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Music

in the

Pavilion



JASPER STRING QUARTET & FRIENDS

Music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Erich Korngold, and Karl Weigl

Friday, January 17th, 2020

Class of 1978 Orrery Pavilion
Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center

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Program Notes

by Sean Gower

“The more the merrier!” Just this might be said about tonight’s concert program, which features three pieces that expand the more common string quartet to a quintet (Mozart) and to a sextet (Weigl and Korngold). While together spanning a period of 130 years, the three pieces were each written by a young, prodigious composer, and each was conceived within the highly social atmosphere of Viennese chamber music.

Mozart (1756–1791) had many opportunities to make new contacts and interact in new musical settings after moving to Vienna in 1781. In the late eighteenth century, chamber music was often seen as a means of “conversation” among cultivated individuals, a popular after-dinner activity among friends—and nowhere more so than in Vienna. For Mozart, chamber music became a vehicle for friendships and for moving among the musical elite. Indeed, one of his new contacts was the esteemed composer Joseph Haydn, twenty-three years Mozart’s elder. The first meeting between Haydn and Mozart may have been a musical party where the two played through quartets together with other musicians, as recalled by the Irish tenor Michael Kelly.

Inspired by Haydn’s innovative string quartets, op. 33, of 1782, Mozart wrote his own set of quartets, op. 10, and dedicated them to Haydn. Finished in 1785, these were performed privately in Mozart’s apartment with his father Leopold and Haydn both in attendance. The household performance prompted the famous comment by Haydn to Leopold: “Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

In such a setting of musical taste, conversation, and merriment, Mozart took interest in the addition of an extra player by writing four *quintets* from 1787–1791. The musicologist Charles Rosen describes these as being “[b]y general consent, Mozart’s greatest achievement in chamber music.” **K. 515 in C major**, the first of these quintets, displays the warm texture and increased possibilities for dialogue effects that Mozart found with the additional viola part.

The first movement displays a substantial sonata-allegro form, with its exposition of themes, stormy development section, and return home to the original material. The opening theme features a dialogue between cello and violin. The two instruments switch roles and play the theme several times more before the second theme finally arrives. The development, or middle

section offers a rich moment of polyphony, where the five instruments imitate one another back and forth, drawing material from several of the previous themes.

The second movement Minuet maintains a cultivated tenor, while the third movement Andante is a duet between the violin and viola players in an operatic style. The final movement closes the piece cheerfully with a contradance tune that returns repeatedly as part of a sonata-rondo form. Mozart and Haydn played this piece together in performances during 1790, echoing the chamber music gatherings where Mozart's musical and social life first took off in Vienna.

The second two works on tonight's program also stand in relation to a major composer outside the program: Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), and in particular, his sextet *Verklärte Nacht* of 1899. Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*) was highly influential for its late-romantic style of yearning, which built on Wagner and Brahms. *Transfigured Night* was premiered by the Rosé Quartet and two other players at the Philharmonic concert hall, showing how chamber music had shifted from an intimate social enjoyment to rehearsed music for the concert hall.

However, chamber music remained a fertile ground for close musical and social interaction. **Karl Weigl's (1881–1949) String Sextet in D minor** was certainly inspired by, or perhaps even mirrored upon, Schoenberg's sextet *Transfigured Night*. Scored for two violins, two violas, and two cellos, this sextet is also written in a single movement that runs about thirty minutes, and displays a late-romantic style. Weigl, like Schoenberg, was a pupil of the composer Alexander von Zemlinsky, and while far less famous than Schoenberg, Weigl was esteemed by Schoenberg throughout his career.

Other commonalities mark the two pieces: Weigl wrote for a similar social circle as Schoenberg at that time, and his sextet was also premiered by the Rosé Quartet, in 1908. Just as Schoenberg had done for his sextet, Weigl arranged a version for a larger string orchestra in 1931. Like *Transfigured Night*, the piece moves from D minor to a rapturous D major over its course, and it displays many of the rich textures, waves of emotion, and shimmering string effects that are also found in Schoenberg's piece. For Weigl, who taught at Brooklyn College and at Philadelphia's Academy of Music after immigrating to the United States, tonight's performance is the American premiere of his sextet.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957) is better remembered today as the composer of Hollywood film soundtracks such as *The Adventures of Robin*

Hood (1938), but he was earlier known in Austria as the most precocious young composer since Felix Mendelsohn. Korngold began his **String Sextet in D Major, op. 10** in 1914 when he was just seventeen years old. Several connections arise between Korngold's Sextet and the Weigl and Schoenberg pieces described above. Korngold's Sextet was premiered in 1917 by the same Rosé Quartet that performed the music of Weigl and Schoenberg. Korngold was also shortly a pupil of Weigl in counterpoint and harmony.

However, in its four movement structure, and in the form of those movements, this Sextet feels more reminiscent of Mozart's Quintet K. 515. Korngold's first movement, *Moderato-Allegro*, employs a variant of sonata form. It opens with a "conversational" theme that comprises a murmuring triplet figure in the second violin, over which the first violin plays a beautiful, yearning melody. This section spins out for about two minutes, before the second theme enters: a serenely quiet, *pianissimo* melody played by violin. The melody sounds over a shimmering, tremolo accompaniment in the three middle parts, which resembles the nocturnal rapture found in the sextets of Weigl and Schoenberg.

