Sundays with the St. Lawrence

St. Lawrence String Quartet

WHEN: SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2017 2:30 PM

VENUE: BING CONCERT HALL

Program

Joseph Haydn: The Six Op. 20 String Quartets

Number 6, in A Major
Number 3, in G minor

— Intermission —

Number 4, in D Major
Number 5, in F minor

— Intermission —

Number 1, in E-flat Major
Number 2, in C Major

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Geoff Nuttall, violin
Owen Dalby, violin
Lesley Robertson, viola
Christopher Costanza, cello

Sundays with the St. Lawrence is presented in partnership with Music at Stanford.

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE. Please be considerate of others and turn off all phones, pagers, and watch alarms. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.
**Introduction**

**Why Haydn?**

"He could amuse, shock, arouse laughter and deep emotion as no other."

—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart speaking about Franz Joseph Haydn

Mozart and Beethoven are generally considered the two great musical geniuses of the classical era, with Haydn as an afterthought. One could argue however that Joseph Haydn was at least as talented, imaginative and groundbreaking as the two giants. When it comes to the string quartet there is little debate. Haydn composed 68 quartets. Over 50 are masterpieces, and the influence they had on Mozart, Beethoven and composers of string quartets that followed cannot be overstated.

**Why Opus 20?**

"Every page of the six quartets of Op. 20 is of historic and aesthetic importance... there is perhaps no single or sextuple opus in the history of instrumental music which has achieved so much or achieved it so quietly..."

—Sir Donald Francis Tovey

These particular quartets by Haydn are the first great masterpieces—by any composer—for the medium of two violins, viola, and cello. In addition to solidifying the formal four-movement structure of the string quartet, for the first time in a small ensemble context one can hear the democratic participation of four truly equal voices. Haydn draws on an immense range of emotional expression in Op. 20, with brilliant compositional flourishes to match. He synthesizes the very pinnacle of baroque-era counterpoint with his distinctive wit, whimsy, pathos, and the groundbreaking use of silence as “topic.” It is these six quartets specifically that threw down the gauntlet and which inspired every major later composer to compose their most profound utterances for the medium of string quartet.

**Why all six?**

"If I hadn’t of known, I would have thought that all six quartets were written by different composers!"

—A music student after a St. Lawrence String Quartet concert of the complete Opus 20

The six opus 20 quartets of Haydn are immensely—and intensely—varied. Each of the six quartets has its own life, spirit, mood, energy, and personality, and no two take the same path as they express emotion. Even within a single Opus 20 quartet we hear unparalleled imaginative and creative passion; just to pick one example, No. 2 in C Major begins with a beautifully flowing and singing first movement, proceeds to a wildly dramatic and operatic slow movement, flows directly into a folk-inspired minuet, and closes with a lively four-part fugue with four subjects. Multiply that level of creativity by six and we have a unique cycle of unprecedented inventiveness; showcasing the complete collection of six highlights the full range of Haydn’s brilliant and unique compositional gifts.
Joseph Haydn (1732–1809):
The Six Op. 20 String Quartets (1772)

Number 6, in A Major
   Allegro di molto e scherzando
   Adagio cantabile
   Minuetto. Allegretto
   Fuga a 3 soggetti. Allegro

An ebullient, effortless, quirky scherzando opening movement gives way to a floating, dreamy aria that is pure song. The third movement is a rhythmically traditional minuet (eminently danceable) with a contrasting middle section called a trio. In acknowledgement of the original meaning of that formal term, Haydn scores the trio for just three parts (omitting the second violin). Each of the three parts, as indicated by the composer, should be played on one string. The master also instructs that all three of the fugal finales in Opus 20 be played sempre sotto voce (“in a hushed voice throughout”), in this case a buoyant and bubbly movement with three subjects.

Number 3, in G minor
   Allegro con spint
   Minueto. Allegretto
   Poco adagio
   Finale. Allegro molto

The opening movement is stormy and tumultuous, with dramatic stops and starts as well as sudden, massive dynamic shifts. The darkness continues in the brooding minuet, finally finding release in the trio that is almost a sigh of relief and in a second violin solo that is simply beautiful. A regal, serene Adagio with a magnificent extended cello solo in the middle section is followed by a Rondo Finale. This return to G minor and the breathless flamboyance and excitement of the first movement is instigated by the second violin.

— Intermission —

Number 4, in D Major
   Allegro di molto
   Un poco adagio affettuoso
   Allegretto alla zingarese
   Presto scherzando

The calm pastoral theme that opens this musical story gives no hint of the virtuosic, brilliant and quicksilver music that follows without warning. This movement is a tale of two distinct characters—one serene, one excited—that interact and interrupt each other throughout. The slow movement is perhaps Haydn’s most deeply felt and emotional theme and variations. It sustains an almost painful affettuoso, culminating in an extended final variation and coda that explodes in anguish, and then ends with quivering pain. A dance follows: a jubilant minuet in the Hungarian Gypsy style. Here Haydn is playing on the knowledge and expectation of the minuet rhythm (see No. 6). One can almost hear him chuckling as players and the dancing audience stumble. In contrast, the trio could not be a more perfectly symmetrical, danceable and proper cello solo. The emotional release from the adagio continues with an effervescent Rondo finale. Scherzando throughout—musical laughter with a hint of bluegrass.

