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MICHELANGELO
STRING
QUARTET

Saturday, November 7, 2015 ~ 2 pm
Coolidge Auditorium
Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Building

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The Library of Congress
Coolidge Auditorium
Saturday, November 7, 2015 — 2 pm

THE GERTRUDE CLARKE WHITTALL FOUNDATION
IN THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MICHELANGELO STRING QUARTET

MIHAELA MARTIN
& DANIEL AUSTRICH, VIOLIN
NOBUKO IMAI, VIOLA
FRANS HELMERSON, VIOLONCELLO



Program

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartet in G major, op. 77 no. 1, H.III: 81 ("Lobkowitz") (1799)

I. *Allegro moderato*

II. *Adagio*

III. Menuetto: *Presto*—Trio

IV. Finale: *Presto*

DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

String Quartet no. 3 in F major, op. 73 (1946)

I. *Allegretto—Poco più mosso*

II. *Moderato con moto—Meno mosso—Adagio—Più mosso*

III. *Allegro non troppo*

IV. *Adagio*—[quarter = 96]—*Adagio*

V. *Moderato—Meno mosso—Adagio*

INTERMISSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

String Quartet in F major, op. 59, no. 1 ("Razumovsky") (1806)

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Theme russe: *Allegro—Adagio ma non troppo—Presto*



About the Program

JOSEPH HAYDN, String Quartet in G major, op. 77/1, H.III: 81¹

Two of the quartets to be heard this afternoon come from sets dedicated to patrons; in Joseph Haydn's case the pair of opus 77 quartets were composed for Prince Joseph Franz Maximilian Lobkowitz. It may be that Haydn had actually written a few more quartets for Lobkowitz, but if so, they are no longer extant.² Around the time Haydn was composing the opus 77 quartets he was also producing major works like *The Creation*, *The Seasons* and other masses; composition was no longer such an easy task for him. Writing to the publisher Gottfried Härtel in 1799, the year that yielded op. 77, Haydn explained:

Every day the world compliments me on the fire of my recent works, but no one will believe the strain and effort it costs me to produce them. Some days my enfeebled memory and the unstrung state of my nerves crush me to the earth to such an extent that I fall prey to the worst sort of depression, and am quite incapable of finding even a single idea for many days thereafter; until at last Providence revives me, and I can again sit down at the pianoforte and begin to scratch away.³

Such statements give the lie to our comfortable vision of "Papa Haydn" jauntily composing away at an advanced age, showing the reality of the effort required to

1 What does the "H" stand for, you may wonder? I was "Hoboken" you would ask—it references the catalog of Haydn's works prepared by Anthony van Hoboken, who opted to group works by category instead of just chronologically; so all of the string quartets are included in H.III, etc. There is no perfect catalog of Haydn's works, but the Hoboken numbers are widely used alongside opus numbers.

2 Barret-Ayres, Reginald, *Joseph Haydn and the String Quartet* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1974), 340-1.

3 As quoted in Webster, James and Georg Feder, "Haydn, Joseph," Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press.

produce works of such refinement in his weakening state. The work, however, was worth it, since Haydn still managed to produce remarkable compositions like the op. 77 string quartets, the first of which is programmed this afternoon.

The tone of the quartet (op. 77/1) is set in the first measure, with a big G-major chord followed by the light pulsing of the triad in the lower voices. The first violin introduces a simple but fragmented melody, the front of which is a descending triad with a dotted rhythm—both aspects of motivic significance to the quartet as a whole. The melody then becomes "stuck" in both violins before starting afresh.⁴ Take a look at the opening bars in a condensed form:

Example 1

Haydn, String Quartet in G major op. 77/1, I: mm.1-5, condensed

The dotted-rhythm figure (labeled "x" above) continues to play multiple roles, and Haydn's economic use of material is in further evidence when the pulsing chords become a series of melodic dyads in the violins. Consider measures 10-12 alongside the opening measures shown in Example 1:

Example 2

Haydn, String Quartet in G major op. 77/1, I: mm.10-12, condensed

⁴ This point is labeled with an arrow in Example 1.

