



Harald Hoffmann

22|23 SEASON

 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

SCHUMANN QUARTET

ERIK SCHUMANN, violin
KEN SCHUMANN, violin
VEIT HERTENSTEIN, viola
MARK SCHUMANN, cello

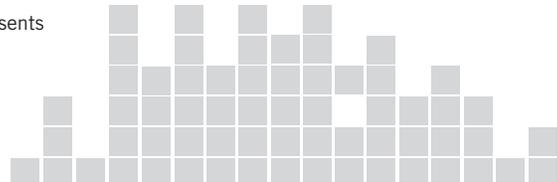
SUN, NOV 20, 3:00 pm
Hodgson Concert Hall

Discography: BERLIN CLASSICS
Exclusive Management: ARTS MANAGEMENT GROUP, INC., 130 West 57th Street,
New York, NY 10019

Supported by
DRS. STEPHEN E. AND MARGARET CRAMER
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PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2 [22:00]

- I. Vivace
- II. Adagio
- III. Menuetto
- IV. Adagio. Presto

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

String Quartet No. 1, "From the Salvation Army" [21:30]

- I. Andante con moto
- II. Allegro con spirito
- III. Adagio cantabile
- IV. Allegro marziale

INTERMISSION

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74, "Harp" [30:00]

- I. Poco adagio – Allegro
- II. Adagio ma non troppo
- III. Presto
- IV. Allegretto con variazioni

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Laurie Shulman

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, No. 2

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Among Haydn's 83 string quartets, a round dozen are identified as the "Tost" quartets: Opp. 54 and 55 (each consisting of three quartets) and the half-dozen of Opus 64. They take their name from Johann Tost, who was principal second violin of the Esterházy court orchestra from March 1783 to March 1788. As director of all Prince Esterházy's musical activities, Haydn worked closely with Tost, and the two became friends. When Tost left the court orchestra to enter the world of commerce, they stayed in touch. The violinist-turned-businessman headed for Paris in late 1788, carrying with him two new Haydn symphonies (Nos. 88 and 89) and six new string quartets. On Haydn's behalf, he arranged for the prominent publishing house of Sieber to issue them in the French capital.

The Opus 64 quartets, which date from 1790, are dedicated to Tost, but his precise involvement with the earlier Opus 54 and 55 quartets is somewhat less clear. His name seems to have attached itself to them by virtue of the fact that he was Haydn's agent, for the works' publication. There is no question that the first violin has an unusually prominent role in all twelve "Tost" quartets. Haydn's biographer Rosemary Hughes has written:

[This emphasis] is used as an artistic resource, calling for technical virtuosity from the first violin to lend fire and eloquence to the music. This is outstandingly the case in the powerful and original

C major Quartet, Op. 54, No. 2: in the first movement, with its bold, striding gestures and big sonorities, and in the c-minor *Adagio*, in which the first violin breaks into impassioned arabesques above the dark and brooding melody, in the manner of a wild Hungarian lament.

Indeed, most critics seem to feel that this C major quartet is the standout among the six of Op. 54 and Op. 55. Each movement is marked with original and daring touches. Irregular five-measure phrases and dramatic pauses mark the opening movement. The slow movement, as Hughes points out, features an intricate violin line rhapsodizing above the somber chorale of the other three instruments.

In a bold move, Haydn proceeds without pause to his Menuetto/Trio, telescoping the central two movements into one extended movement. This ploy is unusual but not unprecedented in Haydn's quartets; there is an earlier example in Opus 20, No. 2. The trio section of the Menuetto switches to C minor, further relating it to the slow movement. Its musical material is also subtly linked to the Adagio. Haydn uses unison melody and tense augmented chords to tug at our musical sensibilities. Although brief, this Trio is powerful.

The quartet concludes with another surprise, this time one of tempo. Instead of a brisk, bouncy finale tinged with Haydnesque wit, we hear another Adagio. While varied by a middle section marked Presto, thereby suggesting that we have heard a slow introduction to a conventional finale, the movement reasserts gravity with a return to the Adagio. By writing two slow movements, Haydn shifts the entire balance and emotional weight of

his quartet. The methodology is astonishingly forward-looking, an experiment that foreshadows the late quartets of Beethoven and even the symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler.

