Advance Program Notes

Brentano String Quartet
Sunday, November 2, 2014, 2 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Brentano String Quartet

Mark Steinberg, violin
Serena Canin, violin
Misha Armory, viola
Nina Lee, cello

String Quartet in B-flat major, KV 458 *Hunt* — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Allegro vivace assai
Menuetto (Moderato)
Adagio
Allegro assai

String Quartet No. 3 (1927) — Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Moderato
Allegro
Recapitulation of Moderato
Coda (Allegro molto)

Intermission

String Quartet in D minor, D. 810 *Death and the Maiden* — Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Allegro
Andante con moto (Variations)
Scherzo (Allegro molto)
Presto-Prestissimo

The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists
www.davidroweartists.com
The Brentano String Quartet records for AEON (distributed by Allegro Media Group)
www.brentanoquartet.com

About Brentano String Quartet

Since its inception in 1992, the Brentano String Quartet has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. "Passionate, uninhibited, and spellbinding," raves the *London Independent;* the *New York Times* extols its "luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism."

As of July 2014, the Brentano Quartet succeeds the Tokyo Quartet as artists in residence at Yale University, departing from their 14-year residency at Princeton University. The quartet also currently serves as the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

The quartet has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York, the Library of Congress in Washington, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Konzerthaus in Vienna, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, and the Sydney Opera House. The quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut.

The Brentano Quartet is known for especially imaginative projects combining old and new music, such as *Fragments: Connecting Past and Present* and *Bach Perspectives.* Among the quartet's latest collaborations with contemporary composers is a new work by Steven Mackey, *One Red Rose,* commemorating the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Other recent commissions include a piano quintet by Vijay Iyer, a work by Eric Moe (with Christine Brandes, soprano), and a new viola quintet by Felipe Lara (performed with violist Hsin-Yun Huang). In 2012, the quartet provided the central music (Beethoven, Opus 131) for the critically acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet.*

The quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The quartet has also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman, pianist Richard Goode, and pianist Mitsuko Uchida.

The quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved," the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

Mozart Quartet K. 458, Hunt

Painter Agnes Martin has said of her work, "if you wake up in the morning and you feel happy about nothing, no cause, that's what I paint about." It could well be said of Mozart that he, too, finds inspiration in the underlying happiness that embraces all corners of our experience, arising radiantly from clear vision. His is an ebullient joy infinitely larger than cheerfulness, although it knows cheer well. He can frolic and poke fun with the best of them, and the next moment enter fully into shadow without being consumed by it.

The String Quartet in B-flat Major, K458, starts like a nursery rhyme: four short, rhyming lines. Innocence incarnate, it eschews any complication or sophistication and, without embarrassment, launches us with high spirits into the piece. It is also this opening that earns the work its nickname, "the Hunt," evoking open-air hunting horns, redolent of fresh air and optimism. The third of the four rhyming lines is almost an exact repetition of the first, but receives the most uncomplicated of embellishments, a simple turn, born of enthusiasm, that will become a seed for much of the movement.

Immediately following the opening statement we find ourselves in the forest, a pair of lovers taunting each other, one calling out teasingly from behind a tree before jumping out and hiding again, finally pretending to disappear entirely before erupting in laughter and glee at all the hijinks. One could be in any number of the master's operas; good-natured wit abounds. After a sequential, traveling passage the music halts for each player in turn to recall, with curiosity, that turn in the opening phrase, now extended to a five-note shake. The music seems to chase after this turn until we are brought to the next theme. Here the turn is contextualized, recognized, perhaps, as the signature motion of a butterfly. And the flutter of the insect becomes indistinguishable from the frisson of delight it engenders. The opening section evaporates into the ether, drifting away, ever fainter.

Following the repeat of the music offered so far is a theme, over a drone, with the characteristic rusticity of the simplest of horns. Again we breathe the fresh air; all is health, and ease. But, as in all comedies, trouble must intrude, even if it is offered with a melodramatic wink, as it is here. The turn figure is modified to make progress up the scale rather than stay in one place, and off it goes looking for a reprieve from the veil of mist that has descended. It is punctuated by theatrical sighs, but the angst doesn't last. The butterflies in the open meadow are there to remind us of the essential lightness of life if we can but lift our eyes. The music lets go of the drama to rediscover the opening idea.

The coda of the movement announces itself with an operatic "halt!" and a tremulous response, but the mask is dropped quickly. The opening nursery rhyme echoes through the whole countryside and overlaps itself. In the end the altered turn from the melodramatic part of the movement reappears completely debarbed, and the music dances away, guileless.

