

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The **Miró Quartet** is increasingly recognized as one of America's brightest and most exciting young chamber groups. Since winning first prize at the 1998 Banff International String Quartet Competition and the prestigious Naumburg Chamber Music Award in 2000, the Miró Quartet has captivated audiences around the world, dazzling listeners with its youthful intensity and mature interpretations. Formed in the fall of 1995, the quartet met with immediate success, winning first prize at the 50th annual Coleman Chamber Music Competition in April 1996, and the following month taking both the first and grand prizes at the Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition.

Their 2004-05 season includes engagements in Montreal, Chicago, San Diego, Berkeley, Washington and many other cities. A highlight of the season took place in February, when the Miró Quartet performed with internationally renowned guitarist Eliot Fisk at the music festival in Round Top, Texas.

Last year the quartet was appointed faculty string quartet at The University of Texas at Austin. The members of the Miró Quartet – violinists Daniel Ching and Sandy Yamamoto, violist John Largess, and cellist Joshua Gindele – teach and coach chamber music there, while continuing their active international touring schedule.

The quartet has been heard on numerous national radio broadcasts, including National Public Radio's *Performance Today* and Minnesota Public Radio's *Saint Paul Sunday*. Internationally, the Miró has been featured on radio networks across Europe, Israel and Canada. The quartet has also been seen on NBC's *Today Show*, ABC's *World News Tonight*, and on various programs of the Canadian Broadcasting Company. At the invitation of Isaac Stern, the quartet performed in a live broadcast at the Jerusalem Music Center in Israel and was featured in the recent American Masters Documentary *Isaac Stern: Life's Virtuoso*.

The members of the quartet maintain a strong dedication to the next generation of musicians and were on the faculty of the Hugh A. Glauser School of Music at Kent State University, where they taught private students and coached chamber music. The Miró has been the resident string quartet of Kent/Blossom Music – Kent State's annual summer chamber music festival, in cooperation with the Cleveland Orchestra. The quartet members are collectively artists-in-residence at the Lake Tahoe Music Festival. In 2001 the quartet

teamed up with the Grand Canyon Music Festival and composer Brent Michael Davids to form the Native American Composers Apprentice Project, which teaches Native American students how to read and write music. The Miró Quartet also serves on the Advisory Council of Community MusicWorks of Providence, Rhode Island, an organization dedicated to enriching the lives of inner-city youths and families through music.

The quartet's unyielding commitment to contemporary music has led to the commission and performance of music by such composers as Leonardo Balada, Lee Hoiby, Brent Michael Davids, David Schober and Jonathan Dawe.

The quartet has released two recordings on the Bridge Records label, performing music by Rued Langgaard and George Crumb. Its performance of Crumb's *Black Angels* on the second Bridge CD has received international acclaim, including the French Diapason d'Or distinction. The Miró's latest recording, released in March 2004, is titled *Epilogue* and includes Mendelssohn's final string quartet (Op. 80), and Schubert's Quintet in C with celebrated cellist Matt Haimovitz.

The Miró Quartet is named after the Spanish artist Joan Miró. Additional information about the quartet may be found at its website, www.miroquartet.com.

Daniel Ching (*violin*) is a founding member of the Miró Quartet and spent his childhood years in the San Francisco area. He began playing the violin under the guidance of his father at age 3. At age 5 he entered the San Francisco Conservatory Preparatory Division on a full twelve-year scholarship, where he studied violin with Serban Rusu and Zaven Melikian, and chamber music with Susan Bates. It was during this time, at age 10, that Mr. Ching was first introduced to string quartets.

As a student at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music he studied violin with Kathleen Winkler, Roland and Almita Vamos, and conducting with Robert Spano and Peter Jaffe. He holds his MM from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he studied with former Cleveland Quartet violinist Donald Weilerstein. He also studied recording engineering and production with Thomas Knab of Telarc, and subsequently engineered the Miró Quartet's first promotional disc.

Mr. Ching is a discerning connoisseur of all things cinematic and electronic, an avid skier and

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

a dedicated reader of science fiction. He serves as senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin.

John Largess (*viola*) began his studies in Boston at age 12 in the public schools, studying with Michael Zaretsky of the Boston Symphony, and later as a student of Michael Tree at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In 1995 he graduated from Yale University to become interim violist with the Colorado String Quartet, with which he toured the US and Canada teaching and concertizing. The following year he was appointed principal violist of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra in South Carolina, a position he held until joining the Miró Quartet in 1997. Also an active speaker and writer about chamber music, in 2004 Mr. Largess was invited to give a week-long lecture series as part of the Eighth International String Quartet Competition at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, Canada; he will repeat this series in 2007.