String Quartet No. 1, “From the Salvation Army”

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

One of America’s first great composers, Charles Ives bucked society and its conventions from his earliest years. Although he exhibited considerable musical talent as a boy, he pursued a career in insurance. Composition was a dilettante activity for him, which was probably a wise choice, for his unorthodox and daring music found little understanding and less success among his contemporaries.

Ives’s father, George, was a trumpeter and bandmaster. Young Charlie grew up in rural southwest Connecticut, surrounded by music. He heard dozens of amateur bands in rehearsal and concert, and attended outdoor religious festivals—called camp meetings—with his family. He also worked as a church organist from age 14, thereby thoroughly absorbing the Protestant hymn repertoire. These diverse sources all found their way into his music.

When he began working on his First String Quartet, Ives was a sophomore at Yale, studying composition with Horatio Parker. The quartet is roughly contemporary with his First Symphony (1895-98), which was Ives’s graduation piece. The two works share conservative musical language, as Ives tried to conform with his teacher’s traditional technique and ideas.

Fifteen years later, Ives returned to the quartet’s opening fugue, reworking and expanding it as the first movement

of his Fourth Symphony. The fugue’s principal theme is the hymn “Missionary Chant,” also known as “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” Similarly, he continued to tinker with the quartet until 1900, returning to it again in 1909.

Ives drew upon hymn tunes throughout his career. They permeate the fabric of this quartet to such an extent that he considered naming the work “A Revival Service.” Ultimately he changed his mind, opting instead for the subtitle “From the Salvation Army.” His original titles for the other movements—Prelude, Offertory, and Postlude—strengthen the church connections. There is some evidence that all four movements grew out of early organ pieces, now lost.

The quartet is thus a cross between European tradition—a four movement structure with a second movement scherzo and a slow third movement—and home-grown American church music. Ives composed a mosaic of hymns and gospel tunes, including “Beulah Land” (I’ve reached the land of corn and wine), “Nettleton” (Come, thou Fount of every blessing), “Webb” (Stand up, stand up for Jesus), and “Shining Shore” (My days are gliding swiftly by). Several of the tunes recur and commingle in the later movements.

Ives’s teacher Horatio Parker thought that revival music was vulgar and had no place in serious composition. The lofty string quartet personified high art and absolute music, yet here was Ives mixing musical oil and water. Parker was doubtless horrified. Today *he* is best remembered not for his own music, but as Charles Ives’s teacher. Although this quartet was not performed in its entirety in public until 1957, it is now considered to be Ives’s first significant composition.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74, “Harp”

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827)

The Opus 74 quartet dates from 1809, the year of Napoleon’s second military advance on Vienna. That political cloud aside, it was a relatively stable period for Beethoven. He was economically secure. The wrenching battle he would fight for years with his sister-in-law, regarding custody of his nephew Karl, had not commenced. In terms of productivity, 1809 was a remarkably fruitful year for Beethoven, yielding the Fifth Piano Concerto, three piano sonatas (Opp. 78, 79, & 81a, “Les Adieux”), some *Lieder*, and the string quartet in E flat.

Two years before, the set of three “Razumovsky” quartets had been widely misunderstood. It appears that in Op. 74, his first post-Razumovsky essay for string quartet, Beethoven made more of an effort to please his audience. To be sure, the E-flat quartet is a substantial work with considerable depth, but it does not mystify, probe, or provoke to the extent of its three Op. 59 predecessors, nor of its immediate successor, the 1810 “Quartetto Serioso,” Op. 95. Beethoven scholar Joseph Kerman called this quartet “an open, unproblematic, lucid work of consolidation.”

The first movement begins with 24 measures of slow introduction. A precedent for the slow introduction exists in Beethoven’s Op. 59, No. 3, but the E flat quartet has none of the cryptic tonal ambiguity of that earlier work. Rather, this introduction sets the tone of the quartet: dignified, elegant, and controlled. Posterity has given this work the subtitle of “Harp.” The nickname derives from the pizzicato arpeggio motive that appears in several

places in the first movement, including the development section and the coda. In Beethoven’s time the motive was deemed to sound like a harp. The analogy may be dubious, but the pizzicato playing is as much fun to watch as to listen to, for it shows how expertly Beethoven distributes his motivic activity among the four players.

