

St. Lawrence String Quartet
Geoff Nuttall, violin
Scott St. John, violin
Lesley Robertson, viola
Christopher Costanza, cello

Katzin Concert Hall
Guest Artists Concert Series
Friday, February 5th, 2010
7:30PM

Program

String Quartet in C major, Op. 54, No. 2

Franz Josef Haydn
(1732-1809)

Vivace

Adagio

Menuetto: Allegretto

Finale: Adagio – Presto - Adagio

String Quartet in F major

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Allegro moderato (tres doux)

Assez vif - (tres rythme) - Lent - Tempo 1

Tres lent

Vif et agite

****Intermission****

String Quartet (2008)

John Adams
(b. 1947)

In two movements

String Quartet was composed for the St. Lawrence String Quartet and was commissioned by The Juilliard School with the generous support of the Trust of Francis Goelet, Stanford Lively Arts Stanford University, and The Banff Centre.



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The St. Lawrence String Quartet

<http://www.slsq.com>

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“Celebrating 20 years, this group has matured and deepened without losing its freshness and edge.”

--The Globe and Mail, April 2009

The St. Lawrence String Quartet (SLSQ) has established itself among the world-class chamber ensembles of its generation. Its mission: bring every piece of music to the audience in vivid color, with pronounced communication and teamwork, and great respect to the composer. Since winning both the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1992, the quartet has delighted audiences with its spontaneous, passionate, and dynamic performances. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* magazine writes, "the St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection."

The SLSQ is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a new recording of Haydn and Dvořák quartets through a partnership with the innovative company ArtistShare.com. ArtistShare offers artists a ground-breaking way to embark on a recording project: the musicians maintain complete creative control, communicate directly with fans, and offer them a way to experience the project from its inception to fruition, as well as participate at the level they wish, from a free download to various membership tiers.

In concert, the foursome regularly delivers traditional quartet repertoire, but is also fervently committed to performing and expanding the works of living composers. In January 2009, they premiered John Adams's "String Quartet," and in Fall 2010 they will premiere a new work by Osvaldo Golijov. Adams penned his "String Quartet" (co-commissioned by The Juilliard School, Stanford Lively Arts, and the Banff Centre) expressly for the St. Lawrence. Golijov's forthcoming new work (commissioned by Stanford Lively Arts) is expected to build on the success of their previous collaboration, which culminated in the twice-Grammy-nominated SLSQ recording of the composer's *Yiddishbuk* (EMI) in 2002. The quartet also paid tribute to a lineup of Canadian composers with performances of five new string quartets around their native country. The St. Lawrence has active working relationships with numerous other composers, including R. Murray Schafer, Christos Hatzis, Jonathan Berger, Ka Nin Chan, Roberto Sierra, and Mark Applebaum.



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The SLSQ has been involved in numerous inventive collaborations, including projects with the renowned Pilobolus Dance Theatre and the Emerson Quartet. In 2007 they joined with soprano Heidi Grant Murphy and pianist Kevin Murphy to premiere Roberto Sierra's "Songs from the Diaspora" – a commission through the Music Accord consortium. They have also performed R. Murray Shafer's Concerto for Quartet and Orchestra "4-40" with Peter Oundjian and the Toronto Symphony, Emmanuel Villaume and the Spoleto Festival Orchestra, and Yuli Turovsky with I Musici de Montreal.

Having been privileged to study with the Emerson, Tokyo and Juilliard String Quartets, the St. Lawrence are themselves passionate educators. Since 1998 they have held the position of Ensemble in Residence at Stanford University. This residency includes working with students of music as well as extensive collaborations with other faculty and departments using music to explore a myriad of topics. The foursome's passion for opening up musical arenas to players and listeners alike is evident in their annual summer chamber music seminar at Stanford and their many forays into the depths of musical meaning with preeminent music educator Robert Kapilow.

Violist Lesley Robertson is a founding member of the group, and hails from Edmonton Alberta. Cellist Christopher Costanza is from Utica, NY and joined the quartet in 2004. Violinists Geoff Nuttall and Scott St. John both grew up in London Ontario; Geoff is a founding member and Scott joined in 2006. Depending on concert repertoire, the two alternate the role of first violin. All four members of the quartet live and teach at beautiful Stanford University, in the Bay Area of California.

The SLSQ is deeply committed to bringing music to less traditional venues outside the classroom or concert hall. Regardless of the venue, the St. Lawrence players maintain a strong desire to share the wonders of chamber music with their listeners, a characteristic of the foursome that has led them to a more informal performance style than one might expect from chamber musicians. "Play every concert like it's your last; every phrase like it's the most important thing you've ever said," Geoff Nuttall asserts. "Remember that the only reason you're there is to make people cry and sweat and shiver, and give them that incredible sense of creation happening before your eyes. That's the reason we all play. Otherwise there's no point."

October, 2009 – please destroy any previously or undated versions.



