

Chamber Music Conversations from the Clark
2020 – 21 Season

Ying Quartet



February 21, 2021

Robin Scott, *violin*

Janet Ying, *violin*

Phillip Ying, *viola*

David Ying, *cello*

PROGRAM

Host

Rogers Brubaker, Professor of Sociology, UCLA

Prerecorded Concert

(Franz) Josef Haydn (1732–1809)

String Quartet in A Major, op. 20, no. 6

Allegro di molto e scherzando

Adagio cantabile

Menuetto: Allegretto

Fuga a 3 soggetti: Allegro

Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904)

**String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, op. 51,
B. 92, “Slavonic”**

Allegro ma non troppo

Dumka: Andante con moto–Vivace

Romanza: Andante con moto

Finale: Allegro assai

Q&A

Rogers Brubaker

Bruce Whiteman, Clark Librarian Emeritus

Robin Scott, Janet Ying, Phillip Ying, David Ying,
members of Ying Quartet

PROGRAM NOTES

(Franz) Josef Haydn (1732–1809) **String Quartet in A Major, op. 20, no. 6**

By the time he was forty, Haydn had been working for the Esterházy family for a decade and had already composed and published three sets of string quartets—op. 9, 17, and 20—all of which contained six individual works. These eighteen quartets exhibit a great deal of stylistic evolution, and in them Haydn eventually establishes what became the standard form for the genre: four movements, with the first and fourth movements generally marked to be played fast and the inner sections consisting of a slow movement and a minuet. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and even later composers would in general follow that model, though the minuet largely disappeared and was replaced by a scherzo, even in some of Haydn's later quartets. This set of string quartets would be highly influential on later composers. Beethoven apparently wrote them out for his own use (rather like aspiring artists copying masterworks in a museum), and Brahms would later own the original manuscript of op. 20, which he left to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.

The op. 20 quartets are known collectively as the “Sun” quartets because of a stylized sun that appeared on the cover of the first edition, which appeared in 1772. Two of the six quartets are in minor keys, but the sixth is in a truly sunny A major and the overall feeling of the piece is cheerful and optimistic, even the highly learned fugue that comprises the finale. The first movement is in sonata form—one can't really say “as usual,” given that Haydn was the composer who helped to make the sonata form the standard structure of Classical-era music—and the themes move from the A major of the first one to E major for the subsidiary one, with a brief foray into E minor. The development section moves slowly towards the key of F-sharp minor, where Haydn plays with the main theme of the exposition before achieving a long pause. (Silence is one of the composer's standard tricks of the trade.) The recapitulation by no means just repeats the exposition, but in fact contains further development of the main themes, before subsiding into the same cadence that concluded the exposition, now, of course, in the home key of A.

Haydn composed a substantial number of operas to be performed at Esterháza around the same time as the op. 20 quartets were written, so it is not surprising that the slow movement of the A-major quartet is at heart a song, played in the first violin, accompanied

by the remaining three instruments. The central thematic material is repeated more than once, with decorative additions and key changes, but retains its cantabile (song-like) character throughout. The brief minuet and trio provides a good example of Haydn re-using themes from one movement to the next. The opening theme of the minuet is discernibly reminiscent of the main theme of the first movement. The Trio section is truly a “trio”: the second violin part is absent, leaving just the three other players. As usual, the minuet is played again following the trio.

The final movement consists of a very fetching fugue in (as Haydn tells us) three subjects. The first subject is played by the first violin, and the second, a slowly descending scale, by the second violin. The final, briefer theme is again first sounded by the top violin, and thereafter all four instruments contribute equally to a wonderful fugal texture. Learned this music certainly is, but it also manages almost effortlessly to be high-spirited and even charming, infectious despite its profound cleverness. The entire movement is played relatively quietly—*sempre sotto voce*, always in a low voice, as Haydn writes—until the final four bars, when the players suddenly perform in unison and the dynamic level leaps briefly to *forte*.

Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904)

String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, op. 51, B. 92, “Slavonic”

Dvořák composed fourteen string quartets over the course of his lifetime, with the earliest works falling among his juvenilia and the last two comprising some of his final compositions. His models consisted primarily of the Viennese classics—especially Schubert—but he brought to the string quartet not only a classic sense of form, but also a Bohemian sensibility that was registered in a warm lyricism, a rhythmic freshness drawn from folk dance, and a harmonic palette based in Wagner but with an added Central European inflection. The works of his that remain in the active repertoire are played astonishingly often: the Cello Concerto, The New World Symphony, the “Dumka” Piano Trio, and many others.

The E-flat major String Quartet comes from the period when Dvořák first developed an international reputation, primarily with the famous Slavonic Dances, another work still very much in the repertoire of orchestras all over the world. Dvořák had got a leg up from Johannes Brahms, who had seen several of his compositions in manuscript and had recommended the Bohemian composer to his publisher, Simrock Verlag. In 1879, the violinist in the Florentine

Quartet asked Dvořák for a quartet that would embody the same sort of spirit to be found in the Slavonic Dances and Dvořák's earlier Moravian Dances. From our vantage point, that seems like asking a composer to do something he did naturally anyway, the things that have kept Dvořák's music on public stages since his death in 1904: compose memorable melodies, write catchy rhythms, and evoke warmth and depth of emotion.

