

Telegraph Quartet

Joseph Maile and Eric Chin, violins
Pei-Ling Lin, viola Jeremiah Shaw, 'cello

Program, Camerata Musica

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Quartet in C major Op. 33 No. 3 "The Bird"
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegretto
Adagio
Presto

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)
Cypresses, B.152
1. I Know that My Love to Thee (Já vím, že v sladké nadeji)
2. Death Reigns in Many a Human Breast (V tak mnohém srdci mrtvo jest)
9. Thou Only, Dear One (Ó duše drahá jedinká)
12. You Ask Why My Songs (Ty se ptáš, proč moje zpevy)
11. Nature Lies Peaceful in Slumber and Dreaming (Nad krajem vévodi lehký spánek)

intermission

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
String Quartet No. 3 in A major, Op. 41 No. 3
Andante espressivo - Allegro molto moderato
Assai agitato
Adagio molto
Finale. Allegro molto vivace

HAYDN:

The glorious first movement of No 3 in C major ("The Bird") has one of the most magical openings in all Haydn. Against soft pulsations from second violin and viola, the first violin steals in with a soft sustained high G, grows increasingly animated (with a hint of birdsong) and then plunges down two octaves against an ardent rising cello line. C major seems firmly established. But Haydn then questions this certainty by repeating the same process in D minor before gliding back to the home key. The violin's chirping acciaccaturas in bar three come to permeate much of the texture, not least in the second subject, where the motivic fragments finally coalesce into a more-or-less rounded tune. At the heart of the development these bird-calls suddenly become mysterious in a sequence of pianissimo clashing suspensions—one of the most haunting moments in all these quartets. Haydn wittily exploits the movement's

unstable opening in an oblique, off-key "recapitulation," stealing in before we quite realize it, and in the reharmonization of the theme (with a feint towards G major) in the very last bars.

Contradicting its title of Scherzo—and the usually bright, "open" key of C major—the tenderly veiled second movement transmutes a dance into a hymn or prayer, with the four instruments playing sotto voce on their lowest strings. With comical incongruity, the trio resumes the first movement's avian associations with a twittering duet for the two violins on their high A and E strings. The serene, warmly textured Adagio, in condensed sonata form (with a brief transition instead of a central development), surely left its mark on the slow movement of Mozart's "Dissonance" Quartet, K.465, in the same key. Instead of literally repeating the first section, Haydn varies it with floridly expressive figuration for the first violin, a touchstone for the player's "taste" and imagination.

The rondo finale is Haydn at his most antic. Its manic refrain, oscillating obsessively between G and E, derives from a Slavonic folk dance. After the tune has tumbled down from first violin to cello, Haydn swerves into an impassioned episode in Hungarian gypsy style. But the mood is quickly punctured by the irrepressible, hyperactive folk tune. The coda is pure slapstick, with a fragment of the theme bandied about between upper and lower instruments before the music seems to disappear into thin air. (Adapted from a note by Richard Wigmore © 2013)

DVOŘÁK:

The provenance of Dvořák's charming 12 pieces for string quartet, conventionally titled "Cypresses," is somewhat complicated. In 1865, a 24-year-old Dvořák fell in love with a 16-year-old piano student (whose younger sister he would eventually marry). In an ardent swoon of unrequited love, he composed a cycle of 18 love songs for voice and piano, setting texts by the Moravian poet, Gustav Pfleger-Moravský, from a volume titled *Cypresses: A Collection of Lyric and Epic Poems*. Dvořák spent years fiddling with the songs in various arrangements and repurposing some of their materials in other compositions. 23 years later, Dvořák, now 47, finally sent the songs to his publisher with the title "*Love Songs*." Around the same time, Dvořák selected 12 of the songs and transcribed them for string quartet. He also provided a new title, "*Echo of Songs*." These remained unpublished until 1927, 17 years after Dvořák's death. It was the publisher, not Dvořák, who attached the title "Cypresses," in reference to the original poems. This explains the three dates associated with the 12 love songs for string quartet: the original songs in 1865, the transcription for string quartet around 1888, and their publication in 1927. While universally known as the Cypresses, one is tempted to honor Dvořák's original poetic intention of calling them collectively "Echo of Songs," as indeed they are.

