

# Petersen Quartet

Sunday, March 10, 2002, 3 pm  
Hertz Hall

Conrad Muck, violin  
Daniel Bell, violin  
Friedemann Weigle, viola  
Jona?s Krej?ci, cello

## PROGRAM

Franz Josef Haydn Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 76, No. 4, "Sunrise"  
Allegro con spirito  
Adagio  
Menuetto (Allegro)  
Finale (Allegro ma non troppo)

Dmitri Shostakovich Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142  
Allegretto  
Adagio – Allegretto: Adagio

## INTERMISSION

Ludwig van Beethoven Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127  
Maestoso – Allegro  
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile  
Scherzando vivace (presto)  
Finale: Allegro con moto

The Petersen Quartet appears by arrangement with David Rowe Artists, Oakland, California.

Capriccio recordings

Cal Performances thanks the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
and the Zellerbach Family Fund for their generous support.

Cal Performances receives additional funding from the National Endowment for the Arts,  
a federal agency that supports the visual, literary, and performing arts to benefit all Americans,  
and the California Arts Council, a state agency.

Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 76, No. 4, "Sunrise"

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Haydn was universally acknowledged as the greatest living composer upon his return to Vienna in 1795 from his second London venture; he was 63. Though his international renown had been founded in large part upon the success of his symphonies and keyboard sonatas, he repeatedly refused offers to compose further in those genres, and instead concentrated the creative energies of his later years upon the string quartet and the vocal forms of Mass and oratorio. Except for the majestic Trumpet Concerto, his only instrumental compositions after 1795 were the six quartets of Op. 76, the two of Op. 77, and the unfinished torso of Op. 103, and they were the culmination of nearly four decades of experience composing in the chamber medium. "The eight quartets which he completed show no signs of flagging powers," wrote Rosemary Hughes in her study of Haydn's chamber music. "In that last great wave of energy which carried them to completion, he gathers up all the efforts and conquests, all the explorations, all the personal idiosyncrasies too, of nearly half a century of unbroken creative life. Nowhere is his thematic and structural concentration so strong and closely woven, his ranging through the furthest reaches of key so searching and profound. If

elsewhere some of his best instrumental finales are based upon folksongs and dances, here he even surpasses them in exhilaration and closeness of texture. The phrase structure is endlessly varied and flexible, now square and symmetrical, now unfolding in long, continuous paragraphs, according to the character and inner life of the themes themselves. And behind this and permeating it all is a quality hard to define, but one in which we can sense the weight of a lifetime's experience, human and musical. No young mind and heart could have conceived this music, could have so tempered exuberance with gentleness, or touched sober steadfastness with vision."

The six quartets of Op. 76 were written on commission from Count Joseph Erdödy, scion of the Viennese family who had encouraged Haydn's work since at least 1776 and whose members became important patrons of Beethoven after his arrival in the capital in 1792. The quartets were apparently ordered and begun by the end of 1796, because Haydn was able to play them at the piano for the Swedish diplomat Frederik Samuel Silverstolpe the following June. They were probably given their formal premiere on September 28, 1797, when they were played for the visit of Archduke Joseph, Viceroy of Hungary, to Eisenstadt, family seat of Haydn's employer, Prince Nicholas Esterházy II. The quartets were issued in Vienna by Artaria in 1799, and appeared shortly thereafter in London. "[I have] never received more pleasure from instrumental music," wrote Charles Burney, the preeminent English musical scholar of his day. "They are full of invention, fire, good taste, and new effects, and seem the production, not of a sublime genius who has written so much and so well already, but of one of highly cultivated talents, who had expended none of his fire before." Critical opinion has not wavered since.

The Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 76, No. 4, derives its sobriquet—"Sunrise"—from the arching opening theme, one of Haydn's most limpid and sensual melodic inventions. The music is more animated during the transitional passage that leads to the second theme, but again becomes subdued, almost dreamy, when that theme proves to be a sweet variant of the opening subject. These two principal moods are again opposed to close the exposition, and their juxtaposition continues to form the basis of the development section. A full recapitulation achieves formal closure and expressive balance. The Adagio is an expression of thoughtful introspection such as could only have been composed by one whose long and rich experience of life is matched by a transcendent mastery of technique. The movement follows no traditional form, but is rather a fantasia, perhaps even a musical sermon, that refers repeatedly back to the hymnal statement with which it began. The jolly peasant dance of the Menuetto stands in striking contrast to the contemplative mood of the Adagio, but the curious, winding melody of the central trio, presented by the violins in barren octaves above a drone in the viola and cello, brings a deeper emotional tone to the movement. The exuberant finale, thought to have been based on a folk song that Haydn brought back with him from England, is in three-part form (B-flat major – B-flat minor – B-flat major) with a dashing coda whose youthful effervescence belies the fact that this was at least the 78th quartet that Haydn had composed.

