

THE **THERESE M. GROJEAN**
CLASSICAL SERIES

Maxwell Quartet

Presented in the May Gallery

Colin Scobie & George Smith, violins | Elliott Perks, viola | Duncan Strachan, 'cello

VILAR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
Sunday, January 16, 2022

PROGRAM

Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet Op. 77 no.1 in G major
Allegro moderato
Adagio
Menuetto. Presto
Finale. Presto

Scottish Folk Music (to be announced from the stage)

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
String Quartet No. 13 in G Major, Op. 106
Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
Finale: Andante sostenuto - Allegro con fuoco

This evening's performance is generously supported by Presenting Underwriters:
Alexia & Jerry Jurschak; Performance Underwriters: Susan & Albert Wehl

ABOUT MAXWELL QUARTET

Winner of the First Prize and Audience Prize at the 2017 Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition, Scotland's Maxwell Quartet is one of the world's most exciting and unique young string quartets for their illuminating juxtaposition of standard repertoire with traditional Scottish music, and contemporary works by such composers as Anna Meredith and James MacMillan. Maxwell was greatly honored to be invited by the Metropolitan Museum and members of the Guarneri Quartet to perform at a 50th anniversary celebration of the Guarneri's career.

The quartet consists of four great friends who grew up playing classical and folk music together across Scotland. They have performed at the Edinburgh Festival, London's Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and the BBC Chamber Music Proms, and at many chamber music festivals across the UK, including their own Loch Shiel Festival in the Scottish highlands, as well as Belgium, the Netherlands, France and Asia.

The quartet's first U.S. tour in 2019 included a NY début on the prestigious Schneider Concerts series. The NY Times praised Maxwell's "charisma and sense of adventure," and The New Yorker hailed their "effervescent sound and buoyant energy." Since then, they have given some 50 concerts across the U.S.

Gramophone Magazine raved about the quartet's début CD (Haydn's Op.71 and Scottish folk music): "earthy robustness . . . their precision at speed and unanimity of bowing are a match for all comers . . . thoroughly delightful." The Strad called the sequel to that CD (Haydn's Op.74 and more Scottish folk music), "just as magical . . . a treat."

Passionate about collaborating with other musicians and art forms, Maxwell has performed with world-class artists such as the Danish String Quartet, as well as a global roster of cross-genre artists, from the Scottish-German soul duo Lunir to ballet dancers and cinematographers.

Colin Scobie, violin: Born in Edinburgh in 1991, Colin Scobie is already established as one of the most creative and compelling violinists and chamber musicians of his generation. He has performed as concerto soloist to critical acclaim across Europe and further afield, with orchestras including Musica Alta Ripa, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, La Serenissima, Scottish Ensemble and the Covent Garden Chamber Orchestra. He has broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and Radio Scotland numerous times and collaborated with many eminent musicians including Marcia Crayford, Stephen Orton, Martino Tirimo, Moray Welsh, Colin Carr, and Alexander Hohenthal.

In 2010 Colin was appointed 2nd violin of the Fitzwilliam Quartet, with which he toured extensively for 2 years in Europe, Africa and America. His desire to explore the possibilities of the quartet repertoire and to lead a young and dynamic quartet led to him join the Maxwell Quartet as first violin in 2013. He has held concertmaster positions at Malmö Opera and Camerata Nordica in Sweden. Colin began playing the violin at the age of eight, studying at St Mary's Music School, Edinburgh, before going on to the Royal College of Music in London. He is a keen traveller and in his spare time enjoys mountain biking and hiking.

George Smith, violin: George hails from Aberlemno in Angus, Scotland, and began learning to play the violin at the age of ten. He studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with William Chandler and Ruth Crouch. While there he played in masterclasses with Midori, Christian Tetzlaff, Ilya Gringolts, Andrew Manze and Barnabas Keleman. He has performed across the UK and further afield as a chamber musician, soloist and Scots fiddle player. Notable performances include winning prizes in the Glenfiddich Fiddle Championship, performing James MacMillan's 'From Ayrshire' for Solo Violin and Orchestra under the baton of the composer, and most recently performing in the Cuillin Mountains on the Isle of Skye.

