



PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE JANUARY 18 / 7:00 PM BING CONCERT HALL

ARTISTS

St. Lawrence String Quartet
Geoff Nuttall, *violin*
Mark Fewer, *violin*
Lesley Robertson, *viola*
Christopher Costanza, *cello*

Second Quartet was commissioned by Stanford Live, Carnegie Hall, The Juilliard School, the Library of Congress' Dina Koston and Roger Shapiro Fund for New Music, and Wigmore Hall with the support of André Hoffmann, president of the Foundation Hoffmann, a Swiss grant-making foundation.

PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn: String Quartet in F Minor, op. 20, no. 5, Hob. III:35 (1772)
Allegro moderato
Menuetto
Adagio
Finale: Fuga a due soggetti

John Adams: Second Quartet (2014, World premiere)
Allegro molto
Andantino – Energico

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet in C-sharp Minor, op. 131 (1825–1826)
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

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, and unwrap all lozenges prior to the performance. Photography and recording of any kind are not permitted. Thank you.

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)
STRING QUARTET IN F MINOR,
OP. 20, NO. 5, HOB. III:35 (1772)

By 1772, Franz Joseph Haydn, now 40, had already written more than 50 symphonies and spent a decade in the service of the Esterházy family. He had lived through the Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) period in the German arts, then reaching its peak. It left its mark in the increasingly subjective nature of his music. Each of the op. 20 quartets has a distinctive character. Each instrument speaks with an independent voice as an equal contributor to a seamless four-part texture. One of two quartets in the minor key, the F-minor quartet opens with a sustained, emotionally intense theme over a pulsing accompaniment. The mood is serious and purposeful; the tension is only slightly eased with the second theme. The *Menuetto*, too, is unusually severe, allowing just a glimpse of a folkdance in its central trio section. The slow third movement, now in a brighter major key yet still maintaining a feeling of poignancy, takes its underlying rhythmic pulse from the *siciliano* dance. Over it, the first violin weaves improvisation-like passages of great beauty.

Then there's a surprise. This is one of three op. 20 quartets to have a fugal finale. While drawing inspiration from a form associated with the past (Bach was in midcareer when Haydn was born), Haydn's F-minor fugue is sprightly and forward-looking in spirit. It is based on two short, independent subjects (*due soggetti*), the first of which presents a melodic pattern familiar to the Baroque. Melodically, it bears a close resemblance to a fugue in Handel's *Messiah* ("And with His Stripes") and to the A-minor fugue in the second book of Bach's 48. The fugue proceeds in a hushed manner, marked "Sotto voce." Its tension and contrapuntal complexity increase steadily throughout the movement until the music bursts out in a fortissimo canon in the crowning moment of an exceptional quartet.

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JOHN ADAMS (1947)
SECOND QUARTET (2014)

John Adams composed both of his string quartets with the St. Lawrence String Quartet in mind. But this latest work is actually the third he has composed for them. The original String Quartet (now likely to be known as the First Quartet) was written in 2008 and premiered in January 2009 at The Juilliard School, the work's principal commissioner. The St. Lawrence String Quartet went on to perform that work many times throughout the world and made the first recording of it for Nonesuch Records.

Adams followed several years later with a grander idea: *Absolute Jest*, a 25-minute work for solo quartet and orchestra based on fragments from Beethoven, primarily from the opp. 131 and 135 string quartets. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony to celebrate its centennial season, *Absolute Jest* was given its first performance in March of that year under that orchestra's music director, Michael Tilson Thomas, with the St. Lawrence String Quartet performing the solo parts. The orchestra has twice toured with *Absolute Jest* and has also recorded it for a forthcoming CD release. Adams and the St. Lawrence have performed the work together in London and Toronto and with the New World Symphony in Florida.

The Second Quartet is thus the third piece to result from this exceptionally fruitful relationship between a composer and his favorite chamber group. Speaking of their working relationship, Adams says, "String quartet writing is one of the most difficult challenges a composer can take on. Unless one is an accomplished string player and writes in that medium all the time—and I don't know many these days who do—the demands of handling this extremely volatile and transparent instrumental medium can easily be humbling, if not downright humiliating. What I appreciate about my friends in the St. Lawrence is their willingness to let me literally 'improvise' on them as if they were a

piano or a drum and I a crazy man beating away with only the roughest outlines of what I want. They will go the distance with me, allow me to try and fail, and they will indulge my seizures of doubt, frustration, and indecision, all the while providing intuitions and frequently brilliant suggestions of their own. It is no surprise then for me to reveal that both the First Quartet and *Absolute Jest* went through radical revision stages both before and after each piece's premiere. Quartet writing for me seems to be a matter of very long-term 'work in progress.'"

Although not a string player himself, Adams admits to a lifelong absorption in the literature, having discovered the Beethoven, Mozart, and Bartók quartets as a teenager. While still a teenager, he often played clarinet in the great quintets by Mozart and Brahms, and during that formative time, he attended what he called "life changing" performances by both the Juilliard and the Budapest String Quartets.

