

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society
presents

The Attacca Quartet
Haydn • Bartók • Beethoven

Amy Schroeder, violin
Keiko Tokunaga, violin
Nathan Schram, Viola
Andrew Yee, Cello

Sunday Afternoon
June 5, 2016 • 4:30 PM
Trinity Church Auditorium
Red Bank, NJ

PROGRAM NOTES

PROGRAM

String Quartet No. 64 in D Major ("Largo"), Op.76, No.5

Franz Joseph Haydn

1. Allegretto
2. Largo cantabile e mesto
3. Menuetto: Allegro
4. Finale: Presto

String Quartet No.2 in A Minor, Op.17

Béla Bartók

1. Moderato
2. Allegro molto capriccioso
3. Lento

INTERMISSION

String Quartet No.9 in C Major, Op.59, No.3 ("Razumovsky")

Ludwig van Beethoven

1. Introduzione: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace
2. Andante con moto quasi Allegretto
3. Menuetto grazioso
4. Finale: Allegro molto

Notes on the Program

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809)

String Quartet No.64 in D Major (“Largo”), Op.76, No.5 (1797)

(~20 minutes)

In 1795 Haydn was at the height of his popularity, both in Vienna and in London. He had completed all of his 104 symphonies and 59 of his 68 string quartets, including commissions from Paris and Cádiz. For nearly twenty years he had been permitted to retain the publication rights to his compositions, where previously they had been the exclusive property of the Esterházy family who had employed him as court composer since 1761. Now an independently wealthy man, Haydn set about writing for posterity rather than for patrons.

Returning from his second acclaimed visit to London in 1795 he began work on a set of six string quartets dedicated to Hungarian count Joseph Georg von Erdödy, and these “Erdödy Quartets” (#60-#65) are the last complete set of string quartets he composed: the final three would appear as a set of two “Lobkowitz” quartets in 1799 and an unfinished Opus 103 in 1803. His former pupil Beethoven had recently published his Opus 1 piano trios, famously refusing to have the phrase “Pupil of Haydn” printed on the cover, claiming “although he had some instruction from Haydn he had never learned anything from him”. Whether Beethoven’s first chamber works either inspired or challenged him, Haydn followed up with six of the greatest works in the string quartet literature.

The fifth of the Erdödy Quartets, Op.76 No.5, is one of Haydn’s most innovative, personal, and engaging of his 68 string quartets. It is commonly referred to as the “Largo Quartet”, owing to the deeply expressive and harmonically adventurous nature of its slow movement.

The first movement starts off sounding like a theme-and-variations built on a gently swaying melody that will form a constant melodic and rhythmic motif throughout the movement, but it abruptly defies expectations as it departs from the classical form and finds itself a mixture of minuet/trio, theme and variations, and sonata.

The quartet’s emotional and structural heart lies in its second movement, marked *Largo cantabile e mesto* (slow, singing, and melancholy). It expresses deep personal feelings more than anything Haydn had previously written, crossing over the threshold between Classical-Era courtly elegance and Romantic-Era emotion. The term *mesto* had been used occasionally in previous centuries as a direction to players to feel the sadness underlying the music, not necessarily to make the music sound mournful. Beethoven would title the slow movement of his 1798 piano sonata *Largo e mesto*, and Bartók titled all four movements of his 1939 string quartet *mesto...* One of the saddest expressions of *mesto* is in the slow movement of Brahms’s horn trio of 1865, written shortly after the death of his mother, and its minor-key *Adagio mesto* movement personifies grief in the extreme.

Haydn’s slow movement, in contrast to Brahms, is not outwardly mournful. Its major key is more nostalgic than grief-stricken, suggesting a life remembered rather than an unbearable loss. It is written in one of the most difficult keys for string players, F-sharp major with six sharps, whose scale has no notes that can be played on the open strings of any of the four instruments. Its many harmonic modulations are often astonishing but always logical in its wandering progression back to its home key.

The light-hearted minuet of the third movement opens with a happy suggestion of the preceding *Largo* motif, then takes off in a lively dance in the traditional form of minuet-trio-minuet, with the middle trio section offering a minor-key excursion into more serious territory.