George works with many other groups in Scotland including the Scottish Ensemble, BBCSSO and Grit Orchestra. He regularly works with non-classical musicians, collaborating with composers including Anna Meredith and Samoyed. Along with this he teaches at various institutions across Scotland and is regularly invited to give workshops and masterclasses on Scottish music. George performs on a Bernardus Calcanius violin which dates from c.1740, and is extremely grateful to the Harrison-Frank Family Foundation for this generous loan. In his spare time, George loves cooking and spending time with his dog, Toast. He also made his own violin in 2013.

Elliott Perks, viola: Elliott grew up in Dorking, Surrey and studied at the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Royal College of Music in London.

Elliott has taken part in numerous concerts as a soloist and chamber musician, performing in most London venues, including The Wigmore Hall, The Royal Festival Hall, The Royal Albert Hall, The Queen Elizabeth Hall, The Purcell Room, Sadlers Wells, Bradford Cathedral, Snape Maltings, Dorking Halls, The Cadogan Hall and numerous concerts in the Menuhin Hall. Recent engagements include playing Viola Viola by George Benjamin in the Purcell Room and Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante with Violinist Oliver Cave and the Audeat Camerata in Hampstead. He has performed as principal guest viola with orchestras including Manchester Camerata, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

In his spare time, Elliott loves tending his garden in South London and playing chess. He teaches viola at the Yehudi Menuhin School.

Duncan Strachan, cello: Born in Dundee in 1987, Duncan grew up in Lochaber, in the west highlands of Scotland, where he began learning cello at the age of 4. Duncan then went to St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh, learning with Pat Hair. He subsequently studied music at St Catherine's College, Oxford, where he was a Leask Music Scholar and an Academic Scholar. He studied cello with Colin Carr before continuing his studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with Robert Irvine.

As a chamber musician Duncan has worked with a wide range of ensembles and prominent figures including Fidelio Trio, Red Note, Florin Trio, Lana Trotovek, Ilya Gringolts, David Watkin and Benjamin Grosvenor. He has also worked with composers including Tom David Wilson, Simon Smith, Anna Meredith, Stuart MacRae, Rory Boyle, Michael Finnissy and many more to perform new works for cello. Duncan also enjoys composing his own music, and in his spare time enjoys fishing and walking in the great outdoors.

PROGRAM NOTES

HAYDN

1799 quietly witnessed a great turning point in the history of the string quartet. With Mozart gone, both an elderly Haydn and a young Beethoven were simultaneously working on a new set of string quartets: Haydn's last and Beethoven's first. In this noteworthy "passing of the baton," the composers shared a common patron; a young Prince Lobkowitz had commissioned both composers around the same time. Beethoven's Op. 18 was published at the end of 1801, Haydn's Op. 77 in early 1802. It is no surprise that Haydn's last quartets are often called "Beethovenian," just as Beethoven's first quartets may be called "Haydnesque." Together, they comprise a great high water mark of the mature Viennese style before Beethoven's middle period expansion. And just as Beethoven's quartets are "early," hewing close to Haydn as a model, Haydn's final quartets represent his own most modern, consolidated and polished efforts in the form, with many forward looking aspects.

An unanswered question regarding this historical moment is whether they knew of each other's latest work. There is evidence to suggest that Haydn may have heard a performance of some of Beethoven's Op. 18 quartets while he was in the midst of working on the Op. 77 set. Some have even speculated that this caused Haydn to stop composing quartets, essentially bowing out of the competition with this new young composer from Bonn. Others suggest that Haydn was busy, tired and possibly ill. Either way, it is a mystery why Op. 77 contains only two quartets rather than Haydn's characteristic three or six to a set. It seems unlikely that Beethoven knew of Haydn's quartets. One might just say they emerged in parallel.

Haydn's Op. 77, no 1 is quite simply a brilliant quartet. The fluid diversity of textures is a hallmark of Haydn and the Viennese style. Dazzling counterpoint is juxtaposed with homophony and even dramatic unisons. Virtuoso concertante solos are soon echoed by call and response interactions that formalize into canons and long harmonic sequences for elegant skeins of interchange evoking the late Baroque. The composite effect demonstrates his unique style, aptly called conversational.

