

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society
presents

The American Quartet

Peter Winograd, violin

Laurie Carney, violin

Daniel Avshalomov, viola

Wolfram Koessel, cello

Haydn • Beethoven • Saylor • Ravel

Sunday Afternoon

May 7, 2017 • 4:30 PM

Trinity Church Auditorium

Red Bank, NJ

ADVANCE NOTES

PROGRAM

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1 (1796-7)

Joseph Haydn

- I. Allegro con spirito
- II. Adagio sostenuto
- III. Menuetto. Presto
- IV. Allegro ma non troppo

String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, "Serioso" (1810)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Allegretto ma non troppo
- III. Allegro assai vivace ma serioso
- IV. Larghetto espressivo - Allegretto agitato

INTERMISSION

Keeping Watch: A Seascape (2017)

(Commissioned in honor of Jim Greene, World Premiere)

Bruce Saylor

String Quartet in F Major (1903)

Maurice Ravel

- I. Allegro moderato - Très doux
- II. Assez vif - Très rythmé
- III. Très lent
- IV. Vif et agité

Notes on the Program

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in G Major, Op. 76, No. 1 (1796-7)

(~20 minutes)



Joseph Haydn's Quartet in G Major Op. 76 no. 1 is the sound of confidence. While always (modestly) aware of his abilities, Haydn returned from his second triumphal visit to England with at least an inkling that he was considered the greatest living composer in Europe.

His compositional style evolved throughout his career, and the signs are manifest in all four movements. Having made the sonata-allegro form his own, Haydn now felt free to alter it in the opening Allegro; his slow movements had never been less than beautiful - now they gained greater depth of expression; for all his disapproval of Beethoven as a student, Haydn did not fail to appreciate how the younger man had vivified minuets, and here the scherzo-in-all-but-name is fast enough to be felt one beat to the bar. And perhaps most remarkable of all is the finale, which he wrote in G minor - and though the sun does emerge later on, his use of the minor mode was unprecedented at the time. A testament to the wisdom which comes (to some) with age.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
String Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95, “Serioso” (1810)

(~20 minutes)



Beethoven's Quartet in F Minor, Op. 95 is one of few works actually subtitled by the composer. Vienna's National Library holds the manuscript, which is inscribed: "Quartetto serioso - 1810 - in the month of October. Dedicated to Herr von Zmeskall and written in the month of October by his friend, L.v. Beethoven" [Although it is likely that he completed it as late as 1814]. "Serious" is a neutral assessment: the first two measures are an angry shout into what had become, for Beethoven, a void. His audible world had been diminishing for ten years, and his affliction (and his temperament) produced a loneliness which came close to silencing all composing for two years.

The shortest of all his quartets, Op. 95 is at once meticulously crafted and passionately unrestrained. It is also the one which alters the tidy characterization of Beethoven's quartets as Early, Middle, and Late works. In it, the composer eschews the grand scale of his "Razumovsky" quartets (Op. 59), and there is no homage to Josef Haydn (as there is in the "Harp", Op. 74); instead we find an intensity of expression and a quest for new structure which presages the last five quartets which follow.

Beethoven wrote that Op. 95 was composed for "a small circle of connoisseurs and is never to be performed in public." So, we ask that you do not tell him about today's performance



Bruce Saylor (1946 -)
Keeping Watch: A Seascape (2017)

(~10 minutes)



Bruce Saylor’s “Keeping Watch: A Seascape” was commissioned in honor of the late Jim Greene by the Red Bank Chamber Music Society, especially for this concert featuring the American String Quartet.

Saylor writes:

It was made known to me that Jim Greene adored the water: was there any way I might refer to that in a memorial context? Since I am very suggestible, the fact provided a stimulating point of departure. Then I searched for poetry, and found the evocative Robert Frost lines, which provided me with more justification rather than inspiration. I loved Frost’s picture: his flat background atmosphere of stillness in sand and sea, punctuated by erect humanity (like the “standing gull,” facing the ocean, rather than the more “varied” land.) I had already been composing that trajectory out: “cellular” intervallic pitch collections spinning out into longer legato lines, leading to emotional outbursts. Coloristic textural gestures evoke ever-present sounds of surf, then juxtapose themselves with successions of more turbulent and tumbling ruminations. The tiny “cell” of pitches expands into an extended melody that each player

**Neither Out Far
Nor In Deep**

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the
land.
They look at the sea all day.

As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

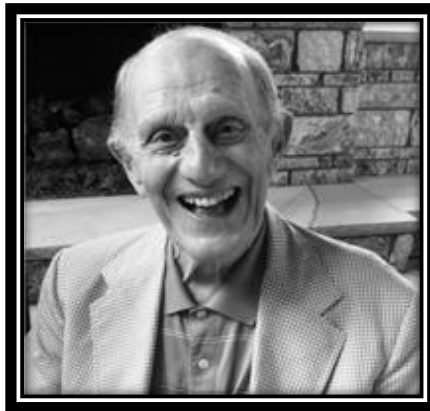
The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be-
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

Robert Frost

sings. We gaze out at the vast expanse of the great Immensity, and we search, watch, wonder. Frost has no stars in his poem, but I have added my own musical ones in the finale, seizing my composer's license to bring the glare of day to sparking night.

In Honor of Jim Greene



Jim Greene (1921-2015)

Jim Greene was a dedicated and valued member of the Red Bank Chamber Music Society Board of Trustees. When he passed away on November 11, 2015, his family thoughtfully suggested RBCMS to receive donations in his honor in lieu of flowers. We received many generous donations and, as we discussed ways that we could use the unexpected funds, we decided that remembering Jim through the commission of a new piece of music in his honor would be particularly appropriate. While Bruce Saylor, the composer of the new piece did not know Jim when he titled his new piece, "Keeping Watch," those of us who were lucky enough to know him all agree it is an apt tribute to the man we loved and admired.