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Notes on the program

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

String Quartet in C, Op. 54 No.2 (Hob.III:57) (1788)

Johann Tost was a violinist in the Esterházy court orchestra, a colleague of Haydn, who was what we would now call the music director, or Kapellmeister. Tost led the second violins for five years, during which time he began to develop a head for business. He both copied and distributed music. In 1789, Haydn gave him the authority to sell rights to two of his symphonies (Nos. 88 and 89) and six quartets (Opp. 54 and 55) to a publisher in Paris. For good measure, Tost threw in a symphony by Haydn's friend Adalbert Gyrowetz and had it published under Haydn's name. The following year, when Haydn was busy with arrangements for traveling to England, Tost was entrusted with six more quartets (Op. 64), which he sold to a Vienna publisher with the dedication "to Monsieur Jean Tost." At this point, with twelve string quartets associated with his name, Tost seems to have parted company with Haydn, marrying a wealthy Esterházy widow, setting up in business in Vienna, selling equipment to the Austrian army during the Napoleonic wars among other things – before falling back on his violin to pay the bills when his business dealings failed later in life.

Op. 54 No. 2 is the finest of the *Tost* quartets; a work of great thoughtfulness and intensity. In his book on the Haydn quartets, the critic and broadcaster Hans Keller claims: "There is no more original Haydn quartet, nor any that contains more prophetic innovations." Haydn's opening fanfare immediately commands our attention. Vigorous and incisive, with a striking use of silence, this opening phrase is asymmetrical, with five measures, rather than the customary four. When it reappears later in the movement, Haydn lessens the suspense of the silence by filling the space with a ghostly echo of itself. Together with the daring key changes and uncompromisingly virtuoso writing for the first violin, Haydn's music reveals qualities that Beethoven was soon to explore in his own quartets.

The brief slow movement opens with a verse of solemn, chorale-like chords. Three times repeated, it provides the foundation for a free improvisation in which the first violin weaves a poignant rhapsody. The music leads without pause into the minuet, where the tension is immediately released. At first cheerful, the minuet's central trio picks up on an off-the-beat accented chord and squeezes it into an anguished chord that anticipates a famous chord in Wagner's *Tristan*. The Minuet was so popular with the Esterházy's that Prince Nicolaus had its main theme used as the tune of a musical clock in his summer palace. The surprises continue into the finale. Haydn begins the movement slowly, as though introducing a quicker movement to follow. Soon, however, the music opens into a magnificently noble melody from the violin, sonorously underpinned by the cello, which quite dominates the movement. Eventually it gives way to a scurrying *Presto* section, a kind of frenzied echo of the opening movement's main theme. But this proves to be a brief interlude, before, in a gesture of the utmost confidence, Haydn brings back the glorious slow melody to conclude the quartet.

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MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

Quartet in F (1902-3)

When the French composer Vincent d'Indy first heard Ravel's new quartet at its première in Paris on March 5, 1904, he said: "It is a piece worthy of any composer's work at the end of a long career." Ravel, however, was just 28 when he wrote the masterpiece that was to become a cornerstone of the quartet repertoire and one of the most popular of all quartets. He dedicated the piece to Gabriel Fauré, whom he considered his true mentor. Its roots, though, are intertwined with those of the D major quartet of César Franck, composed two decades earlier. And in between these two landmark works, the Franck and the Ravel, equally intertwined with both, lies a third masterpiece – the only quartet of Claude Debussy.

Ravel, the youngest of the three composers, was enthusiastically absorbing the music of Debussy, twelve years his senior, when he began work on his string quartet. He went to every one of the first 30 performances of Debussy's revolutionary opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and had the sound of Debussy's earlier quartet so much in his head that some of its lifeblood carried over into his own piece. Still, Debussy had already borrowed the idea of Spanish coloring from Ravel's *Habañera* and he remained heavily influenced by the younger composer's *Gaspard de la nuit* and by his piano writing in general. In his quartet, his longest work to date, Ravel borrowed the use of Eastern exoticism and modality of the harmony from Debussy. He also borrowed the richly scored textures and the idea of a pizzicato second movement.

Both Ravel and Debussy followed Franck's lead in using a single theme, transformed both melodically and harmonically throughout all four movements. With each appearance of the theme, Ravel makes subtle changes, using the thematic unity to bring about a constantly shifting sound world. When compared with Debussy - to whom he frequently was in his lifetime and after - Ravel is the perfectionist, the polisher of classical gems. Debussy, on the other hand, is the dreamer, the visionary who summons up entirely new sound worlds from the depths. Being the younger of the two, Ravel inevitably, suffered from the comparison. Critics were quick to comment on the similarity of his quartet with that of Debussy. They divided themselves and the followers of the composers, into two polarized camps. From this point on, the relationship of these two revolutionary French composers was to grow uneasy. Nevertheless, when Fauré criticized Ravel's finale as a failure, Debussy was magnanimous in the way he reassured Ravel: "In the name of the gods of music and in my name too, do not alter a thing in your quartet." Years later, the American composer and critic Virgil Thomson called Ravel's Quartet: "The classic ideal that is every Frenchman's dream and every foreigner's dream of France. It is the dream of an equilibrium in which sentiment, sensuality, and intelligence are united at their highest intensity."

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JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947)

String Quartet

String Quartet is John Adams's second full-sized work for the medium and his first without electronics. His first string quartet, *John's Book of Alleged Dances* (1994), was composed for the Kronos Quartet and is accompanied by pre-recorded CD, and his second string quartet, *Fellow Traveler* (2007), is a five-minute piece written for Peter Sellars's birthday.

It was a stunning St. Lawrence String Quartet performance of *Alleged Dances* at Stanford University in 2007 that inspired Mr. Adams to compose a piece for them, leading to the world premiere at The Juilliard School and a subsequent tour. String Quartet was commissioned by The Juilliard School with the generous support of the Trust of Francis Goelet, Stanford Lively Arts Stanford University, and The Banff Centre.



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