— Intermission —

Number 5, in F minor
   Allegro moderato
   Minueto
   Adagio
   Finale: Fuga a due soggetti

F minor was Haydn’s key of choice to express his darkest and most potent thoughts. This is one of his most powerful movements in any genre. There is a moment of reprieve from the brooding opening music with a second theme in smiling major, but when this music returns later it’s back in F minor with devastating effect. The two themes are jammed together in the coda, distilling the essence of the movement with a dramatic conclusion. The darkness continues with a frustrated and angry minuet. The trio arrives as a ray of sunlight in F major. The adagio is a simple cavatina, the kind that a minstrel might strum and sing under the balcony of his beloved. The fugue returns to F minor and demonstrates that Haydn knew and loved Handel’s oratorio Messiah. The first of the two subjects is stolen from the chorus, “And with his stripes we are healed.”

— Intermission —

Number 1, in E-flat Major
   Allegro moderato
   Minueto. Allegretto
   Affettuoso e sostenuto
   Finale. Presto

The first movement is friendly, warm-hearted and generous with a brief moment of melodrama in the middle; four friends in jovial discussion of topics they are passionate about. The minuet continues confident and upbeat, with the trio more searching and

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uncertain. The surprising and slightly confused return of the minuet music at the wrong time and place is a stroke of genius. The affettuosso e sostenuto third movement is a sublime yet simple testament to that genius. There is very little music that is at once so deeply felt and so effortless. The rondo finale is an exuberant proclamation of joy that begins with a whoop! and ends with a wink.

Number 2, in C Major

Moderato
Adagio. Capriccio
Minuetto. Allegretto
Fuga a 4 soggetti

This quartet begins with a cello solo, while the viola plays the bass line—musical democracy in action! The second violin leads a dramatic transformation in the second half of the movement to stormy minor material before a return to the sunny opening music. The adagio is one of the most groundbreaking and influential movements in the history of the string quartet. It invokes a Greek chorus, opera, recitative, aria, and full symphony orchestra, all in one capricious musical journey. The movement flows without pause to the sound of bagpipes in the folk-inspired minuet. The trio returns to the solo cello and the dark, brooding qualities of the slow movement. Haydn proudly announces a fugue with four subjects to end this quartet. It’s serious counterpoint, albeit with a very unserious jig-like spirit. Haydn wrote at the end of his autograph score, counterpointing a deep religious faith with characteristic wit, “Laus omnip. Deo / Sic fugit amicus amicum.” (Praise to Almighty God / Thus one friend escapes another).

St. Lawrence String Quartet

“Modern...dramatic...superb...wickedly attentive...with a hint of rock ‘n roll energy...” are just a few ways critics describe the musical phenomenon that is the St Lawrence String Quartet. The SLSQ is renowned for the intensity of its performances, its breadth of repertoire, and its commitment to concert experiences that are at once intellectually exciting and emotionally alive. Highlights in 2016–17 include performances of John Adams’s Absolute Jest for string quartet and orchestra with Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic and with Marin Alsop and the Baltimore Symphony, as well as the European premieres of Adams’s Second Quartet.

Fiercely committed to collaboration with living composers, the SLSQ’s fruitful partnership with Adams, Jonathan Berger, Osvaldo Golijov, and many others has yielded some of the finest additions to the quartet literature in recent years. The Quartet is also especially dedicated to the music of Haydn, and are recording his groundbreaking set of six Op. 20 quartets in high-definition video for a free, universal release online in 2017. According to The New Yorker, “...no other North American quartet plays the music of Haydn with more intelligence, expressivity, and force...”

Established in Toronto in 1989, the SLSQ quickly earned acclaim at top international chamber music competitions and was soon playing hundreds of concerts per year worldwide. They established an ongoing residency at Spoleto Festival USA, made prize-winning recordings for EMI of music by Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Golijov, earning two Grammy nominations and a host of other prizes before being appointed ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University in 1999.

At Stanford, the SLSQ is at the forefront of intellectual life on campus. The SLSQ directs the music department’s chamber music program, and frequently collaborates with other departments including the Schools of Law, Medicine, Business and Education. The Quartet performs regularly at Stanford Live, hosts an annual chamber music seminar, and runs the Emerging String Quartet Program through which they mentor the next generation of young quartets. In the words of Alex Ross of The New Yorker: “The St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection.”

—Notes compiled by the St. Lawrence String Quartet