The finale is marked *Presto* (fast), and there's no such thing as "too fast" for an ensemble that can manage it. It opens with what sounds like the final *bravura* chords that would typically end a flashy work in high style, but it turns out to be not an ending but an announcement, an invitation to embark on a roller-coaster perpetual-motion ride that goes nowhere but back to the beginning and thrills and tickles all the way to the end. One of Haydn's most joke-filled compositions, it defies expectations at every turn, signaling endings that don't arrive and suggesting repeats that instead pivot in new directions.



Béla Bartók (1881 – 1945)
String Quartet No.2 in A Minor, Op.17 (1917)

(~25 minutes)

Béla Bartók is Hungary's national hero in the world of serious music. Franz Liszt is the most famous composer born in Hungary (1811), but he left his native land at age sixteen and never resided there again, and his music can more aptly be described as "European" than "Hungarian". Haydn was a lifelong citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Beethoven's most productive career was centered on its capital Vienna, and both drew on Hungarian musical themes in their compositions; but both are regarded as Austrian/Germanic rather than Hungarian. Other Hungarian composers made their mark – Kodály, Dohnányi, and Franz Lehár stand out – but Bartók is the one most iconically regarded as Hungarian. This may be no more than a reflection of the emergence of independent Hungary after the dismantling of the Empire following the First World War, but is more likely the fact that Bartók consciously wrote in a Hungarian idiom that sang from the ethnic melodies and harmonies of his birthplace, rather than from a European world-music sensibility.

In his twenties he became fascinated with the Magyar folk music of Hungary and neighboring lands. Together with his fellow Hungarian Zoltán Kodály he traveled throughout Hungary and beyond, including Turkey and North Africa, collecting thousands of authentic folk songs. It was a passion that would last for decades and that would infuse his own compositions with their unique harmonies and assertive asymmetric rhythms.

He worked on his second string quartet during the years 1914-17 while in seclusion outside Budapest as the First World War was raging. Whereas his earlier compositions exhibited the influences of Brahms, Strauss, Debussy, and Stravinsky, his new style was entirely his own and was infused with the intoxicating melodies and dances of the Magyar peasants whose music he had collected on his field trips.

The three movements of the quartet were aptly described by his friend and colleague Zoltán Kodály as (1) A quiet life, (2) Joy, and (3) Sorrow.

The first movement *Moderato* opens with a soft murmur that sets the stage for a plaintive motif that

will recur throughout the movement. While “a quiet life” may describe the overall sense of normality expressed by the moderate tempo, the nearly-constant dissonances and accelerations suggest a pervading anxiety that intrude on a peaceful existence.

The second movement *Allegro molto capriccioso* is wild and driving, evoking the spirit of the Arabian dancing and drumming that Bartók would have experienced during his folk-music travels. The *capriccioso* marking is perfectly in accord with his comment in a letter to a friend in 1915: “every now and then I am thrown into a state of depression by the war – a condition which, in my case, alternates with a kind of devil-may-care attitude.

The final movement *Lento* (slow) is a deeply personal expression of despair and desolation. Musical phrases are brief, more like sighs than melodic lines.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

String Quartet No.9 in C Major, Op.59, No.3 (Razumovsky) (1806)

(~30 minutes)

In 1804 Beethoven’s “Eroica” Symphony was premiered in Vienna, and it was an instant sensation that announced the arrival of a revolutionary force in the western musical canon. His earlier works, while always inventive and engaging, tended to reflect the classical sensibilities of Haydn and Mozart. Suddenly, with the “Eroica”, there is no mistaking Beethoven for anyone but Beethoven, and his compositions remain that way for the rest of his creative life. It appears that he had finally come to terms with the inevitability of his ultimate deafness, following several years of rage and despair over its increasing debilitation, and had resolved to make a fresh start. He began work on his great fifth symphony at about this time, though it wasn’t completed until 1808.

The work we hear today is one of three string quartets commissioned in 1805 by Count Andreas Kirillovich Razumovsky (1752-1836), the Russian ambassador to the imperial court at Vienna and an accomplished amateur violinist, who wanted to premiere them at his new palace then under construction. Besides being an ardent patron of Beethoven, Razumovsky maintained a permanent string quartet led by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, in which Count Razumovsky occasionally played second violin. Schuppanzigh was involved in the premières of many of Beethoven’s chamber works; until the founding of his quartet, chamber music was played primarily by amateurs or by professional musicians who joined together *ad hoc*.

