

The Red Bank
Chamber Music Society
presents
The Brentano String Quartet

Mark Steinberg, Violin
Serena Canin, Violin
Misha Amory, Viola
Nina Lee, Cello

Mozart • Webern • Schubert
Gesualdo • Beethoven
Sunday Afternoon
May 13, 2018 • 4:30 PM
Trinity Church Auditorium
Red Bank, NJ
ADVANCE NOTES

PROGRAM

Quartet in E flat major, K. 428 (1783)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

- I. Allegro, ma non troppo
- II. Andante con moto

- III. Menuetto (Allegretto)
- IV. Allegro vivace

Bagatellen, Op. 9 (1913) / Minuets, D89 (1813)

Anton Webern / Franz Schubert

- | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| I. Mäßig | V. Ziemlich fleißend | IX. Äußerst langsam |
| II. Minuet I | VI. Minuet III | X. Minuet V |
| III. Leicht bewegt | VII. Sehr langsam | XI. Fließend |
| IV. Minuet II | VIII. Minuet IV | |

INTERMISSION

Three madrigals (from Book V) (1611)

Carlo Gesualdo, Mark Steinberg (arr.)

- I. Asciagate i beglio occhi
- II. O voi, troppo felici
- III. Tu m'uccidio crudele

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4 (1799)

Ludwig van Beethoven

- I. Allegro ma non tanto
- II. Scherzo (Andante scherzoso quasi Allegretto)
- III. Menuetto (Allegretto)
- IV. Allegro-Prestissimo

The Brentano String Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists

www.davidroweartists.com www.brentanoquartet.com

Notes on the Program

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Quartet in E flat major, K. 428 (1783)

(~35 minutes)



When I was younger I aspired to be a serious composer. It seemed to me that a good approach to composing would involve choosing one of the received forms – sonata allegro form, for example – and, having devised a couple of striking melodic ideas, fit them into that form and follow the rules for getting from one structural point to the next, while maybe, I don't know, throwing in two or three unexpected twists and turns along the way.

Studying the music of great composers, I often felt that I could detect a similar creative system in use, where, on a very good day, I could imagine myself coming up with something nearly that good using my assembly method. But then there was music which seemed to defy this logic, where I was unable to imagine a method that would summon this music into being. Where my approach to writing music was like taking a boxy, pre-fab house, cutting some doorways between the rooms, and populating the rooms with furniture and things, this other music evoked the contemplation of lovely objects, the exploration of unknown passageways, and then, eventually, a realisation that the form itself, an airy mansion that contained these things, had risen up around us, called into being by its contents.

Very often, the composer of that music turned out to be Mozart. And the first movement of his E flat Quartet, K. 428, is a perfect example of it. Why should he attempt to construct his opening theme out of ungainly, awkward intervals, using nine of the twelve notes of the chromatic scale in the process? And how can that ill-advised approach lead him, as a result, to a melody so full of grace and equipoise? Again, how did he think of taking the last two notes of this melody, a falling step, and expand it gradually to

four falling steps, then to six, creating in effect a magic carpet that transports the music joyously to its next key area? Having reached that new key area, B flat major, what inspired him to write a second theme that, instead of consolidating B flat major as it's supposed to do, spends its time flirting with three other keys? Or again, in the middle, development section of the movement, by what alchemy did he excise the rather elegant opening flourish of that second theme, and repurpose it as a kind of nefarious muttering in a minor key, beset by phantasmagorical triplet arpeggios that come from who knows where?

In movements like this one, the sonata form seems not like an uncomfortable suit of clothes into which the complaining composition must fit, but something bespoke: the form is called into being by the substance. Mozart doesn't seek to satisfy the form, but rather to justify its very existence, to explain with his music why it is beautiful and needful.

Likewise with the slow movement. On the one hand it lives in a binary-form "house," one which gives it a nominal definition and direction; on the other hand, the gentle, melancholy inhabitant of that house takes no particular notice of its surroundings as it wanders from chamber to chamber. Again, we have to ask the unanswerable questions. How do the contents of the opening — awkward contours, grinding chromaticism, almost bitter dissonance — become endowed, in this composer's hands, with such luminosity? And how did Mozart, that greatest of melodists, choose to write this music, which contains no melody that can be articulated as such? Rather, we are preoccupied here with shadowy chromatic motion, with shifting planes of chordal progressions like the surfaces of a great Abstract painting, out of which the melodic element seems always about to be born, but in the end remains a thing alluded to, not revealed.

