

PROGRAM: AEOLUS QUARTET

SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 2014 / 2:30 PM / BING CONCERT HALL



ARTISTS

Nicholas Tavani, *Violin*
Rachel Shapiro, *Violin*
Gregory Luce, *Viola*
Alan Richardson, *Cello*

PROGRAM

There will be an opening act, curated by Noemi Berkowitz, featuring the Chocolate Heads Movement Band, a multidisciplinary student performing arts group at Stanford University directed by Aleta Hayes of the Stanford Dance Faculty.

Henry Purcell: Selections from Fantasias in Four Parts (1680)

Christopher Theofanidis: *Ariel Ascending* (1995)

I. begins with a breath; gliding effortlessly
II. fleeting, delicate
III. exuberant, brilliant

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet in F Major, op. 59, no. 1 (1808)

Allegro
Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
Adagio molto e mesto
Thème Russe: Allegro

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms, and unwrap all lozenges prior to the performance. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.

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SELECTED PROGRAM NOTES

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS
(B. 1967)

ARIEL ASCENDING (1995)

I started *Ariel Ascending* after reading the poem “Ariel” by Sylvia Plath, which conjured in me a feeling of both the beautiful and the nightmarish. I was struck by the sense of motion Plath creates—one can almost feel the wind as the poem progresses. The first movement of my quartet tries to pick up on this by having each of the four players contribute to a single, ephemeral line that ebbs and flows gesturally. It is the longest of the three movements at seven and a half minutes and is the most narrative in its structure. Thin melodic strands emerge from delicate surfaces.

The second movement is a kind of transition out of the spirit world of the first movement. It is a true miniature, at two and a half minutes, and it starts and stops as it goes, trying to establish its own identity. Eventually a melody emerges, but it is subsumed back into the more brittle environment around it.

The third movement moves into the realm of the earth and has a very fast, folk-like quality to it. The melodic material is harmonized in a rather strident fashion, often in intervals of sevenths and ninths. The rhythmic base rides over a very quick eighth-note pulse that constantly shifts between the feeling of two and three, creating a locally unstable flow.

Ariel Ascending was written for my very good friends from Munich, the Henschel Quartet, which includes three siblings. This is one of my most difficult pieces, and I would not have been able to write such a work had it not been for that group’s incredible dedication to whatever I could dream up. I am so delighted that the Aeolus Quartet has taken up the work now.

—Notes by Christopher Theofanidis

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)

STRING QUARTET IN F MAJOR,
OP. 59, NO. 1 (1808)

Written six years after the publication of his Op. 18 set, the three quartets of Op. 59 represent a significant and hard-won accomplishment for Ludwig van Beethoven. Commissioned by the Russian ambassador to the imperial court at Vienna, Count Andreas Razumovsky, the Op. 59 set was published at a time when Beethoven’s personal struggles—principal among them his growing deafness—had reached a turning point. The quartets of Op. 59 are already worlds away from the pure classicism of his previous six quartets, and they drew harsh criticism from audiences and performers alike. To complaints by the violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, Beethoven famously replied, “Does he really suppose I think of his puling little fiddle when the spirit speaks to me and I compose something?” The expansiveness of form and musical scope of these first quartets of Beethoven’s so-called middle period are to the chamber repertoire what the *Eroica* is to symphonic music; Beethoven creates a new technical and formal language to convey his renewed conviction that only through his art may he achieve true freedom.

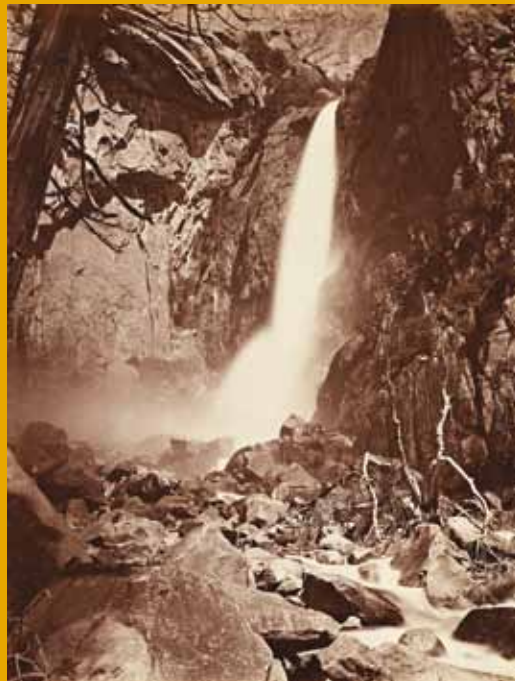
The String Quartet in F Major, op. 59, no. 1, is a significantly longer work than the Op. 18 quartets, and the first movement is proportionately more expansive. Marked *Allegro*, the stately theme rises out of the cello amidst bouncing eighth notes from the inner voices. Passing to the first violin, it develops into several thematic fragments, among them a set of lovely winding duets first between the two violins and then between viola and cello. Introduced by a short, jocose motive in the cello and passing to the violins, the second

theme blooms in a manner purely symphonic. A series of eerie, distant-sounding chords pass around the quartet, further amplifying the effect of spaciousness in this movement, before a brief codetta leads into the development. Unprecedented in its length, this development features forays into distant keys as well as a swiftly intensifying fugue at its center. The recapitulation begins seamlessly as the cello reclaims its theme in contrary motion to a downward scale in the first violin. A dramatic coda leads this movement to its close.

