

Jupiter String Quartet

With Roger Tapping, Voila

March 14, 2010

Temple Beth El

San Antonio, Texas

FRANZ JOSEF HAYDN

String Quartet in F minor, Opus 20, No. 5

This quartet begins with a movement that has often been cited as exemplifying the Sturm und Drang in music. Although the opening employs a dark F minor, the sorrowful mood is relieved by occasional moves to the major mode. Such contrasting tonal shades will eventually give the arrival of F major in the third movement an almost inexpressible poignancy. The second movement, as in the opening, blends major and minor to create an unsettling mixture of emotional effects. The trio provides the work's first sustained exploration of the brighter color of F major, but the return of the minuet reintroduces the shadows of the original key.

The third movement, marked Adagio, establishes a gentle pastoral mood through the use of a siciliano dance rhythm. After so much music in the minor, the use of F major here creates an extraordinarily touching atmosphere. This seemingly guileless music is cast in sonata form, but it also uses procedures clearly derived from the model of the theme with variations. Although it maintains a peaceful surface, this movement introduces harmonic colors of a surprising richness. The overall impression, however, is one of undisturbed simplicity.

This cannot be said of the finale, which presents a fugue of overwhelming sophistication. Haydn uses two subjects, one of which was extremely common in eighteenth-century contrapuntal writing: Bach used it in the Well-Tempered Clavier, Handel used it in Messiah, and Mozart would use it in his Requiem. Haydn's contribution to the career of this theme is one of the most complex, as it thoroughly explores its canonic possibilities. The use of fugue – seemingly one of the most intellectual and rule-bound musical forms – again argues against this work as an exemplification of the lawless Sturm und Drang.

OSVALDO GOLIJOV

Yiddishbbuk (1992)

Born in La Plata, Argentina, to a family of Eastern European Jewish heritage, Osvaldo Golijov studied composition and piano before moving to Israel in 1983. In 1986, he came to the United States, studied with George Crumb and earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. Since 1991, Mr. Golijov has taught at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and also serves on the faculties of the Boston Conservatory and at the Tanglewood Music Center.

About “Yiddishbbuk”, Mr. Golijov has written:

“A broken song played on a shattered cymbalon.” Thus, writes Kafka, begins “Yiddishbbuk,” a collection of apocryphal psalms which he read while living in Prague's Street of the Alchemists. The only remnants of the collection are a few verses interspersed among the entries of Kafka's notebooks, and the last lines are also quoted in a letter to Milena: “No one sings as purely as those who are in the deepest hell. Theirs is the song which we confused with that of the angels.” Written in Hebrew characters and surrounded with musical notation, marks similar to those of the genuine texts, the psalms' only other reference to their music is “In the mode of the Babylonian Lamentations.”

Based on these vestiges, these inscriptions for string quartet are an attempt to reconstruct that music. The movements of the piece bear the initials of the five people commemorated in the work. The first movement remembers three children interned by the Nazis at the Terezín concentration camp: Doris Weiserová (1932-1944), Frantisek Bass (1930-1944), and Tomás Kauders (1934-1943). Their poems and drawings appear in the book “I never saw another butterfly,” published by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. The second movement bears the initials of the writer Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904-1991), and the last movement the initials of Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990).

Written under a 1990 Fromm Commission from Tanglewood, “Yiddishbbuk” premiered there in 1992, and was awarded the first prize in the Kennedy Center’s Friedheim Awards in 1993.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Viola Quintet in G Major, Op. 111