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) String Quartet in F (1903)

(~26 minutes)



Of Maurice Ravel's *String Quartet in F*, no comment could be more apropos than Beethoven's "Tastes differ." Naturally he was not speaking of this piece, but Ravel himself said of it: "[it] reflects a preoccupation with musical structure, imperfectly realized, no doubt, but which appears much clearer than in my previous compositions." The work was dedicated to

Gabriel Fauré, who took over as director of the Paris Conservatoire in the wake of the scandal which attended Ravel's elimination from the competition for the coveted *Prix de Rome*. Fauré, however, never acknowledged Ravel's dedication. Ravel was, in fact, thrown out of Fauré's class, but continued to attend as an auditor during the time he was writing this quartet.

But let us ignore the opinions of Messieurs Ravel and Fauré. In the opinions of quartet-players and audiences around the world, this masterpiece entered the repertory in 1903, and has been heard hundreds of times each season since then. Why? Because it is perfectly crafted; its structure is lean - there is not one superfluous measure in the work; its part-writing is grateful - each instrument is given lovely things to say in registers that flatter it; and its suave sensuality charms listeners from start to finish. One of the plainest definitions of a "classic" is a work which bears repetition, and this one surely qualifies.

Our natty little French friend began as a revolutionary and ended up as the establishment; his musical tastes included the Spanish, Russians, Balinese, and the "jazzers" - and his idea of what a quartet should do in F major awaits you. Our advice: sit back and enjoy, thinking instead of Debussy's note to Ravel: "In the name of the gods of music, and in mine, *do not touch a single note* of what you have written in your quartet."



ARTISTS

Internationally recognized as one of the world's finest quartets, the **American String Quartet** has spent decades honing the luxurious sound for which it is famous. The Quartet celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2014, and, in its years of touring, has performed in all fifty states and has appeared in the most important concert halls worldwide. The group's presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartók, and Mozart have won widespread critical acclaim, and their MusicMasters Complete Mozart String Quartets, performed on a matched quartet set of instruments by Stradivarius, are widely considered to have set the standard for this repertoire.

The Quartet's 2016-17 season features two major projects: the first, with Salman Rushdie, sees the Quartet performing a new work by Paul Cantelon based on Rushdie's novel *The Enchantress of Florence* while the author reads excerpts from the text; the other teams the Quartet with the National Book Award-winning author Phil Klay and the poet Tom Sleigh in a groundbreaking program combining music and readings that examines the effects of war on people, their hearts, and their minds.

The Quartet's diverse activities have also included numerous international radio and television broadcasts; including a recent recording for the BBC; tours of Asia; and performances with the New York City Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. Recent highlights include performances of an all-sextet program with Roberto and Andrés Díaz, many tours of South America, and performances of the complete Beethoven cycle of string quartets in Israel – a country in which the ensemble has performed five times in as many years.

The American's additional extensive discography can be heard on the Albany, CRI, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch, and RCA labels. Most recently the group released "Schubert's Echo," which pairs Schubert's monumental last quartet with works bearing its influence by Second Viennese masters Alban Berg and Anton Webern. This

repertoire posits that the creative line from the First to the Second Viennese Schools is continuous – and evident when these works are heard in the context of each other. The CD is on the NSS Music label, an enterprise created by Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg devoted to intellectual projects that are frequently overlooked by more major labels.

The Quartet's innovative approach to concert programming has won them a number of notable residencies in recent years, including “Beethoven the Contemporary” at the University of Michigan, “The Six Mozart Viola Quintets” at the Aspen Music Festival with Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree (broadcast live nationally via Chicago superstation WFMT), and a four-year cycle entitled “4-5-6...” at Princeton University, where the Quartet performed the complete quintets and sextets of Mozart and Brahms, joined in each concert by renowned guest artists.

As champions of new music, the American has given numerous premieres, including George Tsontakis's 2015 Quartet No. 7.5, “Maverick,” Richard Danielpour's Quartet No. 4, and Curt Cacioppo's a distant voice calling. The premiere of Robert Sirota's American Pilgrimage will take place in September 2016, and will be performed around the U.S. in the cities the work celebrates. In January 2009 the Quartet premièred Tobias Picker's String Quartet No. 2 in New York City in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the Manhattan School of Music.

Formed when its original members were students at The Juilliard School, the American String Quartet's career began with the group winning both the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Award in the same year. Resident quartet at the Aspen Music Festival since 1974 and at the Manhattan School of Music in New York since 1984, the American has also served as resident quartet at the Taos School of Music, the Peabody Conservatory, and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition.

Bruce Saylor's orchestral music has been commissioned and performed by the San Francisco, Houston, Nashville, St. Louis, and Yale symphonies, and by the American Composers Orchestra and the Chicago Composers Orchestra. He is at work on a concerto for violin and orchestra for Gil Morgenstern, the "Tarantella" from which was premiered and recorded last November. His five operas include "Orpheus Descending" premiered by Lyric Opera of Chicago, and "The Image Maker" premiered by the Aaron Copland School of Music under conductor Maurice Peress. His wife the mezzo soprano Constance Beavon has recorded 4 of his vocal chamber works. In addition to 12 large-scale pieces for chorus and orchestra, and much published sacred choral music, Saylor has collaborated on two best-selling holiday CDs with American icon Jessye Norman and on Miss Norman's evening-length "Sacred Ellington" which she has performed around the world. The recipient of more than 40 awards and prizes in composition, Saylor was educated at Juilliard, at Santa Cecilia in Rome, and at the City University of New York Graduate Center. He is an award-winning teacher at Queens College.