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VISION STRING QUARTET

Wednesday, December 9, 2020 ~ 8:00 pm
The Library of Congress
Virtual Event
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**Conversation with the Artists**

Join us online at https://loc.gov/concerts/vision-string-quartet.html for a conversation with the artists, and to explore additional resources related to the concert, available starting at 10am on Wednesday, December 9.

This event is being presented in collaboration with the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, Washington, DC

This event was recorded at the Parktheater in Bensheim, Germany and presented there by Kunstfreunde Bensheim e.V.

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VISION STRING QUARTET

JAKOB ENCKE & DANIEL STOLL, VIOLIN
SANDER STUART, VIOLA
LEONARD DISSELHORST, CELLO
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Quartet no. 3 in A major, op. 41/3 (1842)
   Andante espressivo–Allegro molto moderato–più Adagio–a tempo
   Assai agitato–Un poco adagio–Tempo risoluto
   Adagio molto
   Finale: Allegro molto vivace–Quasi Trio

Vision String Quartet

Untitled
The Shoemaker
Untitled
Copenhagen
Untitled
Samba
Untitled

About the Program

Robert Schumann, Quartet no. 3 in A major

1842 was a banner year for Robert Schumann in the realm of chamber music. In addition to the three string quartets of op. 41, it saw the composition of the piano quintet (op.44), piano quartet (op.47) and the Phantasiestücke (op. 88), in addition to his other projects. The three string quartets were composed rapidly in the span of approximately six weeks, ending with tonight’s selection, completed by July 22nd of that year.¹ In an interview with the Guarneri Quartet, Arnold Steinhardt makes an interesting statement: "...Schumann wrote [the three quartets] not just as isolated pieces but as works intended to be played together. He provided bridges between them. You can play one, and then transition right into the other, and then the other. It's an odd idea. I do know that once in Leipzig there was some Hausmusik—I think Mendelssohn² was present—and all three were

¹ John Worthen, Robert Schumann: Life and Death of a Musician (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2007), 220.
² Schumann’s quartets were dedicated to his friend Mendelssohn.
played that way. Later, he deleted the bridges. I would love to have been there to hear them that way.”

If this indeed occurred, I think we all would have enjoyed witnessing what would have been an intense but enjoyable concert. While some such Zwischenspiele may have been improvised by a soloist, those that were written down provide a fascinating insight into the process of programming choices in past generations.

Without being able to cross these bridges, so to speak, one wonders: what were Schumann’s general thoughts on the string quartet genre and his relationship to that venerable tradition? The authors of the Grove article on Schumann put it well:

"As a critic, Schumann made two principal demands of the prospective composer of string quartets. First, the ‘proper’ quartet style should avoid ‘symphonic furore’ and aim rather for a conversational tone in which ‘everyone has something to say.’ Secondly, the composer must possess an intimate knowledge of the genre’s history, but should strive to produce more than mere imitations of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Both aspects of this aesthetic are aptly reflected in Schumann’s own quartets, which he proudly described in a letter to Härtel of December 1847 as the best works of his earlier period.”

That Schumann has something to say is clear to those who know these substantive works. They aspire to the intimate and achieve it, all within the domain of Schumann’s compositional idioms.

Schumann’s final string quartet opens in the wrong key—or rather it takes some time to clarify that A major is the key, as this is not confirmed until the eleventh measure. A brief seven-bar introduction\(^5\) features seventh-chords built on B (ii\(^6/5\) of A major, in the first inversion with D in the bass), with angst-filled “resolutions” to both F-sharp minor and F-sharp major.\(^6\) A falling fifth motive is featured prominently, followed by a turn that leads to the local chord of resolution. I have permitted myself this small foray into the harmony of the introduction because it suggests a prominent model upon which Schumann may have drawn: Beethoven’s eighteenth piano sonata, op. 31/3. Beethoven’s work opens with a remarkably similar

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5 The oddball seventh measure is an echo (and simultaneously a preemptive echo) of the falling fifth motive, isolated in the first violin.
6 The g-sharp in the second violin resolves up to a unison A with the first violin after a beat’s clash in the second measure.
introductory approach. Compare the two, noting the bass of the opening chord (scale degree 4 of the tonic), the inversion of the seventh chord (ii\(^6/5\)), the falling fifth motive, and the use of the turn to terminate/resolve the phrases:

**Example 1**

a) 

Beethoven: Piano Sonata in E-flat major, op. 31/3, I: mm.1-8.

b) 

Schumann: String Quartet no. 3 in A major, op. 41/3, I: mm.1-11

The arrival in A major occurs after the switch into a new tempo, marked *Allegro molto moderato*. The character of this faster material is much lighter, matching Beethoven’s quirky and optimistic tone, and is of a piece
with the music of Schumann’s playful side.

