

The Red Bank  
Chamber Music Society

*presents*

Attacca Quartet

Amy Schroeder, Violin

Keiko Tokunaga, Violin

Nathan Schram, Viola

Andrew Yee, Cello

ADVANCE NOTES

Haydn • Shaw • Beethoven

Sunday Afternoon

October 8, 2017 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

# PROGRAM

String Quartet in B $\flat$  major, Op. 71 No.1 (1793)

Joseph Haydn

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto
- IV. Vivace

Entr'acte (2011)

Caroline Shaw

## INTERMISSION

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132 (1825)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro
- II. Allegro ma non tanto
- III. Molto Adagio; Andante
- IV. Alla marcia, assai vivace
- V. Allegro appassionato; Presto

## Notes on the Program

### Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

#### String Quartet in B $\flat$ major, Op. 71 No.1 (1793)

(~22 minutes)



Haydn wrote Op. 71 No. 1 in B $\flat$  major at the height of his fame in London. He had visited a few years prior and was welcomed like the rock star he was. The only competition for notoriety he had was that of a deceased composer George Frideric Handel. At first he was confused by the outpouring of love for a dead composer but soon realized what he had been missing. The “Hallelujah Chorus” apparently swept Haydn off his feet. Biographer Giuseppe Carpani: “[Haydn] confessed that when he heard the music of [Handel] . . . he was struck as if he had been put back to the beginning of the studies and had known nothing up to that moment. He meditated on every note and drew from those most learned scores the essence of true musical grandeur.” Haydn is also well known to have, upon hearing the above performance, cried out “He is the Master of us all!”.

Handel’s oratorios were the inspiration for his orchestral masterpiece, *The Creation*. What Haydn got from his travels to London was not just an admiration for Handel but a sense of the scope of influence his music could have on the general public. Up till this point, his quartets were confined to the halls of the Esterhazy palace and, on the road, with a few hot-shot violinists and their “Sancho Panza-esque” quartet companions. He saw huge concert halls and met thousands who would flock and riot to hear his newly composed works. By the end of his career, he would literally be riding out of concerts on a throne on the shoulders of his admirers.

These were the concert halls he was writing for and, after his successful first visit, he knew he wanted to write something extraordinary and large

scale. He began the first movement with a gesture that would grab the attention of a large and rambling audience. The rest of the movement alternates courteous gestural writing with bombastic outbursts. With each return to the theme Haydn treated the following material with wit and thoughtfulness, changing the way the light hits it in subtle ways.

The second movement is a sicilienne, characterized by the gentle lilting figure that carries the movement. The figure is passed back and forth almost always in two voices at a time. The middle section is a heart-wrenching melancholy melody played by the first violin. When the original theme returns, it is adorned with grace notes almost as if it left the room and put on a pearl necklace. The movement ends with a chromatic landing in the cello line.

The minuet is regal and stately, with a trio of shared running quick notes around the quartet. The finale is a cascading, fun-loving, all bets-off show of quartet virtuosity. This quartet is the true arrival of Haydn's late style.



## **Caroline Shaw (1982- )** **Entr'acte**

*(~11 minutes)*



Caroline Shaw is not only a great person and friend to us in the quartet, she also happens to be a Pulitzer Prize and Grammy award winner for her vocal piece “Partita for 8 Voices”. We just completed a project recording her complete quartet works, and we have insisted that almost every program we play this year have at least one of her works on it. She wrote this piece while still studying at Yale. It was written for the

Brentano Quartet after she heard them play a late Haydn quartet. She was

moved by the juxtaposition of the minuet and trio of Op. 77 No. 2. She wrote:

“I love the way some music suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice’s looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition”.

Entr’acte (meaning between acts) is a minuet and trio of sorts. It begins with a simple four note gesture that lengthens and shortens over the course of the opening. Several techniques are used over the course of the piece. One section calls for the playing of dampened strings in rhythm. All that can be heard is a faint aspirating sound. The trio starts with a plucked section and works itself up into a frenzy before quietly returning back to the theme. The piece ends with a slow cello cadenza with the marking “Like recalling fragments of an old tune or story”.



## **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)** **String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132 (1825)**

*(~45 minutes)*



Beethoven’s Op. 132 in A minor quartet is one of the cornerstones of the quartet repertoire. It is a piece that benefits from a surprising first listen but can grow and change and mature alongside you. The late quartets of Beethoven have a way of being totally indescribable and complex but always feel like they are rooted in a basic human gesture. But the late quartets were not a box-office success for Beethoven. One musician at the time wrote, “We know something is there, but we don’t know what it is”.

The first movement is based on a figure containing two half step intervals

separated by a leap. It appears first in the cello and is passed around the quartet. This gesture is buried all over the quartet if you care to listen for it. It shows up in the main theme of the second movement as well.

The third movement is the heart of the work. Beethoven had been bedridden with an intestinal illness. He described the pain as “a devil in my bowels”. He was so ill that he was sure he would not survive. When the illness passed he wrote this movement with a caption at the top.

<p><i>Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart*</i> (Song of Thanks to God from a Convalescent, in the Lydian Mode)</p>
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\*For the sake of brevity the name “Heileger Dankgesang” suffices when referring this movement, saving both the cultural face and phlegm glands of the person referring to the movement.

The movement is separated into five sections, three chorale sections and two sections marked “With new strength”, that bring extra meaning to the slow sections that surround them. The final chorale section reaches one of the great climaxes of all time before retreating into an inward look at the fragility of human life. In our first read-through of this movement for this season, this movement was followed by 45 seconds of heart-broken silence. It is truly one of the greatest musical statements of all time.

The fourth movement exists both as a pseudo cousin of the minuet-trio and a bridge to the final movement. It breaks the silence with a bombastic off-set minuet. Vulgar outbursts are contrasted with whispered ends of sentences. Every theme statement seems to have another theme stapled to its coat tail. In place of a trio exists a recitative. The recitative just so happens to share a motif from two other pieces. The first is Haydn’s Op. 17 No. 5 from 1771 and the second is Beethoven’s own *Symphony No. 9*.

This brings us to the final movement of Op. 132 which was originally intended to finish the 9th symphony. Sketches of the last movement of the 9th symphony have no choir at all, and the orchestra plays a finale on its own. The fiery ending ended up in this quartet, and the movement was

fleshed out to make sense in the context of Op. 132 instead. At the height of the final moments the cello is catapulted into the violin range to play a screamed-pleading melody in the stratosphere of the instrument. This insistence on high cello melodies on the last page is typical of Beethoven and leads me to believe that he hated the cellist in town. Opus 132 cannot be examined from enough angles, cannot be experienced during enough life-changes, cannot be heard with ears capable enough. The piece humbles us as musicians, and it humbles me as an audience member when I listen to it. We are fortunate to be alive in the small sliver of universal time when we can experience such a miracle.

*Program Notes by Andrew Yee*