Agnes Martin says, "my formats are square, but the grids never are absolutely square; they are rectangles, a little bit off the square, making a sort of contradiction, a dissonance, though I didn't set out to do it that way. When I cover the square with rectangles, it lightens the weight of the square, destroys its power." Martin and Mozart share something essential. The second movement of the quartet, the minuet, is the squarest of forms, but Mozart is too clever to allow predictability and regularity to weigh it down. The first phrase is made up of eight bars, or steps, absolutely as expected. Yet within this structure Mozart first organizes those bars not by twos, but into three plus three plus two. Because of this there is no middle to pin down and the music levitates rather than plods. Within the second part of the phrase, Mozart emphasizes the preparation or lift for each step rather than the moment at which foot meets earth, and thus gives wing to the music on a second level. Throughout the movement he defies expectations of leaden symmetry without breaking the frame. By doing this, he is able to enter into the world of high society without succumbing to the tedium of having to be of it. In the contrasting trio section he plays the clown who, in turn, plays at being a diva. There are operatic sighs, and leaps, and weeping, but all from a clown who puts it at such a remove as to be able to toss it aside and smile, as if the cares of the world were in quotation marks.

Mozart Quartet K. 458, Hunt, *continued*

The slow movement of the piece retreats into the key of the subdominant, a benediction, the place where outer reality resolves into our private stillness. Martin wishes "the idea of time would drain out of my cells and leave me quiet even on this shore." Here in this Adagio there is motion but not time in the sense of traveling through. Rather there is the coexistence of all things; the light and the dark that are presented sequentially only because time is the necessary substrate for music are in fact two aspects of the same state. The thematic material that breathes the cold air of shadow in minor also emanates the warmth of the sun's rays in major. There is peace in the doubleness; the two don't cancel each other but rather validate each other, held together in suspension. The movement has the most gentle and delicate of leave-takings.

The last movement abounds with laughter, teasing, skipping, and general merriment. At times it evokes elemental game-playing as the quartet functions as two against two. It is often said of Mozart that he is childlike. Certainly here are elements we associate with child's play, at least with very clever and engaged children: a sense of wonder and of looking at our world as one replete with possibility, an essential lightness of engagement. Agnes Martin claims, "inspiration is pervasive but not a power... It is an untroubled mind. Of course we know that an untroubled state of mind cannot last. So we say that inspiration comes and goes but really it is there all the time waiting for us to be untroubled again. We can therefore say that it is pervasive. Young children are more untroubled than adults and have many more inspirations. All the moments of inspiration added together make what we call sensibility. The development of sensibility is the most important thing for children and adults but is much more possible in children." And in those of preternatural wisdom, like Mozart.

Note by Mark Steinberg

Bartók String Quartet No. 3

Béla Bartók's Third String Quartet was written in 1926, when the composer was in his mid-40s. At this point in his life, he was internationally recognized, not just as an important composer but also as one of the earliest serious ethnomusicologists: he collected and catalogued folk music from several Eastern European countries, and even ranged as far as North Africa in his research. To Bartók's thinking, folk music was of more than scientific interest; it was the life-giving seed without which there was no way forward in musical creation. One might contrast him with a late Romantic composer such as Brahms, for whom writing a Hungarian Rhapsody meant to flavor his essentially Brahmsian composition with a light perfume of Hungarian rhythms or harmonies, as a kind of exotic touch. Bartók aimed, on the other hand, to absorb completely the rhythms and contours of the folk melodies he collected, to a point where his own compositions were the natural result. Where for Brahms or Liszt the folk element would be the garnish on top, for Bartók it was the nucleus, the central thing around which he formed his own style and structure.

The Third Quartet is Bartók's shortest quartet. It is the only one written in one continuous movement, consisting of a First Part (slow music), a Second Part (quick), a Recapitulation of the First Part and a Coda. The First Part has the quality of an artist contemplating his materials, turning over in his hands this motif, that rhythm. In writing music of this kind, Bartók seems to hearken back to Beethoven in his late quartets, writing music whose "examined" quality seems to invite the listener into the composer's workshop to watch him at work — self-referential music, music about the (sometimes very difficult) creative act. Such music might run the risk of being overly abstruse, fragmentary, disorienting; but Bartók couches his exercise in such a dazzling array of textures, colors and intensities that the theory behind the writing is utterly transformed. Late in the First Part, after many halting forays, some brilliant, some desolate, some ghostly, the composer finally launches a sustained song in the second violin and viola, lyrical and warm, with gentle droning accompaniment from the outer voices — a first polished attempt out of the scraps and shreds of his laboratory.