Some rather startling chords (in the context) briefly move the main theme into the C-major realm before a lovely secondary theme emerges in the cello line, eventually passing the torch to the first violin. The syncopated accompaniment is similar to what one finds in much of Schumann’s piano music. This music leads to a well-managed incorporation of elements from the introduction to close the exposition. The development section is surprisingly short, and in fact the first theme’s role in the recapitulation is abridged as well. The movement ends rather unexpectedly, with the falling fifth motive heard one last time in the cello, in what is arguably the first instance of the motive serving a more significant melodic function (in addition to its harmonic one) in the home key of the movement.

In the F-sharp minor Assai agitato of the second movement, one is reminded of the virtuosity of Schumann’s imagination. Several important things are happening simultaneously. First, there is a theme(s) with a set of variations (or in another formulation, a modified rondo-variation set). This seems like a simple-enough idea, but I suspect that this movement was conceived “out of order,” with the primary theme-to-be-varied not occurring until roughly halfway through the movement. If we look at this later iteration and compare it to the very opening of the movement (as just one example), we can see how the mid-movement appearance is a more regularized, traditional presentation of a theme, and a new appreciation for the demands on the musicians in terms of coordination throughout the movement may be felt:

**Example 2**

a)  

![Example 2](image)

Schumann: String Quartet no. 3 in A major, op. 41/3, II: mm. 145-148, condensed
b) \[ \text{Un poco Adagio} \]

Schumann: String Quartet no. 3 in A major, op. 41/3, II: mm. 1-4, condensed

Added to this is the development across the piece of the prominent fifths motive from the first movement. The interval of a fifth is the inversion of the interval of a fourth, and these ideas are explored concurrently in prominent displays. Sometimes Schumann presents the ideas canonically (such as the tonal canonic entrances at \textit{L’istesso tempo} at m. 97); later it evolves into a robust theme as at measure 193’s \textit{Tempo risoluto}, and beyond. Some of the spirit of the opening movement returns in the final section beginning at measure 224, both in the chromatic accompaniment with its internalized turns and in the first violin’s and cello’s larger note-value arpeggios. The movement closes with imitative fourths rising from the bass to close in F-sharp major.

The expressive \textit{Adagio molto} in D major contains two main areas of thematic interest that alternate with each other. The opening material has a Mendelssohnian feel to it, although Mendelssohn would likely never have elaborated the accompanimental figures in the way that Schumann does later in the movement. Some of this music could have appropriately borne the label \textit{Im Legendton}, as Schumann does elsewhere in his oeuvre, as it calls to mind a contemporary account of something more ancient. This is even more apparent in the mysterious second thematic area, in which rising fourths (and fifths) outline fragmented melodic ideas above a fairly static dotted-rhythm accompaniment. The third movement ends in this world. Although it feels at first like a straightforward coda, Schumann adds several chromatic alterations in the lines that leave the listener a bit unsure if there is more to say until the very end.

If it seems that Schumann has left something unsaid, perhaps it is because he planned to shed a different light on similar material in the boisterous finale. The primary rondo material contains the dotted rhythm and playful elements related to the first movement. In the second part of the section labeled \textit{Quasi Trio}, the fifths/fourths make their return in imitative fashion, and one finds both melodic and harmonic nods at the
quartet’s scherzo. A final extended return to the movement’s original material includes a few sideways glances at diminished sonorities before an unimpeded affirmation of A major closes this concise quartet.

David Plylar  
Senior Music Specialist  
Library of Congress, Music Division

VISION QUARTET, Various Pieces

The vision quartet performs several of their own compositions following the Schumann quartet, and offer some commentary from the stage.

