

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society

presents

The American String Quartet

with André-Michel Schub, Piano

Schumann • Brahms

Peter Winograd, violin

Laurie Carney, violin

Daniel Avshalomov, viola

Wolfram Koessel, cello

Sunday Afternoon

October 5, 2014 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

PROGRAM

Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op.44

Robert Schumann

- I. Allegro brillante
- II. In modo d'una marcia. Un poco largamente
- III. Scherzo: Molto vivace
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op.34

Johannes Brahms

1. Allegro non troppo
2. Andante, un poco Adagio
3. Scherzo: Allegro
4. Finale: Poco sostenuto - Allegro non troppo -
- Presto, non troppo

Notes on the Program

The Piano Quintet

A piano quintet is the largest chamber music piano ensemble commonly encountered, and there are remarkably few of them in the standard repertoire. It's practically a small orchestra, and not surprisingly the earliest examples were keyboard concertos reduced from orchestral scores for salon performance. While both Mozart and Beethoven wrote quintets for piano and winds, Franz Schubert was the first composer of note to write a lasting work for piano with four strings, his "Trout" Quintet (1819), using the double-bass to boost the lower tonal register of the ensemble at a time when a Viennese piano didn't have as much power as that of Brahms's day fifty years later. The most popular landmark works in the genre over the next century were written by Schumann (1842), Brahms (1864), Dvořák (1887), Franck (1879), and Shostakovich (1940), and they all used a second violin instead of string bass as the fourth string instrument in order to enrich the treble range.

In general, piano quintets present special challenges both to composers and to players beyond those posed by the more common piano trios and string quartets. First, there are the added difficulties of managing five voices instead of three or four, while still balancing the percussive elements of the piano sound with the continuous texture of the string sounds. Then, both the composer and ensemble are faced with the problem that there are no permanent full-time groups of musicians dedicated to playing the limited repertoire written for this form; as a result, every performance of a piano quintet is a rare event. Still more rare, then, to have two of the greatest works in the form on the same program.

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op.44 (1842)

(~30 minutes)

Robert Schumann, born 200 years ago, was in the vanguard of the Romantic movement in music, not only as a composer but as an influential critic who helped promote the music of his contemporaries as well as to revive public interest in the great composers of the past.

He wrote his piano quintet during just a few weeks in September and October 1842, in his "Chamber Music Year" when he wrote three string quartets, a piano trio, and a piano quartet in addition to this popular quintet. This was the first true piano quintet in the classical literature; no one before him had used the piano as an equal partner with four string players, so Schumann had no earlier models to draw upon. Later composers over the next 100 years would be inspired by this work, but only three of them approach the enduring popularity of Schumann's piano quintet: Brahms, Dvořák, and Shostakovich.

The first movement, marked *Allegro brillante* sets the heroic tone of the work. In Schumann's characteristic style, melodic and rhythmical patterns will recur across multiple movements to enhance the unity of the composition. The opening theme of this first movement will reappear much later in the fourth movement, as a centerpiece of the fugue that will end the work.

The second movement begins in the mood of a funeral march in C minor, then brightens into C major for the second theme. A new *agitato* section offers an unsettled variant of the movement's theme before closing back in the mood of the funeral march.

The third movement scherzo is built upon driving ascending and descending scales. There are two trios: the first is a lyrical canon for first violin and viola in G flat major, with the piano providing a rippling harmony and the other two strings holding long pedal notes; the second trio is a heavily accented perpetual motion with sixteenth notes driving the impetuous mood.

The finale, marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, presents an opening descending theme in C minor and a second ascending theme in E flat major. After elaborating both themes, Schumann combines the first of them with the first theme of the first movement in a brilliant double fugue, introducing new counter-melodies and finishing up with the sound of a rousing country dance.



Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op.34 (1864)

(~40 minutes)

Many of the most beloved works in the concert repertory are heard and remembered today in versions and arrangements different from the forms in which they were originally composed. Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" might have been forgotten in its original piano solo version had Maurice Ravel not orchestrated it; and Brahms's "Saint Anthony Variations" (on a theme by Haydn) might have languished in its two-piano version had it not been for his glorious version for full symphonic orchestra.

Brahms's piano quintet is one of the few standard repertoire works that went through *two* radical revisions of format by its composer until he was finally satisfied with it. It began as a string quintet first performed in 1862, but he destroyed the manuscript after his virtuoso violinist friend advised that strings alone couldn't carry the weight of the music and suggested revising it for piano. Brahms then turned it into a sonata for two pianos, but Robert Schumann's widow Clara joined other critics in suggesting that pianos alone couldn't express the sustained passionate intensity required, and that string voices were essential to the work. Its final transformation into a quintet for piano and four strings was finished in the fall of 1864 and premiered in 1866.

The first movement *Allegro non troppo* has at least five themes or motivic elements, starting with a deceptively calm eighth-note opening in f-minor unison among piano, cello, and first violin, that quickly morphs into a powerful restatement of the motif in sixteenth-note fury. New melodies are

introduced, and harmonic modulations and mood changes are sudden and convincing, all of which create a constant wave of alternating tension and relaxation throughout the movement. The key of F minor is a particularly thorny one for string players, since so few of its scale notes fall on open strings, but it is eminently pianistic and appealed to composers of the Romantic era for its dark melancholic and often stormy color.