The robust opening movement is in definitive sonata form, with the two-beat drive of a march and the three-beat perpetual motion of a dance. As in multiple places throughout the quartet, the cello rises in repartee with the first fiddle for some of the most independent part writing to date. This is one of the most elaborate of Haydn's sonata-form movements, complete with multiple themes, an adventurous development section, a recapitulation full of fresh innovations and even a small coda. The elaborate polyphony bounding with energy makes for a showcase of both technique and bravado character.

The slow movement is almost the polar opposite. Vocal models prevail from the opening unisons, to four-part chorale, to the accompanied cantilena for first violin to the nearly operatic duet for violin and cello. On the surface, the form appears to be another sonata, with all the requisite sections, but, typical of Haydn's endless imagination, the form is relaxed and rhapsodic in the manner of a fantasy. A recurring refrain suggests a rondo but the character equally evokes a da capo aria in a simple song form. Sweet and beautiful like so many of Haydn's lyrical slow movements, it broaches deeper emotions that might best be described as a noble melancholy punctuated by startling outbursts of anguish, a bit of Sturm und Drang surfacing even here at the end of Haydn's quartet journey. One is tempted to say that this is Haydn in his most "Schubertian" vein.

The Scherzo finds Haydn ever toying with his fascination for the transformed minuet here with the verve and pace of a true "Beethovenian" scherzo, though it is clear that Haydn got there first. A leaping, syncopated line may have found its inspiration in Hungarian folk music and its soaring energy propels the violin into the stratospheric range of the instrument. A trio intensifies the rhythmic bustle with husky tremolos, abrupt dynamics and a more frantic kind of folk dance in the rather surprising key of E-flat major.

With the finale, Haydn writes his third sonata form of the quartet, this time a "monothematic" one. The "theme" is barely a scrap of a tune that, in conjunction with all the so-called themes of the quartet, reiterates the Viennese emphasis on the motif rather than melody. The driving rhythms of both the first movement and the scherzo here boil into a true dash of perpetual motion that humorously stalls and disassembles with a playfulness so characteristic of Haydn's finales and so influential on Beethoven. The finale features long stretches of canonic writing in yet another texture: the violins against the viola and cello, the reinforced parts strengthening the canonic play with a unified might. As James Keller has observed, the first and last movements even hint at Mendelssohn with his nervous splendor. In sum, this "late" work of Haydn's shows absolutely no diminution of craft, creativity or energy. Apparently as a conscious choice, Haydn quit on a high note with this exemplar of a genre he largely invented and surely perfected.

—Adapted from a note by Kai Christiansen

DVOŘÁK

Antonín Dvořák's life was in many ways strikingly different from those of his contemporaries who influenced him, such as Wagner, Smetana, and especially Brahms, none of whom came from "peasant" families, as Dvořák did. Antonín's father was a butcher who tried hard to pass the business on to his son, even while ensuring his training as a "fiddler" and singer.

Dvořák's earliest efforts were rejected by almost everyone; he made his living early on as a violist, organist, and music teacher. Lacking external confirmation of his own abilities, Dvořák nonetheless composed morning, noon, and night. He was always extremely critical of his work and, like Brahms—who later became not only a mentor but also a close friend—he tore up many of his earliest works. Those he preserved were all intensely revised as he matured.

Only in his early thirties did signs of success begin to emerge. In his forties he experienced an astonishing rise to international acclaim. At the age of fifty, in 1891, his European fame led to an invitation from the National Conservatory of Music in New York City to become its Director and conduct six concerts of his work, while also teaching composition. Though reluctant to leave his beloved homeland, he came for two visits between 1892 and 1895.

