

*Chamber Music Conversations from the Clark
2020 – 21 Season*

Arod Quartet



March 21, 2021

Jordan Victoria, *violin*
Alexandre Vu, *violin*
Tanguy Parisot, *viola*
Samy Rachid, *cello*

PROGRAM

Host

Rogers Brubaker, Professor of Sociology, UCLA

Prerecorded Concert

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, op. 59, no. 1, “Razumovsky”

Allegro

Allegretto vivace e sempre scherzando

Adagio molto e mesto

Thème russe: Allegro

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, “Death and the Maiden”

II: Andante con moto

Q&A

Rogers Brubaker

Bruce Whiteman, Clark Librarian Emeritus

Jordan Victoria, Alexandre Vu, Tanguy Parisot, Samy Rachid,
members of Arod Quartet

PROGRAM NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) **String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, op. 59, no. 1, “Razumovsky”**

Beethoven spent part of the year 1802 at the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna at the suggestion of a doctor who thought that the comparative quiet of rural life would have a beneficial effect on Beethoven’s hearing problem. But by the fall of that year the composer was more dispirited than ever by what he realized was an irreversible and worsening problem. In early October he wrote the famous Heiligenstadt testament in which despair and a sort of fighting spirit warred for primacy.

From immediately after this time come some of the great works of Beethoven’s so-called Middle Period, including the “Kreutzer” Sonata for violin and piano, op. 47, the “Eroica” Symphony, op. 55, the “Waldstein” Sonata, op. 53, and the “Appassionata” Sonata, op. 57, both for piano, and the opera *Fidelio*. These are all works of heroic proportions and themes. The year 1806 brought the Piano Concerto no. 4, op. 58, and the three string quartets dedicated to Count (later Prince) Razumovsky, works in which the shaken fist—a gesture which posterity has indelibly characterized as a defining Beethovenian act—if not entirely absent, is clothed in a doeskin glove. Razumovsky (1752–1836) was the Czar’s ambassador to Vienna, and he was more famous for his collections of art, books, and aristocratic women than for his diplomatic achievements. He was an important patron for Beethoven, and his private string quartet was the first to perform the three “Razumovsky” quartets, op. 59. He also shared the dedications of the 5th and 6th Symphonies with Prince Lobkowitz, another crucial supporter of Beethoven’s work, and Razumovsky’s brother-in-law. Razumovsky’s Vienna palace was severely damaged by fire in 1814, and he thereafter led a quiet and obscure life in Vienna until his death.

Beethoven first essayed the string quartet form at the end of the eighteenth century in six works that were published in 1801 as his op. 18. The six pieces all fall fairly comfortably into the quartet tradition invented and conventionalized by Haydn and Mozart, and the scholar Joseph Kerman summed them up as “a merely mortal, not a celestial, nourishment.” The three quartets of op. 59, and especially the first in F major, are entirely different. Larger-scale, full of deep and contradictory emotions, and formally inventive, they are as clearly works of the nineteenth century as the earlier set is of the eighteenth.

The opening Allegro begins with a simple theme in the cello that is picked up by the first violin and not brought to a full F-major chord until bar 19. The music eventually shifts to C major in the second section of the exposition and climaxes in a passage of six bars of oddly placed and harmonically moot writing that concludes the first part of the movement. Beethoven then leads the listener to think that, as would be expected, the exposition will be repeated; but an unforeseen G flat in the cello reveals that the development section has begun. It is an expansive and adventurous section of the quartet that, remarkably, includes a double-fugue in E-flat minor. The recapitulation brings other unusual details until the opening theme is emphatically reasserted some fifty-five bars from the end. A brief coda concludes the movement.

Many commentators have pointed out how *sui generis* is the construction of the second movement. It is not in sonata form, and it is not a rondo; least of all is it a minuet and trio. It combines aspects of all of these forms, and does so with the most unassuming melodic material possible. The opening theme in the cello could be played on a drum or a tambourine, but in its single-note figure lies the germ of a truly marvelous piece. The choice of B-flat major for the movement is in itself very unusual; the music wanders additionally through a number of remote tonalities as Beethoven explores the rich potential of his simple themes. The harmonic plan is complex enough to give the movement the feeling of being elaborated almost *ad libitum*.

The Adagio returns to the home key of F, but now in the minor mode. This slow movement represents Beethoven in his most tragic frame of mind; the contrast with the first two movements could not be greater. The mood throughout is one of intense desolation, relieved only somewhat by the subsidiary theme in the relative key of A-flat major. (Kerman, for one, thought the tragic mood overwrought and unconvincing, not so much in itself as in relation to the rest of the quartet.) The last iteration of the F-minor theme leads to an improvisatory passage for the first violin which at last comes to perch on a trill on C. The trill continues as the cello plays the theme of the Finale, a Russian-infused melody that is similar enough in its shape to the theme of the opening movement as almost to constitute a parody. In fact it is borrowed from a genuine Russian folk song. The Finale is full of high spirits, and the “*thème russe*” is seldom forgotten for long. The development section is brief and gets quickly to D minor before subsiding back to the home key for the recapitulation. A short adagio gives the players a moment’s rest before the movement, and the quartet, sprints to a close.

