

Jupiter Quartet
Program

The Jupiter Quartet presents *Folk Encounters*. The first half of this globally-inspired program pairs Su Lian Tan's evocation of traditional South Asian puppet theater with Wynton Marsalis' exploration of the complicated American Creole experience through the lens of a New Orleans ball. The program finishes with folk-inspired chamber music by Dvořák. Dvořák's exuberant and expansive A-flat Major quartet reflects the composer's delight in finding kinship between the folk music of America and his beloved homeland of Czechoslovakia.

Su Lian Tan: *Life in Wayang*

Wynton Marsalis: selections from Quartet No. 1, *At the Octoroon Balls*

III. Creole Contradanzas

IV. Many Gone

V. Hellbound Highball

~~intermission~~

Antonín Dvořák: String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105 B. 193

Program Notes

Su Lian Tan: *Life in Wayang*

Wayang is a type of traditional puppet theater found across the Malay world, most notably in Indonesia and Malaysia. In the type best known internationally, *wayang kulit*, painted leather shadow puppets depict stories adapted from the Hindu epics and accompanied by the layered, cyclical intonations and punctuating gong tones of bronze *gamelan* orchestras. Held outdoors, often in conjunction with religious events, *wayang* performances represent a central place of gathering within communities as children and adults alike can witness both the story world on the screen and the “behind-the-scenes” working of the puppeteer and musicians. *Life in Wayang’s* tripartite structure, mirroring that of traditional *wayang* narratives, transports the listener into the aural, mental, and communal states of *wayang* performance.

Life in Wayang was commissioned by the Takacs String Quartet. They premiered it in April 2003 at Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont.

I. This first movement struggles with our concepts of god and pious love. Beckoned towards the world of light and shadows by the solo violin, the listener is suddenly plunged by the entry of all four instrumental voices into a world where quickly-shifting tremolo and pizzicato evoke the flickering light and darkness of the *wayang* world, and the sharp shifts of the puppets as they enact sacred-secular dramas. Lush, sweeping dissonances interspersed with solo interjections suggest interplay of dramatic characters and the emotions of the audience. The emergence of an even, oscillating ostinato in the middle voices provides a *gamelan*-like core melody over which cello and violin voices twist and turn. With a sudden break to silence, a final pianissimo commentary carries the listener to the next movement.

II. As humans are prone to loving each other, so the music of the second movement charts this journey of rapture and heartbreak, easy and difficult, through twists and turns. Instrumental voices harmonizing in a Western Romantic idiom evoke ballads both familiar and forgotten, bringing the scale of the shadow play from celestial to human. Sudden interjections from the individual voices interrupt these sweet tonalities, returning the listener to the rhythmic and harmonic world of the first movement. Like chiming bells, new strident instrumental attacks mark metered triads that announce a final coda in which both tonalities are reconciled then fade away.

III. The third movement brings us back to the present as we resume our place in the audience of *wayang* performed in a celebration of community. The playful initial melody unfolds accompanied by pizzicato, which then fragments and intensifies into polyvocal conversation. As the narrative reaches its climax, the quartet’s frantic rhythm slows. Suddenly, the *wayang* performance is over. With a final quiet commentary, the audience disperses.

Wynton Marsalis: selections from Quartet No. 1, *At the Octoroon Balls*

*(These notes were written by Bruce Adolphe for the 1995 premiere of **At the Octoroon Balls**, commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and Jazz at Lincoln Center.)*

WE SEEM TO LIVE IN AN ERA OF CULTURAL CROSSOVERS, of exploring diversity. This is a time when klezmer Giora Feldman's wailing clarinet is joined by the Cleveland String Quartet, Edgar Meyer's Nashville, home-spun country style tunes are strummed and bowed by the Emerson String Quartet, a member of the composition faculty at Princeton is an electric guitar virtuoso (Steve Mackey) and Itzhak Perlman cuts a jazz album with Oscar Peterson. It's a good time for master jazzer Wynton Marsalis, the artistic director of Lincoln Center's Jazz Department, to write a string quartet.

We might wonder along with George and Ira Gershwin, "How long has this been going on?" The answer is a very long time. As surely as Papa Haydn appropriated Croatian and Hungarian folk dances and Beethoven made arrangements of popular songs like "*Sally in our Alley*," musicians have never been as compartmentalized in their creative endeavors as is commonly supposed.

While it is a more recent phenomenon that a jazz composer will tackle a string quartet, "classical" composers have been interested in jazz since it burst upon the scene. In the early part of our century, there was an explosion of jazz-influenced composing in Europe. "You Americans take jazz too lightly," wrote Maurice Ravel in 1928. "In my opinion, it is bound to lead to the national music of the United States."

For Wynton Marsalis, the invitation to compose a work for The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center became a more significant "cross-over" endeavor once the medium of string quartet was agreed upon. The string quartet remains the quintessential classical medium. Almost everything there is to know about the mysteries of musical thought can be learned from the string quartets of Beethoven alone. Composers since Beethoven have turned to the string quartet for their most intimate and profound musings.

