

San Antonio Chamber Music Society Chamber Orchestra Kremlin, October 14, 2012

Program Notes

Franz Schubert

QUARTETTSATZ IN C MINOR, D. 703, (1820)

(ORCHESTRAL VERSION)

Schubert's Twelfth string quartet - the Quartettsatz (German for Quartet-Movement) remains, after "Death and the Maiden", the most popular and enduring of his fifteen quartets. As its name suggests, it is not a full blown four movement string quartet, but a single movement that was originally intended as the first movement of a multi-movement work. This is born out by the existence of forty-one measures of a projected second movement, Andante in three-quarter time. Like his most famous "Unfinished" work, the Symphony No. 8, and to a lesser degree the unfinished String Trio in B Flat, the Quartettsatz has gained acceptance as a self-contained, aesthetically pleasing work, with, I might add, all of the attendant conjecture, speculation and nonsense as to why the proposed larger work was left incomplete.

The Quartettsatz did mark a departure from his previously written quartets. All of the earlier works were written as "Hausmusik" (music performed in the home by amateur musicians) with Schubert's brothers Ignaz and Ferdinand on violins, his father playing cello, and Franz himself on viola. Schubert was now clearly writing with professional musicians in mind. Though composed in 1820, the Quartettsatz did not receive its premiere performance until March 1, 1867 in Vienna.

From Sierra Chamber Society Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven

PIANO CONCERTO No. 4 IN G MAJOR, OP. 58

The Concerto No. 4 was premiered in March, 1807 at a private concert in the home of Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz. The Coriolan Overture and the Fourth Symphony were premiered in that same concert. However, the public premiere was not until 22 December, 1808, in Vienna at the Theater an der Wien. Beethoven again took the stage as soloist. This was part of a marathon concert which saw Beethoven's last appearance as a soloist with the orchestra, as well as the premieres of the Choral Fantasy and the Fifth and Sixth symphonies. Beethoven dedicated the concerto to his friend, student, and patron, the Archduke Rudolph.

The first movement opens with the solo piano playing simple chords in the tonic key before coming to rest on a dominant chord. The orchestra then enters with the same theme, in B major, the major mediant key, which is in a chromatic mediant relationship to the tonic. Thus enters the first theme. The orchestra states the main theme in B major, dropping through the circle of fifths to a cadence in the tonic, G major. The theme is then stated again, this time in *stretto* between upper and lower voices. A very strong cadence in the tonic, withering away within one bar, introduces a transitional, modulatory theme with restless triplet accompaniment, also containing hints of *stretto*. The music moves to the minor mediant key, B minor, while the dynamic is reduced to *pianissimo*, at which point material from the opening theme returns. Through a rising bass line and sequential harmonies, the music regains the tonic key (on a dominant pedal) with a new theme derived from bars 3, 4, and 5. The final cadence is delayed for several bars before the material from the opening bar resurfaces as the movement's closing theme, accompanied by a tonic pedal over *forte* dominant chords.

The second movement is widely associated with the imagery of Orpheus taming the Furies (represented, respectively, by the piano and unison strings) at the gates to Hades. It was long thought that Franz Liszt had been the first to suggest this association. The movement's quiet E minor ending leads without pause into the C major chords that open the Finale.

In contrast to the preceding movements, the third movement, in traditional rondo form, is simpler, characterized by a very rhythmic rondo form. The main theme begins in the subdominant key of C major before correcting itself to reach a cadence in the tonic G major. The work was arranged for piano and strings by Vinzenz Lachner (1811-1893).

Beethoven notes provided by Round Top Festival Institute, Round Top, TX.

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

ANDANTE CANTABILE FROM STRING QUARTET No. 1 IN D MAJOR, OP. 11

All three of Tchaikovsky's string quartets are early works, and the first one has been part of the so-called basic repertory almost as far back as its first performance, which was given in Moscow on March 28, 1871, barely a month after it was completed. When the work was performed there again at the end of 1876, Tchaikovsky wrote in his diary, "Probably never in my life have I been so moved by the pride of authorship as when Lev Tolstoy, sitting by me and listening to the *Andante* of my Quartet, burst into tears." Tolstoy, for his part, wrote to Tchaikovsky a few days later, "Never have I received such acute pleasure in the rewards of my literary works as on that wonderful evening." He then invited Tchaikovsky and the four string players to choose their favorites among his novels, which he inscribed to them; Tchaikovsky, who had virtually memorized *War and Peace*, requested and received *The Cossacks*.

The *Andante cantabile*, which so moved Tolstoy, has had a rich life of its own. It became (and remains) a popular piece for string orchestra, and Tchaikovsky himself made a concert arrangement for cello and string orchestra in 1888. The more or less standard arrangement for string orchestra used in this performance was made by Clark McAlister.

The piece opens with a gently melancholic folk tune Tchaikovsky had heard sung by a carpenter at the estate of his sister and her husband at Kamenka, in the Ukraine, early in 1869. The second theme, the composer's own, provides a radiant contrast: wistful and ethereal rather than melancholy. Back in the 1930s it was possibly the first of the several Tchaikovsky melodies to be fitted out with words and performed by dance bands all over America, when André Kostelanetz arranged the music and Mack David provided the words for a song called "On the Isle of May."

From the Kennedy Center

Johannes Brahms

SEXTET IN G MAJOR, No. 2, Op. 36 (1865)

Brahms' Second Sextet followed his First by some five years. The Sextet No. 2 reveals a composer who not only has grown in all the elements of his craft, including very importantly his skill as a contrapuntalist, but also one who has progressed into maturity. In contrast to the geniality of the First Sextet, the Second emerges as a canvas darkened by a beautiful austerity heralding the aura of resignation characterizing so much of the composer's more mature works.

A richness of invention animates the score from the outset. A viola murmuring quietly on a semi-trill figure presages the main theme in the first violin – two ascending fifths, the first in the home key of G followed by one in the unexpected key of E-flat. The viola provides a sense of unrest as the violin finds its way back to the home key after briefly exploring the foreign one. After the main idea is repeated, with cello interjections of descending fifths, the first cello sings the main theme as violins take up the murmuring figures. The movement proceeds with appealing and endearing elegance, including a charming, secondary theme, presented by violin I.

The Scherzo, in second position, is a place of minor-key intimacy expressed in sophisticated contrapuntal and rhythmic terms. The middle Trio section provides multiple contrasts: it is in triple meter whereas the main section is in duple; the key is G major rather than G minor; and the spirit is dashingly Hungarian. But the underlying strength of the movement is the masterful counterpoint enriching the musical texture.

Brahms continues his distinctive command of variation in the third movement Adagio. This set of variations is a mighty technical feat as well as music of affecting expressiveness. The string sonorities add a dimension to the variation process that marks the composer as a spiritual seer far beyond his chronological age. The Adagio is well-placed in the penultimate position, considering the busy athleticism of the finale's main section. The ensemble demands are considerable in the

last movement's perpetual-motion passages (which remind one a bit of Mendelssohn's scherzo ebullience), and the contrasting lyricism radiates with the kind of Brahmsian warmth that is as comforting as anything 19th-century romanticism has to offer.

Adapted from Orrin Howard's program notes for the Los Angeles Philharmonic