ARTISTS
St. Lawrence String Quartet
Geoff Nuttall, violin
Owen Dalby, violin
Lesley Robertson, viola
Christopher Costanza, cello

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

   Judah to Ocean
   Toot Nipple
   Dogjam
   Pavane: She’s So Fine
   Rag the Bone
   Habanera
   Stubble Crotchet
   Hammer & Chisel
   Alligator Escalator
   Ständchen: The Little Serenade

INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven: String Quartet in A Minor, op. 132 (1824–1825)
   Assai sostenuto – Allegro
   Allegro ma non tanto
   Molto adagio – Andante [Sacred Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode]
   Alla marcia, assai vivace – Più allegro
   Allegro appassionato – Presto

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)
STRING QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 20, NO. 1, HOB. III: 31 (1772)

Haydn wrote his six Opus 20 quartets in 1772 at the age of 40. They contained his finest chamber music to date, a fact recognized by both his contemporaries and the composer himself. With Opus 20, Haydn reached true mastery of the form and the texture of the string quartet. This is music designed to move and stir the emotions rather than to merely please and entertain. Each quartet has a distinctive character. The urbane, unhurried opening movement of the 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 has harmonic surprises in store. The heart and soul of the quartet lie in the slow movement, with its solemn four-part chorale-like texture. 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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JOHN ADAMS (B. 1947)
JOHN’S BOOK OF ALLEGED DANCES (1994)

The Alleged Dances were the next pieces written after the Violin Concerto, a complex work that took a full year to compose. The concerto emboldened me to go further with string writing, and some of the techniques and gestures I’d touched on in it appeared again in the new string quartet, only in a less earnest guise. The “book” is a collection of ten dances, six of which are accompanied by a recorded percussion track made of prepared piano sounds. The prepared piano was, of course, the invention of John Cage, who first put erasers, nuts, bolts, and other damping objects in the strings of the grand piano, thereby transforming it into a kind of pygmy gamelan. In the original version of Alleged Dances, the prepared piano sounds were organized as loops installed in an onstage sampler, and one of the quartet players triggered them on cue with a foot pedal. This made for a lot of suspense in the live performance—perhaps too much, as the potential for crash and burn was so high that Kronos eventually persuaded me to create a CD of the loops, a decision that allowed for significantly less anxiety during concerts.

The dances were “alleged” because the steps for them had yet to be invented (although by now a number of choreographers, including Paul Taylor, have created pieces around them). The general tone is dry, droll, sardonic. The music was composed with the personalities of the Kronos players very much in mind. The little pavane, She’s So Fine, for example, is expressly made for Joan Jeanrenaud’s sweetly lyrical high cello register, and the hoedown, Dogjam, honors David Harrington’s bluegrass proclivities.
—Notes by John Adams, reprinted with kind permission from www.earbox.com

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR, OP. 132 (1824–1825)

The five string quartets and Grosse Fuge that Beethoven composed during the last five years of his life mark the pinnacle of his chamber music. The A minor quartet was the second of the sequence to be completed (July 1825) and was originally laid out in four movements. Then, in the spring of 1825, Beethoven fell seriously ill, with a variety of debilitating diseases. Towards the end of May, he began to recover, and the change in his physical well-being had a profound impact on the quartet. A central slow movement was the immediate result, which Beethoven marked sacredly as a place of transcendence and triumph. It is one of the most sublime pieces of music ever written—and one of the longest quartet movements at almost half the length of the quartet itself. Its contemplative stillness is enhanced by the conscious use of an old church mode known as the Lydian mode. Beethoven mentions it in the score, as if to remind us that the old church modes, with their spiritual, often mystical, and tonally ambiguous connotations, were a deep source of inspiration in his late works. In the slow movement of the quartet, the successive alternations of Adagio and Andante bring new expressions of relief from the composer. These are noted in the margin of his score as “Feeling new strength” and “You returned my strength to find me in the evening” and, in the final section, “With the most intimate feeling.” Because of the generally dark character of much of the quartet, this transcendent slow movement seems to radiate inner release from outward suffering.

Beethoven made this huge slow movement the centerpiece of a vast, arch-like structure. The quartet opens with an Allegro, built around two contrasting themes and presenting a thread of unresolved contradictions. The movement departs from conventional form as does the substantial scherzo which follows. Its central pastoral episode, nominally a trio section, begins with a musette-like theme high on the first violin. It continues with a ländler theme which Beethoven had written down in his sketchbook when he first went to Vienna many years earlier. After the sublime, heavenly slow movement, the mood is abruptly broken by a march—which brings us back to earth with a bump. As in the Ninth Symphony, an instrumental recitative leads to the finale. Its impassioned, waltz-like theme, which gives way to an unequivocal feeling of joy, was, in fact, originally designed to be the finale of the Ninth before Beethoven decided on a choral ending for this work. Both works end with a feeling of transcendence and triumph.

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Established in 1989, the St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has developed an undisputed reputation as a truly world-class chamber ensemble. Called "witty, buoyant, and wickedly attentive" (Montreal Gazette) with a "peerless" sense of ensemble (Financial Times), the quartet is celebrated for its "smoldering intensity" (Washington Post) and "flexibility, dramatic flair, and hint of rock 'n' roll energy" (Los Angeles Times). The SLSQ performs internationally and is revered as ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University since 1998.

In late summer 2015, the quartet toured Europe with the San Francisco Symphony, performing Adams: Absolute Jest under the direction of conductor Michael Tilson Thomas for audiences in the United Kingdom, Germany, Romania, and Switzerland. Later in the season, the SLSQ performed at Carnegie Hall in New York and in Vancouver and Toronto. Madison, Wisconsin, and East Lansing, Michigan. Spring highlights included a residency at the University of Maryland and a special Haydn-themed performance at the 29th Street Y in New York. During the summer season, the SLSQ also continued its long association with Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

In recent seasons, the SLSQ has been highlighting first violinist Geoff Nuttall’s long-standing admiration for Haydn with a series of concerts in which the ensemble explores and unpacks the composer’s string quartets from various perspectives and then performs and records the works in their entirety. Nuttall, hailed as "the Jon Stewart of chamber music" (New York Times), explains: "To really devastate the genius of Haydn’s music, the performers and audience have to be really active. The quartet will continue to offer these Haydn discovery programs at least through the 2016-17 season.

The quartet’s residency at the University of Maryland includes an 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. Christopher Costanza is from Boston, Massachusetts; Eugene, Oregon; and East Lansing, Michigan. Spring highlights included a residency at the University of Maryland and a special Haydn-themed performance at the 29th Street Y in New York. During the summer season, the SLSQ also continued its long association with Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

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