With his training in Greek and Latin literature and his BA in archeology from Yale University, as well as studies at the Hebrew University in Israel, he has participated in excavations in Greece, Israel and Jordan. Mr. Largess loves to cook gourmet cuisine, particularly French pastry and fine desserts; luckily, he also enjoys exercising. He serves as senior lecturer and chair of chamber music at the University of Texas at Austin School of Music.

Joshua Gindele (*cello*) is a founding member of the Miró Quartet and began his cello studies at the age of 3, playing a viola his teacher had fitted with an endpin. With the Miró Quartet, Mr. Gindele has won numerous international awards and performed to rave reviews across three continents. Mr. Gindele is also the cellist of *Ménage*, a trio, which was formed under the auspices of National Public Radio. He has performed live with country music legends the Oak Ridge Boys, and has collaborated with director Chris M. to produce the contemporary film score to the movie *Blackbox*. Mr. Gindele has been very active in children's education, teaching tennis to inner-city kids, and has collaborated with Radio Station WQED and the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony on a special student outreach program. An excellent athlete, Mr. Gindele has played competitive tennis, and following the theft of his road bike in New York City, now considers himself a runner. Joshua serves

on a special advisory committee to the Austin Performing Arts Center and also serves as senior lecturer at the University of Texas at Austin.

Mr. Gindele and his wife split their time between a home in downtown Austin and their farm in central Missouri.

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Pei-Yao Wang (*piano*) made her official orchestral debut with the Taipei Symphony Orchestra at age 8 and has since performed as soloist with such orchestras as the Stamford Symphony, Orlando Symphony and the Taipei Philharmonic. She has performed throughout the US, Canada, Europe and Asia, appearing at such venues as Carnegie, Avery Fisher, Alice Tully, 92nd Street Y and Merkin halls in New York City, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, as well as Salle des Varietes in Monte-Carlo, Suntory Hall in Tokyo and the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan.

As a chamber musician, Ms. Wang has collaborated with members of the Guarneri, Orion, Chicago and Mendelssohn quartets, and has performed with such distinguished artists as Claude Frank, David Shifrin and Mitsuko Uchida. She is regularly invited to perform at festivals such as the Marlboro, Caramoor, Norfolk, La Jolla, Ravinia and Bridgehampton in New York.

Ms. Wang was born in Taipei, Taiwan where she began piano studies at age 5. Three years later she was the youngest pianist ever to appear in recital at the Taipei Cultural Center, receiving first prize in the Taiwan National Piano Competition. At age 12, she was invited to study at The Curtis Institute of Music, where she worked with Seymour Lipkin and Institute Director Gary Graffman. After graduation she continued studies with Claude Frank at Yale University, where she received her MM and also pursued a concentration in architecture. She is a member of Chamber Music Society Two, a program to promote emerging young artists. This season, Ms. Wang's chamber music collaborations will take her throughout the US and Taiwan, including the first annual Taiwan Chamber Music Festival. Currently, she resides in New York City, where for several years she was the only student of Richard Goode.

PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello in E-flat major, K. 493
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Composed in 1786

If Mozart had not been so hectically busy during the first months of 1786, he might well have taken time to congratulate himself. His new opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, was scheduled for its premiere on May 1st at Vienna's Burgtheater; he had received from the emperor himself a commission for a one-act comic opera, *Der Schauspieldirektor* (*The Impresario*), to be performed at Schönbrunn Palace in February for the entertainment of the visiting Governor-General of the Netherlands; the list of subscribers for his Lenten concerts had swollen to 120 names, many from the loftiest reaches of Austrian society; he had almost more commissions than he could fill; he was in demand as a teacher; Constanze was pregnant with their third child (the Mozarts had six in the nine years of their marriage; only two survived infancy); and he was living in a spacious flat just around the corner from St. Stephen's Cathedral. His self-congratulations, however, would have been premature.