The slow movement *Andante, un poco Adagio* (moving forward while lingering a bit) is one of the most serenely lyrical compositions in the entire classical repertoire. Its key of A-flat major is the bright side of the first movement's dark F minor: with the same four-flat key signature, it is just as difficult for string players, but its mood is one which musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky called "a key of joyous celebration and human devotion." Brahms delights in both of those aspects of the key: he creates a sense of yearning with *stringendo* passages that either move forward to exuberance or settle back into dreamy calm, and he expresses a mood of religious devotion with passages where the piano's arpeggios suggest a harp's heavenly joy. Throughout the movement Brahms neither rushes nor halts the gentle but inexorable forward motion to its conclusion.

The third movement Scherzo opens in an innocently disguised suggestion of the same A-flat major key but quickly reveals itself to be in an ominous C minor with an intense syncopated pulse that will itself soon explode into an exuberant C-major triumphal march. The rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic motifs of the scherzo suggest inspiration by the last two movements of Beethoven's C-minor fifth symphony, whose unsettled C-minor scherzo bursts into the joyous C-major march of its finale. Brahms, feeling himself forever in the shadow of Beethoven, had begun work on his own first symphony a decade earlier in 1854, but it was not until a decade later in 1876 that he would finally present his own C Minor Symphony to the public.

The Finale is, harmonically and structurally, one of Brahms's most enigmatic works. It opens *poco sostenuto* in the kind of amorphous mist of uncertain harmony and tempo which characterized his idol Beethoven's final works and which would be a hallmark of his heir Jean Sibelius forty years later. It soon gives way to a rhythmic Gypsy-inflected dance in *Allegro non troppo* that builds in intensity and speed until, following a brief respite to recapitulate the themes, resumes its momentum through a coda marked *Presto, non troppo* meaning "pull out all the stops, but back off just a bit" that characterizes Brahms: passion tempered by reason, with classical form and romantic expression always in balance..

ARTISTS

Internationally recognized as one of the world's foremost quartets, the **AMERICAN STRING QUARTET** celebrates its 39th season in 2014-2015. Critics and colleagues hold the Quartet in high esteem, and leading artists and composers seek out the Quartet for collaborations.

In July 2012, the Quartet collaborated with composer Mohammed Fairouz, clarinetist David Krakauer and Shakti Mohan, Indian dancer and Bollywood star, in a performance of Fairouz's *Hindustani Dabkeh*, performed for BBC World News. Following summer residencies at China's Great Wall International Music Academy and at Colorado's Aspen Music Festival, the Quartet's 2012-2013 season included performances in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina and Tennessee.

To celebrate its 35th anniversary, the Quartet recorded an ambitious CD, *Schubert's Echo*, released in August 2010 by NSS Music. The program invites the listener to appreciate the influence of Schubert on two masterworks of early 20th-century Vienna.

Critically acclaimed for its presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartok and Mozart, the American also champions contemporary music. The Quartet has commissioned and premiered works by distinguished composers Claus Adam, Richard Danielpour, Kenneth Fuchs, Tobias Picker and George Tsontakis. The Quartet has recorded on the Albany, CRI, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch and RCA labels. The Quartet's discography includes works by Adam, Corigliano, Danielpour, Dvořák, Fuchs, Prokofiev, Schoenberg and Tsontakis. Originally released by MusicMasters and again in 2008 by Nimbus Records, the Quartet's recordings of the complete Mozart string quartets on a matched set of Stradivarius instruments are widely held to set the standard for this repertoire.

The Quartet's innovative programming and creative approach to education has resulted in notable residencies throughout the country. The Quartet continues as quartet in residence at the Manhattan School of Music (1984-present) and the Aspen Music Festival (1974-present). The ASQ also teaches in Beijing, China, and travels widely abroad.

Formed in 1974 when its original members were students at The Juilliard School, the American String Quartet was launched by winning the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award in the same year.

Pianist **ANDRÉ-MICHEL SCHUB** has been described by the *New York Times* as "pianistically flawless...a formidable pianist with a fierce integrity." He has repeatedly performed with the world's most prestigious orchestras, among them the Boston Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonics, the Detroit Symphony, the Royal Concertgebouw, and the Bournemouth Symphony.

Mr. Schub was the 1981 grand prize winner of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, the 1977 recipient of the Avery Fisher Recital Award, and 1974 winner of the Naumberg International Piano Competition. Since 1997 he has been music director of the Virginia Arts Festival Chamber Music series. He is currently an artist member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and a member of the faculty at the Manhattan School of Music..

Born in France, André-Michel Schub came to the United States with his family when he was eight months old, and New York City has been home ever since. He began his piano studies with his mother when he was four and later continued his work with Jascha Zayde. He first attended Princeton University and then transferred to the Curtis Institute, where he studied with Rudolf Serkin from 1970 to 1973. His recordings for Vox Cum Laude, Piano Disc and CBS Masterworks (now Sony Classical) include works of Beethoven, Brahms, and Liszt, as well as an all-Stravinsky album with Cho-Liang Lin.