

Sunday, November 11, 2007, 5pm
Hertz Hall

Zehetmair Quartet

Thomas Zehetmair, *violin*
Kuba Jakowicz, *violin*
Ruth Killius, *viola*
Ursula Smith, *cello*

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) String Quartet in G major, K. 156 (K. 134b)
(1772–1773)

Presto
Adagio
Tempo di Menuetto

Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22 (1921)

Fugato. Sehr langsame Viertel
Schnelle Achtel. Sehr energisch. Presto
Ruhige Viertel. Stets fleissend
Mäßig schnelle Viertel
Rondo. Gemächlich und mit Grazie

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann (1810–1856) String Quartet in A minor, Op. 41, No. 1 (1842)

Introduzione: Andante espressivo — Allegro
Scherzo: Presto — Intermezzo — (Tempo I)
Adagio
Presto

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) String Quartet in G major, K. 156 (K. 134b)

Composed in 1772–1773.

Mozart's first trip to Italy was climaxed on December 26, 1770, one month before his 15th birthday, by the splendid reception that the music lovers of Milan awarded to his opera *Mitridate* (K. 87). On March 4, 1771, shortly before he and his father, Leopold, returned to Salzburg, Mozart signed another contract with Milan's Teatro Regio Ducale to provide an *opera seria* titled *Lucio Silla* for the Carnival season two years hence. Except for a trip back to Milan in the fall of 1771 to produce the "theatrical serenade" *Ascanio in Alba* (K. 111) in honor of the marriage of the Archduke Ferdinand to Princess Maria Beatrice Ricciarda, Mozart spent the intervening months at home in Salzburg tending to his duties as violinist, organist and composer in the Archbishop's musical establishment. On October 24, 1772, he and Leopold left for Italy, traveling by way of Innsbruck, Bolzano and Verona, and reached Milan on November 4th. Mozart completed *Lucio Silla* during the remainder of the month and began rehearsals on December 12th, though the preparation process was hampered by frequent cast changes and difficulties with facilities. The problems continued right through the premiere performance, on December 26th, which began three hours after the appointed time and ended six hours later. Despite the mixed quality of its first production, *Lucio Silla* proved popular with the Milanese audiences (many of whom were Austrian, or at least would-be Austrian in that territory then under Habsburg domination, and in tune with Mozart's expressive northern musical language), and the new piece was repeated no fewer than 26 times during the Carnival season. One additional product of the trip to Milan was the well-known motet *Exsultate, jubilate* (K. 165), which Wolfgang wrote for the brilliant Roman *castrato* Venanzio Rauzzini, who sang the role of Cecilio in the new opera. The Mozarts lingered in Milan until March (Leopold feigned illness because his leave from his Salzburg post expired directly after the New Year) in the hope that the Grand Duke of Tuscany would offer Wolfgang

regular employment in his household in Florence. No such offer materialized, however, and the travelers left for home on March 4, 1773 to bring the young Mozart's third and last trip to Italy to a close on a note of disappointment.

On the way to Milan in November 1772, Wolfgang began a series of six string quartets (K. 155–160; the publishing etiquette and market demand of the time required that such works be issued in sets of three or six) to have available some recent instrumental music with which to impress the local music lovers at the soirées he expected to attend. He wrote the first of the series (K. 155) to "kill time" in the dreary town of Bolzano, his father reported home, and completed the set soon after *Lucio Silla* was premiered on December 26th. Though, not unexpectedly, the quartets are Italianate in idiom and generally lightweight in their expression, there are many evidences of Mozart's quickly developing creative maturity in the frequent interweaving of the instrumental voices in true chamber music fashion and in the choice of minor keys for all but one of the slow movements.

The Quartet in G major (K. 156) opens with a compact sonata form that takes a sprightly, triple-meter dance tune as its main theme; Mozart, apparently melodically fecund from birth, found a place for no fewer than six melodic embryos in the second theme group. The long notes of the development section, which is urged on by a repeated one-measure figure, are subtly related in shape to the movement's opening measures. The earlier motives, appropriately adjusted as to key, are recapitulated to round out the form. Mozart originally began sketching something lighthearted for the Quartet's slow movement—a *cantabile* melody for the first violin with a conventional accompaniment for the lower strings—but changed his mind and instead provided a surprisingly expressive *Adagio* in E minor in which all the instruments participate equally. The movement turns brighter in character as it approaches its mid-point, but when this music returns near the end it is re-cast in the home key to provide for a somber close. The finale is a fully worked-out *Menuetto*, with a central trio based on a dainty, stair-step motive whose minor key recalls the mood of the *Adagio*.