The E-flat Quartet was one of six quartets that Mozart dedicated in a group to his great contemporary, Joseph Haydn, and the Minuet movement is the moment of frankest homage to the older composer. The affect of the main section lies close to the particular flavor of Haydn's humor and spirit, opening with a guffawing figure, and tending to make jokes out of stuttering motions, as well as passages that get stuck and go around in circles before

finding their way out again. By contrast, the central Trio section is pure Mozart. Written in a nearby minor key, and set against against brooding bass pedal points, it presents a drifting, mesmeric tableau containing classically Mozartean paradoxes: grace by dint of asymmetry, consolation through the expression of sadness.

The finale starts with a children's tease: a few little fillips of tunefulness, wrapped up innocently enough, and then abruptly interrupted by a rambunctious blizzard of activity, tearing all over the map. The teasing continues in the next passages, as the moment of the outbreak shifts, becomes unpredictable — a game of musical “gotcha.” Later melodies are graver, sweeter; it is ever Mozart's way, in his chamber music as in his operas, to get us chuckling, and then to transfix us with a moment whose tenderness is all the more affecting because it came out of nowhere. At the end of the movement, when the children's tease returns for the last time, it is adorned with a graceful upper melody, a kind of birdsong, which might seek to forgive or relax the earlier fakery. However, the horseplay persists right up to the end, as the music dwindles almost to a pinpoint before clobbering us with four final, triumphal chords.

Anton Webern (1883-1945)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Bagatellen, Op. 9 (1913) / Minuets, D89 (1813)

(~18 minutes)



In 1932 Anton Webern conducted and recorded his arrangements of six German dances by Schubert. The recordings are full of vibrant detail and freedom, and of evident love for and kinship with the music. Schubert, and perhaps particularly the visceral sweep, swoop and sway of the dance music, occupies a sizable branch of Webern's genealogical tree. For the Second Viennese School composers (Schubert being part of the so-called First Viennese School), dance, meaning primarily the waltz and thus, reaching backwards, its precursor the minuet, represents the life force, the

external, socially viable manifestation of archetypal impulses of the psyche. Webern's Vienna, home of Sigmund Freud, was leading the way down a new path in understanding of the self. Poised between a veneer of accommodation and conventionality and the nascent flowering of investigation into the emotional mind, with its attendant associations and desires, a space for interior questioning was being pried open.

As the Schubert dances, written when the composer was just sixteen, fit and work their magic within a solid, architectural framework, the Webern pieces of Op. 9 create their form as a vapor spreads its smoky tendrils. They are catalogues of breaths, sighs and gasps; charged, compressed conversations of intimate gestural wisps. The alternation of Schubert and Webern is an oscillation between generations, between public and private expression, between the shapes of the body and the shapes of thoughts. It is also a new composite structure within which gestures slip across the boundaries of time, mirroring each other, reflecting back and forth in unstill waters, betraying their common ancestry in a collective soul. The great violinist Felix Galimir used always to encourage young artists to search for and bring out in performance the element of dance in the music of the Second Viennese School. Clearly this was a concern for Webern himself, and in these intertwined works we can begin to feel the resonance in our somatic memories permeating it all.



Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613) Mark Steinberg (arr.)
Three madrigals (from Book V) (1611)

(~8 minutes)

1. The panic-stricken
kink in the neck to be seen
in all of Grünewald's subjects,
exposing the throat and often turning
the face towards a blinding light,
is the extreme response of our bodies
to the absence of balance in nature
2. the event of the century,
awaited with great terror, the eclipse of the sun,
...
the secret sickening away of the world,
in which a phantasmal encroachment of dusk
in the midst of daytime like a fainting fit
poured through the vault of the sky...
a fiery red arose, and colors
such as his eyes had not known
radiantly wandered about, never again to be
driven out of the painter's memory.