In the event, the quartets were ready but the palace was not, so the first performance was probably at a public hall in Vienna by a professional ensemble to an audience of no more than 100. The music was so radically different from anything that the players had ever seen that at first they thought it must be a joke; Beethoven’s famous student Carl Czerny reported a violinist’s remark, “Surely you do not consider this music,” and the composer’s response, “Not for you, but for a later age.” The three quartets are symphonic in scope and multilayered in texture; each repeated listening is rewarded by a deeper understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment.

Like all three Razumovsky Quartets the third has four movements, but unusually it has all four in the same key signature. It opens ambiguously with a darkly dramatic slow *Adagio* introduction that

has no fixed tonal center, no indication that it is aiming for the bright C Major key that will burst full-grown in a lively *Allegro*.

The second movement is slow, dark and foreboding, offering a minor-key contrast to the exuberance of the first movement. Overall it feels settled, as if it wants its mood to linger in the listener's ear after its last notes are sounded.

The third movement opens as a leisurely minuet, much in the style of Haydn who was still alive and would be productive for another few years. But a sense of conflict and foreboding tragedy foreshadows the energetic bravado of the fourth movement, which Beethoven directed to be played without a break.

The finale is a fugue dressed in sonata-form clothing, with a recurring motif that unforgettably burrows itself into the listener's ear and sustains interest throughout the movement.

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ARTISTS

First Prize winners of the 7th Osaka International Chamber Music Competition in 2011, top prizewinners and Listeners' Choice Award recipients in the 2011 Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition, and winners of the Alice Coleman Grand Prize at the 60th annual Coleman Chamber Ensemble Competition in 2006, the internationally acclaimed **ATTACCA QUARTET** has become one of America's premier young performing ensembles. Praised by *Strad* for possessing "maturity beyond its members' years," they were formed at the Juilliard School in 2003, and made their professional debut in 2007 as part of the Artists International Winners Series in Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. From 2011-2013 they served as the Juilliard Graduate Resident String Quartet, and for the 2014 – 2015 season the Attacca Quartet was named the Quartet in Residence for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The Attacca Quartet recently completed a recording project of Haydn's masterwork "the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross" arranged by Andrew Yee and the Attacca Quartet. In his review for *Gramophone*, Donald Rosenberg wrote "The Attacca Quartet explore the work's range of expressive moods with utmost sensitivity to nuance and interplay. . . They triumph in every respect, and are captured in such vivid sound that no telling Haydn detail is allowed to go unheard." *theWholeNote.com* wrote "...It's easily the most satisfying string version of the work that I've heard."

In 2013, the Attacca Quartet released the complete works for string quartet by John Adams on Azica Records. It was praised by Steve Smith of the *New York Times* as a “vivacious, compelling set,” describing the Attacca Quartet’s playing as “exuberant, funky, and...exactly nuanced.” *The Boston Globe* also praised the release, stating: “Few [recent recordings] are as consequential as ‘Fellow Traveler,’...superb performances.” The album was the recipient of the 2013 National Federation of Music Clubs Centennial Chamber Music Award. The Attacca Quartet has been honored with both the Arthur Foote Award from the Harvard Musical Association and the Lotos Prize in the Arts from the Stecher and Horowitz Foundation.

2015–2016 marks the final seasons in New York and Canada of “The 68”, an ambitious self-produced project in which the Attacca Quartet performed all sixty-eight of Haydn’s string quartets. They will also perform in concerts around the United States, Canada, South America and parts of Europe. Their recent highlights include: appearances in Madrid performing all of John Adams’s works for string quartet, including his Absolute Jest for String Quartet and Orchestra, soloing with the Spanish National Orchestra under the composer’s direction; tours of Ireland and Japan; a four-concert run at the Melbourne Festival in Australia; residencies at the Virginia Arts Festival and Bravo! Vail Music Festival.

The Attacca Quartet has engaged in extensive educational and community outreach projects, serving as guest artists and teaching fellows at the Lincoln Center Institute, the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Vivace String Camp in New York, the Woodlands ChamberFest in Texas, and Animato Summer Music Camp at Florida International University in Miami. Since 2006, they have performed in yearly benefit concerts supporting the Parkinson’s Disease Foundation’s efforts. The members of the Attacca Quartet currently reside in New York City. They are represented by Baker Artists, LLC.

Their website is

<http://attaccaquartet.com/>

which includes a calendar of upcoming performances.