Bartók, String Quartet No. 3, *continued*

Just as we are given this one moment of seeming completeness, the atmosphere dissolves in the space of a few short bars, and we are catapulted into the Second Part, which is in every way different: quick rather than measured, continuous rather than fragmented, moving along scales instead of leaps, confident and single-minded rather than halting and dilatory. The Second Part also sounds, at least on the surface, closer to folk roots, particularly in its rhythm and its evocation of a stamping dance. Starting teasingly with plucked chords in the cello and viola, the music slowly gathers strength, moving to a terse, dancing melody, passed among the instruments, then repeated more forcefully, inverted, and finally exploding in the second main idea, strongly rhythmic, played fortissimo by the lower voices. These two melodies move through several transformations, with tempi that sometimes press forward, and sometimes fall back; at one point the first melody is transformed into a tense, pianissimo chase, a whispered fugue. Finally the music reaches a peroration of sorts, punctuated by wailing slides, fragmenting gradually in the throes of its crisis.

This fragmentation portends the return of the First Part, ushered in by a short but intense cello passage. In this "Recapitulation," the slow First Part is transformed almost beyond recognition. The material is the same, but the energy and the pacing are quite different. Earlier, the music was contemplative but curious, filled with an energy to try moving in many possible directions. In this later incarnation, the energy is spent, desolate; appropriately for a recapitulation, the music seems to reminisce, to look brokenly backwards rather than forwards. Then, just when the point of utter stillness is upon us, we are swept by some invisible source of energy into the whirling, ghostly music of the Coda. This final, brief section is a return to the vitality of the Second Part, recapping its materials in a yet more intense and effervescent manner, punctuated by gruff refrains and seismic slides, and culminating in a final salvo of brusque unison gestures, an energetic affirmation of life.

Note by Misha Amory

Schubert String Quartet in D-minor, Death and the Maiden

Schubert was a poet of unfulfillable longing, of human vulnerability, of the excruciating sweetness of the yearning to be at peace. He famously said of himself:

"I feel myself to be the most unfortunate, the most miserable being in the world. Think of a man whose health will never be right again, and who from despair over the fact makes it worse instead of better, think of a man, I say, whose splendid hopes have come to naught, to whom the happiness of love and friendship offers nothing but acutest pain, whose enthusiasm (at least, the inspiring kind) for the Beautiful threatens to disappear, and ask yourself whether he isn't a miserable, unfortunate fellow.

"My peace is gone, my heart is heavy,
"I find it never, nevermore…

"so might I sing every day, since each night when I go to sleep I hope never again to wake, and each morning merely reminds me of the misery of yesterday."

In no other composer's work, with the possible exception of Shostakovich, do we find such stark and shattering juxtaposition of the human and the inhuman. Stony, unforgiving musical elements with no sense of malleability demand to be acknowledged, setting up a drama of the vulnerable individual in the clutches of destiny. Schubert's celebrated lyricism has at its core the suffering of recognizing that which can not be had. The most tender passages very often have a quality of distance, of a vision of that most dearly hoped for and yet felt to be ungraspable. For the qualities of splendid hopes, of the happiness of love and friendship, of enthusiasm for the beautiful which Schubert mentions are far from absent from his work. But they appear only in the guise of dreams, representing a wounding optimism. In many ways the traveler of the Winterreise, a lonely soul wandering though a barren, icy landscape, is emblematic of much of this composer's output.

Schubert String Quartet in D-minor, Death and the Maiden, *continued*

One of Schubert's most beloved chamber music works, written when he was 27, the D-minor String Quartet is characterized quite strongly by these qualities. Its opening measures could hardly be more stern and forbidding, and are immediately answered by tremulous whispered versions of the same motif, reacting with fear and filled with questioning. It is reminiscent of the casting out of Eden and the tenebrous trembling following. The tension between these two faces of the same material motivates the unfurling drama of the movement. The second theme is filled with hope, a gently rolling, tender melody which quickly becomes unsettled and takes on an unexpected harshness, filled with desperation. At the arrival of the coda we are plunged into an abyss, cold and distant, surrounded by spectral cries. A quickening of the tempo allows for one more attempt at facing the crisis head-on, but dissolves in defeat at the movement's close.

The second movement is responsible for the nickname of this quartet, "Death and the Maiden," since it is a set of variations on Schubert's song of the same name. Rhythmically it proceeds in dactyls, the metrical foot of ancient Greek elegiac poetry. In the song, Death approaches a young maiden and says to her, "give me your hand, you lovely, tender creature. I am a friend and come not to punish. Be of good courage, I am not cruel; you shall sleep softly in my arms." The treatment of this theme here reveals the full ambiguity of the idea of Death in Schubert's music, at once terrifying and consoling. The theme is presented as a hushed chorale, austere and inexorable. A breathless, gasping variation follows, and then one with the original theme sung in the cello while the other instruments provide a richly textured, yet delicate accompaniment. The full fury of Death is unleashed in the third variation, the rhythm of the theme repeated obsessively four times as fast, with the delicate answers in the first half of the variation disappearing in the second. An exploration of a possible sense of final peace is allowed before a terrifying, inevitable but very slow building to the climax of the movement. Its denouement glistens with the ambiguity of resignation which is both tired and finally at rest.

