

This afternoon's concert is co-sponsored by ESSEX MEADOWS
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New York Philharmonic String Quartet

Frank Huang, *violin* Sheryl Staples, *violin*

Cynthia Phelps, *viola* Carter Brey, *cello*

with Mihae Lee, *piano*

Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2, "Quinten"

Allegro

Andante o piu tosto allegretto

Menuetto: Allegro ma non troppo

Finale: Vivace assai

Franz Josef Haydn

(1732-1809)

Quartet in F major, Op. 96, "American"

Allegro ma non troppo

Lento

Molto vivace

Finale: vivace ma non troppo

Antonín Dvořák

(1841-1904)

~ INTERMISSION ~

Quintet in E-flat major for Piano and Strings, Op. 44

Allegro brillante

In modo d'un marcia: un poco largamente

Scherzo: molto vivace

Allegro ma non troppo

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

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Program Notes by Barbara Leish

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Quartet in D minor, Op. 76, No. 2, “Quinten” (Fifths) (1796-97)

When he was in his twenties, Joseph Haydn began his long service in the Hungarian house of Esterházy. Over the next several decades, as the Esterházy court’s resident composer and musical director, he produced an enormous body of work that had a profound impact on the development of Western music. Haydn himself described his output during those years as experimental, bold, and original. But in 1760 Haydn’s patron Prince Nicolas Esterházy died, and the Prince’s successor had little interest in music. Haydn, beloved by the Viennese and by now wealthy, could have rested on his considerable laurels and retired. Instead, ready for new adventures, he set out on the first of two triumphant visits to England, where he was feted and lionized. Rejuvenated, he went on to compose some of his greatest music, including the “London” Symphonies, the oratorio *The Creation*, and the six Opus 76 String Quartets – works rich in daring musical ideas and innovations.

The Quartet Op. 76 No. 2 in D minor in particular is a compositional tour de force. H.C. Robbins Landon called it “one of the most serious, learned and intellectually formidable works he ever wrote.” It gets its nickname from the unorthodox construction of the opening Allegro. While it is in sonata form – exposition, development, recapitulation – there is no contrasting second or third theme. Rather, the movement opens with two falling fifths, and everything develops from these intervals. They are passed from instrument to instrument and appear in a variety of transformations: speeded up, slowed down, inverted, syncopated, in counterpoint, in different keys. Structurally ingenious and musically gripping, the Allegro is swept along by the first violin’s virtuosic figurations as it rushes headlong to a dramatic coda.

Taking us to a different world, Haydn follows the dark and stern Allegro with a leisurely Andante that is much lighter in texture, and that features variations on a graceful theme played by the first violin. The respite is short-lived, however. The strange, lumbering Menuetto that follows is another memorable example of Haydn’s urge to innovate. It has been fancifully nicknamed the “witches’ minuet” for its demonic sound. Structurally it is a strict canon, with the top two instruments and the bottom two playing in octave unison, a measure apart. To Tovey the music sounded like “clowns dancing with flat feet.” Even the major-mode trio is more galumphing than dancelike.

The sun does finally shine in the concluding Vivace assai, a rollicking dance whose folklike qualities would have been familiar to Haydn’s audiences. Brimming with suggestions of gypsy fiddling, it is spiced with syncopation, drones, teasing pauses, and a braying donkey motif on its way to its exuberant major-key close. In four movements – a taut, monothematic Allegro, a lightly ornamented, gentle Andante, an ungainly minuet

written in strict counterpoint, and a raucous finale – Haydn has treated his listeners to a wonderful demonstration of the expressive possibilities of the string quartet.

Antonin Dvořák (1841-1904)

Quartet in F major, Op. 96, “American” (1893)

If Haydn’s “Quinten” Quartet is a brilliant example of musical innovation, Dvořák with equal brilliance captures the lyricism and lilt of folk music in his “American” Quartet. Dvořák had come to America in 1892 to head the newly founded National Conservatory of Music in New York City. After a demanding first year, he left with his family to spend the summer in Spillville, Iowa, a tiny community of Czech immigrants. The village and the surrounding countryside reminded the composer of his native Bohemia. Relaxed and at ease, he played the church organ, drank beer with Czech-speaking villagers, fished, and took long walks in the woods. It was like coming home.