Paul Hindemith (1895–1963) String Quartet No. 4, Op. 22

Composed in 1921.

Premiered on November 4, 1922, in Donaueschingen by the Amar Quartet.

On June 24, 1915, while still a violin student at the Hoch Conservatorium, Paul Hindemith became concertmaster of the Frankfurt Opera; he was 20. Despite some managerial trepidation because of his draft status, Hindemith was renewed in his post in June 1917, but he was called up for military service only a few weeks later. He was stationed in Frankfurt for several months, living in a local army barracks and receiving special permission to continue playing at the Opera, but at the beginning of 1918 he was transferred to France, where he was assigned to the regimental band. “I play the big drum,” he wrote to a friend, “and I am told that never before has this instrument been handled here with such rhythmic precision.” He also played in a string quartet that had the regiment’s commanding officer as its principal patron. “My fellow players are not exactly of the first rank,” Hindemith continued in his letter, “but they take tremendous trouble, so that—what with the many rehearsals I have with them—we produce quite tolerable music. Graf von Keilmannsegg [the commanding officer], to whom we always play, is delighted. He is extremely nice to me.” Hindemith was posted to Flanders that summer, and he spent the last months of the war serving as a sentry in the trenches and escaping injury only by what he confided to his diary was simple good luck.

When he was mustered out of the armed forces early in 1919, Hindemith, then 24, had established a reputation as a fine string player but he was little recognized as a composer, having written only a small number of chamber pieces, published nothing and had few performances. His level of public notoriety changed dramatically on June 2, 1919, when his ambitious debut concert in Frankfurt of the Piano Quintet (Op. 7), the two Sonatas for Viola and Piano (Op. 11) and the String Quartet No. 2 (Op. 10; the Quartet No. 1, Op. 2, was a student effort from 1915)—the composer partici-

pated in everything as violist—attracted favorable critical attention. Hindemith shot to the forefront of German musical modernism with the June 1921 Stuttgart premiere of two one-act operas, *Murder, Hope of Women* and *Das Nusch-Nuschi*, a musical play for Burmese puppets, whose iconoclastic subject matter and provocative attitude toward sexuality created a minor scandal. The first performance of his Third String Quartet (Op. 16) at the Donaueschingen Contemporary Music Festival two months later—for which he formed Amar Quartet with violinists Licco Amar and Walter Kaspar and cellist Maurits Frank—solidified his place as Germany’s leading young composer. By the end of 1921, Hindemith had written the String Quartet No. 4 for the Amar Quartet to take on their tours; the ensemble introduced the work at Donaueschingen on November 4, 1922.

One of the essential building blocks of Hindemith’s creative style was his absorption of Bach’s contrapuntal techniques into his distinctively modern idiom. A significant early example of his indebtedness to Bach is the Fourth Quartet’s opening movement, a slow, somber *Fugato* (a piece or passage that incorporates the imitative textures of a fugue) that is interrupted by a violent transformation of the theme at the center. The second movement, the Quartet’s scherzo, alternates aggressive music (A) launched by five hammered, unison notes with a lyrical strain (B) begun by the first violin in its high register: A–B—developmental transition on A–A–B–A. The third movement, calm and flowing, follows a loose sonata form based on three complementary themes, developed throughout, that are presented continuously in the exposition and returned in compressed forms in the recapitulation: one with gently leaping notes begun by the second violin over an insistent pizzicato accompaniment in the lower strings; a stepwise motive that is introduced by the first violin when the pizzicato accompaniment resumes; and a smooth, arching strain in the viola. The brief but powerful fourth movement serves as a summons for the finale, a rondo that takes as its theme a perky tune announced by the viola whose returns are separated by quieter episodes.

INTERMISSION

Robert Schumann (1810–1856) String Quartet in A minor, Op. 41, No. 1

Composed in 1842.

Premiered on September 13, 1842, in Leipzig by the Ferdinand David Quartet.

