



Castalian String Quartet

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2022

7:30 PM ET

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



CASTALIAN STRING QUARTET

Sini Simonen, Violin
Daniel Robert, Violin
Ruth Gibson, Viola
Steffan Morris, Cello

Program

String Quartet No. 1 (Kreutzer Sonata)

Adagio – Con moto
Con moto
Con moto (Vivace. Andante)
Con moto (Adagio)

Leoš Janáček
(1854–1928)

String Quartet in D minor, Op. 56 (Voces intimae)

Andante – Allegro molto moderato
Vivace
Adagio di molto
Allegretto (ma pesante)
Allegro

Jean Sibelius
(1865–1957)

 *Intermission* 

String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro
Presto
Andante con moto, ma non troppo
Alla danza tedesca (Allegro assai)
Cavatina (Adagio molto espressivo)
Finale: Grosse Fuge (Op. 133)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

A replay of this performance is available on demand until 7:30 PM ET on Sunday, November 13, 2022 at

<http://go.middlebury.edu/Castalian-2022/>

This free Performing Arts Series event is made possible thanks to the Sunderman Family Concert Endowment Fund, in memory of Dr. F. William Sunderman Jr. and Dr. Carolyn Reynolds Sunderman.

Program Notes

JANÁČEK String Quartet No. 1 (Kreutzer Sonata)

Note courtesy Hyperion Records

In 1924, 40 years after Smetana's death, Janáček wrote with amazement to his friend Max Brod about how the composer had continued to write "during that illness of his." The same year, which also marked the 100th anniversary of Smetana's birth, Janáček contributed a commemorative article to *Lidové noviny*, the Brno newspaper, telling how "each work of his reaches the horizon and the ceiling of its subject. It's impossible to go higher or broader." Such sentiments, coming from a composer who had always felt a stronger kinship to Dvořák, testify to Smetana's lasting appeal.

Unlike both of his Bohemian counterparts, however, Janáček often looked further east for his literary and musical inspiration. Evidence of his pan-Slavism is found in the String Quartet No. 1, "after Tolstoy's Kreutzer Sonata," a novella initially banned by the Tsarist authorities but which Janáček owned in a (highly annotated) Russian edition from 1900. Tolstoy was one of the Moravian composer's lodestars and he had previously thought of adapting both *Anna Karenina* and *The Living Corpse* for the operatic stage. *The Kreutzer Sonata*, a tale of an unhappy marriage in which a wife has an affair with a violinist with whom she is playing Beethoven's eponymous Sonata, had first inspired Janáček in 1908, when he completed a piano trio based on the subject. The trio had its premiere in Brno on April 8, 1909, belatedly marking the Russian author's 80th birthday.

Janáček returned to Tolstoy's story and to his piano trio in 1923, when, during a trip to Prague, the Czech Quartet asked him to write a new work for them. Given that Janáček appears to have destroyed the manuscript of the piano trio (which was never published), we cannot be certain to what extent the new string quartet, completed that autumn, relied on pre-existing material, though it has been shown, thanks to a surviving sketch for the 1908-9 piano trio, that both works quote fittingly and evocatively from the first movement of Beethoven's 'Kreutzer' Sonata. But it is the dark mood of Tolstoy's novella, with the husband stabbing his adulterous wife, that pervades Janáček's manifestly dramatic work. Pitting violent motifs against more heartfelt lyricism, Janáček creates a series of confrontations, as if between husband, represented by the former, and wife, described by the latter. "I was imagining a poor woman, tormented and run down, just like the one the Russian writer Tolstoy describes in his Kreutzer Sonata," the composer wrote to his friend and muse, Kamila Stösslová.

SIBELIUS String Quartet in D minor, Op. 56 (Voces intimae)

Note by John Henken, courtesy of the L. A. Philharmonic

Sibelius was a middling violinist himself, and he wrote a fair amount of chamber music in his student years, including at least three full string quartets and a number of shorter pieces for four string players. Only one, though, dates from his artistic maturity. The string quartet “Voces intimae” was composed in winter 1908–09, between the Third and Fourth Symphonies and during a time of health and financial crises. One of the last pieces he wrote on a four-year contract with the publisher Robert Lienau, it was premiered in Berlin in January 1910.

Often spare and brooding, the five-movement quartet anticipates the Fourth Symphony far more than it reflects the brighter rituals of the Third Symphony. The subtitle “Intimate Voices” suggests both the conversational quality of chamber music and the inwardness of Sibelius’ ruminations. The work begins with an introductory bit of dialog between first violin and cello, leading into a movement punctuating murmurous figuration with firm chords. A fleetly ricocheting scherzo in A major follows directly, further linked to the first with motivic connections.

A soulful quest for serenity in F major lies at the center of the work. Uncertainty is immediately apparent harmonically in this Adagio, and as the music slithers into a new key area, there are suddenly three detached, soft chords in E minor, remote from any of the previous harmonic implications. It was over these chords that Sibelius wrote the words “voces intimae” in a friend’s score, suggesting a personal reference.

Like the first scherzo, the second scherzo is motivically related to the first movement, and it also shares the opening movement’s murmuring figures. A more impetuous sort of figuration is prominent in the fiery finale, with more than a hint of folk fiddling. Initially marking the movement Allegro, Sibelius adds *più allegro* (more lively), then *poco a poco più allegro ed energico* (little by little more lively and energetic), and then *sempre più energico* (always more energetic), as the music rushes onward like the homeward bound *Lemminkäinen* of Sibelius’ epic tone poem. This is fiercely accented music of forceful contrasts but irresistible momentum.