W.G. Sebald, from *After Nature*



One could choose among so many passages from this great book, or so many potent and piercing images from Grünewald's paintings, to find signposts toward the expressionistic dungeon that is Gesualdo's province. All chill the soul with the exquisite vibrations of pain; all pulsate with the wretchedness wrung from delicious hypersensitivity to abandonment and the specter of death. In his arresting and abiding juxtapositions, Gesualdo conjures enveloping, luminous onyx, then again oppressive light against which no eyelid dare close. Gesualdo, infamous Prince of Venosa, murderer of his wife and her lover, darts and shifts. Alchemical harmonic transformations ensure the listener remains unbalanced, any hint of rootedness a chimera. The

Madrigals of Books V and VI may very well have autobiographical significance; this is a soul that fascinates, that resonates with elements of ours, yet which we can feel fortunate not to inhabit. The texts speak of death, of joy never to be regained, of the cruelty inherent in love. Even with the texts suppressed in instrumental arrangement their shadows allow for ice to have carved their likeness deep into the music left behind. The present string quartet arrangement hews extremely closely to the original, albeit with five voices compressed within the confines of four instrumental parts. So may we feel compressed and confined in the prison of Gesualdo's icy castle, glad for the chance to peer down into the moat and experience the frisson that attends the contemplation of doubt and doom.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

String Quartet in C minor, Op. 18, No. 4 (1799)

(~23 minutes)



What is it in theatrical masks, those frozen faces, that so captivates us and draws us in? Ossified and yet vibrant, masks, reaching outward from their still essence, draw forth our emotional heritage. Despite their immobility they become potent and resonant symbols that pierce us to the core. Certain tropes of theatricality are like that as well. Dramatic clichés catch us unawares and render us vulnerable to their charge.

Paradoxically, from within the string quartet's arena of intimacy Beethoven, in his c minor quartet, Op. 18 No. 4, creates a work of the theater, an exploration of symbol and clever caricature, emblematic more than evocative. Keys have flavors, and c minor had already been associated with *sturm und drang* in the works of Haydn and Mozart, as well as in those of Beethoven himself in the piano trio, Op. 1 No. 3, the string trio, Op. 9 No. 3, and the "Pathétique" piano sonata, Op. 13. However, works that more

deeply and darkly explore the philosophical underpinnings of c minor, such as the Fifth Symphony or the last piano sonata, still lay in the future. In this quartet Beethoven, unusually, stays in c (minor or major) for all four movements, and in various ways keeps exploring masks, disguises and dramatic device. He opens the piece with an unrelenting elemental pulsation in the cello and an unstable theme, with displaced sighs and jabs, atop. This is angst made audible and palpable, rhythmically restless, replete with distortion and suppression, eminently operatic. These are volcanic rumblings that lead, inevitably, to eruption and a simple caricature of conflict, the one against the many, an Olympian hurling of thunderbolts as a competition between the gods. Again, all is consciously primitive theatrical trope. After this idea is punctuated by an exclamation point of sorts, a single unison note changes the scene, one that in a symphony would be a horn's proclamation. It is a sort of *deus ex machina* that announces the major mode come to save us, heroism personified in a single pitch. The phrase is followed, however, by the tragic mask replacing the comic one, the same figure drawing us back into minor, albeit only momentarily, reminding us that Beethoven, the distributor of masks, is a conjurer.

When we arrive at the second theme, in major as expected, we might recognize it as the barely refashioned first theme, the spell reversed so the old witch is restored to her youthful beauty as a princess. And so it goes throughout the movement. We are held in doubleness, under the power of a clever Sophist. (And in fact this second theme that would most usually be drawn into the minor mode later in the movement steadfastly refuses to do so and remains a foil to the first theme, undermining the expected tragic or serious cast of the movement.) The first theme is Caliban, the second, Ariel; both are emanations from a single enchanted island. Beethoven is Prospero, puppet-master of the theater of our emotions, and he wields his magic staff with aplomb.