The Scherzo is far from the original idea of such a movement as a light joke. Filled with jabbing offbeat accents, its anxiety is dissipated in the trio which follows, now in major. Soft throughout, this trio is a perfect example of the unreachable Eden Schubert dreams of, forever out of reach. The return of the Scherzo dashes any such hopes, of course, and the movement comes to fiery end, setting up the energetic final movement.

The final Presto is a dark galloping night ride in D-minor, which keeps finding itself precariously perched in major keys. Forcefully driving almost without relief, with even more slowly moving themes accompanied by figures which dart about restlessly, the movement as it nears its close erupts into a Prestissimo coda which rushes headlong, mercilessly, to the final, brutal chords of the piece.

Note by Mark Steinberg

Engagement Activities

Sunday, November 2, 2014, 10 AM
Master Class with Brentano String Quartet
Squires Recital Salon
Brentano String Quartet musicians Mark Steinberg, violin, and Nina Lee, cello, give a master class, open to the public.
Thank you to Alan Weinstein for leading this public master class.

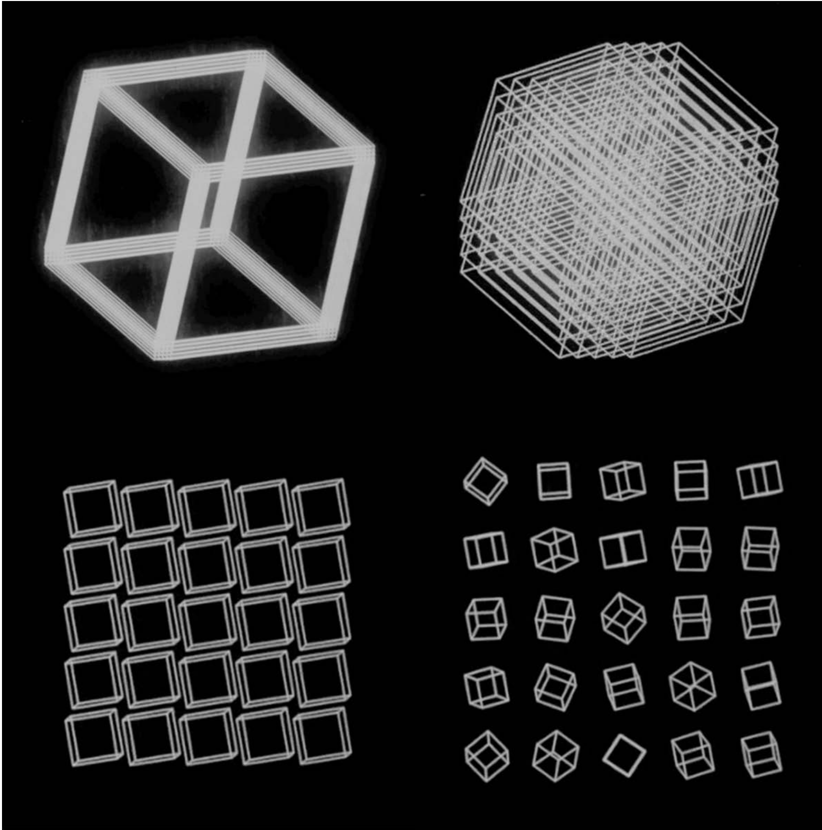
Ingolf Dahl, Concerto a Tre for Clarinet, Violin and Cello
Katelyn Rockefeller, clarinet
Victoria Bomi Choi, violin
John Kofol, cello

Beethoven, Opus 18, No. 4. *Allegro ma non troppo*
Steven Zaboji, violin
Jason Agola, violin
Katie Heltzel, viola
Anna Schierlmann, cello

Beethoven, Opus 97, *Archduke Trio; Allegro moderato*
Nathan Folta, violin
Alex Fowler, cello
Travis Whaley, piano

Donald Erb, *Illusions, Bariolage*
Alex Fowler, cello
Jacob Courington, bass

In the Galleries



Manfred Mohr
Stills from *Cube Transformation Study, 1972*
Digitization of original 16mm film
Programmed in FORTRAN IV

Explore CONNECTIONS between works of art, artists, and viewers; between art past and present; and between ideas and their aesthetic manifestation.

Evolving Geometries: Line, Form, and Color
Thursday, September 25, 2014-Thursday, November 20, 2014
Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 AM-6 PM/Saturday-Sunday, 10 AM-4 PM

Three one-person exhibitions by renowned artists Manfred Mohr, Patrick Wilson, and Odili Donald Odita, who inventively explore geometry from multiple perspectives.

This exhibition features an audio guide available via cell phone. To hear a sample, call (540) 209-9027 and press 7, followed by the pound (#) key. The full guide is available in the galleries.