The first theme in the opening movement is *echt* Dvořák: warm and beautiful, with lots of wonderful counterpoint, and a completely uncomplicated feeling. The second subject, in B-flat major, if a little less winning, nevertheless provides contrast to the first and, after a repetition of the whole exposition, slides easily into the development section. Here the first subject takes over, now in E minor, but eventually Dvořák uses both main themes for the free play that is a sonata development. Surprisingly perhaps, the first theme is excised when the recapitulation begins, and Dvořák focuses on the secondary material. But that wonderful main theme returns to dominate the coda, in which the music gradually quiets down, slows down, and ends with a susurrant of muffled bliss. The second movement, which might usually be a scherzo, at least in string quartets after Beethoven, is what Dvořák calls a "dumka," a slow and elegiac piece interrupted twice by a much faster dance-like section. In fact, these sections alternate until at the end the fast music is slowed down in a kind of coda.

The slow movement is an unblushingly indulgent romance in ABA form. An inconsequential melody carries a freight of lethargic warmth. It is hard to imagine Dvořák lying on a beach in a skimpy bathing-suit beneath a hot sun, but if he ever did, this movement might have recollected that experience. Although sometimes described as a sonata form, the finale is really more of a rondo. The charming and happy theme heard at the outset returns more than once, along with two subsidiary themes that contrast with it. The second of these, while less striking than the first and third, will in fact be the one that Dvořák chooses to conclude the movement. It is not surprising that here, as elsewhere in this string quartet, Dvořák gives some prominence to the viola part. Like Schubert before him (and Hindemith after), he was himself an accomplished viola player.

ABOUT YING QUARTET



Front cover and above photo credit: Todd Maturazzo

The Grammy Award-winning Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today's world. Now in its third decade, the Quartet has established itself as an ensemble of the highest musical qualifications. Their performances regularly take place in many of the world's most important concert halls; at the same time, the Quartet's belief that concert music can also be a meaningful part of everyday life has drawn the foursome to perform in settings as diverse as the workplace, schools, juvenile prisons, and the White House. In fact, the Ying Quartet's constant quest to explore the creative possibilities of the string quartet has led it to an unusually diverse array of musical projects and interests.

The Ying's ongoing *LifeMusic* commissioning project, created in response to their commitment to expanding the rich string quartet repertoire, has already achieved an impressive history. Supported by the Institute for American Music, the Ying Quartet commissions both established and emerging composers to create music that reflects contemporary American life. Recent works include Billy Childs' *Awakening*; Lera Auerbach's *Sylvia's Diary*; Lowell Liebermann's String Quartet No. 3, *To the Victims of War*; Sebastian Currier's *Next Atlantis*; and John Novacek's *Three Rags for String Quartet*. In August 2016 the

Ying Quartet released a new Schumann/Beethoven recording on Sono Luminus with the cellist Zuill Bailey; and in 2016–17 the five musicians toured with the Schumann Cello Concerto transcribed for cello and string quartet along with Beethoven's *Kreutzer Sonata*, also reimagined for cello quintet.

The Quartet's 2018–19 season featured performances with the jazz pianist Billy Childs, a tour of China, performances for the Philadelphia and Phoenix Chamber Music Societies, and performances in the group's role as quartet-in-residence at the Bowdoin International Music Festival.

The Ying Quartet's many other recordings reflect several of the group's wide-ranging musical interests and have generated consistent, enthusiastic acclaim. The group's CD "American Anthem" (Sono Luminus), heralding the music of Randall Thompson, Samuel Barber, and Howard Hanson, was released in 2013 to rave reviews; their 2007 Telarc release of the three Tchaikovsky Quartets and the *Souvenir de Florence* (with James Dunham and Paul Katz) was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Chamber Music Performance category.

The Ying Quartet first came to professional prominence in the early 1990s during their years as resident quartet of Jesup, Iowa, a farm town of 2000 people. Playing before audiences of six to six hundred in homes, schools, churches, and banks, the Quartet had its earliest opportunities to enable music and creative endeavor as integral parts of community life. The Quartet considers its time in Jesup the foundation of its present musical life and goals.

As quartet-in-residence at the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, the Ying Quartet teaches in the string department and leads a rigorous, sequentially designed chamber music program. One cornerstone of chamber music activity at Eastman is the noted "Music for All" program, in which all students have the opportunity to perform in community settings beyond the concert hall. The Quartet is currently the ensemble-in-residence at the Bowdoin International Music Festival, and from 2001–2008, the members of the Ying Quartet were the Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University.

<http://www.ying4.com/>

Ying Quartet is represented by MKI Artists:

<https://mkiartists.com/>

ABOUT BRUCE WHITEMAN

Bruce Whiteman has been writing the program notes for the *Chamber Music at the Clark* series since 1998. He was Head Librarian at UCLA's Clark Library from 1996–2010, and is now a full-time poet, writer, and translator. He lives in Canada.



CHAMBER MUSIC CONVERSATIONS FROM THE CLARK

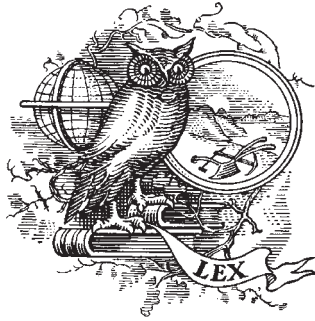
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In 1926 philanthropist William Andrews Clark Jr. donated his library of rare books to the burgeoning UCLA campus in honor of his father, a copper magnate and United States senator from Montana. The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, a unique resource for the humanities, today includes major holdings in English literature and history (1580–1820) and fine printing, as well as the world's most comprehensive collection of the works of Oscar Wilde, attracting scholars throughout the world. The library hosts a range of activities, including scholarly lectures and conferences, theatrical performances, and music concerts—organized by the UCLA Center for 17th- & 18th-Century Studies. The acclaimed *Chamber Music at the Clark* series honors the musical passion of William Andrews Clark Jr., an accomplished violinist and founder of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.