

San Antonio: 01.27.13

OPUS 3 ARTISTS
presents the

Miró
Q|U|A|R|T|E|T

Daniel Ching, violin
William Fedkenheuer, violin
John Largess, viola
Joshua Gindele, cello

Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1
Allegro
Romanze: Poco adagio
Allegretto molto moderato e comodo
Allegro

BRAHMS
(1833 - 1897)

INTERMISSION

Quartet a la Carte

Exclusive Management:
Opus 3 Artists
470 Park Avenue South
9th Floor North
New York NY 10016
www.opus3artists.com

The Miró Quartet is Faculty String Quartet in Residence at The University of Texas at Austin.
The Miró Quartet can be heard on <http://www.classicallounge.com/miroquarte>

Program Notes

Brahms, String Quartet No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 51

The musical manner that Brahms adopted as a young man, and the skill that he showed when he was only twenty, led Schumann to proclaim him, in 1853, “a musician chosen to give ideal expression to his times, a young man over whose cradle Graces and Hero have stood watch.” From the very beginning he was the Brahms of noble melody, of rich texture, of rhythmic freedom, of large statements in big forms beautifully written for the instruments. This does not mean that there is little difference in the music he wrote at twenty and at forty. He matured and grew and said different things at different times, but even when young, he had found his own eloquent language, which he would use consistently and well until the end of his life.

Schumann’s pronouncement mentioned “string quartets,” and Brahms may have written twenty or more of them before he allowed the pair we now call his first two quartets to be published, twenty years later. The long delay had two causes. One was the burden of following Beethoven. Many composers of great talent, perhaps even true genius, have been struck dumb by the gravity of this historical weight. (How few Tenth Symphonies were written after Beethoven’s time!). Brahms also needed a way to deal with the complex polyphony that was an inherent part of his musical thought, so that it could make the impression he wanted with only four stringed instruments. The Sextets of the 1860’s had given him a satisfactory medium, fifty per cent larger, but a Quintet had failed. In the 1870’s he felt, at last, that he knew what to do with four players, and the Op. 51 Quartets are great works in which fullness of expression is unhindered by economy of means. They were completed in 1873, after perhaps as much as eight years of thought, during his summer vacation in the countryside not far from Munich. Musician-friends came out from the city, pretty young women among them. There was much jollity, much music. Brahms enjoyed the rustic surroundings and the beauties of nature. In simplest terms, he had a good time - and while having it, he finished and tried out the two Quartets, the popular Haydn Variations, and several songs. The first public performance was given by the Hellmesberger Quartet in Vienna on December 11, 1873.

The first Quartet of the pair is a somber but passionate piece. Its Allegro first movement may be derived from one of the early, discarded works, but it is in his familiar expressive language, complex and involuted, speaking here of tense drama. The opening theme will be referred to in all the later

movements except the Scherzo. In the second movement it is transformed into the principal subject of a calm Romance, Poco adagio, a simple three part song of great beauty in the distant key of Aflat. Third, the place for the Scherzo, is taken by a movement in the traditional form, Allegretto molto moderato e comodo, but with none of the original Italian meaning of the name which is “joke.” It is music that may be interpreted as a gracious dance or as an uneasy, sinister, shadowy one. The contrasting central trio section, Un poco più animato, is a folklike tune colorfully accompanied by unusual sounds from the open strings of the second violin and viola. In the Allegro finale, Brahms refers again to the scherzo, but the musical materials are most closely related to those that open the Quartet, and the whole is presented with a concentrated force that recalls and balances the entire opening movement.