



MIDDLEBURY
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES
P R E S E N T S

*Dover String Quartet
Haochen Zhang, Piano*

FRIDAY, MARCH 10, 2023
MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



Dover String Quartet
Haochen Zhang, Piano

Program

Piano Quintet No. 2, "In Six Parts"

Marc Neikrug

(b. 1946)

Intermission

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34

Johannes Brahms

Allegro non troppo

(1833-1897)

Andante, un poco Adagio

Scherzo. Allegro

Finale. Poco sostenuto – Allegro non troppo

*A replay of this concert is available on demand until 7:30 PM ET
on Sunday, March 12 at*

<http://go.middlebury.edu/Dover-Zhang/>

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Program Notes

NEIKRUG Piano Quintet No. 2, "In Six Parts"

Note by the composer, Marc Neikrug

The second piano quintet was composed in Santa Fe in 2021 for Haochen Zhang and the Dover String Quartet.

My first quintet was in one extended movement, which encompassed a somewhat traditional opening, scherzo, slow movement, and finale. For this second quintet, I wanted to explore a completely different scenario.

Therefore, even under the title, Piano Quintet No. 2, I added a subtitle: *"In Six Parts."* The form of the work is all about layering and perspective. This begins, on the most basic level, with the six parts themselves. Parts number one, four and six are the three anchors of the work. They are longer and more emotionally varied, even perhaps, more profound. They anchor the piece. As a totality, they are one, long, arching movement, which is simply separated in time by interspersing the other, shorter parts. Over the course of the piece, this long 'movement' undergoes a developing exploration of several episodes of

varying character. The episodic nature of this music is similar to a stream of consciousness. Emotions change abruptly and towards extremes, rather than having preparatory transitions.

An aside: as regards the emotional content of music, I have long left the idea of any specific, representative reflections. I believe that the emotions in music encompass their own world. And clearly, we can relate to that world and absorb the experience.

There are several specific, and recognizable aspects of these episodes, which are found in all three parts of this arching movement. There is a prominent three chord progression, which appears in all three parts. There are longer sections developing a flowing, chromatic melody, which is simpler in the strings and more embellished in the piano filigree. There is a falling two chord motif. And there are short, two note, plaintive, cries.

One of the most complex and difficult aspects of composing any piece is creating the last movement. One always faces the urge to arrive at a summation, a culmination of the previous parts. In this case, the sixth part becomes a natural outgrowth of its organic development, from part one and part four.

Parts two and three act as both small episodes of their own, as well as crucial 'spacers' between part one and four. The three anchors are intense and demanding of the listener. They need time in between. Part two is really an episode in sound and atmosphere. It is a duet by the two violins alone, which is meant to sound like one violin. It is soft, mysterious, and fleeting.

Part three is in essence a chorale, played by the piano. It is, however, also a good example of the layering I referred to above. This specific layering manifests in a softer, faster music, which we hear on a different plane from the piano chorale. I think of how clouds, layered in the sky, travel at different heights and different speeds. In a further method of cohesion, the chorale stems from the three-chord motif, which appears in parts one, four, and six.

Part number five serves the same purpose between the anchors four and six. It has its own sound and emotion, but also serves to separate and add space. This part is a jazzy, improvisatory, semi-unison sprint. In addition to its other functions, it also provides substantial propulsion. The accumulated energy allows for the weight of the sixth part that follows it. In some ways it feels like a finale itself and makes

part six feel like a long coda, adding to its sense of culmination or epilogue.

Part six begins all pizzicato in the strings. This material is derived from the fast, secondary string parts of the movement three chorale. It then progresses through episodes of the further developed themes from parts one and four, including the chromatic melody and the three-chord theme. It ends in a reflective, calm resolution.

Another thought about the layered aspects of the piece involves the writing for the strings and the piano. In many piano quintets, thinking of Brahms, Schumann, Dvorak, the piano and strings play substantially the same music. I tried to make a distinct separation and independence for them. In much of the writing the piano and strings can sound as if they are playing on different planes, closer or further away.

