

American String Quartet with Tom Sleigh, poet and Phil Klay, writer

Peter Winograd, violin
Laurie Carney, violin
Daniel Avshalomov, viola
Wolfram Koessel, cello
Tom Sleigh, poet
Phil Klay, writer

Lyric in Time of War

The following pieces will be interwoven with readings by Mr. Sleigh and Mr. Klay

<i>Praeludium</i> in F minor, BWV 857, from the <i>Well-Tempered Clavier</i>	Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Quartet No. 8 in C minor, Op. 110 Largo Allegro molto Allegretto Largo Largo	Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
String Quartet No. 6 Marcia	Béla Bartók (1881-1945)
String Quartet, Op. 11 Adagio	Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
Quartet in F minor, Op. 95 "Serioso" Allegro con brio Allegretto ma non troppo Allegro assai vivace ma serio - Più Allegro Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato - Allegro	Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

American String Quartet is represented by MKI Artists;
One Lawson Lane, Suite 320, Burlington, VT 05401.

Recordings: NSS Music, Albany Records, and Arabesque Records,

www.americanstringquartet.com

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Lyric in Time of War

Music expresses what words cannot, but in addressing the issues of war and healing we have combined the powers of both. The works we chose - from Bach to the present - grew equally from mind and heart, and they reflect the aesthetic of the American String Quartet as well as the preferences of the authors with whom we collaborate.

Each time we present this program we are so captivated by the images and emotions of the readings that we find ourselves saying, "Could have just listened to you read and not played a note."; while our colleagues have told us they'd as soon have had an evening of music alone.

J. S. Bach's F Minor *Praeludium* sets the tone with a balance of sorrow and peace, and while Shostakovich's C-minor Quartet No. 8 contrasts starkly in sound and scale, the emotional undercurrent is not far from that of Bach. Although officially dedicated to "Victims of Fascism and War," the 8th Quartet is an autobiographical portrait of the artist's suffering under Stalin.

Bartók was driven from his native Hungary by the shadow of war, and the second movement of his final quartet ("Marcia") was built on a folk-dance (*verbunkos*) used to enlist village boys into military service. The classical form of the movement means that the jaunty opening march returns at the end, but one can hear without recourse to the printed score that not all return, and that of those who do, few are whole.

Best-known to contemporary audiences, Barber's Adagio from the Quartet Op. 11 is his undisputed masterpiece. Its aching grief and distinctly American language have made it the theme of national sorrow from FDR's funeral through that of JFK to the aftermath of terrorist violence in 2015-2016.

Art cannot solve our problems, but there is hope that it can equip us to face them with equanimity.

--Note by Daniel Avshalomov of the American String Quartet

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, in Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Quartet in f minor, Op. 95, "Serioso"

Allegro con brio ~ Allegretto ma non troppo
Allegro assai vivace ma serioso ~ Larghetto; Allegretto agitato.

Beethoven's Op. 95 quartet is the only one he supplied with a subtitle, "Serioso," an obvious reference to the prevailing somber mood of the piece. The composer's growing deafness, precarious health, frustration in love, financial insecurity, and unhappy family life had combined to make him angry, bitter, and deeply despondent. In a letter to his old friend Dr. Franz Wegeler on May 2, 1810, he wrote, "If I had not read somewhere that no one should quit life voluntarily while he could still do something worthwhile, I would have been dead long ago, and certainly by my own hand. Oh, life is so beautiful, but for me it is poisoned forever."

Although extremely short, the "Serioso," which Felix Mendelssohn called Beethoven's most characteristic work, is not a miniature. It is a compressed, concentrated composition, highly integrated movement to movement, with an emotional range that far exceeds its limited size. Usually classified as one of the final works of Beethoven's middle period, many of its pages anticipate the exalted third period quartets that were to follow some fourteen years later.

Beethoven began the quartet late in the summer of 1810, and finished it in October of that year. His dedication to Nikolaus von Zmeskall is significant, because it is the first quartet inscribed to a friend from the middle class rather than a noble patron. The work received its premiere in Vienna in May 1814, played by the Schuppanzigh Quartet.

The first movement, the shortest Beethoven ever wrote, lashes out with an angry, laconic phrase, played in unison by the entire quartet. Two features stand out: the five-note opening turn and the general descending and ascending contour. A suspenseful silence follows, after which the first violin whips up and down in forceful octave jumps. After briefly expanding the opening fragment, the quieter, rolling second theme is introduced by the viola and then picked up by the others. The violins state the tender third theme to complete the very concise, and not repeated, exposition. The short development, which opens in a fury based on the first theme, leads to a truncated recapitulation. The coda reaches a climax as the viola insistently repeats the opening five-note turn until, as though exhausted by the effort, it finally fades away.

Beethoven related the second movement to the first by starting at the same soft level as the other ended and by giving the introductory cello phrase the same falling-rising shape as the quartet opening, although minus its decorative turns. The first subject then enters, a warm cantabile melody over a sinuous, weaving accompaniment. After a full stop, the viola announces the second theme, which Beethoven treats as a fugato, passing it from part to part in imitation. The fugato section is interrupted for a reminder of the cello opening before continuing with even more complex fugal treatment of the viola melody, including the addition of a

countermelody, shortening the gap between entrances and inverting the theme. An abbreviated restatement of the beginning section precedes the coda ending.

The third movement continues without pause, starting with a figure drawn from both the rhythm of the octaves and the sudden, dramatic silences of the first movement. The roughness and strong propulsive energy provide a sharp contrast to the contemplative mood that Beethoven has established. The middle section, resembling at once a solemn chorale and a grim march, is probably the source of the *serioso* in the movement and quartet titles. The lower instruments move along in grave block chords as the first violin weaves a decorative filigree around the measured tread. Beethoven then returns to the opening and finally provides brief glimpses of both parts before concluding the movement.

The finale is related to the third movement by a slow introduction based on that movement's opening rhythmic figure. To continue the chain of interconnections, the introduction's repeated last pair of notes is transformed into the head of the first subject of the ensuing *Allegretto agitato*. The first part of the theme is restless and anxious; the second part, weak and listless. In contrast, the following subject is blustery and violent, an evocation of a thunderstorm with flashing bolts of lightning. Unremitting restlessness and nervous anxiety pervade the movement until nearly the very end. Then, in an abrupt change of mood, Beethoven speeds up the tempo, changes mode from minor to major, and ends with a gay conclusion that attests to the indomitability of the human spirit, no matter how sorely tried by bad fortune.

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