There had long been an undercurrent in Mozart's output of a particularly probing sort of expression, one very different from the Rococo charm and surface prettiness of the vast bulk of 18th-century music. As early as 1771, his overture to the oratorio *La Betulia liberata* (K. 118) was cast in a solemn minor mode. In 1773, when he was 17, the unexpected expressive elements that pierced the customary *galanterie* of his opera *Lucio Silla* had so disturbed and puzzled the Milanese audiences that his earlier popularity in Italy began to wane and he never returned to that country. Later that same year he visited Vienna and first learned of the new, passionate, Romantic sensibility — the so-called *Sturm und Drang* (*Storm and Stress*) — which was infusing the music of some of the best composers, including Haydn. When Mozart returned home to Salzburg in September, he wrote his stormy G minor Symphony (No. 25, K. 183).

As Mozart reached his full maturity in the years after arriving in Vienna in 1781, his most expressive manner of writing, whose chief evidences are the use of minor modes, chromaticism, rich counterpoint and thorough thematic development, appeared in his compositions with increasing frequency. Such characteristics had regularly been evident in the slow movements of his piano concertos, but in 1785

he actually dared to cast an entire composition (the Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466) in a minor key, though he did relieve that work's austerity somewhat by concluding it with a third-movement coda in a bright, major tonality. "An experiment, just an aberration," thought the Viennese public, who recognized Mozart's talent, if not its full range and power. They assumed he would return to the more popular and accepted means of expression the following season, and subscribed to his 1786 concerts in large numbers. In March he presented his patrons with the beautiful and deeply felt A major Concerto (K. 488), with a passionate middle movement in the key of F-sharp minor. A month later he introduced the Concerto in C minor (K. 491), which, unlike the earlier D minor Concerto, maintains its tragic mood to the last measure. "It is hard to imagine the expression on the faces of the Viennese public when on April 7, 1786, Mozart played this work at his subscription concert," wrote Alfred Einstein. Having thus stirred the doubts of Viennese audiences about the artistic path he was following, it is little wonder that *Figaro* received only small applause when it was premiered at the Burgtheater on May 1st. The following year his concert subscription list was returned almost blank. The year 1786, which had begun with high hope for great success, ended with frustration. The noble C major Concerto (K. 503) of December was the last such work he was to play at one of his own concerts, after which he was never again able to secure enough patrons to sponsor another similar venture.

Among the most important harbingers of the shift in Mozart's musical language was the G minor Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello (K. 478), which he completed on October 16, 1785 in response to a commission for three (some sources say six) such works from the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister. Hoffmeister had only entered the business a year earlier, and Mozart's extraordinary and disturbing score, for which the publisher saw little market, threw a fright into him. "Write more popularly, or else I can neither print nor pay for anything of yours!" he admonished. Mozart cast some quaint expletives upon the publisher's head, and said it was fine with him if the contract was canceled. It was. (Composer and publisher remained friends and associates, however. The following year, Hoffmeister brought out the Quartet in D major, K. 499, which still bears his name as sobriquet.) Rather surprisingly, then, Mozart completed

PROGRAM NOTES

another piano quartet, one in E-flat major, eight months later in Vienna, on June 3, 1786, without any known prospect of commission or publication. The new work was somewhat lighter in mood than its G minor predecessor, but was every bit as rich (and challenging to the contemporary Viennese taste) in its harmonic daring and contrapuntal elaborations. Artaria & Co., proving more bold than Hoffmeister, acquired the piece, and published both of the piano quartets a year later; there are hints in contemporary documents that they enjoyed a number of performances in Vienna. Mozart played K. 493 at the palace of his host in Prague, Count Joseph Thun, when he visited that city in January 1787 to observe for himself the wild success there of his *Marriage of Figaro*.

Alfred Einstein said of the E-flat Piano Quartet that “it is bright in color, but iridescent, with hints of darker shades,” a description that could well serve as a summation of many of the masterpieces of Mozart’s later years. The work opens with a broad, dramatic statement in chordal texture that serves as preface to the half-dozen motives comprising the first theme group. (Mozart’s ability to control an abundance of thematic units with ease and seeming inevitability is one of the most astonishing aspects of his formal technique.) The complementary subject is a graceful tune with a turn-figure initiated by the piano and quickly taken over by the violin. It is this motive which is used, through modulation and instrumental dialogue, as the exclusive material of the development section. The recapitulation provides both formal balance and further elaborations of the themes, with the turn-figure motive serving as the subject for a brief coda.

The Larghetto is an essay that could have been authored by none other than Mozart. Melding sonata-form balance, wistful grace and melodic suavity with audacious harmonic invention (almost every phrase in the movement is immediately repeated with some unexpectable change of harmony) and expressive intensity, it is precisely such surpassing music that has made Mozart a living presence in our modern world while the then-more-popular creations of his contemporaries have long since slipped from currency.