For many years, Brahms followed the sensible Viennese custom of taking to the countryside when the summer heat made life in the city unpleasant. In 1880, he first visited the resort of Bad Ischl in the lovely Salzkammergut region east of Salzburg, an area of mountains and lakes widely famed for its enchanting scenery (and in more recent years the site of the filming of *The Sound of Music*). There he composed the Academic Festival and Tragic overtures and the Piano Trio, Op. 87, cantankerously telling his friends that he was encouraged to such productivity because the miserable weather confined him constantly to his villa. Two years later, however, he again chanced Ischl, again found the weather poor, and again composed; the String Quintet, Op. 88, dates from the summer of 1882. Brahms then stayed away from Bad Ischl until 1889, but thereafter it became his annual country retreat until his last summer, seven years later. In his biography of the composer, Walter Niemann explained the town's attraction for the composer: "Half of Vienna and the whole circle of Brahms' friends and acquaintances would gather here round the master as years went by, and so at rainy Ischl he felt quite secluded, and yet with much to stimulate him. He was particularly fond of making an excursion from Ischl to the lovelier, but even rainier, Gmunden, where he would visit his faithful friend Viktor von Miller zu Aichholz and his wife, Olga, in their splendid villa, surrounded by a great park. Here he would meet [the composer Karl] Goldmark, Eduard Hanslick, and other friends and colleagues from Vienna, or would bury himself in the great library with black coffee and his well-known enormous cigars, and he was treated by the Millers as one of the family." It was at Ischl during the summer of 1890 that Brahms composed what Niemann called "the most passionate, the freshest, and the most deeply inspired by nature" of all his works—the Viola Quintet in G major, Op. 111.

Brahms was 57 years old in 1890. By that time, he had acquired the great hedgerow of beard that is so familiar from the photographs of him in later life, a pronounced corpulence, and a feeling that he had "worked enough; now let the young people take over." When he submitted the score of the new quintet to his publisher, Fritz Simrock, in December 1890, a month after it had been premiered in Vienna by the Rosé Quartet, he attached a note to the manuscript: "With this letter you can bid farewell to my music—because it is certainly time to leave off." His dear friend and faithful correspondent Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, reminding him that his health was excellent and that he was at the peak of his popularity, wrote to him, "He who can invent all this [i.e., the Quintet in G major] must be in a happy frame of mind! It is the work of a man of 30." Still, Brahms was not to be swayed, and he announced his retirement as a composer. When he heard the celebrated clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld at Meiningen the following spring, however, his resolve was broken, and he again took up the pen to produce the resplendent valedictories of his last years: the Trio (Op. 114), Quintet (Op. 115), and Sonatas

(Op. 120) for Clarinet; the Fantasies and Intermezzi for Piano (Op. 116-119); the Four Serious Songs (Op. 121); and the Chorale Preludes for Organ (Op. 122).

The critic and champion of Brahms' music Eduard Hanslick praised the Viola Quintet for "the beautiful warm-hearted solidity of the subject matter, the continuity of the sentiment, and the admirable conciseness of the form. More and more, Brahms seems to concentrate himself; more and more consciously does he find his strength in the expression of healthy, proportionately simple feelings. A full emotional life works in them without strain, without exaggeration. There is nothing of that self-conscious rending to pieces, that mysterious tone-painting and 'dramatic' representation with which ambitious semi-geniuses of the present day furnish us even in the domain of pure instrumental music."

The opening Allegro is one of Brahms' typically masterful sonata forms, broad in scale and gesture yet enormously subtle and integrated in detail. The cello is entrusted with the task of announcing the main theme through a glowing but dense curtain of accompanimental rustlings from the upper strings. The complementary melody, almost Schubertian in its warm lyricism, is presented in duet by the violas. The development incorporates much of the thematic material from the exposition, but keeps returning, almost like a refrain, to the rustling figurations of the movement's opening. The earlier themes are recapitulated in heightened settings to round out the movement. When Max Kalbeck, the composer's friend and eventual biographer, said that this music reminded him of the Prater, Vienna's famed amusement park, Brahms replied, "You've guessed it! And the delightful girls there."

The Adagio is a set of three free variations based on a touching theme whose most characteristic gesture is the ornamental turn in its opening phrase. The following Allegretto serves as the work's scherzo, though in spirit it is indebted to the popular waltzes of his adopted Vienna that Brahms so loved. The finale combines elements of sonata and rondo, a formal procedure, perhaps borrowed from Haydn, that Brahms employed in several other of his important works.