

Opus One

Piano Quartet

BEETHOVEN

Quartet in E-Flat Major for Piano and Strings, Op. 16

- I Grave - Allegro, ma non troppo
- II Andante cantabile
- III Rondo: Allegro, ma non troppo

This work began as a Quintet for Piano and Winds inspired by the great work of Mozart, the Quintet, K. 452. Both Mozart and Beethoven's works are in the same key, have the same form, the same instrumentation and many other compositional techniques in common. Beethoven then arranged his quintet for a piano quartet, the version we hear this evening. This was a common practice in his day, when publishers encouraged composers to arrange their works for other groups in order to expand touring possibilities. Whether one hears it either as a quintet or quartet, it seems hard to believe that it could be as brilliant with any other instrumentation, but it is truly magnificent in both versions. Written in 1796 when Beethoven was living in Vienna and making a great career as a pianist, the work reflects his earlier classical period, the writing filled with brilliance, charm and humor. It was a time before his dreadful hearing loss, and before his life changed so dramatically. He was known as an extraordinary improviser and apparently angered his colleagues during the first performance of this very work with extensive solos at the piano. The quartet opens with a slow introduction employing a dotted rhythm that is first stated softly, then loudly, the work progresses shortly to the main body of the movement, with the piano introducing the tuneful theme, followed by the strings. Spectacular melodies are passed through all of the instruments in the second movement, which is a magical, soulful gem. The finale has a rollicking, fun character, which belies the difficulty that was to shortly take over Beethoven's life.

Notes by Ida Kavafian

ROBERTO SIERRA

Fuego de ángel, Quartet for Piano and Strings (2011), commissioned by and dedicated to Music from Angel Fire with the support of the Bruce E. Howden, Jr. American Composers Project and Friends of Music from Angel Fire

- I El ángel y las sombras. Moderado, pero muy expresivo
- II Misteriosa danza. Danzante
- III La visión del angel. Expresivo
- IV Fuego

For more than three decades, the works of American composer Roberto Sierra have been part of the repertoire and numerous commissions of many of the leading orchestras, ensembles and festivals in the U.S. and Europe. At the inaugural concert of the 2002 world renowned Proms in London, his Fandangos were performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, broadcast by both the BBC Radio and Television throughout the UK and Europe. International ensembles that have performed his works include the leading orchestras of the US and Europe. In 2007 the Serge and Olga Koussevitzky International Recording Award (KIRA) was awarded to Albany Records for the recording of Sierra's composition Sinfonía No. 3, La Salsa. Roberto Sierra has served as Composer-In-Residence with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, the Puerto Rico Symphony Orchestra and New Mexico Symphony. In 2010 he was elected to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has been widely recorded by ensembles across the globe, and has been commissioned by leading artists and festivals, including Heidi Grant Murphy, Kevin Murphy, the St. Lawrence String Quartet, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Chamber Music Northwest and Stanford Lively Arts. Roberto Sierra was born in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, and studied composition both in Puerto Rico and Europe, where one of his teachers was renowned composer György Ligeti at the Hochschule für Musik in Hamburg, Germany. The work we hear this evening was commissioned by and dedicated to the festival, Music from Angel Fire. It was written for OPUS ONE. *Fuego de ángel* masterfully combines the style and flavor of Sierra's Puerto Rican roots with his impeccable European training to form an enchanting and original work.

Notes by Ida Kavafian

DVORAK Quartet in E-Flat Major for Piano and Strings, Op. 87

- I Allegro con fuoco
- II Lento
- III Allegro moderato, grazioso
- IV Allegro ma non troppo

Chamber music was extremely important to Dvorak, both as a composer and as a performer. The Quartet in E-Flat was written when he was at his creative peak, in 1889. From the first bold statement of the strings in octaves to the rousing final notes, this work is filled with the joy, excitement, depth of feeling and distinctive character that can only

be Dvorak. This is the second of his two forays into this combination of instruments. Though his earlier piano quartet, Op. 23 also contains these typical qualities, the second quartet is the work of a mature compositional genius, brilliantly and tightly constructed. When he wrote this work, Dvorak had not yet had his stint in America as Director of the National Conservatory in New York City, with the summers spent in the Czech community of Spillville, IA. Those years in America produced works that were “New World” in character. Tonight’s work however, is thoroughly Bohemian in style and feeling. Dvorak himself wrote to a friend: “As expected, it came easily and the melodies just surged upon me, thank God!” After the distinctive unison opening material, the first movement brings the greatest of contrasts including the most explosive piano writing with supporting punctuation from the strings, to the most tender, intimate sections, this time punctuated by soft heartbeats. The movement builds up with great intensity, again employing unison playing before coming to an exciting close. In the second movement, Dvorak shows his deep love for the cello in one of the great solos in the chamber music literature for that instrument, subtly accompanied by gentle chords and pizzicati in the piano and upper strings. There are two passionate, turbulent sections but the movement finishes the way it began, calmly and sweetly. The graceful third movement is almost waltz-like in feeling, but with a lilting, uniquely Bohemian folk-type character and a trio section of contrasting material. Dvorak even writes in a cimbalom style for the piano to achieve this wonderful flavor. The Finale is filled with tremendous spirit, with a fiery ascending four note motive throughout. The closing of the piece is both thrilling and satisfying, providing the listener with the feeling that they have journeyed along with the musicians through much of Dvorak’s magical world.

Notes by Ida Kavafian