Within days of his arrival, Dvořák began work on the joyful F major String Quartet. He wrote quickly, sketching it out in just three days and finishing it in less than two weeks. Like the Quintet that he also wrote that summer and the New World Symphony that he had finished the previous winter, the “American” String Quartet was inspired by the sounds he had heard. Over the years, musicologists have searched the Quartet for direct quotations from American folk melodies, without success. Others have heard suggestions of Czech folk music – not surprising, because folk traditions from around the world share common features, including melodies based on the pentatonic (five-note) scale, rhythmic ostinatos, and marked syncopations. Still, the American influence is unmistakable. Dvořák was intrigued by all of America’s music, whether African American songs, Native American drumming, or the rhythm of Scottish folk tunes. As he said, “I know that I would never have written my new symphony, or the String Quartet in F major, or the quintet here in Spillville, if I had never seen America!”

The Quartet’s tone is set by the sunny Allegro, which opens with the viola singing a bouncy, syncopated, pentatonic tune over tremolos. There’s a lovely second theme, also pentatonic. Throughout the movement, there’s a notable simplicity of style. While the development section ends with a fugato, for the most part Dvořák avoids polyphonic and harmonic complexity. What he wanted, he said, was “to write something for once that was very melodious and straightforward.”

Dvořák’s gift for lyrical invention is in full flower in the evocative Lento. A melancholy song flows without interruption over an undulating accompaniment, rising to a dramatic peak before subsiding. Some listeners have heard suggestions of both African-American spirituals and the songs of the Plains Indian. The scherzo that follows, which is dominated by a single rhythmic motif, has a rustic vitality. Charmingly, early in the movement the violin plays notes high up in its range to imitate the song of the scarlet tanager, a bird Dvořák heard on his walks in the Spillville woods. If the Lento suggests spirituals, the opening rhythms of the ebullient Finale may have been inspired by Native American drumming. Part of the way through, Dvořák introduces a brief organ-like chorale – perhaps another nod to Spillville – before the music drives to a jubilant close.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44 (1842)

Schumann's Piano Quintet was the first great chamber-music work that paired the piano with a string quartet. In the year he wrote it, he was on a typical-for-Schumann emotional roller coaster. Married less than two years, he hated it when Clara was on tour, but he also hated traveling with her and being in her shadow. At home and miserable while Clara was in northern Europe early in 1842, he passed the time studying counterpoint and the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. But he was depressed, drinking too much, and unable to compose. Robert blamed Clara. In their household book he wrote, "You deprive me of all my ideas right now. I can't even put a single song together. I don't know what's wrong with me." He quickly revived after she returned home, however. By the end of the year he had written three string quartets, a piano trio, a piano quartet, and the glorious Piano Quintet, his most famous chamber work. It took Schumann less than three weeks to finish the Quintet, which he wrote for and dedicated to Clara. Not surprisingly, given Clara's brilliance as a pianist and his own love of the instrument, the piano is front and center for much of the Quintet. But the work is also very much a lush exploration of the sonorities produced when piano and strings work together.

From the outset, the Quintet is marked by what Ronald Taylor describes as "verve, enthusiasm, serenity, charm, and above all a sense of utter conviction, the feeling ... that Schumann saw its entire course from the very moment of its joyful opening bars." Schumann launches the work with a bold unison opening that will reappear in a surprising way at the end of finale. In one of Schumann's magical transformations, this opening motif melts almost immediately into an expressive song. Next the cello and the viola present an equally disarming second theme. Virtuoso piano runs in the development section and a satisfyingly big sound at the end are among the highlights of a movement marked by Schumann's melodic gifts and his sense of high drama.

Each of the movements that follows is dazzling in its own way. The solemn second movement has the air of a funeral march, although both a lyrical second subject played over a restless piano and an agitated middle section affect the opening mood. The instruments chase one other up and down the scale in the acrobatic Scherzo, which features two trios, the first a lyrical inversion of the first movement's opening theme, the second a whirl of motion. The Quintet ends with an exultant Allegro that sweeps to a thrilling coda: a fugue whose subjects are the first theme of the opening movement and the main theme of the finale.

Clara was ill for the Quintet's first private performance, so Felix Mendelssohn sight-read the demanding part. That must have been quite an evening.



The New York Philharmonic String Quartet comprises four Principal musicians from the Orchestra: Concertmaster Frank Huang (The Charles E. Culpeper Chair); Principal Associate Concertmaster Sheryl Staples (The Elizabeth G. Beinecke Chair); Principal Viola Cynthia Phelps (The Mr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Rose Chair); and Principal Cello Carter Brey (The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Chair).