To his surprise, he fell in love with much of American popular music. Everyone agrees that his encounter was immensely influential on his later work, especially his Symphony No. 9, "From the New World," and the "American" Quartet. Despite his love for American folk music, especially African American and Native American, Dvořák also longed for Czech culture. Unable to get home, he managed to arrange a "vacation" with his family in a tiny Midwestern village of Czech settlers: Spillville, Iowa. Dvořák found it a curious place. He wrote:



VILAR PERFORMING
ARTS CENTER
BEAVER CREEK

"It is very strange here. Few people and a great deal of empty space. A farmer's nearest neighbor is often 4 miles off, especially in the prairies (I call them the Sahara) . . . there are only endless acres of field and meadow and that is all you see. You don't meet a soul (here they only ride on horseback) and you are glad to see in the woods and meadows the huge herds of cattle which, summer and winter, are out at pasture in the broad fields. Men go to the woods and meadows where the cows graze to milk them. And so it is very "wild" here and sometimes very sad, sad to despair."

The Opus 106 Quartet embodies Dvořák's intense, lifetime love of chamber music, his mature mastery of classical form intricacies, and his revolutionary commitment to folk melody. It celebrates the joy of life while also exhibiting the profound grief that the loss of his children and many of his friends had produced.

Some have interpreted the quartet, not written until his return home, as expressing Dvořák's joy over leaving America, "a fervent thanksgiving for homecoming" in the words of one critic. That is certainly possible, since the American influences are much harder to detect. Some who consider it his greatest quartet even claim that in it he ruled out American influences entirely. But anyone who listens closely will hear that American melodies and rhythms were still in his soul.

The Quartet opens with a series of contrasting motives—rising leaps, trills, and descending arpeggios—said by some to echo birdsongs he had heard in Spillville. These are then developed with amazing energy. Only after the treatment of the opening figures subsides does he introduce the central melody, first in fragments, then fully exuberant, and finally dissolving as dissonant harmonies (marked *feroce*) take over. Improvisatory gestures with sudden changes of pace lead into a lyrical second theme. The development section draws the opening motives and first theme into a Beethoven-like drama; there is even a moment of jagged fury in the recapitulation that recalls Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*. Dvořák's lyricism, however, returns again and again, holding its own against the impassioned outbursts.

Dvořák biographer Otakar Sourek described the second movement as "one of the loveliest and most profound slow movements in Dvořák's creation." It is a set of variations on a pair of themes, but each variation grows and develops, reaching beyond the bounds of its theme. The first theme, in E-flat minor, is full of pathos, while the second, in E-flat major, is tender and peaceful. In the middle of the movement, the first theme is developed with greater and greater ferocity until a grand statement of the second theme breaks through. At this moment the quartet truly sounds like an orchestra, with each instrument playing full-voiced chords. Rarely has a composer produced a theme-and-variations movement as profoundly moving and interesting as this one.

The third movement is a scherzo with a main theme that sounds rather rough, especially after the slow movement's tender ending. Dvořák pushes against the boundaries of decorum as dissonances pile up over static harmonies and repeating rhythms. There are two trio sections. The first trio's pastoral mode is pure Dvořák, with a pentatonic melody that is serene, sweet, and touched with nostalgia. Juxtapositions of duple and triple rhythms create shimmering textures. In the second trio, Dvořák demonstrates his mastery of the classical idiom; it would sound perfectly at home in many of Beethoven's quartets.

The Finale is a rondo with a slow, hymn-like introduction and a movingly syncopated main subject, interrupted by frequent and aggressive assertions

of affirmation. A return of the hymn-like introduction mid-movement leads to tender recollections of the first movement. These recollections are again and again placed in dialogue with darker material and with the chanted affirmations. Each idea attempts to seize control of the music, but all give way to the main subject, and the quartet ends with triumphant exuberance.

—Adapted from a note by Wayne Booth and Yonatan Malin (from a recording on the Cedille label)

The Maxwell Quartet appears by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists, www.chambermuse.com

COMING UP NEXT in the Therese M. Grojean Classical Series:
Tuesday, January 25, 2022 | Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

21
2022

FAMILY · CONCERTS · COMEDY · BROADWAY · CLASSICAL · DANCE

INSPIRED
Together
2021-22 WINTER SERIES

VILAR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
BEAVER CREEK

Intensely committed performances.
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER | JAN 25 7PM