As the music continues, the sense of simplicity is undermined by increasing harmonic movement and activity, such as newly-introduced triplet material in the violins. The return of the main material (note that this is all in the exposition) at measure 27 displays the atomization of the material (as its discrete chunks are used independently as melody and secondary melody) and the transformation of the accompaniment in terms of register and figuration. Let Example 3 stand in for many that showcase Haydn's ingenuity:

Example 3

The musical score for Example 3 consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The music is in G major and measures 27-30. Annotations include 'x: triad' above the first and third measures of Vln. I and below the first measure of Vc., and 'pulse' above the first two measures of Vln. II and Vla. The Vc. staff shows a dotted-rhythm figure in measures 28 and 29.

Haydn, String Quartet in G major op. 77/1, I: mm.27-30

A lyrical, longer melodic idea is introduced that will blossom as the movement develops, especially in its poignant minor-mode appearances. As the exposition closes Haydn employs interlocking arpeggios to exciting effect and closes the section with a coordinated series of the dotted-rhythm figures in all parts.

In the central section Haydn begins by moving somewhat unexpectedly to C major, and from there he continues the processes of variation he had already begun. The various musical ideas are here presented in a more concise form, and one outcome of this is that melodic phrases tend to be longer, with melodic extensions drawn from earlier figuration. The harmonic tension relaxes by the final appearance of the main theme.

There are several details that are particularly noteworthy about the opening of the slow movement. The *Adagio* opens with the unified statement of the main thematic material in unison at the octave in all four instruments, and the melodic tag in measure two should be familiar as a variant of the "x" dotted-rhythm motive from the opening movement. The return of the exact same pitches in measure 5 shows Haydn's great awareness of how registral variation can contribute to the development of an idea; such subtle yet effective techniques are employed throughout the work.

Look at Example 4a and b side-by-side to see how close, yet different they are:

Example 4

a) b)

Vln. I x: triad

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Haydn, String Quartet in G major op. 77/1, II: mm.1-2; 5-6

From these straightforward ideas Haydn constructed an extremely fine exploration of the material. His treatment of the music is endlessly variable, casting the recognizable snippets of material in transformative ways. Even the return to the primary form of the material is subject to the subtle registral and harmonic shifts in evidence since the very opening of the movement.

The Menuetto returns to G major from E-flat major. The opening theme retains the characteristic dropping triad, and features an oft-accented second beat. The first violin in several places offers this figure from the stratosphere, but is always supported by musical activity underneath it. The Trio returns to the E-flat of the *Adagio*, and a principal characteristic emerges at the end of the melody, where the upper violin presents a birdcall-like oscillating minor third. This figure serves as a launching point into a C-minor presentation of the theme; as the Trio closes the "birdcall" idea is inflected with playful ornamentation, followed by a return to the Menuetto's first section.

In a tactic similar to that employed in the *Adagio*, Haydn returns to the unison (at the octave) statement of the opening theme in the Finale. One striking feature of this movement is that after providing the "normative" statement of the main theme, Haydn immediately presents the same theme in a different accompanimental (and as it progresses, harmonic) context. The result is a mixture of familiarity and discovery. The quartet writing is exuberant as it moves into extended passages of running sixteenth notes. While Haydn often treats the primary melody as a full unit, he also utilizes portions of it as motivically significant instigators in the episodes, using imitative, quasi-canonic counterpoint as one means of traversal. Given the

combination of nonstop activity and the very effective choices that unified the introduction and development of the material, the final movement of Haydn's penultimate completed string quartet decisively concludes one of Haydn's great accomplishments in the genre.



DMITRY SHOSTAKOVICH, String Quartet no. 3 in F major, op. 73

The relationships between the artistic output of a Soviet composer and politics were, it is safe to say, complicated. It is easy to get bogged down in the details of the cycles of the rise and fall of Shostakovich's reputation with respect to the authorities, so we will briefly thread the needle here for a glimpse of the context in which Shostakovich composed his third string quartet. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in the Summer of 1941, Shostakovich embarked on a remarkable series of works that would bring great acclaim, followed by harsh criticism. The first work was to be the seventh symphony, the "Leningrad." The first three movements were composed in Leningrad, the safety of which was very much in doubt, and the fourth was completed after he was ordered to evacuate to Moscow and beyond.⁵ The work was received as an inspired act of defiance and patriotism.⁶ After working on *The Gamblers* and other works including his second piano sonata, in 1943 Shostakovich completed his eighth symphony in just a few months' time. It was not greeted with the same enthusiasm as its predecessor, and was criticized for its tragic qualities. As quoted from contemporary criticism by biographer Laurel Fay, N. A. Timofeyev expressed in 1945: "What is the reason for the somewhat chilly reception of the Eighth Symphony? I think it is because these tremendous experiences, these sufferings brought about by evil are not overcome, are not vanquished, instead they are, as it were, replaced by a passacaglia and a pastorale."⁷ That is, elements of its formal design did not live up to the ideological promise of a successful symphonic work during a time of war.

