



Ying Quartet

Sunday, April 11, 7:00pm PDT and Thursday, April 15, 6:00pm PDT

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Music at Kohl's Virtual Season 38! We're coming to you online all season as we continue to observe the highest level of safety regulations and caution. While we miss being with you live and in person in the warm and intimate setting of the Kohl Mansion's Great Hall, we are grateful that you have chosen to join us in this new virtual realm to enjoy great performances from the comfort of your home.

This season affords us new opportunities to share these concert broadcasts with audiences far and wide outside the concert hall walls, as well as the chance to see and hear our superb performers in their own home towns. We're delighted to be able to bring you these programs – brief, compact, modestly priced, and easily accessible from your personal screens. You can still enjoy the popular, lively introductions by beloved musicologist Kai Christiansen before each concert, as well as informal, up-close conversations with the artists inviting us to learn about their lives off the stage.

Music at Kohl is now global! Friends and family members near and far may sign up online at www.musicatkohl.org and become part of our extended concert family. We hope you'll invite them to experience Music at Kohl Online!

As we begin with great anticipation and enthusiasm to plan for a reunion in the Great Hall of the Kohl Mansion in the future, we are grateful to be with you "virtually" in your own homes! Great music continues to bring us joy at a safe and comfortable distance. Thank you for joining us!

Zerlina Chen Hayes
President

Patricia Kristof Moy
Executive Director

Tickets and information: 650.762.1130 ~ www.musicatkohl.org

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Ying Quartet

Robin Scott, violin
Janet Ying, violin
Phillip Ying, viola
David Ying, cello

Program

String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127

Ludwig van Beethoven

Maestoso - Allegro
Adagio, ma non troppo e molto cantabile
Scherzando vivace - Presto
Finale

Italian Serenade

Hugo Wolf

The Ying Quartet is represented by MKI Artists; One Lawson Lane, Suite 320, Burlington, VT 05401.
<http://www.ying4.com/>

Music at Kohl Mansion is presented in collaboration with
Mercy High School, Burlingame – Natalie Cirigliano Brosnan, Head of School.

Program Notes

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827

String Quartet No. 12 in E-flat major, Op. 127, 1824-1825

Beethoven's Op. 127 is the first of his legendary "late quartets," six string quartets that comprise Beethoven's final and perhaps greatest musical achievement. Besides some aborted sketches, he had not worked significantly in the genre for over a decade since the Op. 95 "Serioso" quartet of 1810. In the interim, Beethoven composed his final piano sonatas, the *Missa Solemnis* and the *9th Symphony*, all magnificent works of towering stature. The last piano sonatas, "late" in the same profound sense as the quartets would be, inaugurated several of the stylistic traits of his final period: innovative forms bordering on fantasia, sublime beauty, deeply intimate emotion, epic lengths, superhuman virtuosity and a beautiful obsession with seemingly inexhaustible variation. Beethoven's final music seems to plumb the depths from the personal to the universal and still, somehow, beyond: transcendental.

Paradoxically, by comparison with the ineffable nature of his late quartets, Beethoven's personal life at the time is a sad tale of endless woe. By 1816, Beethoven was totally deaf, a fact that only increased his isolation and loneliness. He had suffered an unrequited love, an obsessive legal battle over his suicidal nephew Karl, and problems with his publishers, finances and physical health. But in November of 1822, the hermitic Beethoven received a godsend: a letter from a young Russian Prince Galitzin who requested "one, two or three new quartets for which labor I will be glad to pay you what you think proper." From May 1824 to November 1826 (four months before his death), Beethoven monumentally composed the three quartets for Galitzin as well as two additional quartets, his final music.

The first of the late quartets, *String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127*, was completed in February of 1825. With inadequate time for rehearsals, the Schuppanzigh Quartet gave the premiere on March 1825 in Vienna and it was rather poorly received. One reviewer wrote that the work was an "incomprehensible, incoherent, vague, over-extended series of fantasias—chaos, from which flashes of genius emerged from time to time like lightning bolts from a black thunder cloud." But the masterwork eventually pleased while enjoying a number of performances during Beethoven's last years.

Although Op. 127 comprises four movements, it is anything but conventional. The opening movement largely follows a first-movement sonata design, but it presents a somewhat strange dramatic polarity between the gentle lyricism of the main theme and a brace of bold declamatory chords that announce the music and brashly interrupt it again three more times with a transformative effect. As if finally able to complete itself, the tender theme concludes with a surprising and poignant turn of delicate grace more like ultra-refined Mozart than Beethoven.

The second movement places us squarely in the astonishing realm of late Beethoven with an epic set of variations on a very simple but exquisitely beautiful theme. These are not Beethoven's typical variations full of brio, virtuosity and shocking contrasts. Instead, Beethoven offers a rhapsodic slow movement in which sustained lyricism spans great arcs of loosely braided contrapuntal textures in what is ultimately an extended and passionately emotional song.

A bristling Scherzo brings the music back to earth with muscular drive, rhythmic complexity full of starts and stops and a darker, quicksilver trio, all recalling some of Beethoven's finest symphonic writing. Like

the other movements, this is ample and rich for a scherzo including a characteristically humorous ending.