Quartet No. 14 in F-sharp major, Op. 142  
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Shostakovich's late quartets, which rank with Bartók's six examples of the form as the most significant contributions to the genre in the 20th century, provide one of the most intimate confessionals of personal feelings ever vouchsafed by a composer in his music. In *Testimony*, his purported memoirs, Shostakovich offered these words about the principal subject of the music of his last years: "Fear of death may be the most intense emotion of all. I sometimes think that there is no deeper feeling. The irony lies in the fact that under the influence of that fear, people create poetry, prose, and music; that is, they try to strengthen their ties with the living and increase their influence upon them. I tried to convince myself that I shouldn't fear death. But how can you not fear death? Death is not considered an appropriate theme for Soviet art, and writing about death is tantamount to wiping your nose on your sleeve in company. But I always thought that I was not alone in my thinking about death, and that other people were concerned with it too, despite the fact that they live in a socialist society in which even tragedies receive the epithet 'optimistic.' I wrote a number of works reflecting my understanding of the question, and as it seems to me, they're not particularly optimistic compositions. . . . I think that working on these compositions had a positive effect, and I fear death less now; or rather, I'm used to the idea of an inevitable end and treat it as such. After all, it's a law of nature and no one has ever eluded it. . . . When you ponder and write about death, you make some gains. First, you have time to think through things that are related to death and you lose the panicky fear. And second, you try to make fewer mistakes. . . . [The critics] wanted [my music] to be comforting, to say that death is only the beginning. But it's not a beginning, it's the real end, there will be nothing afterward, nothing. I feel that you must look truth right in the eyes."

Hard, blunt, pessimistic words, these, which found their strongest expression in the searing Symphony No. 14 of 1969, Shostakovich's song cycle of 11 poems by four authors dealing with death. In contrast to the Fourteenth Symphony, the Fourteenth Quartet is among the late works of Shostakovich that seem to achieve some accommodation

with the thought of death, a bittersweet acceptance of its inevitability and the essential function it plays in the continuum of life. "Here more than anywhere else in Shostakovich," wrote Christopher Rowland and Alan George, members of the Fitzwilliam Quartet, which championed Shostakovich's chamber music in performance and recording, "[is music] which expresses at the same time radiance, sadness, joy, pain, in the way that perhaps Schubert of all composers knew best. . . . Like all the major works of Shostakovich's final years, this quartet is unique. They all share a privateness, a sparseness of texture, and an obsession with death, but each views these experiences through different eyes and feelings. No other work [than the Fourteenth Quartet] has this impassioned radiance: no other work comes so close to Schubert."

The Quartet No. 14 was dedicated to Sergei Shirinsky, cellist of the Beethoven String Quartet, the ensemble that premiered all of Shostakovich's quartets from the Second onwards; they introduced the Fourteenth Quartet in Leningrad on November 12, 1973. (Shirinsky's death prevented the group from premiering the Fifteenth Quartet the following year.) The repeated-note motive that the unaccompanied viola presents to begin the work serves not only as an intonation of the central

F-sharp tonality but also as a cyclical marker during the progress of the work, reappearing in later movements as a means of formal unification. The principal theme of the first movement, a melody of simplicity and grudging wit, is assigned to the cello. Much of the music that follows grows seamlessly from this initial motive, the strongest melodic contrast being provided by a waltz-like strain initiated by the first violin above a hyperactive accompaniment in the second violin. Solo cadenzas for the cello serve as signposts of the movement's formal progress. The thoughtful Adagio is announced by the violin, but soon devolves into a long, richly expressive soliloquy for the cello. The finale, launched by the return of the repeated-note figure that began the quartet, rises to climaxes of both rhythmic tension and lyrical effusion before subsiding to a resigned, dying close. The Quartet No. 14 is, as Shostakovich once said of the music of Benjamin Britten, a work that achieves its profound effect because its outer simplicity is coupled with a vast inner depth of emotional expression.

Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127  
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

"I sit pondering and pondering. I have long known what I want to do, but I can't get it down on paper. I feel I am on the threshold of great things." These words of Beethoven, written in 1822, were prophetic. At the time, he was still involved in the five years of Herculean labor that finally yielded up the *Missa Solemnis* in 1823, a task that demanded all his concentration lest it be crowded from his thoughts by a head (and sketchbook) full of yet unconnected ideas for a new symphony, into which, he was convinced, he needed to somehow take the unprecedented step of integrating a chorus. The string quartet, a genre for which he had not written in a dozen years, was also on his mind, as evidenced by his letter of June 5, 1822, to the Leipzig publisher Carl Friedrich Peters urging him to consider issuing a new quartet that would be ready "very soon." Burdened by poor health, financial difficulties (Rossini was appalled at the squalor of Beethoven's small, dank apartment when he visited him that year), the emotional drain of being guardian to a worthless nephew, and the obsession with finishing the *Missa* and the Ninth Symphony, it was, however, to be some time before he was able to take up a new quartet in earnest.

On November 9, 1822, Prince Nikolas Galitzin, a devotee of Beethoven's music and an amateur cellist, wrote from St. Petersburg asking Beethoven for "one, two or three quartets for which labor I will be glad to pay you whatever amount you think proper." Beethoven was elated by the commission, and he replied immediately to accept it and set the fee of 50 ducats for each quartet, a high price, but readily accepted by Galitzin. The music, however, took somewhat longer. The Ninth Symphony was completed in February 1823, but Beethoven, exhausted, was unable to begin Galitzin's first quartet until May. "I am really impatient to have a new quartet of yours," badgered Galitzin. "Nevertheless, I beg you not to mind and to be guided in this only by your inspiration and the disposition of your mind." A flurry of correspondence passed between St. Petersburg and Vienna after the E-flat Quartet was started in May, but Beethoven could not be hurried in this project, and the score was not finished until February of the following year. In the meantime, Beethoven, pressed for money, had convinced Galitzin to transfer the payment of 50 ducats for the first quartet to a subscription for the new *Missa Solemnis*. In appreciation, Beethoven gave his patron the honor of sponsoring the first performance of the *Missa Solemnis*, and it was duly premiered in St. Petersburg on April 7, 1824. The premiere of the E-flat Quartet was given in Vienna on March 6, 1825, by the ensemble of Ignaz Schuppanzigh, a champion of Beethoven's works in earlier years and the first musician in Austria to undertake public quartet concerts.

"In these last works," wrote Melvin Berger in his *Guide to Chamber Music*, "Beethoven leaves the realm of personal self-expression and enters the domain of the universal—plumbing the full depths of the human soul and

psyche. . . . In a sense, it is music that transcends music, that even transcends human feelings and thoughts, to achieve a spiritual level above all worldly concerns.” The series of the five late quartets and the Grosse Fuge were Beethoven’s final musical thoughts, and they were the only important works that occupied him during his last four years. They are the ultimate distillation of his art. The conventions of traditional musical expression are swept away by a concentration on the most fundamental, the most absolutely essential elements of the creation of tonal art. Contrast, lyricism, texture, motivic growth—every facet of composition is not just brought under magisterial technical control, but heightened to a level that nearly defies traditional analysis and description. This music, like the deepest, most powerful emotions, passes beyond mere words to touch the noblest threads of our feelings and humanity.

The opening movement of the Quartet in E-flat major erects a distinctive sonata structure upon two sharply differentiated thematic elements: a series of bold, proclamatory chords and a sunny, flowing melody of vernal freshness. The bold chords return both for expressive contrast and as a formal marker to indicate the arrival at the development and the recapitulation (Beethoven had much earlier tried a similar experiment in the famous “Pathétique” Sonata, Op. 13, of 1799), with the intervening sections devoted to a lithe working-out, almost a fantasia, of the flowing motive. Beethoven’s mastery of variation technique, one of the touchstones of his fullest creative maturity, is seen nowhere better than in the work’s Adagio, a sublime movement, built upon a spacious, arching theme, that progresses from a state of hymnal introspection through its animated central paragraphs to a close of rapt transcendence. The third movement achieves a remarkable balance of playfulness and rigorous thematic development, with a sleek, spectral central trio providing the perfect foil. The Finale is a compact sonata structure built from a naively melodious main theme and a marching second subject. The work culminates in a luminous transformation of the Finale’s principal theme.