As with most of my music, the demands on the performers are great. The writing requires obvious mastery of their instruments. It also demands engaged emotional understanding and great ensemble. Because of the independence of the parts, everyone needs to be aware of what everyone else is playing at all times.

BRAHMS Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34

Note by Steve Lacoste, courtesy of the L.A. Philharmonic

The development of Brahms' Piano Quintet is not unlike the metamorphic journey of the butterfly from larva to cocoon to its final emergence as a miraculous winged creature. Granted, the story of the Piano Quintet is not so dramatic. Originally conceived as a string quintet with two cellos, it soon metamorphosed into a sonata for two pianos before its final transformation into this Piano Quintet.

After having rehearsed the string quintet version for several months, Brahms' colleague, the violinist Joseph Joachim, wrote to him on April 15, 1863, "I am unwilling to let the quintet pass out of my hands without having played it to you... I do not wish to dogmatize on the details of a work which in every line shows some proof of overpowering strength. But what is lacking is, in a word, charm. After a time, on hearing the work quietly, I think you will feel the same as I do about it."

Upon receipt of this criticism, Brahms set to work correcting passages to which Joachim had specifically referred. After a private hearing, Brahms still was not pleased. The problem lay in the string writing.

Brahms' demands upon the instruments exceeded his understanding of their capabilities. Having recognized this, he sought to rescore the music. The first metamorphosis was about to begin.

By February of 1864, Brahms had transformed the string quintet into a sonata for two pianos. Once again, he was disappointed after he performed it from the manuscript with pianist Carl Tausig. However, Clara Schumann, who had studied the original string quintet version, and to whom Brahms also sent the new version for two pianos, had a different take. She wrote to Brahms on July 22, 1864, "The work is splendid, but it cannot be called a sonata. Rather it is a work so full of ideas that it requires an orchestra for its interpretation. These ideas are for the most part lost on the piano... The first time I tried the work I had a feeling that it was an arrangement... So please remodel it once more!"

The second transformation came about on the advice of Hermann Levi to form a piano quintet out of the ashes of the sonata. Brahms complied by sending the newest manifestation of the score to Levi, who responded on November 5, 1865, "The Quintet is beautiful beyond words. Anyone who did not know it in its earlier forms of string quintet and two-piano sonata would never believe that it was

not originally thought out and designed for the present combination of instruments... You have turned a monotonous work for two pianos into a thing of great beauty, a masterpiece of chamber music..."

Brahms was able to create a hybrid work out of the original string-quintet and two-piano versions, almost as a compromise between himself and his artistic confidants. With the contrasting timbre of the piano against the strings, we can readily distinguish individual melodic lines and juxtapositions of thematic fragments in this very rich weave of contrapuntal threads.

About the Artists

Dover String Quartet

Joel Link, violin

Bryan Lee, violin

Hezekiah Leung, viola

Camden Shaw, cello



Named one of the greatest string quartets of the last 100 years by BBC Music Magazine, the GRAMMY®

nominated Dover Quartet has followed a “practically meteoric” (Strings) trajectory to become one of the most in-demand chamber ensembles in the world. In addition to its faculty role as the Penelope P. Watkins Ensemble in Residence at the Curtis Institute of Music, the Dover Quartet holds residencies with the Kennedy Center, Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, Artosphere, and the Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival. The group’s awards include a stunning sweep of all prizes at the 2013 Banff International String Quartet Competition, grand and first prizes at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, and prizes at the Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition. Its prestigious honors include the Avery Fisher Career Grant, Chamber Music America’s Cleveland Quartet Award, and Lincoln Center’s Hunt Family Award.

The Dover Quartet’s active 2021–22 season includes world premiere performances of Marc Neikrug’s Piano Quintet No. 2 at the Kennedy Center with Haochen Zhang, Chris Rogerson’s Dream Sequence for Santa Fe Pro Musica with Anne-Marie McDermott, and Steven Mackey’s theatrical musical work Memoir at Artosphere with arx duo and narrator Natalie Christa. Other recent and upcoming artist collaborations include performances with the Escher String Quartet, Bridget Kibbey, the Pavel Haas Quartet, and Davóne Tines. The

quartet has also recently collaborated with artists including Emanuel Ax, Inon Barnaton, Ray Chen, Edgar Meyer, Anthony McGill, the late Peter Serkin, and Roomful of Teeth.