“I often feel tempted to crush my piano—it is too narrow for my thoughts,” wrote Schumann in 1839 to Heinrich Dorn, his former composition teacher. Until that time (Schumann turned thirty that summer), he had produced only songs and small-scale works for solo piano, with the exception of an abandoned symphony in 1832, but within a year of his words to Professor Dorn he received strong encouragement to act on his ambition to launch into the grander genres of music. The venerated Franz Liszt had recently taken up a number of his piano works, notably the brilliant *Carnaval*, and tried to convince his young colleague that he was capable of accomplishing bigger things. Liszt fired off several letters encouraging Schumann to forge ahead, even offering to arrange performances and seek out a publisher for him. “I think I have already expressed to you in one of my previous letters the desire I have to see you write some *ensemble* pieces—trios, quintets, septets. Will you forgive me for insisting again on this point? It seems to me that success, even commercial success, will not be denied them.” Liszt was the brightest star in the European musical firmament at that time, and Schumann could hardly help but be swayed by his advice. Another source of encouragement for Schumann to broach the larger musical forms came from his beloved wife, Clara. Their long-hoped-for marriage finally took place in September 1840, and Clara, one of the greatest musicians and pianists of the 19th century, was soon coaxing her new husband to extend his creative range. Her urging had an almost immediate effect. The year 1841 was one of enormous productivity for Schumann, during which he wrote not one but two symphonies, the first movement of what became his Piano Concerto, a hybrid orchestral work called *Overture, Scherzo and Finale* (Op. 52) and sketches for a C minor symphony that was never completed.

In 1842, Schumann turned from the orchestral genres to concentrate with nearly monomaniacal zeal on chamber music. Entries in his diary testify to the frantic pace of his inspiration: “June 4th: Started the Quartet in A minor. June 6th: Finished the *Adagio* of the Quartet. June 8th: My Quartet almost finished. June 11th: A good day, started a Second Quartet. June 18th: The Second Quartet almost finished up to the *Variazioni*. July 5th: Finished my Second Quartet. July 8th: Began the Third Quartet. July 10th: Worked with application on the Third Quartet.” Schumann’s three string quartets, published together under the single opus number 41, were completed in a frenzy of creative activity within just six weeks, after which he never wrote another work in the form. Having nearly exhausted himself, he and Clara took a holiday at a Bohemian spa in August, but he again threw himself into composition soon after his return: the Piano Quintet (Op. 44) was begun in September and the Piano Quartet (Op. 47) on October 24th; both were finished before the *Phantasiestücke* for Piano, Violin and Cello (Op. 88) was created in December. Schumann, drained by three months of feverish work, then slumped into a state of nervous collapse, and he was unable to compose again until the following February, though his achievement of 1842—the composition of six chamber music masterpieces in five months—stands as one of the greatest bursts of creative inspiration in the history of the art.

Schumann first considered writing a string quartet as early as 1838—“The thought gives me pleasure,” he told Clara. He made two attempts the following year (“I can assure you they’re as good as Haydn” was his hyperbolic description of his sketches to his fiancée), but he was dissatisfied with them, and apparently destroyed the manuscripts. Invitations to perform in Bremen and Hamburg, cities eager to hear Clara’s piano playing and Robert’s new B-flat Symphony, enabled them to tour together in February 1842 (at no little emotional expense, however, since it meant being separated for some time from their first child, Marie, born the previous September 1st), but rather than traveling with her to Copenhagen, Robert went home to Leipzig, immersing himself in the study of the quartets of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven

