

Parker Quartet

Daniel Chong, violin
Ken Hamao, violin
Jessica Bodner, viola
Kee-Hyun Kim, cello

The Art of the Fugue BWV 1080

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Canone I

Quartet No. 2, "Intimate Letters"

Leos Janáček
(1854-1928)

Andante – Con moto – Allegro
Adagio – Vivace
Moderato – Andante – Adagio
Allegro – Andante – Adagio

Officium Breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky, op. 28

György Kurtág
(b. 1926)

Intermission

Quartet No. 3 in A Major, Op. 41

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

Andante espressivo – Allegro molto moderato
Assai agitato
Adagio molto
Finale: Allegro molto vivace

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

Recordings: Naxos Records, Nimbus Records, and Albany Records

www.parkerquartet.com

Program Notes

The Art of the Fugue, BWV 1080 – Canone I

J.S. Bach

The Art of the Fugue (German: Die Kunst der Fuge), BWV 1080, is an incomplete musical work of unspecified instrumentation by Johann Sebastian Bach. Written in the last decade of his life, The Art of Fugue is the culmination of Bach's experimentation with monothematic instrumental works.

This work consists of 14 fugues and four canons in D minor, each using some variation of a single principal subject, and generally ordered to increase in complexity. "The governing idea of the work", as put by Bach specialist Christoph Wolff, "was an exploration in depth of the contrapuntal possibilities inherent in a single musical subject."^[1] The word "contrapunctus" is often used for each fugue.

It is now generally accepted by scholars that the work was envisioned for keyboard.^[8] However, and despite any disagreements as to whether *The Art of Fugue* was intended to be performed at all and, if so, on what instrument(s), the work continues to be performed and recorded by many different solo instruments and ensembles.

Canone I - *Canon per Augmentationem in Contrario Motu*: Canon in which the following voice is both inverted and augmented.

String Quartet No. 2 "Intimate Letters"

Leoš Janáček

Czech composer Leoš Janáček labored in relative obscurity much of his professional career. Although he was respected as a teacher, folklorist, and director of a music academy, his compositions were rarely performed outside his home city of Brno. Two events after his 60th birthday in 1914 led to a remarkable late flowering of his creative powers. In 1915 the Czech National Theatre in Prague accepted his opera *Jenůfa* for performance the following year. Now considerably improved since its lackluster 1904 première in Brno, it was an immediate and lasting success. Janáček's artistic confidence soared, and he quickly revised an earlier opera he had abandoned, *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček*, for its première in Prague.

A second, more important event occurred in the summer of 1917. While on holiday, Janáček fell passionately in love with Kamila Stösslová, a beautiful 26 year-old woman; he was 62. Both were married. Janáček began a largely one-sided correspondence with Kamila, writing over 700 love letters to her during the next ten years. Her letters in return were infrequent, and those that survive are formal and cool in tone.

Within days of returning from their fateful first meeting, Janáček began his song cycle *Diary of One Who Disappeared* about a young man who deserts his family to live with a gypsy woman. Three of his finest operas followed—*Katya Kabanova*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and *The Makropulos Affair*, each with a lead female role inspired by Kamila. A steady output of choral, orchestral, and chamber compositions also followed in years after he met Kamila. As his fame grew, his music was performed frequently in Prague and other music capitals of Europe.

Kamila kept Janáček at arms-length until something changed in 1927, and she agreed to accept his love. She began signing her letters "your Kamila," and his letters to her became even more impassioned. In January 1928 Janáček began his String Quartet No. 2, calling it "Love Letters" until he settled on the less revealing title "Intimate Letters." As he wrote the quartet, he described it in his letters to Kamila. "Our life

will be in [this piece]...I composed the first movement as my impression when I saw you for the first time...Kamila, it will be beautiful, strange, unrestrained, inspired..." The second movement celebrates their first kiss (their only physical intimacy according to his diary) and his dream of marital union and the birth of their child. "Today I wrote in the musical tones my sweetest desire...Just as you are, laughing with tears in your eyes—that is how it sounds." He wrote the third movement to be "particularly joyful and then dissolve...into a vision like your image." The final movement depicts the struggle between Janáček's desperate hopes for a new life with Kamila and the uncertainty of never knowing where he stood with her. He wrote that the last movement "won't finish with fear for my pretty little weasel, [but] with great longing and fulfillment."