Another significant composition of the period, and demonstrative of the varied reception (both public and official) that his work was receiving, was the Piano Trio no. 2, completed in 1944 and dedicated to the memory of his close friend Ivan Sollertinsky, who had died suddenly at a young age. The work was warmly received, and was awarded a second category Stalin Prize in 1946—Shostakovich's third.⁸ 1945 saw the completion of the Symphony no. 9, a work in which Shostakovich did not conform to the expected weight of symphonic victory. A

5 Fay, Laurel E., *Shostakovich: A Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 124-128.

6 Ibid., 131.

7 Ibid., 138.

8 Ibid., 140-143.

much lighter and shorter piece than its predecessors, it was admired by some but confounded others. The ninth symphony would be the focus of criticism from musicologist Israel Nestyev, spurring debate about Shostakovich's motives and merits at the Fall Composers' Plenum, where many of the Soviet Union's compositional luminaries met. It was near the beginning of the Andrey Zhdanov's tenure as Stalin's "ideological watchdog."⁹ Even a composer of Shostakovich's eminence could be found in the crosshairs of criticism.

It was from this position of lessening stability that Shostakovich wrote his second and third string quartets. Shostakovich contributed a significant body of work to the string quartet genre, and himself regarded his third quartet very highly (at least in relation to the work he had created by 1950 when he made the statement). This was in spite of its "unofficial censure in 1948 as 'formalist'..."¹⁰

Composed in 1946 and cast in five movements, the quartet's opening *Allegretto* begins with a high-spirited melody in the first violin. While chromatic inflections suggest some darker roots, there is a playfulness to the music, not just melodically, but also in the instances of a mixed-mode harmony, such as the C-major close of the first theme's presentation with the minor-sixth A-flat in the cello line. Just after that moment Shostakovich alters the texture significantly to transition to the second thematic area. It is a beautiful and slightly unnerving effect, as the outer voices play a line from which pitches are drawn and held in the inner voices. The hairpin choices work splendidly:

Example 5

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello (Vc.). The music is in F major (one flat) and 3/4 time. The first measure (m. 46) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Violin I part has a melodic line with chromatic inflections. The Violin II and Viola parts play a chordal accompaniment, with the Viola part marked "arco". The Cello part has a rhythmic accompaniment. The second measure (m. 47) continues the texture. The third measure (m. 48) shows a change in dynamics and phrasing. The fourth measure (m. 49) concludes the phrase with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Hairpins are used throughout to indicate dynamic changes.

Shostakovich, String Quartet in F major, op. 73, I: mm.46-49

9 Ibid., 150-153.
 10 Ibid., 151.

The theme that follows contrasts greatly with muffled pain in its four-note head motive. It nevertheless maintains the thread of the earlier melodic ideas with its repeated notes and arpeggiations. Nodding to the primary theme's inherent descending tendency, the development's opening has the character of a de-tuning organ grinder winding down before abandoning a straightforward tack for a more harmonically gritty imitative exploration. A great series of high, strained sevenths and ninths leads to a remarkable recapitulation that serves as both transition and arrival. The ideas are condensed until Shostakovich develops what had earlier been just a three-bar secondary idea, driving the music forward. The final appearance of the theme is given loudly with a valedictory closing with a cadence of light harmonics in the first violin atop the plucked ensemble.

The second movement is a march-like waltz, opening with a duet for viola and violin. The viola's E-minor triad is juxtaposed with a chromatically mobile theme in the violin. Eventually the second violin joins in this uneasy melody, while the cello introduces a *lamentoso* descending half-step figure, which serves as a melodic counterbalance as the waltz pulse pulls back. The central section is markedly different while still evoking the world of the waltz-march, with light staccato chords on each beat followed by a variant of the half-step figure using larger intervals. The music continues to explore darker areas than might have been expected, with the regular beat-attacks receding in importance as the movement closes—a pained viola solo ends with a rhythmically reversed form of the half-step motive and an E-minor chord that dies away.