The quartet is without a slow movement, as if to go there the composer would have to relinquish his thespian's costumes and speak more confessionally. The second movement replaces the missing slow movement with a playful one, clocklike in its mesmeric regularity. It begins with the character of innocence and the veneer of the scholarly, aping the start of a

fugue, children playing at serious discourse. Even the opening, a couldn't-be-simpler thrice repeated pitch, dons several masks during this clever movement, borrowing disguises rather than growing or transforming, from teasing to chuckling to pompous to mysterious to tender. The movement also opens with the selfsame two pitches as the first movement, a flirtation in the villain's eyes.

Again these pitches are used to catapult us into the third movement, a Punch and Judy show of a minuet. Belying his fairly moderate marking of "Allegretto," Beethoven indicates a speed for the movement that is certainly too quick to be danced to with any decorum, and, as if that weren't enough to discourage any attempt at elegant dancing, he throws in jagged offbeat accents with abandon. Although Haydn and Mozart have quartets with minuets in minor that are defiant or strong, this minuet that deals in mock anger is an innovation. The trio section is more acquiescent and attempts to take wing and leave behind the shackles of the minuet proper. But somehow it can't help looking back over its shoulder at the last moment and, after three hesitant, whispered chords, it gets pulled back into the room and, devilishly, is forced to try to dance at fever pitch, even faster than before. It is a sort of parody of a dance of death and it whirls by in a flash.

A new character enters the scene in the final movement, an itinerant gypsy, fiddling with virtuosity and pride and stamping his foot for emphasis. (The stomping may be another version of the repeated notes underpinning the opening of the piece, of the theme of the second movement, or the trio of the minuet.) His music alternates with visits with other characters. In the first a suave and elegant suitor appears. It shouldn't surprise us at this point that a closer inspection reveals him to be the gypsy himself in borrowed garb, as evidenced by echoes of the contours and figuration of the opening tune. A third music starts with four taps of a magic wand traveling up the quartet from lowest instrument to highest, and each tap is nothing but the quick, ornamental filling in of the rising interval announcing the suitor. All is shapeshifting, Prospero's magic. Some demoniac fiddling sets us up, after a theatrically suspenseful pause that echoes the moment waiting to collapse back into the minuet in the previous movement, for a wild, breathless "Prestissimo" romp, all swagger and panache. And then, a last moment

reprieve as the major mode arrives and evaporates up into the stratosphere, having vanquished the evil minor for good. Or has it? The piece ends with three repetitions of the same two pitches that started all the movements but this one, now filled in with the notes in between. This is also the material that formed the four magic wand taps earlier in the movement, but now they are rooted in place, defiant. (They are possibly also a gruff answer to the elfin start of the second movement.) Beethoven places them only on pitches that belong, equally and enigmatically, both to c minor and C Major, adding nothing else. He thus refuses to tip his hand toward one or the other, relishing this ambiguity, surely with an impish grin, as the curtain snaps shut.

Program Notes
Mozart -- Misha Amory
Schubert/Webern. Gesualdo, Beethoven – Mark Steinberg



Note

As a favor to your fellow concertgoers, please remember to turn off your cell phones. If you feel you might have a cough coming on, please try to unwrap any lozenges before the concert begins or between movements.

Artists

Since its inception in 1992, the **Brentano String Quartet** has appeared throughout the world to popular and critical acclaim. “Passionate, uninhibited and spellbinding,” raves the London Independent; the New York Times extols its “luxuriously warm sound [and] yearning lyricism.”

Since 2014, the Brentano Quartet has served as Artists in Residence at Yale University. The Quartet also currently serves as the collaborative ensemble for the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Formerly, they were Artists in Residence at Princeton University for many years.

The Quartet has performed in the world’s most prestigious venues, including Carnegie Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York; the Library of Congress in Washington; the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam; the Konzerthaus in Vienna; Suntory Hall in Tokyo; and the Sydney Opera House. The Quartet had its first European tour in 1997, and was honored in the U.K. with the Royal Philharmonic Award for Most Outstanding Debut.

In addition to their interest in performing very old music, the Brentano Quartet frequently collaborates with contemporary composers. Recent commissions include a piano quintet by Vijay Iyer, a work by Eric Moe (with Christine Brandes, soprano), and a viola quintet by Felipe Lara (performed with violist Hsin-Yun Huang). In 2012, the Quartet provided the central music (Beethoven Opus 131) for the critically-acclaimed independent film *A Late Quartet*.

