

The Vermeer Quartet

Shmuel Ashkenasi, Violin
Mathias Tacke, Violin
Richard Young, Viola
Marc Johnson, Cello

Sunday Afternoon, April 18, 1993, at 4:00
Rackham Auditorium, Ann Arbor, Michigan

PROGRAM

Quartet Movement in C minor, Op. posth. (D. 703) Schubert

Quartet No. 1, "Metamorphoses Nocturnes" Ligeti

INTERMISSION

Quartet in E minor, "From My Life" Smetana
Allegro vivo appassionato
Allegro moderato alla Polka
Largo sostenuto
Vivace

The Vermeer Quartet may be heard on Orfeo and Teldec Records.

The Quartet is represented by ICM Artists, Ltd., New York, Lee Lamont, President.

Quartet Movement in C minor, D. 703*Franz Schubert (1797-1828)*

In December 1820, Schubert wrote the first movement of a string quartet in C minor and started an *Andante*, but after forty-one measures he put the score aside and never took it up again. It is the chamber-music repertoire's equivalent of his Unfinished Symphony, a glorious work brought suddenly to a halt for mysterious reasons that have escaped history. Posterity values it highly, whether Schubert did or not, and the original manuscript later became one of the treasures of Johannes Brahms' collection of autograph scores. Its first public performance, in 1867, was part of the great Schubert revival of that decade, and in 1870 it was published.

The movement is a powerful, restless, dramatic work, in which the young composer, nearing his twenty-fourth birthday, finds a personal musical language that owes little to his predecessors. The stormy opening crescendo, which almost prefigures Wagner, appears to be part of the formal first theme of the movement, but the listener is surprised to discover, at the end, that Schubert has put it aside and hardly referred to it again until the movement's very last measures. All four instruments play without pause or relief in almost every measure except the opening and closing crescendo passages. This is music of an intensity for which Schubert's earlier instrumental works have not prepared us.

(In English-speaking countries, this work was long known by the title of its German first edition, *Quartettsatz*, which, though it means no more than "Quartet-Movement," led eventually to the senseless barbarism, "Satz-Quartet.")

Quartet No. 1, "Metamorphoses Nocturnes"*Gyorgi Ligeti (b. 1923)*

Gyorgi Ligeti, the Hungarian-born avant garde composer, began his studies in composition at the Music Conservatory in Cluj, Rumania. From 1945 to 1949, he continued his studies at the Franz Liszt Conservatory in Budapest, and then spent a year in folk music research. In 1950,

Ligeti returned to the Conservatory to teach music theory, but he left Hungary during the uprising of 1956 and settled in the West. As a young composer, Ligeti had worked in a more or less conventional neoclassical style, but in Germany he began to explore serial techniques and the virtually unlimited possibilities of electronic music. Before long, however, he decided that he would continue to write for traditional instruments, but with all the freedom in the use of sound materials that composers of electronic music allow themselves.

Ligeti is among the most original composers to seek new sonorities from the human voice and traditional instruments. Among his most characteristic trademark sonorities are sustained "sound clusters" or "clouds" of sound – played extremely softly and seemingly suspended in time, unmeasured by pulse. Quartet No. 1 offers a glimpse of the music Ligeti wrote before leaving Hungary and developing his more innovative ideas. It was composed during 1953 and 1954, but did not receive its first performance until 1958 in Vienna.

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor ("From My Life")*Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884)*

Like Beethoven, Bedrich Smetana was destined to spend the last years of his life in total deafness, but also like Beethoven, he continued to compose. He wrote the string quartet to which he gave the title "From My Life" in 1876, two years after he had completely lost his hearing, and at the first public performance, in 1879, he stood at the side of the stage, watching the motions of the players in difficult and important passages through opera glasses.

In 1878, in a letter to a friend, Smetana gave an account of the Quartet, here abridged:

I did not set out to write a quartet according to recipe or custom in the usual forms. With me the form of every composition is given by the subject itself, and this quartet shaped its own form. I wanted to write a tone-picture of my life. The first

movement [*Allegro vivo appassionato*] depicts my youthful inclination towards art, the romantic atmosphere, the inexpressible longing for something I could neither express nor define, and also the warning, as it were, of my future misfortune. The long note in the finale is the fateful ringing in my ears that announced the beginning of my deafness.

The second movement, a quasi-polka [*Allegro moderato alla polka*], reminds me of my happy youth, when I composed dance tunes and was well known as a passionate dancer. In the

trio I paint my memories of the aristocratic circles in which I lived for many years. The third movement [*Largo sostenuto*] recalls the happiness of my first love for the girl who later became my wife.

The fourth movement [*Vivace*] describes the folk element in my music and my joy that was checked by the catastrophe of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery, but, remembering the promise of the beginnings of my career, sadness.