The shortest of the movements, the finale, curiously without tempo or character marking, appears to drive the quartet home with a beneficent, even jolly affect. It features two themes, one buoyant and lighthearted, the other, insistent and heavy with stomping accents. But something special happens at the end, one of so many magical moments throughout the late quartets. Beethoven writes a coda changing the key, meter, tempo and thereby the fundamental character of the music in a transcendent miracle of variation.

Hugo Wolf, 1860-1903 **Italian Serenade, 1887**

Hugo Wolf was an elusive figure remembered primarily for his masterful lieder, his trenchant criticism of Brahms and his eventual decay into dissolution and madness. He was a fierce disciple of Wagner and the new German school and can be regarded as a late Viennese Romantic before the turning of the tide with Schoenberg after Wolf's death. Leaving only a few works for small ensemble, his lone and rarely performed string Quartet in D minor is the closest thing we have to Wagnerian or even mature Mahlerian chamber music. Wolf also penned a two single movement works for string quartet, a substantial *Intermezzo* and his one "outlier", the celebrated *Italian Serenade*. Completed in 1886, the *Italian Serenade* occupied Wolf for some time with the word "Italian" added to the simple title Serenade only in later revisions. Nonetheless, the predominantly buoyant music, tuneful, colorful and rhythmically animated, seems to naturally support free associations with things Italian if not in some way enhanced by association with Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* and Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* written only a few years after Wolf's musical postcard. A lithely ornamented melody warbles to the evocation of strumming guitars with a strong penchant for dance if not even a suggestion of operatic comedy.

The word serenade historically implies music of honor, tribute or amorous entreaty, music that is calm, "light" and suitable for relaxed social evenings. It is music that entertains and even dazzles with delight. Wolf's bright serenade largely conforms to this character. But there is more than just this in the music. The rhythmic and occasionally contrapuntal writing is skillful and meticulous with a rich variety of textures weaving throughout. The music develops into a sharply articulated adventure with a bit more intrigue one might expect of a little "night music." Wolf's late Viennese Romantic sensibilities emerge in the middle as the texture dramatically falls apart into dissonant recitative, a kind of expressionistic call and response accompanied by disorienting swirls, mocking echoes, parody and a brief touch of the macabre. But it seems entirely consonant with an Italian evening, particularly the wild intrigue of a psychedelic Venetian carnival. And just like a group of masked figures that approach, pass and disappear into the night, the intrigue evaporates and the music resumes its giddy serenade.

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Kai Christiansen is a musicologist, writer and lecturer on chamber music
and is the founder of earsense, an online chamber music exploratorium at earsense.org

Meet the Musicians

Ying Quartet

Robin Scott, violin

Janet Ying, violin

Phillip Ying, viola

David Ying, cello

The Grammy Award-winning Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today's world. Now in its third decade, the Quartet has established itself as an ensemble of the highest musical qualifications. Their performances regularly take place in many of the world's most important concert halls; at the same time, the Quartet's belief that concert music can also be a meaningful part of everyday life has also drawn the foursome to perform in settings as diverse as the workplace, schools, juvenile prisons, and the White House. In fact, the Ying Quartet's constant quest to explore the creative possibilities of the string quartet has led it to an unusually diverse array of musical projects and interests.

The Ying's ongoing LifeMusic commissioning project, created in response to their commitment to expanding the rich string quartet repertoire, has already achieved an impressive history. Supported by the Institute for American Music, the Ying Quartet commissions both established and emerging composers to create music that reflects contemporary American life. Recent works include Billy Childs' *Awakening*; Lera Auerbach's *Sylvia's Diary*; Lowell Liebermann's *String Quartet No. 3, To the Victims of War*; Sebastian Currier's *Next Atlantis*; and John Novacek's *Three Rags for String Quartet*. In August 2016 the Ying Quartet released a new Schumann/ Beethoven recording on Sono Luminus with the cellist Zuill Bailey, and in 2016-17 the five toured with the Schumann Cello Concerto transcribed for cello and string quartet along with Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata," also reimagined for cello quintet.

The Quartet's recent seasons featured performances with the jazz pianist Billy Childs, a tour of China, performances for the Philadelphia and Phoenix Chamber Music Societies, and performances in the group's role as quartet-in-residence at the Bowdoin International Music Festival.

The Ying Quartet's many other recordings reflect many of the group's wide-ranging musical interests and have generated consistent, enthusiastic acclaim. The group's CD "American Anthem" (Sono Luminus), heralding the music of Randall Thompson, Samuel Barber, and Howard Hanson, was released in 2013 to rave reviews; their 2007 Telarc release of the three Tchaikovsky Quartets and the *Souvenir de Florence* (with James Dunham and Paul Katz) was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Chamber Music Performance category.

The Ying Quartet first came to professional prominence in the early 1990s during their years as resident quartet of Jesup, Iowa, a farm town of 2000 people. Playing before audiences of six to six hundred in homes, schools, churches, and banks, the Quartet had its first opportunities to enable music and creative endeavor to become an integral part of community life. The Quartet considers its time in Jesup the foundation of its present musical life and goals.

As quartet-in-residence at the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, the Ying Quartet teaches in the string department and leads a rigorous, sequentially designed chamber music program. One cornerstone of chamber music activity at Eastman is the noted "Music for All" program, in which all students have the opportunity to perform in community settings beyond the concert hall. The Quartet is the ensemble-in-residence at the Bowdoin International Music Festival, and from 2001-2008, the members of the Ying Quartet were the Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University.