The quartet has worked closely with other important composers of our time, among them Elliot Carter, Charles Wuorinen, Chou Wen-chung, Bruce Adolphe, and György Kurtág. The Quartet has also been privileged to collaborate with such artists as soprano Jessye Norman and pianists Richard Goode, Jonathan Biss, and Mitsuko Uchida.

The Quartet is named for Antonie Brentano, whom many scholars consider to be Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved”, the intended recipient of his famous love confession.

Mark Steinberg is an active chamber musician and recitalist. He has been heard in chamber music festivals in Holland, Germany, Austria, and France and participated for four summers in the Marlboro Music Festival, with which he has toured extensively. He has also appeared in the El Paso Festival, on the Bargemusic series in New York, at Chamber Music Northwest, with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and in trio and duo concerts with pianist Mitsuko Uchida, with whom he presented the complete Mozart sonata cycle in London's Wigmore Hall in 2001, with additional recitals in other cities, a project that continues for the next few years. Mr. Steinberg has been soloist with the London Philharmonia, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Kansas City Camerata, the Auckland Philharmonia, and the Philadelphia Concerto Soloists, with conductors such as Kurt Sanderling, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Miguel Harth-Bedoya. Mark Steinberg holds degrees from Indiana University and The Juilliard School and has studied with Louise Behrend, Josef Gingold, and Robert Mann. An advocate of contemporary music, Mr. Steinberg has worked closely with many composers and has performed with 20th century music ensembles including the Guild of Composers, the Da Capo Chamber Players, Speculum Musicae, and Continuum, with which he has recorded and toured extensively in the U.S. and Europe. He has also performed and recorded chamber music on period instruments with the Helicon Ensemble, the Four Nations Ensemble, and the Smithsonian Institute. He has taught at Juilliard's Pre-College division, at Princeton University, and New York University, and is currently on the violin faculty of the Mannes College of Music.

Violinist **Serena Canin** was born into a family of professional musicians in New York City. An accomplished chamber musician, Ms. Canin was twice invited to the Marlboro Music Festival and has toured the United States with Music From Marlboro, the Brandenburg Ensemble, and Goliard Concerts. In New York, Ms. Canin performs regularly with the Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Sea Cliff Chamber Players. She has made frequent appearances on the Continuum Series at Alice Tully Hall, the Summergarden Series at the Museum of Modern Art, at the Garden City Chamber Music Society, and at Chamber Music Quad Cities in Davenport, Iowa. Ms. Canin holds teaching positions at Princeton University and at New York University, and has

taught chamber music to young musicians at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. She has degrees from Swarthmore College and the Juilliard School, and her teachers have included Burton Kaplan and Robert Mann. She lives in Manhattan with her husband, pianist Thomas Sauer.

Since winning the 1991 Naumburg Viola Award, **Misha Amory** has been active as a soloist and chamber musician. He has performed with orchestras in the United States and Europe, and has been presented in recital at New York's Tully Hall, Los Angeles' Ambassador series, Philadelphia's Mozart on the Square festival, Boston's Gardner Museum, Houston's Da Camera series and Washington's Phillips Collection. He has been invited to perform at the Marlboro Festival, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, the Vancouver Festival, the Chamber Music Society at Lincoln Center and the Boston Chamber Music Society, and he has released a recording of Hindemith sonatas on the Musical Heritage Society label. Mr. Amory holds degrees from Yale University and the Juilliard School; his principal teachers were Heidi Castleman, Caroline Levine and Samuel Rhodes. Himself a dedicated teacher, Mr. Amory serves on the faculties of the Juilliard School in New York City and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia.

An active chamber musician, **Nina Lee** has collaborated with many artists such as Felix Galimir, Jaime Laredo, David Soyer, Nobuko Imai, Isidore Cohen and Mitsuko Uchida, and has performed at the Marlboro and Tanglewood Music Festivals. She has toured with Musicians from Marlboro and has participated in the El Paso International Chamber Music Festival. She is the recipient of a Music Certificate from the Curtis Institute of Music, and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in music from the Juilliard School, where her teacher was Joel Krosnick. Ms. Lee teaches at Princeton University and Columbia University.