PROGRAM: SUNDAYS WITH THE ST. LAWRENCE

SUNDAY, APRIL 27, 2014 / 2:30 PM / BING CONCERT HALL

ARTISTS
St. Lawrence String Quartet
Geoff Nuttall, Violin
Mark Fewer, Violin
Lesley Robertson, Viola
Christopher Costanza, Cello
Jessica Rivera, Soprano

PROGRAM
Joseph Haydn: Quartet in E-flat Major, op. 20, no. 1, Hob. III:31 (1772)
   Allegro moderato
   Minuet: Un poco allegretto
   Affetuoso e sostenuto
   Finale: Presto

George Tsontakis: String Quartet No. 7 for String Quartet and Soprano (2014)
   I. Prelude
   II. The Swallows
   III. Coffin of Snow (Rossetti)
   IV. Whitman

*INTERMISSION*

Giuseppe Verdi: String Quartet in E Minor, op. 68 (1873)
   Allegro
   Andantino
   Prestissimo
   Scherzo fuga: Allegro assai mosso

Sundays with the St. Lawrence is presented in partnership with Music at Stanford and generously supported by Paul and iris Brest.

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.
JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)
QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 20, NO. 1, HOB. III:31 (1772)

Mozart greatly admired Joseph Haydn’s collection of six string quartets, Op. 20. Beethoven copied them by hand to better understand their inner workings. In 1885, Brahms became the proud owner of Haydn’s original manuscript copy of the quartets, which he kept until the end of his life. Haydn broke new ground with his Op. 20, and publishers could not get copies to print fast enough. An unauthorized printing by a Berlin publisher gave the collection its opus number and nickname, Sun Quartets, from the rising sun on the cover of the publication. In another edition, issued toward the end of Haydn’s life, his official Viennese publisher, Artaria, acknowledged that it was with these quartets that “Haydn so decisively found his fame.” This is music designed to move and stir the emotions, rather than merely please and entertain.

Each quartet has a distinctive character. The urbane, unhurried opening movement of this E-flat quartet allows each instrument a role within the whole, whether taking the lead, partnering in a duo texture, bringing a musical line to a three-part discussion, or—mostly in the central development section—contributing to the four-part texture. The musical ideas evolve incrementally from the opening phrases with an economy that increasingly became a hallmark of Haydn’s quartet writing. Though cast in regular four-bar phrases, the minuet keeps harmonic surprises in store, while its central trio section deliberately avoids anything remotely predictable.

The heart and soul of the quartet lies in its slow movement, Affettuoso e sostenuto (“Tender and sustained”). Its solemn, four-part chorale-like texture is inward looking and elusive. Certainly, Mozart remained fascinated by the tranquil strength of purpose that Haydn draws out of the four instruments and paid tribute to its composer in the slow movement of his own E-flat quartet, K. 428, a work over which he labored long and hard and that he dedicated to Haydn. In the finale, Haydn uncorks the bottle and releases sparkling contents that are succinctly and playfully developed in three-bar phrases from the movement’s opening ideas.

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GEORGE TSONTAKIS (B. 1951)
STRING QUARTET NO. 7 FOR STRING QUARTET AND SOPRANO (2014)

I am finding it not easy, if uneasy, to write words about a piece of music that is in sympathy with and inspired by something visual. It is, as they say, a bit “beyond my pay grade,” but here are some thoughts I have been conjuring up, perhaps more or less abstract, in note form. They may be helpful to some.

I set out to express sentiments parallel to those I sensed in Bill Viola’s Going Forth by Day, not so much as a reaction to his beautiful and lyrical work but to touch upon a common tangent and move away in a mirrored direction. Stasis versus motion, transformation, transcendence, and a strata of warm mysticism versus detachment are the principles that I take away, “hear,” and translate into music. Searching for and finding, and then letting go, in sequence but at the same time, all at once. Perhaps there is a residue of my closeness to T. S. Eliot’s Four Quartets and my reactive work Four Symphonic Quartets that imbues this work as well. One does not lose such poignant residues but brings them forth as a kind of creative “fertilizer” to inform the next work—or, actually, one may not be able to help it from happening. The piling up and colliding of abstractions into complexities of maturity is part of a human “gift package.”

In Going Forth by Day, there is storytelling, but the underlying abstractions that jettison each “story” are allowed to separate and telescope outward into mystical realms. Truths are “let go,” contradictions reconciled, complexities are explained, and simply and elegantly so.

When Amy Anderson kindly sent me the carol of the bird of death from Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” as a possible text to set, the focus on the course I would take became clear. “Lilacs,” like Four Quartets had come very much alive for me through the setting of the Whitman work by my teacher Roger Sessions. The seed was replanted; all seemed to fall into place. The parallel universe I would seek to create was now defined—of birds, of death’s gentle power and dominance, and of transcendence and rebirth.