BEETHOVEN String Quartet in B-flat Major, Op. 130, with Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

Note courtesy Hyperion Records

In its original form with the Grosse Fuge as finale, this was the longest of Beethoven’s Quartets. The fugue was found at first incomprehensible and almost unplayable and Beethoven was at length persuaded to substitute a shorter, lighter, easier finale; this was the last thing he ever completed.

Although it seems surprising that Beethoven agreed to this compromise, the artistic reason for it could have been deeper than a mere desire to please, or a lack of confidence in his own judgment. Such indecisions had plagued him before, in the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, in *Fidelio*, or in the appalling cuts and shifts he suggested in the “Hammerklavier” Sonata. Publishing the Grosse Fuge separately as Op. 133 may well have been done in the hope that it would eventually find its way back to its original place, as it now often does, for it is widely and rightly felt that the small “substitute” finale cannot counterweigh the great first movement. But if the Grosse Fuge is restored to Op. 130, what are we to do with the other piece? The idea that two such disparate movements are satisfying alternatives could be sustained only by ingenuity. Perhaps the answer lies further back.

Listening to the first movement, notice the mysteriously disembodied effect of the whole second group in the strange key of G-flat, approached abruptly, and not grounded as a tonality at all. The same thing happens in the Grosse Fuge, even more mysteriously, when everything slips into a wonderful, animated cloud of soft G-flat. These two events are crucial. The work as a whole also has something in common with a Bach partita; Beethoven in his later works searches the past ever more deeply.

The first movement is followed by a very fast and short Scherzo in the tonic minor; the next movement ambling gently and delicately, with many original quartet textures, is in the related key of D-flat. Then comes the simple *Alla danza tedesca*, but suddenly in the strange key of G major, as far away as possible from D-flat – a switch to the other side of the musical universe! This violent dissociation, expressed in the simplest language, is the secret heart of the work, psychologically connected with those in the first movement and the Grosse Fuge.

From G it is an easy step to E-flat, where we find the touching Cavatina, and the note G at the top of its last chord begins both the Grosse Fuge and the second finale. The fugue is a mighty struggle stretching mind and sinews to the limit, and besides the great G-flat dissociation it contains, it also makes another such rift by means of the key of A-flat, the “contradictory” flat seventh of the tonic B-flat. But at length, with an unmistakable sense of release, it breaks through into sunlight – the air is all-at-once fresh and free, and the music takes flight. Does not the extra movement say, gloriously, “Now we can play!”? Is it not a felicitous appendix, in its vivid delight the most heroic of all Beethoven’s utterances?

His bodily condition was piteous, but his spirit found its way into this sparkling Allegro in which all tonal contradictions and dissociations are wonderfully resolved (especially the A-flat question, the point of which depends on our having heard the Grosse Fuge). There is a powerful case for freeing ourselves from the vexing choice. Beethoven might have welcomed this way out; perhaps he felt that Op. 130/133 was somehow not quite finished. Therefore, already *in extremis*, without time to change existing publishing arrangements, he achieved his happiest music. Shouldn’t it take its natural place?

Biography

Castalian String Quartet

Sini Simonen, Violin

Daniel Robert, Violin

Ruth Gibson, Viola

Steffan Morris, Cello

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

– The Scotsman

Since its formation in 2011, the London-based Castalian Quartet has distinguished itself as one of the most dynamic, sophisticated young string quartets performing today. Appointed the inaugural Hans Keller String Quartet in Residence at the Oxford University Faculty of Music in 2021, they are also the recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society’s 2019 Young Artists Award. The Quartet is gaining international acclaim as they take their talents abroad, having performed at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonic, Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Paris Philharmonie, Vienna Konzerthaus, Montreal’s Salle Bourgie, Carnegie Hall, and the Spoleto USA Festival, among many other esteemed venues worldwide.



The Castalian Quartet will tour North America in the 2022–23 season with performances in San Diego and Berkeley, California; Schenectady and Buffalo, NY; Middlebury, VT; Waterford, VA; Durham, NC; and Toronto in Canada. The Quartet collaborates with many living composers, including recent premieres of works by Mark-Anthony Turnage, Charlotte Bray, and Edmund Finnis. In the 2023–24 season, they will perform several U.S. concerts with pianist Stephen Hough featuring Hough’s own string quartet in addition to the Brahms quintet. They have also established a strong presence abroad, with performances of the complete Haydn Op. 76 Quartets at Wigmore Hall, and concerts at the Paris Philharmonie, the Vienna Konzerthaus, and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. They have played at the Heidelberger Frühling, East Neuk, Zwischentöne in Engelberg, Neuchatel Chamber Music Switzerland, and Banff International Festivals. Further afield, they undertook tours of China and Colombia.

In spring 2022, the Castalian Quartet released its first recording *Between Two Worlds* (Delphian), featuring works by Thomas Adès, Beethoven, and first violinist Sini Simonen’s own arrangements of early works by Orlando de Lassus and John Dowland. BBC Music Magazine raved: “Perceptively programmed, *Between Two Worlds* explores the mystic properties of time through a series of intricately connected works, each performed with rare beauty and

originality by a quartet working at the height of its powers,” and praised the quartet as “intimately alive to every shift of colour and mood in this extraordinary score and succeeds in conjuring the sense of both deep contemplation and vivid spontaneity.” Gramophone praised the album as “consistently sensitive; bright, focused, [and] agile.... this excellent presentation facilitates a highly creative brand of time travel... a most fascinating release.”

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.

The Castalian Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists.

www.davidroweartists.com

www.castalianstringquartet.com



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Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndaकिनna, or "homeland." We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.

We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.