The new quartet uses the same tropes as *Absolute Jest* in that it too is based on tiny fragments—"fractals," in the composer's words—from Beethoven. But the economy here is much stricter. The first movement, for example, is entirely based on two short phrases from the scherzo to the late Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, opus 110. The transformations of harmony, cadential patterns, and rhythmic profile that occur in this movement go way beyond the types of manipulations favored in *Absolute Jest*.

Like the First Quartet, this new work is organized in two parts. The first movement has scherzo impetus and moves at the fastest pace possible for the performers to play it. The familiar Beethoven cadences and half cadences reappear throughout the movement like a homing mechanism, and each apparition is followed by a departure to an increasingly remote key and textural region.

The second part begins "*Andantino*," with a gentle melody that is drawn from the opening movement of the same opus 110 piano sonata.

Here the original Beethoven harmonic and melodic ideas go off in unexpected directions, almost as if they were suggestions for a kind of compositional free association.

The *Andantino* grows in range and complexity until it finally leads into the *Energico* final part of the piece, a treatment of one of the shortest of the *Diabelli Variations*. This particular variation of Beethoven's features a sequence of neighbor-key appoggiaturas, each a half step away from its main chord. Adams amplifies this chromatic relationship without intentionally distorting it. Like its original Beethoven model, the movement is characterized by emphatic gestures, frequent uses of *sforzando*, and a busy but convivial mood of hyperactivity among the four instruments.

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770–1827)
STRING QUARTET IN C-SHARP
MINOR, OP. 131 (1825–1826)**

This, the greatest of Ludwig van Beethoven's quartets, was the music that the gravely ill Franz Schubert asked to be played five days before his death. More than any other work, it epitomizes the profundity, inwardness, idiosyncrasy, and timelessness of Beethoven's late compositions. Throughout his later works, Beethoven tended less and less to cast his music in the traditional three or four movements. Op. 131 contains seven throughout its 40-minute expanse. Unusually for Beethoven, it begins with a slow movement, a calm yet gently forceful fugue that Wagner said "floats over the sorrows of the world." It gradually builds to its full intensity and prepares the listener for the scale and depth of what is to follow. The movement appears to explore every aspect of a four-note theme: G#, B#, C#, A. But then these four notes go on to provide the thematic underpinning of the entire quartet.

A chromatic shift upward leads to the second movement. It forms a bright and optimistic

balance to the first movement, tempered by frequent hesitations. Two sharp chords herald a brief, recitative-like third movement, which is just 11 bars long. The slow movement follows without pause. This is the emotional center of gravity of the entire quartet. It begins with another gentle theme marked "*Dolce*" ("Sweetly") that Wagner called the "incarnation of innocence." The scale of the movement is huge: a theme with six variations and a coda. Contrast again follows with the *Presto*, a brilliant scherzo. With its calm, ethereal mood, the brief *Adagio* enters another world. It serves as an introduction to the extended movement that follows. This final *Allegro* is the only movement written in sonata form. The profusion of themes, however, and the power of their utterance strain at the boundaries of the edifice. Wagner thought that the movement expresses "the fury of the world's dance—fierce pleasure, agony, ecstasy of love, joy, anger, passion and suffering, lightning flashes and thunder rolls."
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ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

Currently celebrating its 25th-anniversary season, the St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has developed an undisputed reputation as a truly world-class chamber ensemble. The quartet performs over 120 concerts annually worldwide and calls Stanford University home, where the group is ensemble-in-residence. The SLSQ continues to build its reputation for imaginative and spontaneous music-making through an energetic commitment to the great established quartet literature as well

as the championing of new works by such composers as John Adams, Osvaldo Golijov, Ezequiel Viñao, and Jonathan Berger.

The quartet maintains a busy touring schedule. Its 2014–15 season includes a three-concert series at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, during which the quartet will play Stradivari instruments from the library's prized collection. In January 2015, the SLSQ will premiere at Stanford University a string quartet by John Adams—his third work composed for the group. The quartet will also perform and give master classes around North America, with visits to Houston, Toronto, Philadelphia, Oberlin, Montreal, and many other cities. The SLSQ is proud to continue its long association with the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, during the summer season.

Since 1998, the SLSQ has held the position of ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University. This residency includes working with music students as well as collaborating extensively with other faculty and departments to use music to explore a myriad of topics. Collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, the School of Education, the Law School, and others. In addition to their appointments at Stanford, the members of the SLSQ are visiting artists at the University of Toronto.

The foursome's passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in its annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford. Lesley Robertson and Geoff Nuttall are founding members of the group and hail from Edmonton, Alberta, and London, Ontario, respectively. Christopher Costanza is from Utica, New York, and joined the group in 2003. Mark Fewer, a native of Newfoundland, began his first season with the quartet in 2014, succeeding violinist Scott St. John. All four members of the quartet live and teach at Stanford. ❄️