The choice of Herman Melville’s haunting Civil War poem “Shiloh: A Requiem” came on the heels of my decision to use “Lilacs” and has swallows creating a huge and seemingly depleted space where soldiers died. The image reminded me immediately of Viola’s walking humanity, pacing horizontally, through a spacious forest of trees and light, brown and green nature. They glide forward, like Melville’s swallows, but with no sense of returning, like Melville’s soldiers. The forest walkers only “progress,” to somewhere, but seemingly, anywhere.

Nothing to me has explained the loneliness of what death might at first deliver more than Christina Rossetti’s four short lines in “Dead in the Cold”: “Lilacs,” like Four Quartets and my reactive work Four Symphonic Quartets that imbues this work as well. One does not lose such poignant residues but brings them forth as a kind of creative “fertilizer” to inform the next work—or, actually, one may not be able to help it from happening. The piling up and colliding of abstractions into complexities of maturity is part of a human “gift package.”

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The movement that contains the Rossetti as its inner seed begins and ends in a “deluge,” and here conscious pictures of Viola’s panel by the same name are at work.

Whitman’s “gray-brown bird” carols to us the wonders and lyrical beauty of death as if there is no other way to reconcile with it. To me, this is not so unlike Viola’s “resurrection” of his man from a river as rescue “witnesses” look on or his depiction of a parent’s final boat ride, a peaceful voyage on a calm lake or river. The soul just floats away, as in Whitman’s words, “I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.”

As it happens, Melville, Rossetti, and Whitman all lived in essentially the same time period and were mature during the course of the Civil War, although Rossetti was English born.

—© 2014, George Tsontakis

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813–1901)
STRING QUARTET IN E MINOR, OP. 68 (1873)

With more than two dozen operas in his catalog, Giuseppe Verdi waited until he was 59 to write his only chamber music composition and a further three years before publishing it. He wrote the quartet in Naples during a production delay while supervising rehearsals of his operas Aida and Don Carlos. The premiere of the musically rewarding, technically demanding quartet was a modest enough occasion, given for invited friends in Verdi’s hotel. Like Wagner’s only chamber work, the Siegfried Idyll, Verdi’s quartet was initially not for public consumption. Although a music critic from the Milan Gazette musicale felt that Verdi had “given the world a new masterpiece,” Verdi was nonplussed. “I don’t know whether it is good or bad,” he wrote, “only that it is a quartet.”

This was 1873. In the same summer, the 40-year-old Brahms was also arranging private performances of his two earliest quartets. Brahms felt the weight of the Austro-German tradition on his shoulders, and it shows in his writing. In Italy, the land of opera, Verdi was free from a similar legacy of quartet and symphonic writing. With a career built on a tradition of writing for the human voice, he was, at heart, a lyrical composer with a genius for singing lines and dialogue between parts. Melodies abound in his quartet. The opening movement is based on five melodic ideas, the first drawn from some of Amneris’s music in Aida. A later melody, high in the first violin, has a Mendelssohn-like airiness. All the ideas and motifs are developed with a genuine seriousness of purpose. Verdi knew the string quartet repertoire thoroughly and kept copies of the quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven by his bedside. An elegant, beautifully structured slow movement follows, again full of melodic writing. There’s more from the opera house in the third movement, beginning with a sparkling opening chorus that is complemented by a heroic tenor serenade sung by the cello. The busy, fugal finale both honors tradition in its use of a range of academic techniques and offers a preview of the masterly fugue that closes Verdi’s operatic masterpiece Falstaff, which was to follow two decades later.

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ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET

The St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has established itself among the world-class chamber ensembles of its generation. Its mission: bring every piece of music to the audience in vivid color, with pronounced communication and teamwork and great respect to the composer. Since winning both the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1992, the quartet has delighted audiences with its spontaneous, passionate, and dynamic performances. Alex Ross of the New Yorker magazine writes, “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.”

Whether playing Haydn or premiering a new work, SLSQ has a rare ability to bring audiences to rapt attention. It reveals surprising nuances in familiar repertoire and illuminates the works of some of today’s most celebrated composers, often all in the course of one evening. John Adams has written two critically acclaimed works expressly for the quartet, including String Quartet (2009) and Absolute Jest (2012), which it premiered with the San Francisco Symphony in 2012. In 2011, SLSQ premiered Qohelet, a work by Osvaldo Golijov, also composed for the group.