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

String Quartet No. 14 in D Minor, “Death and the Maiden”

In February 1817 Schubert set to music a short poem by Matthias Claudius (1740–1815) called “Der Tod und das Mädchen,” a simple two-stanza work in which a young girl begs Death to pass her by. Death is polite, and in carrying her off, consoles her: “Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen” (You will sleep softly in my arms). Schubert’s song is short and moving. Its brief piano introduction reappears in the later D Minor String Quartet as the theme for a set of variations that comprises the slow second movement played here. The song’s title became the nickname for the whole composition. Some analysts have taken this quartet in its entirety to be a meditation on death, encouraged to do so not just by the music but also by a famous letter that Schubert wrote in March of 1824 (when the string quartet was composed), in which he referred to himself as “the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world.” Other commentators have tried to find more life-affirming qualities in the piece, to keep a line drawn, in other words, between the composer and the work. All agree that the “Death and the Maiden” quartet is a passionate, deeply felt piece of music, and one of the great masterpieces of the repertoire. It is the second of Schubert’s final three quartets, all of them clearly written for professional performance, not for his family’s amateur ensemble, as many of his earlier contributions to the genre had been. (There is a contemporary report that even Ignaz Schuppanzigh, the great violinist whose ensemble premiered many of Beethoven’s quartets, found this Schubert work too difficult to play.)

Today we hear only the second movement, comprised of the set of five variations on the theme from the “Death and the Maiden” song, not in D minor (the key of the song and of the three other movements of the string quartet), but in G minor. This spare theme has two parts, an eight-bar phrase and a sixteen-bar phrase, each of which is repeated. The emotions that Schubert wrests from this simple material are quite astonishing. Only the fourth variation is in a major key, and it provides some welcome relief from the intensity of the first three. The theme reaches an apotheosis in the final variation, with its haunting sixteenth-note accompaniment. The coda, like the song, moves sublimely into G major for the final few bars.

ABOUT AROD QUARTET



Front cover and above photo credit: Marco Borggreve

With all four members only in their twenties, the Paris-based Arod Quartet has already dazzled awestruck chamber-music lovers in concerts at such prestigious venues as the Auditorium of the Louvre in Paris, and the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. The Arod quickly skyrocketed to international attention when they won the coveted First Prize of the 2016 ARD International Music Competition in Munich, having already taken First Prize at the Carl Nielsen Chamber Music Competition in Copenhagen. In April 2019 the Quartet undertook its American debut tour, which featured its inaugural Carnegie Hall performance—one of the only European chamber ensembles ever to make its Carnegie Hall debut on its first trip to the United States.

Honored with a rare multi-record contract, the Arod Quartet records exclusively for Erato Warner Classics, which released their debut Mendelssohn album in Fall 2017. The group joined the prestigious BBC New Generation Artists' roster that same year. The Quartet's 2019–20 season featured performances at the Philharmonie de Paris, the Louvre, and the Bourdeaux Opéra; a tour with the remarkable pianist Alexandre Tharaud; debut tours in Israel and Taiwan; and two tours in the United States to keep up with demand.

Previous seasons have seen the Arod Quartet—which was named the ECHO Rising Star during the 2018–19 season—perform at the Auditorium of the Louvre, the Philharmonie de Paris, London’s Wigmore Hall and Barbican Centre, Salzburg’s Mozarteum, the Konzerthaus in Vienna, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Oji Hall of Tokyo, and the Berlin Philharmonia.

Their teachers include Mathieu Herzog and Jean Sulem. The group currently serves as artist-in-residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Brussels with the Artemis Quartet. In recent years the Arod has worked very closely with the Ebène Quartet and the Diotima Quartet, and has collaborated with Alexandre Tharaud, Martin Fröst, and Amihai Grosz, the founding member of the Jerusalem Quartet and now the principal violist of the Berlin Philharmonic. Their sophomore album, a recording of Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, and Webern with the soprano Elsa Dressing, was released in Fall 2019 (Erato Warner Classics).

The group takes its name from Legolas’s horse in J.R.R. Tolkien’s epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. In Tolkien’s mythic Rohirric language, Arod means ‘swift.’ Mécénat Musical Société Générale is the Arod’s principal sponsor, and the ensemble is the 2016 HSBC Laureate of the Académie du Festival d’Aix-en-Provence. Jordan Victoria and Alexandre Vu are loan recipients of composite Stradivari and Guaragnini violins through the Beare’s International Violin Society.

<https://quatuorarod.com/en/>

Arod Quartet is represented by MKI Artists:
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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.



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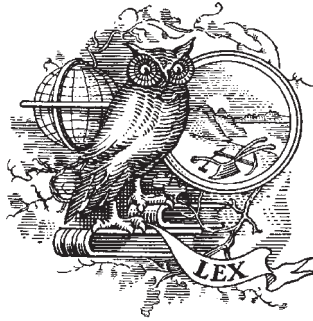
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In 1926 philanthropist William Andrews Clark Jr. donated his library of rare books to the burgeoning UCLA campus in honor of his father, a copper magnate and United States senator from Montana. The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, a unique resource 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.