— Leonard Burkat

ABOUT THE ARTIST



The Vermeer Quartet, with performances in virtually every major city in North America, Europe and Australia, has achieved international recognition as one of the world's foremost chamber ensembles. Formed in 1970 at the Marlboro Music Festival, the Quartet has since performed at such prestigious festivals as Tanglewood, Aldeburgh, Mostly Mozart, Aspen, Bath, Lucerne, Flanders, Stresa, Schleswig-Holstein, South Bank, Berlin, Santa Fe, Edinburgh, Great Woods, Spoleto, Ravinia and the Casals Festival. The members of the Vermeer Quartet are on the Resident Artist Faculty of Northern Illinois University at DeKalb and give annual master classes at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England. Each summer, they are the featured ensemble for Bay Chamber Con-

certs in Rockport, Maine. The Vermeer Quartet makes its permanent home in Chicago and is the resident quartet for Chamber Music Chicago. It has recorded extensively for Teldec Records, and its discography includes quartets of Beethoven, Dvorák, Verdi, Mendelssohn and Schubert.

The Vermeer Quartet's members are originally from Israel, Germany, New York and Nebraska, thus bringing to the ensemble a unique blend of musical and cultural backgrounds. Switzerland's *Suisse*, writes, "Out of this alchemy is born a thing of beauty which one can define, without hesitation, as perfection."

Shmuel Ashkenasi, violin, was born in Israel where he was a student of Ilona Feher. He later studied with Efreim Zimbalist at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He was the winner of the Merriweather Post Competition in Washington, D.C., was a finalist at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, and was second prize winner at the Tchaikovsky Competition. He has performed with many of the leading orchestras in the United States, Europe, the former Soviet Union and Japan, and has appeared in recital with Murray Perahia and Peter Serkin. He has recorded Paganini violin concertos with the Vienna Symphony

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Mathias Tacke, violin, is originally from Bremen, Germany. He studied with Ernst Mayer-Schierning in Detmold, with Emanuel Hurwitz and David Takeno in London, and with Sandor Vegh in Cornwall. He won first prize in the Jugend Musiziert national competition and graduated with honors from the Nordwestdeutsche Musikakademie, where he was later appointed to the faculty. From 1983 to 1992, Mr. Tacke was a member of the Ensemble Modern, one of the most important professional groups specializing in 20th-century music. In this capacity he gave countless premieres, including works by most of today's leading composers. He has made many recordings for such labels as Sony, ECM, and Harmonia Mundi.

Richard Young, viola, studied with Josef Gingold, Aaron Rosand, William Primrose and Zoltan Szekely. At age thirteen he was invited to perform for Queen Elisabeth of Belgium. Since then he has been soloist with many orchestras and has given recitals throughout the United States. A special award winner in the Rockefeller Foundation American Music Competition, he was a member of the New Hungarian Quartet and the Rogeri Trio. He has taught at the University of Michigan and was chairman of the string department at Oberlin Conservatory. He has appeared at many festivals including the Library of Congress, Puerto Vallarta, Wolf Trap, Saratoga, Kapalua and the Casals Festival.

Marc Johnson, cello, studied in Lincoln, Nebraska, with Carol Work, at the Eastman School of Music with Ronald Leonard, and at Indiana University with Janos Starker and Josef Gingold. While still a student, he was the youngest member of the Rochester Philharmonic and has since performed as soloist with that orchestra. In addition to many other awards, he won first prize in the prestigious Washington International Competition. Before joining the Vermeer Quartet, Mr. Johnson was a member of the Pittsburgh Symphony. He has recorded for CRI Records and has received critical acclaim for his recitals and solo appearances with various orchestras in the United States and Europe.



Guarneri String Quartet Sunday, April 25

A celebration of the Musical Society's 30th Chamber Arts Series would only be fitting if it included a concert by the esteemed Guarneri String Quartet. Returning for their 26th concert in Ann Arbor, the Guarneri is hailed as the world's premier quartet. Half of the proceeds of this special concert will be donated to Chamber Music America, the national chamber music service organization of which the Musical Society is a member. The program in Ann Arbor consists entirely of all-Beethoven Quartets: G-major, Op. 18, No. 2; E-flat major, Op. 74 ("The Harp"); and F major, Op. 135. Rackham Auditorium, 4:00 p.m.

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Philips Pre-concert Presentation: Chamber Music: A Vital Part of American Cultural Life.
Moderator: Mr. Dean J. Stein, Executive Director, Chamber Music America. Rackham Fourth Floor Amphitheatre, 2:30 p.m.

Call 764-2538 for tickets or visit The University Musical Society box office in Burton Tower.