The second movement, a slow *Adagio*, was actually composed first by Korngold, and its ecstatic surges and tense harmonies resemble Schoenberg's *Transfigured Night* more than any of the other movements. The third movement *Intermezzo* shifts to a lighthearted disposition. According to Korngold scholar Brendan Carroll, this movement begins with a motif that the composer considered his personal motto. He used the same motif in other works, and called it the "Motif of the Cheerful Heart." The *Finale* references themes from the previous three movements, and ends with great merriment in D major. Premiered in 1917 by the same Rosé Quartet, the piece reflects how chamber music, even as times changed in Vienna, retained the "small world" atmosphere of close acquaintances and friendly musicians.

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The Artists

Jasper String Quartet

Winner of the prestigious CMA Cleveland Quartet Award, Philadelphia's Jasper String Quartet is the Professional Quartet in Residence at Temple University's Center for Gifted Young Musicians and the Founder and Artistic Director of Jasper Chamber Concerts.

The Jaspers have been hailed as "sonically delightful and expressively compelling" (The Strad) and the New York Times named their recent album, Unbound, as one of the 25 Best Classical Recordings of 2017.

The Quartet's latest release on Sono Luminus features their commission of Aaron Jay Kernis' Quartet No. 3 and Debussy Quartet Op. 10. This, their 5th album, adds to their recordings of Beethoven Op. 59, No. 3, Beethoven Op. 131, Schubert Death and the Maiden and the first recordings of quartets by Donnacha Dennehy, Annie Gosfield, Judd Greenstein, Ted Hearne, David Lang, Missy Mazzoli and Caroline Shaw.

David Yang

Recipient of an artist fellowship from the Independence Foundation awarded to a small number of exceptional artists, violist David Yang has been described as "lithe and expressive" in the Strad Magazine and called "a conduit for music;" the all-around renaissance man has forged a career that is a unique blend of performing, composition, and storytelling. David has been heard in collaboration with members of the Borromeo, Brentano, Jasper, Lark, Miro, and Tokyo String Quartets and Apple Hill Chamber Players, Trio Solisti, and Eroica Piano Trios. Concert highlights include concertos in Canada and Great Britain along with recitals in Italy, the UK and throughout North America. As an active advocate of new music he has premiered dozens of works. He is currently Artistic Director of the Newburyport Chamber Music Festival (Boston) and Ashburton Chamber Music Festival (England). A founding member of Ensemble Epomeo based in the United Kingdom, their premiere recording was "critic's choice" in Gramophone Magazine ("*A splendid disc I cannot get enough of*") and their second CD of the music of Schnittke, Penderecki, and Kurtag received four stars in the Guardian ("*...remarkable intensity and elegant assurance throughout... bristles with detail—there are finely balanced chords moving from glowing diatonicism to harsh dissonance, and carefully shaped melodies*").

with beautifully expressive vibrato—yet they never lose sight of the work’s broader architecture, nor of its poignant, increasingly bleak mood” - The Strad Magazine). The release of their third recording, Schoenberg’s *Verklarte Nacht*, received universal acclaim (“*an impressive recording that exposes many details of the score that usually remain obscure*” - Gavin Dixon).

Clancy Newman

Cellist Clancy Newman, first prize winner of the prestigious Walter W. Naumburg International Competition and recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, has had the unusual career of a performer/composer. From Albany, NY, he began playing cello at the age of six, and at twelve he received his first significant public recognition when he won a Gold Medal at the Dandenong Youth Festival in Australia, competing against contestants twice his age. In the years that followed, he won numerous other competitions, including the Juilliard School Cello Competition, the National Federation of Music Clubs competition, and the Astral Artists National Auditions. He has performed as soloist throughout the United States, as well as in Europe, Asia, Canada, and Australia. He can often be heard on NPR’s “Performance Today” and has been featured on A&E and PBS. A sought after chamber musician, he is a member of the Clarosa piano quartet and a former member of Chamber Music Society Two of Lincoln Center and the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman trio. He has also toured as a member of “Musicians from Marlboro”. He developed an interest in composition at an early age, writing his first piece at seven, a piece for solo cello. Since then, he has greatly expanded the cello repertoire: he premiered his Four Pieces for Solo Cello at the Violoncello Society in New York, his Sonata for Cello and Piano in New York’s Weill Hall, and his Four Seasons of Life for cello and string orchestra with Symphony in C in Philadelphia. He has also written numerous chamber music works, and has been a featured composer on series by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Chicago Chamber Musicians. His piano trio, Juxt-Opposition, is available on Bridge Records, and it uses a method of composition he invented called The Golden Ratio Method. In 2019, his new piano quintet, Cherry Blossom Fantasy, was premiered at the opening ceremony of the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington DC.

Mr. Newman is a graduate of the five-year exchange program between Juilliard and Columbia University, receiving a M.M. from Juilliard and a B.A. in English from Columbia. His teachers have included David Gibson, Joel Krosnick and Harvey Shapiro.

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First page of Karl Weigl's String Sextet in D Minor.

Front cover: Anonymous. *Joseph Haydn playing quartets*. Before 1790, StaatsMuseum, Vienna. [Public domain].