozart. As always with his chamber music sonata forms, the so-called “recapitulation” features significant elaboration and extension making the thematic recurrence more than a mere reprise, but in fact, a much fuller realization creating an elevated conclusion.

The *Menuetto* theme begins with two gentle downward leaps, then combines both the loud/soft dynamics and the chromatic vocabulary from the previous movement into a jerky upward climb that hints at the future of the scherzo genre with a mild jest elaborated in contrary motion by the cello. The section is rounded off by a lovely, poised minuet phrase, all gallant propriety restored with the unaccented chromatic line trailing off in well-mannered conclusion. The second reprise inverts both the leaps and the chromatic line while shifting the melodic roles down into the cello and viola parts for a witty contrast that revels in Mozart’s newfound facility for independent part writing. Yet another contrast exercises the full range and power of quartet texture as the trio begins with all four players

in bold unison. Dramatic with its minor key, continued chromatic and dynamic tension, and a sorrowful sighing motif (in the cello), the trio introduces the first dark shadow in the quartet. With a formal plan of dramatic modulation even in the *Menuetto*, all four movements of this early classical masterpiece are ruled by sonata form.

Moving to the warm glow of the sub-dominant key (C major), the *Andante cantabile* sings an exquisitely graceful song, sophisticated with shifts into pathos, its supple heroic reassertions and its radiant flairs of divine beauty. The dark intensity of the trio returns along with the stark intonations of all four instruments in unison. But this wayward tangent is lovingly coaxed back into illumination with gentle guidance that rises into a rich, polyphonic cadence that blossoms into four independent but interwoven threads. The marvel of this slow movement is beautifully expressed by Alec King who writes, “Mozart pours forth a stream of rapt, contemplative music... rich... soaring... with beautifully calculated climaxes. It is a remarkable example of the sustained, exalted feeling expressed with wonderful harmonic resource, yet without a single melodic phrase that is at all memorable in itself.”

The finale is a further miracle and an important milestone in the history of the string quartet and classical music in general. Cast in sonata form, its exposition is made of equal parts polyphonic fugue and homophonic melody with accompaniment, the ancient learned style and the fashionable gallant style seamlessly mixed into a wonder of exciting complexity and relaxing ease, a unified drama par excellence. The reintroduction of polyphony as a compliment to the accompanied lyricism of the progressive sonata form is one of the key events in achieving the mature classical style and it is difficult to find another example of the effortless, almost insouciant blend that Mozart attained here (the closest example being Mozart’s own Jupiter Symphony whose finale uses almost the same theme). Each of the two thematic areas of the sonata includes both a fugato (a portion of a fugue) and an accompanied theme. The second thematic area even combines

the first and second fugato subjects into a double fugato. The development begins with yet another fugato based on a new, third theme. With its *Molto Allegro* drive, its rococo shimmer and its contrapuntal grandeur, one would expect a conclusion of awesome might. Instead, Mozart ends with subtle, delicate finesse, quietly completing the final statement of the first fugato subject with its missing three-note tail for perfect harmonic closure as if he were whispering the simple solution to a perplexing but delightful riddle. In addition to highlighting the contrapuntal riches of the fresh but now mature quartet form, Mozart simultaneously demonstrates two other cardinal features of the genre: humor and intimacy.

Program notes by Earsense.

Henri Dutilleux (1916-2013)
Ainsi la nuit (1976)

Henri Dutilleux's work for string quartet, *Ainsi la nuit* (1976) was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation and was intended for performance by the Juilliard Quartet. Before starting on the actual composition, Dutilleux spent some time studying the intricacies of string-playing techniques of the time. He had not attempted to write a work for string quartet since his days as a student at the Paris Conservatoire. The composer has stated that Webern's *Six Bagatelles* (1913) were most beneficial in helping him get up to date. Dutilleux also looked over Berg's *Lyric Suite* (1926), as well as compositions for string quartet by Beethoven and Bartók. After making a series of sketches in which he practiced writing for string quartet, the composer sent three completed pieces to the Juilliard Quartet. These pieces, entitled *Nuits* (1974), have musical material which was later used in the final version of *Ainsi la nuit*. Dutilleux completed *Ainsi la nuit* in 1976 and the work was premiered on January 6, 1977, in Paris, but not by the Juilliard Quartet. Actually, the premiere was given by the Quatuor Parrenin. The Juilliard Quartet would first perform the composition in the Library of Congress at Washington, D.C., on April 13, 1978. The final version of the piece has seven movements with four "parentheses" lying in

between the first five movements. Dutilleux did not like to leave the individual movements of his works untitled. The seven movements of *Ainsi la nuit* are "Nocturne I," "Miroir d'espace," "Litanies I," "Litanies II," "Constellations," "Nocturne II," and "Temps suspendu." The "parentheses" are mostly used to recall or foreshadow musical material in the rest of the work. For this reason, *Ainsi la nuit* is often associated with the idea of memory.

Many of the characteristics of Dutilleux's later works are displayed in *Ainsi la nuit*, including "fan-shaped" writing, the outlining of a tonal triad in a seemingly atonal work, and a similarity of some melodies to the modality of Gregorian chant. Dutilleux's "fan-shaped" writing can best be described through a piano composition in which the placement of the pianist's fingers create a mirror image between the hands. In *Ainsi la nuit*, this is accomplished through the voices of the four string instruments. Many of Dutilleux's pieces from the same period as *Ainsi la nuit* also make use of "fan-shaped" writing. It has also been discovered that in some of Dutilleux's later works, a tonal triad is outlined over the course of the piece by an emphasis on individual pitches. This is also true in *Ainsi la nuit*, as a D major triad is outlined with each successive pitch being centered upon in a separate movement. The pitch D is emphasized in the untitled introduction, while F sharp is the most important pitch in the fourth movement, "Litanies II." Finally, in "Constellations," the climax of the piece, the pitch A is the central pitch. The Gregorian influences in "Nocturne I," as well as the opening of "Litanies II," were acknowledged in Dutilleux's own program note.