SLSQ maintains a busy touring schedule. Some 2013–14 season highlights include visits to Vancouver, Princeton, Portland, Toronto, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, Palm Beach, and Washington, D.C. The quartet also will premiere a new work by George Tsontakis in Carmel, California. It will perform Absolute Jest with the Toronto Symphony and on a European tour with the San Francisco Symphony. During the summer season, SLSQ is proud to continue its long association with Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

Since 1998, SLSQ has held the position of ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University. This residency includes working with music students as well as extensive collaborations with other...
faculty and departments using music to explore myriad topics. Recent collaborations have involved the School of Medicine, the School of Education, and the Law School. In addition to their appointment at Stanford, the musicians of SLSQ are visiting artists-in-residence at Arizona State University. 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 and its many forays into the depths of musical meaning with preeminent music educator Robert Kapilow.

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, begins his first season with the quartet in 2014, succeeding violinist Scott St. John. All four members of the quartet live in and teach at Stanford.

**JESSICA RIVERA**

Possessing a voice praised by the *San Francisco Chronicle* for its “effortless precision and tonal luster,” soprano Jessica Rivera is established as one of the most creatively inspired vocal artists before the public today. The intelligence, dimension, and spirituality with which she infuses her performances on the great international concert and opera stages has garnered the Grammy Award winner unique artistic collaborations with many of today’s most celebrated composers, including John Adams, Gabriela Lena Frank, Osvaldo Golijov, Jonathan Leshnoff, and Nico Muhly, and has brought her together in collaboration with such esteemed conductors as Bernard Haitink, Sir Simon Rattle, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Robert Spano, and Michael Tilson Thomas.

Ms. Rivera’s 2013–14 season features performances of Donnacha Dennehy’s *That the Night Come* with Miguel Harth-Bedoya and the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra; Rachmaninoff’s *The Bells* with Matthew Halls and the Houston Symphony; Golijov’s *La pasión según San Marcos* with Spano and the Boston Symphony Orchestra; Mark Grey’s *Fire Angels*, Mahler’s Fourth Symphony, and Vaughan Williams’s *Dona nobis pacem* with Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra; Philip Glass’s *The Civil Wars’ “The Rome Section*” with Grant Gershon and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra; and Mozart’s Requiem with David Robertson conducting the Cleveland Orchestra. The artist reprises her acclaimed portrayal of Micaëla in *Carmen* for the Cincinnati Opera, and in a national recital tour, Ms. Rivera is joined by mezzo-soprano Kelley O’Connor and Spano on the piano for concerts at Carnegie Hall, the University of California at Berkeley, Kennesaw State University, Pepperdine University, and Cincinnati’s Constella Festival. Ms. Rivera continues her artist residency program with San Francisco Performances, where she conducts workshops in classroom and community settings throughout the Bay Area, encouraging young people to open their minds to the beauty and power of music as well as to the poetry and spirit behind the art of song.

The artist made her European operatic debut as Kitty Oppenheimer in Peter Sellars’s acclaimed production of Adams’s *Doctor Atomic* with the Netherlands Opera, a role that also served for her debuts at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Finnish National Opera, and she joined the roster of the Metropolitan Opera for its new production of *Doctor Atomic* under the direction of Alan Gilbert. She gave concert performances of *Doctor Atomic* with Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and her portrayal of Kitty Oppenheimer was captured in Amsterdam and is commercially available on DVD on the BBC/Opus Arte label.

Ms. Rivera made her critically acclaimed Santa Fe Opera debut in the summer of 2005 as Nuria in the world premiere of the revised edition of Golijov’s *Ainadamar*. She reprised the role for the 2007 Grammy Award–winning Deutsche Grammophon recording of the work with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Spano, and she bowed in the Sellars staging at Lincoln Center and Opera Boston as well as in performances at the Barbican Centre, the Adelaide Festival of Arts, the Cincinnati Opera, and the Ojai and Ravinia Festivals. The artist’s first performances of Margarita Xirgu in *Ainadamar*, a role created by Dawn Upshaw, occurred in the summer of 2007 at the Colorado Music Festival under the baton of Michael Christie, and she reprised the part recently for Madrid’s Teatro Real.

Committed to the art of recital, Ms. Rivera has performed in concert halls in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Fe. In past seasons, to support a recital disc on the Urtext label that examines works for soprano, clarinet, and piano, Ms. Rivera toured North America with concerts in Los Angeles, New York (Carnegie Hall), Las Vegas, Oklahoma City, and Chicago (Ravinia Festival). She also has given a recital program at the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival accompanied at the piano by Spano. She was deeply honored to receive a commission from Carnegie Hall for the world premiere of a song cycle by Muhly called *The Adulteress* on the occasion of her Weill Hall recital performance. ✠