The *Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando* doubtless raised more than a few eyebrows at its first performance, as the opening cello solo is simply the rhythmic repetition of a single B flat. The next few entrances are no less curious, merely humorous snippets of conversation. Many themes and motives populate this ever-dancing movement, and its form is complex although it roughly mimics a large sonata form. Sudden silences and drastic textural shifts keep both listeners and performers on their toes. A *sempre pianissimo* section in all four voices leads to a comical and jarring finish.

On the manuscript for the *Adagio molto e mesto*, Beethoven wrote the words, “A weeping willow or acacia tree upon my brother’s grave.” As both of his brothers were alive at the time of the quartet’s composition, the specific intent of his inscription is unclear, but the sentiment is unmistakably at the heart of this movement. The atmosphere is set by a single tone in the second violin before the first violin enters with a grieving cantilena melody marked “*sotto voce*.” While Beethoven’s scores are littered with crossed-out and rewritten parts, at the very center

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Carleton Watkins (U.S.A., 1829–1916), *The Lower Yosemite Fall, Yosemite, 1855–1866*, from the album *Photographs of the Yosemite Valley*. Albumen print. Lent by Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries.

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of the *Adagio* is a transcendent section that Beethoven wrote out note for note, never once altering the manuscript.

A brief but brilliant violin cadenza leads into the final *Thème Russe: Allegro*. Perhaps a nod to his Russian patron, Beethoven transforms what was originally a slow and sad Russian folksong into the spritely, bouncing final movement of the quartet. Beethoven develops his jaunty Russian theme throughout the movement, only conceding his joke in the last lines of the piece when he slows the tempo to less than half and presents the Russian theme in its original form before once more galloping to a triumphant close.

—Notes by Rachel Kitagawa Shapiro

AEOLUS QUARTET

Praised by the *Strad* magazine for its “high-octane” performance, the Aeolus Quartet is among the finest young string quartets performing today. Violinists Nicholas Tavani and Rachel Shapiro, violist Gregory Luce, and cellist Alan Richardson formed the Aeolus Quartet in 2008 at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Since its inception, the all-American quartet has been awarded prizes at nearly every major competition in the United States and has performed across the globe with showings “worthy of a major-league quartet” (Scott Cantrell, *Dallas Morning News*). Luke Quinton of the *Austin American-Statesman* writes, “The Aeolus Quartet is a powerful and thoughtful group of young musicians who are plotting an ascending course... This vibrant group shows great promise.” The group is currently the Graduate Resident String Quartet at the Juilliard School.

The Aeolus Quartet is the grand-prize winner of the 2011 Plowman Chamber Music Competition and

2011 Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition. It was awarded first prize at the 2009 Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition, a silver medal at the 2011 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and a bronze medal at the 2010 International Chamber Music Ensemble Competition in New England. The 16th annual Austin Critics’ Table named the Aeolus Quartet the best ensemble of 2010–11. The Aeolus Quartet has released two critically acclaimed albums of classical and contemporary works through the Longhorn Music/Naxos Records label, which are available on iTunes, on Amazon, and through major retailers worldwide.

The quartet has performed across North America, Europe, and Asia in venues such as Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Hall, Merkin Concert Hall, the Library of Congress, Renwick Gallery, St. Martin-in-the-Fields, and the Shanghai Oriental Art Center.

Dedicated to bringing music into the community, the Aeolus Quartet has been widely recognized for its highly innovative and engaging outreach programs. The Fischhoff National Chamber Music Association awarded the Aeolus the 2013 Educator Award in acknowledgment of the positive impact its educational efforts have had in diverse communities. Additionally, the group was awarded the 2012 John Lad Prize, which culminated in large-scale community-engagement work, performances in the Stanford area, and a master-class residency at Stanford University. The members of the Aeolus Quartet have also served as teaching faculty at Stanford University’s Education Program for Gifted Youth, the Austin Chamber Music Workshop, and Da Camera of Houston’s Music Encounters program. Working in

collaboration with the University of Texas through the Rural Chamber Music Outreach Initiative, the quartet has presented educational programs and performances in communities throughout the state of Texas.

The Aeolus Quartet has studied extensively with the Miró, Guarneri, and Juilliard Quartets. Other mentors include artists such as William Preucil, Peter Salaff, Donald Weilerstein, Itzhak Perlman, Gerhard Schulz, and Mark Steinberg. Members of the quartet hold degrees from the Peabody Conservatory, the Cleveland Institute of Music, and the University of Texas at Austin, where the group served as the first Young Professional String Quartet in Residence.

The quartet’s 2013–14 season includes their debut performance at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, multiple performances on the Smithsonian Institution’s rare instrument collection, an educational tour of the Midwest in conjunction with the Fischhoff Competition, collaborations with Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree, concert touring throughout the United States, and extended residencies in Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. The quartet is named for the Greek god Aeolus, who governed the four winds. This idea of a single spirit uniting four individual forces serves as an inspiration to the members of the Aeolus Quartet as they pursue their art. ✨