Cedille Records released the second of three volumes of the quartet's recording of the Beethoven Complete String Quartets in October 2021. Strad described the highly acclaimed recordings as "meticulously balanced, technically clean-as-a-whistle and intonationally immaculate." Their recording of Encores was also released in 2021 on the Brooklyn Classical label. The quartet's GRAMMY® nominated recording of The Schumann Quartets was released by Azica Records in 2019. Cedille Records released the Dover Quartet's Voices of Defiance: 1943, 1944, 1945 in October 2017; and an all-Mozart debut recording in the 2016–17 season, featuring the late Michael Tree, violist of the Guarneri Quartet. Voices of Defiance, which explores works written during World War II by Viktor Ullman, Dmitri Shostakovich, and Simon Laks, was lauded upon its release as "undoubtedly one of the most compelling discs released this year" (Wall Street Journal).

The Dover Quartet draws from the lineage of the distinguished Guarneri, Cleveland, and Vermeer quartets. Its members studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University's Shepherd School of

Music, where they were mentored extensively by Shmuel Ashkenasi, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, Kenneth Goldsmith, Joseph Silverstein, Arnold Steinhardt, Michael Tree, and Peter Wiley. It was at Curtis that the Dover Quartet formed, and its name pays tribute to Dover Beach by fellow Curtis alumnus Samuel Barber.

The Dover Quartet proudly endorses Thomastik-Infeld strings.
DoverQuartet.com

Haochen Zhang, piano

Since his gold medal win at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2009, Haochen Zhang has captivated audiences in the United States, Europe, and Asia with a unique combination



of deep musical sensitivity, fearless imagination, and spectacular virtuosity. In 2017 he received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, which recognizes talented musicians with the potential for a major career in music.

Zhang has appeared with many of the world's leading festivals and orchestras including the China Philharmonic Orchestra with Long Yu at the BBC Proms; the Munich Philharmonic with Lorin Maazel in a sold-out tour in Munich and China; the Moscow Easter Festival by special invitation of Valery Gergiev; the Sydney Symphony Orchestra with David Robertson in a tour of China; the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra with Thomas Hengelbrock in a tour of Tokyo, Beijing, and Shanghai; and the Philadelphia Orchestra with Yannick Nézet-Séguin in a tour of Japan. In October 2017 he gave a concerto performance at Carnegie Hall with the NCPA Orchestra, which was followed by his recital debut at Carnegie's Zankel Hall.

Additional symphony highlights include appearances with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, performances of all the Beethoven concertos with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, and a tour in China with the National Symphony Orchestra. He has also performed with the London and WDR symphony orchestras; the London, Japan, and Warsaw philharmonic orchestras; the San Francisco, Pacific, Seattle, and Kansas City symphonies; the Los Angeles and Israel philharmonics; Mariinsky Orchestra; Lucerne Festival Orchestra;

Frankfurt Radio Symphony; and National Symphony Orchestra, Taiwan, among others.

Recital appearances include those at Spivey Hall, La Jolla Music Society, Celebrity Series of Boston, CU Presents Artist Series, Cliburn Concerts, Krannert Center, Wolf Trap Discovery Series, Lied Center of Kansas, and UVM Lane Series, among others. He frequently presents solo recitals across China and Europe.

In July 2019 Zhang released his debut concerto album on BIS Records, performing with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra under Dima Slobodeniouk. His debut solo album was released by BIS in February 2017. Mr. Zhang's performances at the Cliburn Competition were released by Harmonia Mundi in 2009 and he is featured in Peter Rosen's award-winning documentary, *A Surprise in Texas*, chronicling the competition.

Zhang is an avid chamber musician, collaborating with colleagues such as the Shanghai, Tokyo, and Brentano string quartets. He performs regularly at festivals including the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and La Jolla Music Society's SummerFest.

Zhang is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music where he studied under Gary Graffman. He has also studied with Andreas Haefliger and at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Shenzhen Arts School with Dan Zhaoyi.

HaochenZhang.com

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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.