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2020•2021 SEASON



Castalian String Quartet
Friday, February 26, 2021 · 7:30 pm ET



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JOSEPH HAYDN

(1732–1809)

STARTS AT 4:26 ON VIDEO

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 76, No. 3, "Emperor"

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

(1854–1928)

STARTS AT 34:00 ON VIDEO

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, "Kreutzer Sonata"

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

STARTS AT 54:46 ON VIDEO

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

JOSEPH HAYDN

(1732–1809)

String Quartet in C Major, Op. 76, No. 3 "Emperor"

Composed 1797

Joseph Haydn composed in all genres of music but made the most profound impact with his 105 symphonies and his 68 string quartets. From his humble beginnings as a choir boy, he built a solid career that included leadership of the Esterhazy family musical establishment and a stint in England that solidified his public reputation. He returned from London to Vienna in 1795 and was recognized as the greatest living composer. During this final period of his life, he composed primarily sacred choral music and string quartets. He considered one of his greatest achievements to be his oratorio *The Creation*, which was completed in 1798. Haydn worked on several additional projects at the same time, including his Opus 76 set of six string quartets dedicated to Count Joseph Erdödy.

The second movement, "Poco Adagio, Cantabile," is the source of the nickname for the String Quartet in C Major, Op. 76, No. 3. Haydn composed "Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser" ("God Save Emperor Franz") early in 1797 as a hymn for the emperor that would be equal to the British national anthem, "God Save the King." The hymn became the imperial anthem and later the German national anthem as well as the Austrian national anthem. A number of other texts borrowed this music in later years, including the popular protestant hymn "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken." The hymn was less than a year old, though, when Haydn adapted it for the second movement of his quartet by turning it into a theme with four variations. Each variation features a different instrument on the melody: in order, the second violin, violoncello, viola, and finally the first violin.

The other three movements are as enjoyable as the second. The quartet opens with a good-natured "Allegro" in sonata form. The development section introduces a rustic feel with a drone in the cello. Listen for the tonality to move briefly to minor before the recapitulation. The third movement is a minuet and trio with a charming character. The "Finale Presto" begins in C minor and makes a foray into the relative major before entering the primary key of C major to conclude the piece.

LEOŠ JANÁČEK

(1854–1928)

String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, “Kreutzer Sonata”

(1923)

Leoš Janáček was born in Moravia while it was part of the Austrian empire. His father and grandfather were both teachers and musicians. Janáček became a choir boy in a monastery in Brno at the age of 11. He completed his studies at the Imperial and Royal Slavonic Men’s Teacher Training Institute before studying at the Prague Organ School, the Leipzig Conservatory, and the Vienna Conservatory. He returned to Brno in 1880 as a champion of Czech music and politics and became influential in the city’s musical life. He also developed an affinity for Russian culture. Janáček achieved success with his opera *Jenůfa*. His catalogue of compositions is balanced between vocal and instrumental works, with many of his chamber and orchestral works reflecting poetic and literary influences.

The music of Janáček’s String Quartet No. 1 is closely related to a piano trio that he composed in 1908–1909 for a Tolstoy evening at the Club of the Friends of Arts in Brno to celebrate the author’s 80th birthday. He based the trio on Leo Tolstoy’s novella, *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Although the novella takes its name from Beethoven’s Violin Sonata No. 9, dedicated to Rodolphe Kreutzer, the story centers less on Beethoven’s music than on the position of love in contemporary society and the thought processes that led the character Posdnicheff to murder his wife (as he recounts to the novella’s narrator during a train journey). Paul Wingfield has persuasively argued that the first and third movements of the quartet were close transcriptions of the first and final movements of the three-movement piano trio, while the second and fourth movements were newly composed in 1923. The quartet was commissioned by the Czech Quartet (also known as the Bohemian Quartet), who gave the premiere of the work in Prague in 1924.

Tolstoy’s novella is packed with extremes of emotion, and this is reflected in Janáček’s quartet. The first movement introduces tempo and tonality changes to illustrate the contrasting moods portrayed in the story. The melodies of the second movement are reminiscent at times of speech. Listen for an eerie *sul ponticello* [on the bridge] passage that is passed from the viola to the second violin and then the first violin. The opening violin and cello duet of the third movement can be heard as a collaboration between Posdnicheff’s wife and the violinist he suspects will be her lover, with the second violin and viola portraying Posdnicheff’s ugly rage as they interrupt the duet with furious *sul ponticello* thirty-second notes. Janáček based the lovely duet theme on a melody from Beethoven’s Kreutzer Sonata (the featured piece of the novella’s recital). The finale brings back melodic motives from all three movements for resolution. The overall effect of the quartet is highly dramatic, using an expanded tonal vocabulary characteristic of the most influential musical thought of the early 20th century.



JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

(1873)

Johannes Brahms was introduced to Vienna in 1862 and remained associated with the glittering imperial capital for the rest of his life. Although he had already established a successful career in his hometown of Hamburg and other influential German cities, the intense Viennese musical scene proved to be a great source of inspiration. Brahms took on the practical jobs of directing the Vienna Singakademie (1863–1864) and the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (1872–1875), leading both the orchestra and choir. He also continued his concert tours throughout Europe as both a solo pianist and as a guest conductor. Publishing his compositions contributed to his financial success, as his music was much in demand. He settled into a frugal yet comfortable life of music surrounded by a large group of friends from many walks of life.

The eminent surgeon and amateur musician Theodor Billroth was one of these friends. He met Brahms in 1865. The two soon became close friends, and Billroth took part in trial rehearsals of Brahms's chamber music. Brahms dedicated his two Opus 51 string quartets to Billroth. These were the first two quartets that Brahms published, but they came after he had already written and discarded around 20 string quartets. Robert Schumann famously said that Brahms as a composer seemed to spring "like Minerva fully armed from the head of the son of Cronus," but Brahms's success was fueled both by his talent and his careful compositional strategies. Although he was popularly considered to be musically conservative due to his preference for absolute music instead of the literary-inspired symphonic poem type of instrumental music developed by Franz Liszt, Brahms considered himself to be writing "music of the future" that continued the natural evolution of the Classical forms used by Haydn and Beethoven.

The String Quartet in A minor Op. 51, No. 2 certainly uses a form that would have been familiar to Haydn: sonata form for the first and last movements, a song-like slower second movement, and a minuet and trio for the third movement. But the roughly 75 years in between this piece and Haydn's Op. 76, No. 3 quartet had seen a remarkable development of harmony and rhythm. Brahms's musical language would not have been understood by the audiences in Haydn's Vienna. The lyrical opening movement of the string quartet contains Brahms's signature use of triplet motives contrasting with duple meter. The beautiful primary melody in the second movement features most prominently in the first violin but is sung enchantingly by the cello during the recapitulation. Listen for the descending arpeggios that pass from the second violin through the viola to the cello in the coda of this movement. Brahms labels the third movement "Quasi Minuetto," and indeed the music seems to have moved far away from the traditional triple-meter dance that inspired it. The contrasting allegretto sections in duple time are marked by fast sixteenth-notes. The finale opens decisively. In this movement, Brahms plays with meter and key while not actually straying out of bounds. Rests serve as punctuation throughout. The tranquil coda provides a brief moment of introspection before the music races to the final cadence in a wonderful conclusion to this evening of three very different string quartets by eminent composers of chamber music.

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Castalian String Quartet

Sini Simonen, violin
Daniel Roberts, violin
Charlotte Bonneton, viola
Christopher Graves, cello

“...a powerful individuality of sound matched by an instinctive singularity of musical intention...”

—*The Scotsman*

In the 10 years since its formation, the London-based Castalian Quartet has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. Recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society’s 2019 Young Artists Award, the Quartet also received the prestigious inaugural Merito String Quartet Award and Valentin Erben Prize in 2018, has won a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship Award, and is beginning to gain international acclaim as they take their talents abroad.

The Castalian Quartet had their debut performances in Toronto, New York, Santa Fe, San Diego, and many other cities across North America in the 2020–2021 season. In February 2019, the Quartet was joined at Wigmore Hall by guest artists Stephen Hough, Cédric Tiberghien, Michael Collins, Nils Mönkemeyer, Isabel Charisius, and Ursula Smith to perform the chamber music of Brahms and Schumann. *The Guardian* (UK) raved, “To hear this music, so full of poetry, joy and sorrow, realised to such perfection, felt like a miracle.”

Other recent highlights include debuts at the Paris Philharmonie and Vienna Konzerthaus; performances of the complete Haydn Op. 76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall; concerts in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Zwischentöne Festival in Engelberg, Neuchatel Chamber Music in Switzerland, and Banff International Festivals. Further afield they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

Formed in 2011, the Castalian Quartet studied with Oliver Wille (Kuss Quartet) at the Hannover University of Music, Drama and Media, graduating with a master’s degree. In addition to the above, awards include Third Prize at the 2016 Banff Quartet Competition and First Prize at the 2015 Lyon Chamber Music Competition. The Quartet was selected by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2016. They have received coaching from Simon Rowland-Jones, David Waterman, and Isabel Charisius.

Their name is derived from the Castalian Spring in the ancient city of Delphi. According to Greek mythology, the nymph Castalia transformed herself into a fountain to evade Apollo’s pursuit, thus creating a source of poetic inspiration for all who drink from her waters. Herman Hesse chose Castalia as the name of his futuristic European utopia in *The Glass Bead Game*. The novel’s protagonist, a Castalian by the name of Knecht, is mentored in this land of intellectual thought and education by the venerable Music Master.



FINAL 2020-2021 SEASON CONCERT

Dudok Quartet

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