The finale is a large rondo with sonata elements based on a subject that Einstein deemed “the purest, most childlike and godlike melody ever sung,” a quality not lightly achieved by Mozart, since this composer who almost always worked

out his pieces fully in his head before committing a note to paper left two revised sketches for the theme. The movement continually tries to break into unrestrained jubilation, but is always held back by a certain inner tension expressed through the chromaticism of its harmony. Einstein wrote that this music recalled to him a remark Haydn once made to Mozart’s father about his extraordinary son: “[He has] the highest taste, and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

Quartet for Violin, Viola and Cello and Piano Sir William Walton (1902-1983)

Composed in 1918-1919;

revised in 1921 and 1975

**Premiered on September 19, 1924 in Liverpool
by members of the McCullagh String Quartet
and pianist J.E. Wallace**

Sir William Walton (he was knighted in 1951) was the son of two musicians: his mother was a singing teacher and his father, the local church choirmaster. Reports have it (though, unfortunately, without corroborating details) that he was singing Handel anthems before he could speak. Piano and violin lessons followed. He was packed off to the Choir School at Christ Church, Oxford, when he was 10 because his father knew the educational opportunities to be better there than in provincial Oldham, the family’s hometown. At age 16, Walton, already showing musical promise, was admitted to Christ Church College by the Right Rev. Thomas Banks Strong, Dean of the College, who also tapped the institution’s funds to be sure that the young student could meet his needs. Perhaps challenged by the Rev. Strong’s faith in him, or perhaps to fulfill an ambitious assignment from Hugh Allen, the noted organist and teacher who had just joined the Oxford faculty (he was knighted in 1920), sometime in 1918 Walton began a quartet for piano and strings, his first large-scale undertaking.

At just that time, the offspring of the wealthy, cultured and well-placed Sitwell family — Edith, Osbert and Sacheverell — were trolling England’s campuses in search of youthful artistic genius (a sort of social compensation for their mother having recently been clapped into Holloway Prison for three months when her husband refused to honor her debts). The Rev. Strong pointed the Sitwells toward young Walton, who invited them to his rooms in February 1919. Osbert later

PROGRAM NOTES

recounted the meeting: “Our host, not quite 17 years of age, we found to be a rather tall, slight figure, with pale skin and straight, fair hair.... Sensitiveness rather than toughness was the quality at first most apparent in him.... The atmosphere was not, however, easy; music showed a way out of the constraint, and after tea we pressed him to play some of his compositions to us. Accordingly, he sat down at the piano to play the slow movement from his Piano Quartet.... As he began to play, he revealed a lack of mastery of the instrument so that it was difficult to form an opinion of the music at first hearing. It was as impossible that afternoon to estimate his character or talents as it was to foresee that for the next seventeen years he would become an inseparable companion and friend.” Despite Walton’s poor showing at the keyboard, the Sitwells sensed that they have discovered an exceptional talent. Within a year, so absorbed in his musical studies that he failed all his other subjects, Walton left Oxford and moved in with his new family in London. Two years later he wrote *Facade* to Edith’s delightfully eccentric poems, and became a sensation at age 20. The Piano Quartet also won him a certain notoriety when it was chosen by Hugh Allen, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Sir Henry Hadow for a Carnegie Trust Publication Award. In gratitude for his experiences at Oxford, Walton dedicated the score to Rev. Strong. The Quartet was premiered in Liverpool in September 1924 and first heard in London five years later, and at its occasional performances since has continued to excite admiration that it was the creation of a 17-year-old composer with almost no formal training.

The Quartet’s opening sonata-form movement takes as its main theme a modal tune seeded by the English pastoral tradition; the viola is entrusted with the complimentary subject, a quiet, arching, leisurely melody. The main theme passes through some agitated transformations in the development section before being returned in its original form to begin the recapitulation. The scherzo is built from three thematic ideas: a sharply rhythmic strain opposing strings and piano, a fugato for the strings based on the main theme of the opening movement, and a grand tune of Elgarian breadth announced by the unison strings above full chords in the piano. These elements are subjected to some development and then returned in order in the movement’s second half. The outer sections of the Andante are given over to a soft, muted

theme, subtly harmonized, while the movement’s spacious central episode develops from a sweet, naive tune first sounded in the viola and includes reminiscences of the first movement’s main theme. The finale is a sonata-rondo, with a stamping dance melody as its returning theme and intervening episodes encompassing an expressive cello strain and an imitative passage based on a muscular subject for the strings.

Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello in G minor, Op. 25

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Composed in 1857-1861

**Premiered on November 16, 1862 in Vienna
by the composer as pianist and members
of the Hellmesberger Quartet**

The high-minded direction of Johannes Brahms’ musical career was evident from his teenage years: as a lad, he studied the masterpieces of the Austro-German tradition with Eduard Marxsen, the most illustrious piano teacher in his native Hamburg; he played Bach and Beethoven at his earliest recitals; his first published compositions were not showy virtuoso trifles but three ambitious piano sonatas inspired by Classical models; and he was irresistibly drawn to Joseph Joachim and the Schumanns and others of the most exalted musicians of his day. When Schumann hailed him as the savior of German music, the rightful heir to the mantle of Beethoven, in his famous article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1853, Brahms was only too eager to accept both the renown and the responsibility inherent in such a lofty appraisal. He tried sketching a symphony as early as 1855 (not completing it, however, until two decades later), but his principal means of fulfilling Schumann’s prophecy during the early phase of his creative life were focused first on the genres of piano works and songs, and then on chamber music.

Finished compositions did not come easily for Brahms, however, and he made numerous attempts to satisfy himself with a chamber piece before he allowed the publication of his Piano Trio, Op. 8 in 1854. (He destroyed at least three earlier efforts in that form.) The following year, he turned to writing quartets for piano, violin, viola and cello, a genre whose only precedents were the two by Mozart and a single specimen by Schumann. Work on the quartets did not go smoothly, however, and he laid one (in C minor, eventually Op. 60) aside for

PROGRAM NOTES

almost two decades, and tinkered with the other two for the next half-dozen years in Hamburg and at his part-time post as music director for the court Lippe-Detmold, midway between Frankfurt and Hamburg.

Brahms was principally based in Hamburg during those years, usually staying with his parents, but in 1860, when he was 27 years old and eager to find the quiet and privacy to work on his compositions, he rented spacious rooms (“a quite charming flat with a garden,” he said) in the suburb of Hamm from one Frau Dr. Elisabeth Rössing, a neighbor of two members of the local women’s choir he was then directing. Hamm was to be his home for the next two years, and there he worked on the Variations on a Theme of Schumann for Piano Duet (Op. 23), the Handel Variations (Op. 24) and the Piano Quartets in G minor (Op. 25) and A major (Op. 26). Brahms dedicated the A major Quartet to his hospitable landlady. The two piano quartets were finally finished by early autumn 1861, and given a private reading by some unknown local musicians and Clara Schumann during her visit to Hamm shortly thereafter. Brahms basked in the glow of Clara’s approval of both his new pieces and the direction of his career.

In September 1862, Brahms succumbed to a long-held desire and visited Vienna. He had already made several professional contacts in the city, perhaps most notably with Joseph Hellmesberger, director of the Vienna Conservatory and leader of a highly regarded string quartet. Hellmesberger introduced his German visitor to Julius Epstein, professor of piano at the school, and an evening

of Brahms’ music was planned for Epstein’s apartment, located, fortuitously, at Schulerstrasse 8, the very building in which Mozart had composed *The Marriage of Figaro*. Hellmesberger and his colleagues eagerly joined Brahms in reading the two new piano quartets, and the violinist echoed Schumann’s pronouncement when it was over: “This is indeed Beethoven’s heir.” Hellmesberger insisted that they mark Brahms’ arrival in Vienna by presenting the G minor Quartet at his recital on November 16th in the hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde; the program garnered sufficient success to warrant scheduling another concert two weeks later to introduce the A major Quartet. Those events solidified Brahms’ reputation in Vienna, and were instrumental in helping him decide to settle in the city for good in August 1863, the same month that Fritz Simrock published the G minor Piano Quartet.

The first movement of the G minor Piano Quartet contains an abundance of thematic material woven into a seamless continuum through Brahms’ consummate contrapuntal skill. Balanced within its closely reasoned sonata form are pathos and vigor, introspection and jubilation, storm and tranquility. The second movement (Intermezzo), cast in the traditional form of scherzo and trio, is formed from long-spun melodies in gentle, rocking rhythms. The Andante is in a broad three-part structure, with the middle section taking on a snappy martial air. The Gypsy Rondo finale is a spirited essay much in the style of Brahms’ invigorating Hungarian Dances.

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