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## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The Petersen Quartet is widely acclaimed as one of the most exciting string quartets to have emerged from Germany in recent years. Founded in 1979 by students at the Hanns Eisler Musikhochschule in Berlin, the ensemble went on to win many international awards, including top prizes at France’s Evian Competition (1985), the International Music Competition in Florence (1986), and the ARD Competition in Munich (1987).

The Petersen Quartet’s extensive performance schedule includes concerts throughout Germany and Europe as well as regular tours overseas. They appear frequently in such European music centers as Berlin, Munich, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels, Rome, Milan, Zurich, and London, as well as at major festivals, including those of Berlin, Schleswig-Holstein, Bath, and Salzburg. The Quartet has toured throughout Australia, and visits North America often, where the ensemble has appeared in New York (Carnegie Hall), Los Angeles, San Francisco, Berkeley, Boston, Vancouver, Dallas, Chicago, and Toronto.

The Petersen Quartet’s current North American tour will bring them to New York (Lincoln Center), Washington, DC (Library of Congress), Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Toronto, Dallas, Berkeley, Vancouver, Cambridge (MA), and La Jolla (CA), among others.

The ensemble was quartet-in-residence at the Berlin Radio for five years, a fruitful collaboration that led to a close and ongoing relationship with Capriccio Records. The group’s numerous recordings on the Capriccio label include works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Berg, Janáček, Dutilleux, and Boccherini. These recordings have received numerous awards, including the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis (German Recording Prize), the Choc de l’Annee (Recording of the Year), and the Echo Prize for best recording of contemporary chamber music (The Maiden and Death by Siegfried Matthus).

The Petersen Quartet has collaborated with such eminent artists as Stephen Kovacevich, David Geringas, Siegfried Lorenz, and Tabea Zimmermann. The artists’ teachers and mentors have included the Amadeus Quartet, Thomas Brandis, and Sandor Vegh; members of the Quartet have also studied chamber music with Walter Levin of the LaSalle Quartet, Donald Weilerstein of the Cleveland Quartet, and Milan Skampa and Antonin Kohout of the Smetana Quartet.

Conrad Muck (violin) was born in Dresden and began violin lessons at the age of five. He attended the Special School for Music Carl Maria von Weber in Dresden; he then studied in Dresden with Reinhard Ulbricht and Gustav Schmal, in Berlin with Werner Scholz, and in Freiburg with Wolfgang Marschner. His education was rounded out by masterclasses

with Tibor Varga, Max Rostal, and Ruggiero Ricci. He won first prize at the Ludwig Spohr Competition in Freiburg (1988), and first prize at the Bodensee Music Competition in Konstanz (1991). In addition to his work with the Petersen Quartet, Muck is active as a soloist; he has appeared with major German orchestras such as the Dresden Staatskapelle, the Dresden Philharmonic, and the Berlin Symphony Orchestra, as well as with orchestras in the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, and Bulgaria.

Daniel Bell (violin) grew up in Nottingham and Edinburgh. He studied violin at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester, the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and the Cleveland Institute of Music in Ohio, where he graduated with honors. His teachers have included Roger Raphael, Donald Weilerstein, and David Takeno. In 1998, he won the first prize at the Royal Over-Seas League String Competition in London. His solo recitals have included appearances at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall and at festivals such as Cheltenham, Brighton, Windsor, and Lichfield. Bell has also performed extensively as soloist with orchestras, with a broad range of repertoire from classical to contemporary.

Friedemann Weigle (viola) was born in Berlin, where he received his first music instruction on the recorder at the age of four; at age six, he began violin lessons. He later switched to the viola, studying at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin with Alfred Lipka. As a student, he helped found the Petersen Quartet. Following his studies, in addition to continuing his activities with the Quartet, he was principal violist of the Berlin Symphony Orchestra for four years. He currently teaches viola and chamber music at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, as well as at several international chamber music festivals, and serves regularly on the jury of the national music competition "Jugend Musiziert."

Jona? Krej?ci (cello) was born in London and raised in Prague, where he began cello lessons at the age of six. While still a student at the Prague Conservatory, he took a year in London to study with William Pleeth. Upon graduating from the Conservatory, he entered the University of Southern California on a full scholarship to study with Lynn Harrell. After finishing his studies, he spent two years in Vienna, where he performed in chamber ensembles and in the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. As a member of the Prague-based Skampa Quartet for six years, he performed in major venues throughout the world. Krej?ci was also principal cellist of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra. As a soloist, he has performed with orchestras in the United States, Japan, Austria, and the Czech Republic.