The third movement packs an abundance of ideas into its brief span of about four minutes. The bellicose undertones of the previous movement are here quite overt. The uneven but harsh G-sharp-minor attacks provide the foundation for a *marcatissimo* melody in the first violin. This melody goes from strident to folksy, and traverses many realms in between as the movement progresses. Periodically Shostakovich unifies the ensemble for increased energy before moving back to the chord-accompanied melody model. One such significant moment occurs when the viola takes over melodically, buttressed by a plucked accompaniment in the remaining strings. While a brief sojourn to C major near the end seems to promise some respite, the push to the end is relentless.

The *Adagio* does not bring with it much relief. The primary theme is presented in unison at three octaves in the lower voices, with the first violin's plaintive melodic response to follow. A variant restatement of the theme includes an increasingly beautiful setting of the violin's melody. After the cello presents the theme, now accompanied, Shostakovich cleverly switches the roles of the ensemble, with the lower voices arriving at a repeated figure (with a starting focus on G-sharp and E) while the originally *basso* melody is given to the first violin. It is in this presentation that the melody achieves its most "natural-sounding" state, that

is, a more traditional setting. The cello and viola close out the movement in a haunting duet that rests on low C-sharps. The final movement follows the fourth without pause, the cello's sudden C-natural and new material signalling the shift to the finale. The cello melody is accompanied only by the plucked viola. In another sleight-of-hand transformation, the violin's entrance with the melody acquires the feel of a dance, assisted by the viola's switch to bowing and the cello's measured line on the strong beat of each bar. A new melody in D minor with a different groove emerges; earlier motivic ideas are referenced, as are textures like the *pizzicato*-accompanied viola solo. A new melody is introduced in the cello, and its rhythmic profile and character strongly reference the very first melody of the entire quartet. Shostakovich continues to showcase the moderately-paced ideas from various vantage points, from localized canons and *ostinati* to tremolo accompaniments. In the midst of these tremoli Shostakovich returns to the main theme of the fourth movement, including an evocation of the sparse closing of that movement. This dramatic moment is set against an A-minor return of the fifth movement's secondary melody. A violin solo leads to the long-awaited F-major coda. The lower strings play a softly sustained chord while the violin plays above it. The registral transformation of this theme, first heard deep in the cello, gives it a sense of harmonic stability, and the tranquility denied to the roving themes until this last, quiet resolution.



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, **String Quartet in F major, op. 59, no. 1** ("Razumovsky")

1806 was something of a banner year for Beethoven, yielding major completed and/or significantly advanced works like the violin concerto, fourth symphony, the *Leonore* Overture no. 3, the fourth piano concerto (finished in 1807), the C-minor Thirty-Two Variations on an Original Theme, and the three "Razumovsky" quartets. The op. 59 quartets, like Haydn's op. 77 set, earned their moniker due to their dedication to a patron. In Beethoven's case the commissioner was the Russian Ambassador in Vienna, Count Andreas Kyrillovitch Razumovsky. The scale of the new quartets, the first since his op. 18 debut in the genre, was massive when considered alongside their predecessors and contemporaries. In a sense the scale was symphonic, but the post-Eroica achievement is perhaps more remarkable when considering the disparity between the variety available in orchestral forces versus the "limitations" of just four musicians. Of course, these limitations were also the strengths of chamber music, since the string quartet was small enough for each individual voice to be independent and understood as such, while also being intimate enough to act as a unit when desired.

All four movements of the F-major quartet can be described in terms of sonata form, while the inner movements are still readily identifiable as scherzo and slow movement. The endurance and technical demands that Beethoven required in the Razumovskys were formidable—luckily, Beethoven had access to his friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh, one of the finest chamber musicians of his day and the one who led the task of preparing and presenting the pieces in performance. Even Schuppanzigh might have hesitated if Beethoven had not countermanded his first instincts, as evidenced in the manuscript with crossed-out material: he had initially planned to repeat the development and recapitulation sections of both the first and second movements!¹¹

All three quartets this afternoon involve special attention paid to the registral placement of melodic material, with the composers varying the register and textural settings as a means of development. The striking opening of Beethoven's quartet gives a clue as to where he might be headed, starting as he does with the melody in the cello beneath buoyant repeated notes in the middle voices. While the violin expands on the second half of the melody, Beethoven reserves the multi-register exploration of this for later in the development. The theme itself feels like an introduction to a secondary idea that follows the big F-major arrival in measure 19. What we find is that the extra material before the second key area is drawn from the same rhythmic and contour stock as the first melody, illuminating a unity that grows brighter as the movement progresses. Another great example of how Beethoven uses register as a dramatic device can be seen in his treatment of an interrupted cadential passage that precedes the close of the exposition. Notice how far apart the voicings are, when one might normally expect to see the upper voice occurring within the interval of a fifth:

