

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC STRING QUARTET

APR 6 / Cobb Great Hall

Frank Huang
Violin

Qianqian Li
Violin

Cynthia Phelps
Viola

Carter Brey
Cello

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String Quartet No. 19 in C major, K. 465 ("Dissonance")
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

I. Adagio – Allegro

(1756-1791)

II. Andante cantabile

III. Menuetto and Trio

IV. Allegro molto

In Response to the Madness
Joel Thompson (b. 1988)

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 810 ("Death and the Maiden")

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

I. Allegro

II. Andante con moto

III. Scherzo and Trio

IV. Presto – Prestissimo

This performance will run approximately 100 minutes,
including a 20-minute intermission.

BIOS

The New York Philharmonic String Quartet comprises four Principal musicians from the Orchestra: Concertmaster **Frank Huang** (The Charles E. Culpeper Chair); Principal Second Violin Group **Qianqian Li**; 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 string quartet 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 other 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 (*Violin*) 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 Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two). Before joining the Houston Symphony as concertmaster in 2010, Frank Huang held the position of first violinist of the Grammy Award-winning Ying Quartet.

QIANQIAN LI (*Violin*) has performed at major music festivals including Aspen, Tanglewood, Yellow Barn, and Sarasota. As a soloist, she has performed with orchestras in major concert halls in Asia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Before joining the New York Philharmonic, she served as a member of the first violin section of The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra for three years, after winning positions with the orchestras of Seattle, Atlanta, and St. Paul in the same period. She has also performed with the Boston, Pittsburgh, and Atlanta symphony orchestras and The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra.

CYNTHIA PHELPS (*Viola*) 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-violin group with Philharmonic Principal Harp Nancy Allen and flutist Carol Wincenc.

CARTER BREY (*Cello*) 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.

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) composed his String Quartet No. 19 in D minor, K. 465, in 1785. It was the last of the six quartets he dedicated to Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). Haydn's development of the string quartet was an inspiration to Mozart, whose dedication of these quartets was an expression of gratitude when he stated that Haydn had inspired him and others as a father inspires his children to go forth into the world and achieve success. (His comment gave rise to the often-condescending "Papa Haydn" nickname, a misapplication of Mozart's sentiment. He and Haydn addressed each other with the informal German "du," equivalent to the English "thou" rather than "you." Mozart's use of this form of address in the dedication is an indication of the friendship between the two men.)

The name "Dissonance" was applied to this quartet because of its extensive use of dissonance (lack of traditional harmonies and resolutions of chords), especially in the opening bars. An Italian theorist wrote a treatise condemning this work precisely because of the unsettling quality of those measures, but his criticism ignores the fact that dissonance had been used for centuries. Haydn stated that if Mozart used dissonance,

that was his explicit intention. Coming from one who never shied away from dissonance in his own works, this was a strong statement of support by the senior composer.

Nearly ten years had passed since Mozart's last string quartet. The quartet form had developed significantly, thanks in large part to Haydn (often considered the "father" of the string quartet). Innovations included greater independence of each instrumental line, a wider range of pitches, and greater technical brilliance in both the composition and performance of the music. Mozart's compositional style had also developed to include a new maturity and self-assuredness. He dared to begin K. 465 with an introductory 22 dissonant measures, which was an unusually lengthy passage of discordance. The remainder of the movement proceeds in a bright "Mozartean" spirit. The first theme is the more fully developed (another Haydnesque technique), with the focus mainly on the theme's first two measures. The second theme is minimally developed; it serves as a bridge between the first statement and its development. The second movement is driven by a rhythmic pattern of two sixteenth-notes and two eighth-notes, primarily passed between the first violin and the cello. It also features one of Mozart's loveliest legato melodies. The minuet is in C major but has many chromatic passages, echoing the unsettled feeling of the quartet's opening bars. The trio remains in $\frac{3}{4}$ time but switches to C minor.

In the finale, Mozart continued to explore tonality through unexpected modulations. A leaping first theme dominates much of the movement, with a second theme of fast sixteenth notes, especially in the first violin. This masterpiece has remained a favorite with musicians and audiences alike.

Joel Thompson (1988-) is an Emmy Award-winning Atlanta resident, active as a composer, pianist, conductor, and educator. He holds bachelor and master of music degrees from Emory University and is now working on his doctorate in composition at the Yale School of Music. The quartet "In Response to the Madness" was composed in March 2019. The Grant Park Music Festival (Chicago) both commissioned and premiered it in summer 2019. Thompson's own program notes state that he had only one rule when writing the quartet: to observe all the major news stories of any day on which he worked on the composition. That way, he felt his music would reflect his emotional response to the stories, many of which focused on political, economic, racial, or climate-related concerns. Some happier stories also found their way briefly into the work. The stream-of-consciousness approach helped him to deal with current events. He also said that he hopes the audience will find the quartet to be cathartic and capable of changing attitudes. The work features driving rhythms, extreme registers for each instrument, and alternately intense and lyrical passages.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) completed his String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, D.810, "Death and the Maiden," in Vienna in 1824. Although there was apparently a private performance of it in 1826, for which Schubert wrote out the individual parts, the quartet was neither published nor publicly performed until 1831. The overall tone of the work is somber, dramatic, and at times almost frantic, with abrupt changes of dynamics. Triplet patterns form a persistent motive throughout the quartet.

The first movement is in constant motion, described by one commentator as a "relentless race through terror, pain and resignation." The parts are complex and frequently cross one another. The second movement gives the quartet its nickname. One of Schubert's 600-plus art songs was "Der Tod und das Mädchen" ("Death and the Maiden"), in which the singer portrays a frantic maiden who asks Death to leave her, followed by Death's promise of comfort and peace. The eight bars of the piano introduction and the seven bars of accompaniment for Death's final phrase begin the second movement, transferred almost note for note to the strings. After the first statement of those measures, the movement embarks upon five variations on the theme. The art song had become so popular at the time that audiences recognized those thirteen bars out of the 42-measure song, and so the song's title became the quartet's common name. A light-hearted scherzo

provides a much-needed contrast to the heaviness of the other movements. The finale is a *tarantella*, a fast traditional southern Italian dance thought to fight off “madness and death.”

The quartet was composed at a time when much of popular culture was focused on a centuries-old legend concerning dances of death, and it is one of several works in which Schubert explored the theme. He had also just recovered from a serious illness when he wrote the quartet, and he was beginning to realize that his health was in serious decline. For all its somber nature, however, this quartet is regarded as one of the greatest in string quartet literature.

—Mary Black-Junttonen, MSU Music Librarian Emeritus