The extended slow movement is a cross between nobility and melancholy; this may well be the closest Beethoven ever got to sentimentality. A vigorous and mysterious scherzo in C minor follows, hammering at our senses with determination. Its aggressive C major trio section bounces up and down in bumptious scale passages, more like an exercise in counterpoint than a melody. Beethoven introduces the trio twice, to temper the careening pace of the scherzo. He dispels the nervous energy gradually, allowing the pace to relax and the tension to subside, ingeniously ushering in the theme and variations of the finale.

After the explosive drive of the scherzo, one half expects a self-important, blockbuster conclusion. No such dramatic weight in these variations; instead we hear a cloud-free theme and unruffled serenity. Beethoven alternates lyrical and vigorous variations, extending the sixth one by two episodes to conclude the quartet.



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

SCHUMANN QUARTET

The Schumann Quartet has reached a stage where anything is possible, because it has dispensed with certainties. This also has consequences for audiences, which from one concert to the next have to be prepared for all eventualities: “A work really develops only in a live performance,” the quartet says. “That is ‘the real thing’, because we ourselves never know what will happen. On the stage, all imitation disappears, and you automatically become honest with yourself. Then you can create a bond with the audience—communicate with it in music.” This live situation will gain an added energy in the near future: Albrecht Mayer, Menahem Pressler, Kit Armstrong, Anna Vinnitskaya and Anna Lucia Richter are among the quartet's current partners.

A special highlight of the 21/22 season will be the four concerts at Wigmore Hall London, where the quartet is quartet in residence this season. Furthermore, the quartet will be back on tour in the USA after an enforced break. It will be a guest at the String Quartet Biennale Amsterdam, the Schleswig Holstein Music Festival and the MDR Musiksommer, as well as in Berlin, Schwetzingen, Frankfurt, Cologne and Dortmund. In addition, the quartet will be able to present two special programs in Madrid and Bilbao together with mezzo-soprano Anna-Lucia Richter.

Its album *Intermezzo* (2018, Mendelssohn, Schumann und Reimann with Anna Lucia Richter) has been hailed enthusiastically both at home and abroad and received the award *Opus Klassik* in the quintet category. It is celebrated as a worthy successor to its award-winning *Landscapes* album, in which in which the quartet traces its own roots by combining works of Haydn, Bartók, Takemitsu and Pärt. Among other prizes, the latter received the *Jahrespreis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*, five Diapasons and was selected as Editor's Choice by the *BBC Music* magazine.

For its previous CD, *Mozart Ives Verdi*, the Schumann Quartet was accorded the 2016 Newcomer Award at the BBC Music Magazine Awards in London. In 2020 the quartet has expanded its discography with *Fragment* and his examination of one of the masters of the string quartet: Franz Schubert.

The three brothers Mark, Erik and Ken Schumann have been playing together since their earliest childhood—meanwhile violist Veit Hertenstein completes the quartet. The four musicians enjoy the way they communicate without words. Although the individual personalities clearly manifest themselves, a common space arises in every musical work in a process of spiritual metamorphosis. The quartet's openness and curiosity may be partly the result of the formative influence exerted on it by teachers, such as Eberhard Feltz and the Alban Berg Quartet, or partners, such as Menahem Pressler.

Awards, CD releases—it is always tempting to speculate on what factors have led to many people viewing the Schumann Quartet as one of the best in the world. But the four musicians themselves regard these stages more as encounters, as a confirmation of the path they have taken. They feel that their musical development

over the past two years represents a quantum leap. “We really want to take things to extremes, to see how far the excitement and our spontaneity as a group take us,” says Ken Schumann, the middle of the three Schumann brothers. They charmingly sidestep any attempt to categorise their sound, approach or style, and let the concerts speak for themselves.

And the critics approve: “Fire and energy. The Schumann Quartet plays staggeringly well [...] without doubt one of the very best formations among today's abundance of quartets, [...] with sparkling virtuosity and a willingness to astonish” (Harald Eggebrecht in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*). Quotes taken from an interview with journalists from the classical music magazine *VAN* (van-magazin.de).



Harald Hoffmann