

Balourdet Quartet

Program

“Deepest Dedication”

As part of a personal dedication of six quartets to Haydn, Mozart’s D minor Quartet flourishes through operatic narrative and personalities. Beethoven’s patronage by the Russian Count Rasumovsky served as a launching point to expand on classical form and search for new realms of cross-cultural possibilities, centering the work around Russian church modes and a hymn. We dedicate our exciting commission by Karim Al-Zand, made possible by the CMA Commissioning Grant, to the thriving new-music scene today, and who help keep this living tradition vital to our shared cultural fabric.

String Quartet No. 15 in D minor, K.421 (1783)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)

Allegro moderato
Andante
Menuetto & Trio, Allegretto
Allegretto ma non troppo

Strange Machines (2022 CMA Commission)

Karim Al-Zand
(b.1970)

1. *Alberti Machine*
2. *Goldberg Machine*
3. *Mannheim Machine*

Intermission

String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 59 No.1 (1808)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Allegro
Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando
Adagio molto e mesto – attacca
“Theme Russe” : Allegro

Program Notes

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's String Quartet No. 15 in D minor, K. 421/417b is the second of the [Quartets dedicated to Haydn](#) and the only one of the set in a [minor key](#). Though undated in the autograph, it is believed to have been completed in 1783, while his wife [Constanze Mozart](#) was in labour with her first child Raimund. Constanze stated that the rising string figures in the second movement corresponded to her cries from the other room.

It is in four movements:

Allegro moderato
Andante (F major)
Menuetto and Trio (the latter in D major). Allegretto
Allegretto ma non troppo

The first movement is characterized by a sharp contrast between the aperiodicity of the first subject group, characterized by Arnold Schoenberg as "prose-like," and the "wholly periodic" second subject group. In the *Andante* and the *Menuetto and Trio*, "normal expectations of phraseology are confounded." The main part of the *Menuetto* is in minuet sonata form, while "the contrasting major-mode *Trio* ... is ... almost embarrassingly lightweight on its own ... [but] makes a wonderful foil to the darker character of the Minuet." The last movement is a set of variations. The movement ends in a picardy third.

Canadian-American composer **Karim Al-Zand's String Quartet No.4 "Strange Machines"** was a commission that has been made possible by the Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program, with generous funding provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The piece imagines three quirky musical automata. In *Alberti Machine* we encounter a steam-punk music box, its buttons, levers and dials adjusting a familiar accompanimental pattern until the machine breaks. Bach meets Rube in *Goldberg Machine*, a contraption that careens between variations in a musical chain reaction. *Mannheim Machine* is a cliché-bot, an unhinged device that furiously spits out distorted musical tropes from the dawn of the symphony.

Al-Zand was born in Tunis, Tunisia, raised in Ottawa, Canada and educated in Montreal (McGill University, BMus 1993) and Cambridge (Harvard University, PhD 2000). Since 2000 he has taught composition and music theory in Houston at the Shepherd School of Music, Rice University. His music has been called "strong and startlingly lovely" (*Boston Globe*). His compositions are wide-ranging in influence and inspiration, encompassing solo, chamber, vocal and orchestral works. From scores for dance, to compositions for young people, to multi-disciplinary and collaborative works, Al-Zand's music is diverse in both its subject matter and its audience. It explores connections between music and other arts, and draws inspiration from varied sources such as graphic art, myths and fables, folk music of the world, film, spoken word, jazz, and his own Middle Eastern heritage. Al-Zand's music has enjoyed success in the US, Canada and abroad and he is the recipient of several national awards, including the "Arts and Letters Award in Music" from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet No. 7 in F major, Op. 59, No. 1, was written and published in 1808. This work is the first of three of his "[Rasumovsky](#)" cycle of string quartets. Commissioned by prince [Andrey Razumovsky](#), then the [Russian ambassador to Vienna](#), this quartet is the first of Beethoven's middle period quartets and departs in style from his earlier [Op. 18 quartets](#). The most apparent difference is that this quartet is over forty minutes long in a typical performance, whereas most of Beethoven's earlier quartets lasted twenty-five to thirty minutes. Furthermore, this quartet notoriously requires a greatly expanded technical repertoire. It consists of four movements:

1. Allegro (F major)
2. Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando (B ♭ major)
3. Adagio molto e mesto - attacca (F minor)
4. "Thème Russe": Allegro (F major)

The first movement is in an expansive [sonata form](#), including a [fugato](#) in the development and lasting nearly twelve minutes even though it forgoes the then-customary repeat of the exposition. The opening cello melody has its tonality only weakly defined, with the first cadence establishing the key of F major only occurring several bars into the movement.

Another feature of the first movement is the delayed emotional recapitulation. As became one of Beethoven's many tools for emotional manipulation, delaying the grandiosity of the recapitulation for several bars after the establishment of the tonic key allowed Beethoven to heighten expectation of a definitive statement.

While both the majestic slow third movement and the fourth are also in sonata form, the second movement [scherzo](#) is formally one of the most unusual movements of Beethoven's middle period, easily classifiable as being also in sonata form.

The final movement is built around a popular Russian theme, likely an attempt to ingratiate the work to its Russian commissioner.