Dvořák transcribed the songs quite faithfully. Each of the Cypresses pursues a lyrical song form typically featuring a solo vocal line (most often in the first violin) beautifully set within the texture of the string quartet. Dvořák brought the experience of a career of composing string quartets to these arrangements. The "accompaniments" feature rich, colorful textures using a range of string techniques, counterpoints and rhythmic nuances. Both the scoring and the endearing melodic invention of these pieces identify their composer almost immediately. While most of the Cypresses express their amorous intent with gentle, lovely tunes at a moderate

tempo, a few, including No.2, cry out in despair and anguish, agitated and dark in a manner recalling Schubert. —Kai Christiansen, www.earsense.org

SCHUMANN:

1842 was the year of chamber music for Robert Schumann (as 1840 and 1841 were the years of song and of orchestral music, respectively), and he commenced his remarkable instrumental explorations with the three string quartets. For many years it was customary to dismiss these three Op. 41 works as unidiomatic and overly pianistic, claiming that their composer's relative unfamiliarity with string instruments precluded him from creating works of much merit. While it is perhaps true that these works cannot compete with those of either Beethoven or Brahms, their total lack of dependence on the dry clichés of the mid-nineteenth century and their intensely expressive musical poetry compensate for such flaws as would be insurmountable in the music of a lesser composer. The three Opus 41 string quartets, then, are entirely successful on their own terms, much as, though he was far more familiar with the medium, Schumann found himself compelled to discover fresh solutions to the compositional issues presented by the keyboard.

The third of the set but the second in order of composition, the Quartet in A major is by far the most structurally traditional work of the group. The very first gesture of the first movement's brief introduction is identical, harmonically and motivically, to the opening gesture of Beethoven's Op.31, No.3, and one must suspect a conscious or subconscious debt on Schumann's part. The falling fifth motive outlined by this gesture is soon built into the first measure of the primary theme proper (A major, three-four time as opposed to the four-four of the introduction), a tender idea in two halves: the first a graceful eight-bar melody, the second a quarter-note arpeggiation played out in imitation between the four instruments. In Op.41, No.3, at last, Schumann writes a true second theme, whose gentle offbeats and expressive cello melody provide fertile material for development (as, indeed, does the imitative strain of the first theme).

Assai agitato, in F sharp minor, is a roughly-hewn theme and variations (very free variations, to be sure) that presents a far more emotionally disturbed composer than do any of the other movements in the three quartets. A series of short, hurried, syncopated phrase groups collectively form the theme. The first of the variations (note that Schumann does not mark them as such, and one almost feels them to be more in the way of responses to one another than variations in the collective sense of the word) affords the cello and viola opportunity to give their thoughts on the main theme, while the second is a determined effort to make a fugue out of what would seem to be unpromising subject-material (the angry intensity of the imitation makes it clear that Schumann wishes to portray the players' valiant, but ultimately unsuccessful effort, to expunge their grief by logical exercise). The fragmented theme is sewn together into a single lyrical idea in the third variation, while the fourth and last is a furious onslaught determined to wipe away, by violence if necessary, the painful sentimentality of the previous section. A quiet epilogue, the calm after the storm, provides some comfort, and the music winds down into the warmth of F sharp major.

The third movement, Adagio molto, is a lush song without words, growing from quiet statement to heated exclamation before drawing to a comfortable, peaceful end. The finale, on the other

hand, is a sprightly, rather free rondo whose dotted-eighth refrain theme lurches forward with good humor. Two subsidiary ideas appear, and each is repeated in the second half of the piece before the driving coda brings the work home. —Blair Johnston