Wynton Marsalis comes to the string quartet as a renowned jazz player and composer, but a stranger to the string quartet medium. Being a mature artist, Marsalis approached the task in the right way: as himself, drawing on his own life and music for material. A composer may turn to the outside world to borrow, as Ravel borrowed the "blues," and a composer may cross boundaries, as Marsalis does here; but it is inward that all creative artists must look for inspiration, for the memories that fire the imagination.

Wynton Marsalis's *At the Octoroon Balls* is inspired by the composer's early life in New Orleans. "A ball is a ritual and a dance," Marsalis explains. "Everybody was in their finest clothing. At the Octoroon Balls there was an interesting cross-section of life. People from different strata of society came together in pursuit of pleasure and fulfillment. The music brought people together."

New Orleans is considered the birthplace of jazz. From West African cross-rhythms, the work songs of slaves, field hollers and spirituals, came ragtime and the blues. This mixed with European-American quadrilles, waltzes, sentimental ballads, brass bands, cigar-box guitars, clarinets, comets and trombones, and that's how jazz was born.

Wynton, too, was born in New Orleans (Crescent City). The musical education of this modern American included traditional jazz in a Baptist church, R&B, the Crispy Critters (top 40 band), Juilliard, salsa bands, Broadway pits and the Brooklyn Philharmonia; culminating in a relationship with Art Blakey as a regular with the Jazz Messengers. Wynton speaks lovingly of Art Blakey. "He taught me the real meaning of jazz music, that it has a spiritual connection and that it is about American democracy."

As it turns out, jazz and the string quartet are natural stagefellows, as the music on this program demonstrates. There is something that jazz and classical chamber music share which is not shared by commercial, popular music. What is that something? I believe it is perfectly expressed by Wynton Marsalis when, speaking about influences on his life and work, he said, "My father, Ellis Marsalis, helped me understand the joy of seriousness."

Antonín Dvořák: String Quartet No. 14 in A-flat Major, Op. 105 B. 193

Dvorak began writing his Quartet in A flat major just before he was due to leave the United States for his homeland. He started on the sketch in New York at the end of March 1895 but, after completing 111 bars, he laid it aside (presumably because he had to prepare for his departure) and only returned to the sketch in December of that year, once back in Prague. The quartets appeared after an unusually long break of four months which Dvorak probably took in order to rest after his two-and-a-half years in America. The outcome of this lengthy period of inactivity was a surfeit of ideas thus, just two days after completing Quartet in G major, Dvorak reached once more for his New York sketch for the Quartet in A flat major, and finished it in under three weeks. Of his original sketch he used only the exposition in the first movement; from the development section onwards, he approached the quartet from an entirely different perspective.

Like the Quartet in G major from the same period, the Quartet in A flat major is also a masterpiece of its genre. In this, his last chamber work, Dvorak brought together all the experience he had acquired in the field of absolute music and transformed the tradition into something exceptional. In contrast to its predecessor, the Quartet in A flat major is conceived more polyphonically and the scherzo is now incorporated into the second movement. In this quartet as well, Dvorak works with a rich palette of expressional means and vibrant thematic material. The typical traits of the composer's American period, traces of which are still evident in the previous Quartet in G major, are now absent. The overall tone of the work is positive and joyful, and faithfully reflects his spiritual disposition at the time.

The first movement begins with a slow introduction which, first in the cello, then gradually in the other instruments, anticipates the main theme. The quartet boasts a wealth of ideas, particularly in the treatment of the main theme, which undergoes various modifications even as it is first introduced in the exposition; its individual partial elements then co-create various contrasting musical figures. The second subject features a distinctive rhythm constructed around a succession of triplets. The skilfully conceived development section first incorporates individual motivic cells from the main subject, which are later "encroached upon" by the second subject. The music in the development gradually becomes more agitated, leading to the recapitulation which, surprisingly, does not begin in A flat major, but in G major. The recapitulation follows its traditional course, to be followed by a coda at the end which further intensifies the prevailing joyous mood of the movement.

The second movement is sometimes described as Dvorak's most inspiring scherzo. It is written in traditional three-part A-B-A form, the whole built around a single thematic focal point, namely a highly rhythmical, syncopated idea exposed in the introduction to part A. As it develops, this theme acquires a more lyrical character in which we will hear echoes of the lullaby sung by Bohus's mother from the opera [*The Jacobin*](#). The middle part of the movement, part B, in contrast, brings a serene, broadly arching melody. The third movement is a prime example of typical Dvorakian lyricism and fervour. With the exception of the middle section,

with its somewhat more sombre tone, the movement represents a wonderful arc of tranquility and contentment, incorporating masterful use of contrapuntal approaches and an unusually rich sound. The fourth movement, a combination of the sonata principle and rondo, crowns the work in an expression of spontaneous joy. It is constructed from three themes and betrays a strong resonance of Czech folklore, in particular, the polka. Towards the end, Dvorak gradually enhances the joyous tone of the movement, and the work culminates in dazzling euphoric style.