Example 6

p

Beethoven, String Quartet in F major, op. 59/1, I: mm.85-88

11 Lockwood, Lewis, *Beethoven: the Music and the Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003), 320-321.

This unusual spacing continues to be developed as the movement progresses. In the secondary key area of C major Beethoven introduces trills and figures that are readily repeated, such as the violins' scalar descent in thirds. The beginning of the development is somewhat disguised, seemingly as a repeat of the exposition. But in fact there is no repeat, and the brief restatement of the opening theme quickly continues to evolve, moving into spaces unexpected and transformed. After a lush exploration of the material Beethoven moves to a fugato section. The return of the main theme is sneakily accomplished, as Beethoven begins with a reappearance of the secondary idea from the first thematic group, reversing the approach to the main theme. As one might suspect, the development of material continues apace even while the thematic material is being consolidated. A coda gives a fully fleshed-out rendering of the theme before the movement's bucolic ending.

Beethoven's ability to create a massive edifice out of the most basic material is fully displayed in the scherzo (not so-called in name, but definitely in spirit). The opening line is literally the cello playing a rhythmic idea, completely alone:

Example 7



Beethoven, String Quartet in F major, op. 59/1, II: mm.1-4, cello

This idea is followed by a dancing figure, a secondary theme and the continuation of the rhythmic motive. Beethoven uses it imaginatively in many contexts, sometimes stating it baldly and at other times using portions of the rhythm in an alternative melodic context, and so on; we even find reference to the displaced register constructs that punctuated the first movement. The fun thing about this type of composition is that the simplicity of the fundamental idea allows for the traces of the author's invention to be followed to some degree even at the first listen.

No less impressive is the deeply moving *Adagio molto e mesto*, the quartet's impressive slow movement. This is music that feels like it could have been drawn from the music composed in Beethoven's later years; it is a world where variation and textural considerations occupy the same plane. After the tremendous excursion of the *Adagio*, a violin cadenza serves as a link to the finale, which begins *attacca* without a break. The opening melody, again in the cello, is marked as a "Russian theme." Indeed, it is thought that this theme that appears in the quartet's finale was adapted from a collection of folk melodies collected by Ivan Prach and published in 1790.¹² The disarming, innocent feel of the melody is

12 Ibid., 317.

quickly given new life in Beethoven's hands, and he again shows the multitude of possibilities inherent in his material. The energy rarely abates in the entire movement, and only briefly when it does. The primary exception is the *Adagio ma non troppo* that presents the slowed-down main theme in the first violin, followed by a rapid *Presto* to close the work. Op. 59 no. 1 lives up to its monumental reputation not just because of its scope, but because each movement is handled as a miniature world in itself, not so much as peripheral bodies orbiting a central planet, but as four satellites of varying gravity but equal magnitude.

David Henning Phylar
Music Specialist
Library of Congress, Music Division



About the Artists

The **Michelangelo Quartet** was formed in 2002 by four musicians distinguished as soloists, chamber musicians and teachers, who share an irresistible desire to play together the greatest repertoire of all. Since their first concert season in 2003/4, they have toured regularly in Scandinavia, Benelux, the UK, Germany, Italy and Japan, giving concerts in major halls such as the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Théâtre des Champs Elysées, Paris, Tonhalle, Zürich, and London's Wigmore Hall. Festival appearances have included Edinburgh, Sion, Naantali, Hardanger, the Pablo Casals Festival, Prades, and the Delft and New Zealand Chamber Music Festivals. During the 5 years of its existence, critics have consistently praised the quartet for the collective virtuosity and experience of its members, as well as their musicality and intensity of feeling. The Quartet performed the complete Beethoven quartets cycle in Scotland in the 2012/2013 season and in Japan in February 2015.

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Distinguished Professor of Music Emeritus, University of California, Davis

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Marie Rolf, PhD

*Senior Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Professor of Music Theory,
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"Fritz Kreisler's Violin and Piano Version of the Sibelius Violin Concerto"

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Dan Morgenstern

Library of Congress Jazz Scholar

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