About the Artists

"...amazingly vivacious, vivid and electrifying... the hot-blooded guys from the vision string quartet seem to be completely fearless” Der Tagesspiegel

Founded in 2012 and based in Berlin, the vision string quartet has already established itself as one of the finest young string quartets of its generation. With a unique versatility that focuses on the classical string quartet repertoire alongside their own compositions and arrangements of other disparate genres, the four young musicians are on a mission to re-address with integrity how classical music is presented and perceived by both new and traditional audiences. Their distinctive characteristics of performing all their concerts completely from memory and standing up lend performances an added intimacy and intensity which has been widely praised.

2016 was a year of remarkable achievement for the quartet as they achieved not only first prize in two major competitions but all the audience and special prizes, too. Adding to their successes at the Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy Competition in Berlin at the beginning of the year and at the International Concours de Génève at the end of the year, they were also awarded the prestigious Würth Prize in November 2016, only a month after they had received the audience prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival. In 2018 they were awarded the prestigious chamber music prize of the Jürgen Ponto Foundation.
The young quartet experiments with innovative concert formats which they have brought to leading classical concert halls such as the Gewandhaus Leipzig, Tonhalle Düsseldorf, Konzerthaus Berlin and Philharmonie Luxembourg, as well as to prestigious festivals including the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Rheingau Music Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Heidelberg Frühling and the Lucerne Festival. They have hosted concerts in complete darkness, have collaborated on projects with renowned ballet dancer and choreographer John Neumeier and worked together with lighting designers to bring further creative dimensions to their performances.

The 2018/19 season included the quartet’s UK debut with concerts at the Wigmore Hall, Sage Gateshead and a BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Concert live from Perth Concert Hall in Scotland. They played at Amici della Musica in Florence, undertook a tour of Israel with performances in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa and appeared in Copenhagen at the Danish String Quartet’s Series of 4. Concerts in Germany included performances at the Berlin Philharmonie, Cologne Philharmonie, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Philharmonie Essen, the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden and Bremen’s Die Glocke.

The quartet has studied in Berlin under the Artemis Quartet and Günter Pichler of the Alban Berg Quartet at the Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía in Madrid. In addition, they have received tuition from teachers such as Heime Müller, Eberhardt Feltz and Gerhard Schulz, as well as participated in masterclasses at the Jeunesses Musicales, ProQuartet in France and the Foundation Villa Musica Rheinland-Pfalz where they were scholarship holders.

Chamber music partners include Jörg Widmann, Eckart Runge from the Artemis Quartet, Haiou Zhang, Edicson Ruiz, Avi Avital, Nils Mönkemeyer and the Quatuor les Dissonances.
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*Events marked with an asterisk are part of our (Re)Hearing Beethoven Festival

See loc.gov/concerts/beethoven.html for the full lineup, including performances, lectures and conversations.

*Friday, December 4, 2020 at 8:00 pm [Concert]
"The President's Own" United States Marine Band
Music by Beethoven: Symphonies 3 and 7
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/presidents-own-marine-band.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/4/20

*Saturday, December 5, 2020 at 8:00 pm [Concert]
Borromeo String Quartet
Music by Beethoven: Symphony no. 8, op. 130 & 133
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/borromeo-nicholas-cords.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/4/20

*Thursday, December 10, 2020 at 8:00 pm [Concert]
ZOFO
Music by Beethoven: Symphonies 4 and 6
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/zofo.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/10/20
BONUS: This concert will be available as an augmented reality experience for a limited period of time!

*Friday, December 11, 2020 at 8:00 pm [Concert]
Verona String Quartet and Adam Golka
Music by Beethoven: Hammerklavier Sonata in Two Versions
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/beethovens-hammerklavier.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/11/20
**Saturday, December 12, 2020 at 8:00 pm** [Concert]
Ran Dank & Soyeon Kate Lee
Music by Liszt and Beethoven: Symphony no. 9
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/dank-lee.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/11/20

**Thursday, December 17, 2020 at 8:00 pm** [Concert]
Christopher Taylor
Music by Beethoven: Symphonies 1, 2 and 5
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/christopher-taylor.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/17/20

**Friday, December 18, 2020 at 8:00 pm** [Concert]
Stradivari Anniversary Concert
Details to be announced
Virtual Event (https://loc.gov/concerts/antonio-stradivari.html)
Additional video content available starting at 10am on 12/18/20

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