in April and May. On June 4th, he began the furious activity that yielded his only three string quartets. The pieces were dedicated to his friend Felix Mendelssohn, music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts and an inspiration for Schumann in the polished craftsmanship and elevated content of his compositions. As a surprise for Clara's 23rd birthday, Schumann arranged a private performance of all three quartets on September 13th at the home of Ferdinand David, the Gewandhaus Orchestra's concertmaster, for whom Mendelssohn was to write his Violin Concerto two years later. "My respect for Robert's genius, for his intellect, altogether for the whole composer, grows with each work," wrote Clara, who once admitted not caring much for the genre of the string quartet until her husband had contributed to the form. "Here everything is new and at the same time lucid, finely worked out, and always in quartet idiom." The respected Moritz Hauptmann, who had just assumed Bach's old position as Cantor of the Thomasschule, shared Clara's enthusiasm for the new quartets: "At David's, I heard three quartets by Schumann. His first, which delighted me immensely, made me marvel at his talent, which I had thought far from so remarkable. I had previously judged it from his piano pieces, things which are aphoristic and fragmentary, sheer revelings in strangeness. Here, too, there is no dearth of the unusual in content and structure; but it is cleverly conceived and held together, and—a great deal of it is very beautiful." Schumann himself, though usually restrained in speaking of his own works, wrote to the publisher Härtel on October 15, 1842, "This past summer I worked with much ardor at three quartets. They were played several times at David's, and apparently pleased both players and listeners, Mendelssohn in particular. I do not care to say any more about them. But you may be sure that I have spared no pains to compose something really good; indeed, I sometimes think, my best." Five years later, he told Härtel, "I still regard them as my best work of the earlier days, and Mendelssohn often spoke to me in

the same sense." Härtel published the parts in 1843 and issued the scores six years later.

The A minor Quartet, the initial focus of Schumann's white-hot creative passion of 1842, is a finely crafted composition which shows his intense study not only of the chamber music of Haydn and Beethoven, but also of the polyphonic intricacies of Johann Sebastian Bach. The introduction, grown from a motive given in precise imitation by all four voices, establishes the contrapuntal idiom that pervades the first movement. The main body of this sonata form turns, surprisingly, from the A minor tonality of the opening to the brighter reaches of F major for the presentation of the main theme, an arching melody in animated 6/8 meter assigned to the first violin. An imitative transition based on a phrase from the main theme leads to the second subject, which consists of a pair of motives—one skipping, the other scalar—played simultaneously by the violins. The development section, carefully shaded as to its emotional content, is an ingenious concatenation of all the earlier thematic material. The recapitulation, a full reiteration of the exposition's motives, maintains the F major tonality to the end of the movement.

The *Scherzo* is the most gossamer movement among Schumann's chamber works. Its central trio, labeled *Intermezzo*, contrasts with the surrounding *Scherzo* in key (major), meter (duple) and texture (chordal). The *Adagio*, which superimposes floating arpeggios upon a hymnal melody, is in a three-part form (A–B–A) that becomes more animated as it passes through its middle regions. The sonata-form finale is built upon a bounding melody for which Schumann devised a number of inventive counterpoints and permutations. A bucolic passage reminiscent of a bagpipe tune serves as an expressive foil in the final pages, after which a major-key gallop across the finale's principal theme closes this imaginative and poetic Quartet.

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Ursula Smith, cello; Kuba Jakowicz, violin; Ruth Killius, viola; Thomas Zehetmair, violin

Zehetmair Quartet

Founded in autumn 1994, the Zehetmair Quartet embarked upon its first concert tour in spring 1998. Their success resulted in re-engagements by all the promoters, followed by invitations to the United States (2001 and 2003) and Japan (2002) to complement the Quartet's annual European tours. In the summer of 2004 the Zehetmair Quartet was guest at the Edinburgh Festival, the Helsinki Festival, the Schleswig Holstein Musik Festival and others. In 2005, the Zehetmair Quartet gave a master class in Bern for the first time, and further master classes are planned for the following years. In spring 2006, a very successful concert tour led the Zehetmair Quartet throughout Europe, with appearances in Vienna, Berlin, Cologne, Zurich, Madrid, Lisbon and Manchester, among others.

Their first CD, featuring Bartók's 4th and Hartmann's 1st quartet, was released in 2000 on the ECM label and was awarded the Quarterly Prize by the Deutsche Schallplattenkritik. Their CD release of Schumann's 1st and 3rd string quartets (also on ECM) won the Gramophone Award (Record of the Year), the Diapason d'Or of the Year, the Dutch Edison Classical Music Award 2004, the Belgian Caecilia Award and the Klara Award for the best international production of the year. Their latest CD, with Hindemith's 4th and Bartók's 5th string quartets, was released on ECM this past spring.

The Zehetmair Quartet rehearses a new program each year, under a conception that generally envisages rarely performed masterpieces (e.g., by Hartmann or Veress) in combination with the more standard repertoire.