The group was formed in January 2017, during the Philharmonic's 175th anniversary season; the New York Philharmonic String Quartet made its debut as the solo ensemble in John Adams's *Absolute Jest* in New York in March 2017, and reprised the work on the Orchestra's *EUROPE / SPRING* 2017 tour.

All four members are multiple prize winners, have appeared as concerto soloists with the Philharmonic and orchestras around the world, and have appeared frequently in the Philharmonic's chamber music series at David Geffen Hall and Merkin Concert Hall.

Frank Huang has performed at the Marlboro Music Festival, Ravinia's Steans Institute, Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and Caramoor. He frequently participates in Musicians from Marlboro's tours, and was selected by The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center to be a member of the prestigious CMS Two program. Before joining the Houston Symphony as concertmaster in 2010, Frank Huang held the position of first violinist of the Grammy Award-winning Ying Quartet.

Sheryl Staples has performed chamber music for U.S. Ambassadors in London, Paris, Berlin, Beijing, and Hong Kong. She toured Mexico, Brazil, and Chile in 2013, and she has appeared at summer festivals including La Jolla Music Society's SummerFest, Boston Chamber Music Society, Salt Bay Chamberfest, and the chamber music festivals of Santa Fe, Mainly Mozart, Seattle, Aspen, Sarasota, Martha's Vineyard, Strings Music Festival, and Brightstar. She appears on three Stereophile CDs with the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival.

Cynthia Phelps performs with The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Jupiter Chamber Players, and the Santa Fe, La Jolla, Seattle, Chamber Music Northwest, and Bridgehampton festivals. She has appeared with the Guarneri, Tokyo, Orion, American, Brentano, and Prague Quartets, and the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio. She is also a founding member of the chamber group Les Amies, a flute-harp-violita group with Philharmonic Principal Harp Nancy Allen and flutist Carol Wincenc.

Carter Brey has made regular appearances with the Tokyo and Emerson string quartets as well as The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and at festivals such as Spoleto (both in the United States and Italy), and the Santa Fe and La Jolla Chamber Music festivals. He and pianist Christopher O’Riley recorded *Le Grand Tango: Music of Latin America*, a disc of compositions from South America and Mexico released on Helicon Records. These performances mark the debut of the New York Philharmonic String Quartet.



CREDIT : CHRISTIAN STEINER

Praised by *Boston Globe* as “simply dazzling,” Artistic Director and pianist **Mihae Lee** has captivated audiences throughout North America, Europe, and Asia in solo recitals and chamber music concerts, in such venues as Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Jordan Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Academia Nazionale de Santa Cecilia in Rome, Warsaw National Philharmonic Hall, and Taipei National Hall. An active chamber musician, Mihae is a founding member of the Triton Horn Trio and was an artist member of the Boston Chamber Music Society for three decades. Her recordings of Brahms, Shostakovich, Bartok, and Stravinsky with the members of BCMS were critically acclaimed by High Fidelity,

CD Review, and Fanfare magazines, the reviews calling her sound “as warm as Rubinstein, yet virile as Toscanini.” Mihae has appeared frequently at numerous international chamber music festivals including Dubrovnik, Amsterdam, Groningen, Medellin Festicamara, Great Woods, Seattle, OK Mozart, Mainly Mozart, Music from Angel Fire, El Paso, Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, Chamber Music Northwest, Rockport, Sebago-Long Lake, Bard, Norfolk, Mostly Music, Music Mountain, and Chestnut Hill Concerts. Mihae has been a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Bargemusic in New York and Speculum Musicae; has collaborated with the Juilliard, Tokyo, Muir, Cassatt, and Manhattan string quartets; and has premiered and recorded works by such composers as Gunther Schuller, Ned Rorem, Paul Lansky, Henri Lazarof, Michael Daugherty, and Ezra Laderman. Mihae is often heard over the airwaves on National Public Radio’s “Performance Today,” and on WNYC and WQXR in New York City, WGBH in Boston, and other stations around the country. A native of Korea, she is a graduate of The Juilliard School and the New England Conservatory studying with Martin Canin and Russell Sherman. Mihae has released recordings on the Bridge, Etcetera, EDI, Northeastern, and BCMS labels, and since 2016 she serves as Music Director of the Sebago-Long Lake Music Festival in Maine.