Program notes by Chris Boyes.

Maurice Ravel (1875- 1937)
Quartet in F major (1903)

Ravel wrote his only string quartet in 1902-03 while still a student at the Paris Conservatory. Its form and musical language reflect the influences on his musical style. He admired the transparent textures and structural logic of Mozart, the reserved expression of his teacher Gabriel Faure, the pastel harmonies of Debussy, and the shimmering sonorities of the Javanese gamelan orchestra that first enthralled him and other Parisians at the World Exposition in 1889.

The work's opening theme belongs not only to the first movement but plays a role in the rest of the quartet. Ravel's use of the cyclic procedure of bringing earlier themes into succeeding movements effectively unifies what otherwise could be considered disparate movements. The second subject, a lovely violin melody accompanied by scalar harmonies in the lower instruments, "rises and falls through a long arc with the elegance and ease of a thrush on the wing," says Richard Edda. Throughout the development of this movement's sonata form, rustling configurations accompany its elegant themes. As in the Mozartian model, the recapitulation returns to earlier themes to balance and complete the first movement.

Marked "rather fast and very rhythmic," the second movement is a modern scherzo in three sections, the first beginning pizzicato. Here Ravel conjures up the sound of the Javanese gamelan orchestra by having the inner and outer strings play in different rhythms. The opening theme derives from the first subject of the first movement. The middle section begins slowly and highlights the deeper sonorities of the cello, which now initiates a kind of rhapsody on the scherzo's earlier themes. A shortened version of the opening pizzicato section returns to conclude the movement.

The third movement recaptures the mood of the scherzo's middle section. Cast in a minor key, it features considerable solo playing in the various instruments. It serves as a structural foil to the

carefully defined forms of the earlier movements with its quickly changing sonorities, its frequent juxtapositions of mood and tempo, and its continually evolving themes. It is much like "an improvisation for quartet" (Edda).

A powerful, metrically irregular motive launches the finale; this motive returns as the movement proceeds, much like a rondo. It separates contrasting episodes that recall familiar material from earlier movements, such as the theme of the first movement, the pizzicato figures of the second, and the shimmering tremolos of the second and third. Structurally, the movement's awkward five-beat meter contributes to its unsettled character. Following a dramatic statement of the finale theme, a triumphant ascending arpeggio crescendos to a resounding F Major chord, concluding the work fortissimo.
Program notes by John Noell Moore



ESCHER STRING QUARTET

Acclaimed for their profound musical insight and rare tonal beauty, the Escher Quartet has been recognized as one of the finest quartets of their generation. Championed by the Emerson String Quartet, the Escher has toured extensively throughout the U.S., Europe, Australia and Asia. From 2010-2012, the Quartet served as BBC New Generation Artists, and gave debuts at both Wigmore Hall and the BBC Proms. In its home town of New York, the ensemble serves as Artists of The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, where last season they presented a critically acclaimed 3-concert series featuring the quartets of Benjamin

Britten. In 2013, the Quartet became one of the very few chamber ensembles to be awarded the prestigious Avery Fischer Career Grant.

Within months of its inception in 2005, the Escher Quartet was invited by both Pinchas Zukerman and Itzhak Perlman to be Quartet in Residence at each artist's summer festival: the Young Artists Programme at Canada's National Arts Centre and the Perlman Chamber Music Program on Shelter Island, NY. The Escher has since collaborated with artists including Khatia Buniatishvili, Leon Fleischer, David Finckel, Wu Han, Lynn Harrell, Joseph Kalichstein, and Jason Vieaux, as well as jazz vocalist Kurt Elling.

The Escher Quartet has performed at the Cheltenham and City of London festivals, the Auditorium du Louvre in Paris, the 92nd Street Y in New York, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, and at the Ravinia and Caramoor festivals. Elsewhere, the Quartet has toured China and made its Australian debut at the Perth International Arts Festival. Last season, the ensemble returned to Wigmore Hall, and made debuts in Switzerland at the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève and in Austria at the Schloss Esterházy in Eisenstadt. Highlights in the United States included performances at Northwestern University, the Coleman Chamber Music Society and the Buffalo Chamber Music Society.

The current season sees the Escher Quartet's debut at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, as well as at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in Israel. In addition, the Quartet tours the UK with pianist Benjamin Grosvenor, and continues its relationship with Wigmore Hall, returning to collaborate with jazz saxophonist Joshua Redman. The Escher gives further performances at New York's Lincoln Center and finishes the season with a return to Music@Menlo.

Further significant debuts follow next season including Berlin's Konzerthaus, the Rio International Chamber Music Week in Brazil and the Hong Kong International Chamber Music Festival, as well as an appearance at London's Kings

Place.

The Escher Quartet has recorded the complete Zemlinsky String Quartets on the Naxos label and released Volume 1 in July 2013; Volume 2 follows in Summer 2014. Upcoming releases include the Mendelssohn Quartet cycle for the Swedish label BIS.

The Escher Quartet takes its name from Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher, inspired by Escher's method of interplay between individual components working together to form a whole.



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Program Design by Eddie Cardenas

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