After first hearing "Intimate Letters" performed, Janáček wrote to Kamila, "Did I compose that? Those cries of joy, but what a strange thing—also cries of terror. Exaltation, a warm declaration of love, imploring, untamed longing...[and] fearing." "Intimate Letters" was one of Janáček's very last compositions. In early August he came down with pneumonia after an outing with Kamila and her son, and he died on August 10, 1928.

- Notes by Robert Strong © 2015

Officium Breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky, op. 28 György Kurtág

Hungarian composer [György Kurtág](#) completed Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky opus 28 in 1989. It is a string quartet in 15 concise movements and about eleven and a half minutes in duration. The composer required over ten years to come up with enough material for another string quartet; his last one was completed in 1978, and every tiny movement should be heard with great care. It is music that eschews development in favor of brief communications of atmosphere, which are more potent than many listeners may have realized possible. [Kurtág](#) is in many ways developing the ideas of [Webern](#) in his own music, taking some of the Austrian master's discoveries further just as [Webern](#) had done with the work of his former teacher [Schoenberg](#). [Webern](#) had managed to successfully free the atonal and twelve-tone methods of the outmoded methods of writing. This crystallization of the language created a completely new and contracted dramatic curve. [Kurtág](#) takes this process further, realizing the impact of this direction, and effectively eliminates the dramatic curve. In its place is a hyper-intensification of the moment, so that he requires just enough time to demonstrate an idea that is so powerful that there is nothing left to be done with it once it has been heard. For many listeners, this innovation takes some time to absorb. Because no one else writes in this manner, there is no blueprint for writing one of these tiny "microludes," which is perhaps why it takes the composer so long to conceive of enough of them to constitute a complete piece of music. There is a finite amount of ways of distributing sounds among four instruments for a few moments, and to use this near non-arsenal to make especially effective bursts of sound requires genius. Beautiful moments in the standard quartet catalog are too many to count, but until [Kurtág](#) came along, the beauty of these moments required a great deal of context in order to make them significant. Just as a critical unveiling of a fact in a novel or film is given impact by the situation surrounding it, music has traditionally worked upon itself to give the subsequent moment value. This composer has done something different; he has injected the context, the significance, into the initial moment of its demonstration. Only the American composer Feldman has done something comparable, but his works demonstrate a similar point over a great deal of time, and are the result of completely separate, New World musical investigations. [Kurtág](#) is through-and-through Middle European. He continues the traditions of [Webern](#) and [Bartók](#). Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky opus 28 is a masterpiece of European music, as completely original and compelling as those who wrote memorable works from previous centuries. It is new for its time and completely grounded in the progress of the musical canon.

The operative word for this music is intense. There is something desperate and political about the sound, which allows itself to burst through for only a moment. No self-pity, no request or overt yearning is heard; it is simply too grave for that, demonstrating a clenched dignity that knows too well that violently thrashing about will not come the outcome of something terrible. It is the courageous nature of this self-possession that ennobles humanity during its darkest hour, the least easily publicized form of valor. *Officium breve* in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky opus 28 shows us what quiet strength is made of, and is among the most inspiring quartets of its age.

- Notes by John Keillor

Quartet in A, Op. 41, No. 3

Robert Schumann

Unlike many composers, whose developing style can be traced over time through any one medium, Schumann wrote in sets – over 100 songs including the cycles *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und Leben* in 1840 (the year he finally married his beloved Clara), two symphonies in 1841 and most of his chamber music in 1842. All three string quartets, as well as the piano quartet and quintet, date from that year.

The first movement of his third string quartet opens with a slow introduction of the main theme, which seems to be calling out: “Cla-ra.” This descending fifth motto occurs throughout the movement. If this theme is full of a lyricism that displays the song-writing skills of the composer, the second theme, a lilting melody in the cello and first violin, shows the influence of Schumann the pianist; it works very well at the keyboard, but is unusual writing for a string quartet because of the unanchored off-beat accompaniment.

The second movement is a theme and variations – with a twist. The theme does not come at the beginning of the movement, but instead is played after three variations have already been heard.

The slow movement is surely one of Schumann’s finest compositions. It is full of deeply heartfelt and intensely personal emotions that periodically overflow into passionate outpourings. The rhythmic accompaniment, almost military in its insistence, only serves to highlight the romantic nature of the movement, where the same rhythmic figure, only considerably accelerated, now predominates.

While it would have been quite common in a last movement to include a fugal section between statements of the rondo theme (as he did in the last movement of the Piano Quintet), Schumann instead introduces an elegant Gavotte in the finale, adding a nice contrast to an otherwise energetic rondo that kicks up its heels on the off-beats and gallops off to a rousing finish.

-Notes by Steven Miller (1996)