

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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COVER: Félicien Rops, *Gaspard de la Nuit* (detail), 1868,
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection



The Sixty-eighth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell
and F. Lamot Belin

Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,739th Concert

Chiara String Quartet

Rebecca Fischer and Julie Yoon, *violin*
Jonah Sirota, *viola*
Gregory Beaver, *cello*

Presented in honor of
The Darker Side of Light:
Arts of Privacy 1850–1900

October 14, 2009
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall

Admission free

Program

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

String Quartet no. 1 in B Minor, op. 50

Allegro

Andante molto

Andante

Anton Webern (1883–1945)

Five Pieces for String Quartet, op. 5

Heftig bewegt

Sehr langsam

Sehr lebhaft

Sehr langsam

In zarter Bewegung

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

String Quartet

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino, doucement espressif

Très modéré – Très mouvementé

The Musicians

Described by the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* as “vastly talented, vastly resourceful, and vastly committed to the music of their time,” the Chiara String Quartet reaches from the concert hall into clubs, bars, and galleries, expanding the places to hear live classical music while returning chamber music to its roots in intimate spaces. In addition to traditional concert venues, such as Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, Harris Hall in Aspen, Colorado, Philadelphia’s Kimmel Center, and New York’s Weill Recital Hall, the Quartet has performed at Caffè Vivaldi in New York’s West Village, Kansas City’s The Brick, Houston’s Mucky Duck, and Chicago’s The Hideout.

The Chiara Quartet has been quartet-in-residence at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln since 2005, and was recently named Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University. The Quartet founded the Red River Chamber Music Festival, a summer study and performance festival in Grand Forks, North Dakota, and participates in Greenwood Music Camp, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Chamber Music Institute. Recently awarded the Guarneri Quartet Residency Award for artistic excellence by Chamber Music America, the Quartet’s other honors include a top prize at the Paolo Borciani International Competition, winning the Astral Artistic Services National Audition, and winning first prize at the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition.

Outside the United States, the quartet has performed at the American Academy in Rome, in Sweden with clarinetist Håkan Rosengren, and at Munich’s Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, performing *Different Trains* by Steve Reich. Chiara has premiered works by Gabriela Lena Frank, Jefferson Friedman, Nico Muhly, Randall Snyder, and Michael Wittgraf. Its discography includes the Mozart and Brahms clarinet quintets with Håkan Rosengren and the world premiere recordings of Robert Sirota’s *Triptych* and Gabriela Lena Frank’s *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout*. The Chiara String Quartet appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Artspromo of Shutesbury, Massachusetts.

Program Notes

The art of the late nineteenth century largely connotes impressionism, paintings of café-concerts and the open air that invoke the entertainments of city life and the pleasures of the landscape. A less familiar side to the story exists, one in a realm of sober contemplation and *recherché*. These sometimes enigmatic and often melancholy subjects explore an altogether different dimension of aesthetic experience and appreciation. In this discreet world of individual collecting, prints, drawings, and small sculpture were kept aside in portfolios or stored away in cabinets for more purposeful, private study, much like taking a book from the shelf for quiet enjoyment.

The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy 1850–1900, the exhibition currently on view in the National Gallery's prints and drawings galleries, includes more than a hundred works in the Gallery's extensive collections that reflect this late-Romantic sensibility. Such an encounter with art was a private affair that often encouraged the investigation of highly suggestive, sometimes disturbing subject matter. These complex states of mind and symptoms of deep social tension surfaced in opium dreams, obsessions over a lover, despairing contemplations of suicide, and abject meditations on violence and death. By no means restricted to the visual arts, this somber aesthetic found voice in poetry, prose, theater, and, not least, music. This milieu attracted the talents of academically trained artists, realists, impressionists, and especially symbolists. Much like their musical counterparts, symbolist artists in particular sought to dissolve any simple equation between the experience of art and the empirical world.

Composers, too, responded to the various moods of symbolism, especially in their chamber music. The most famous music of Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924), César Franck (1822–1890), and Henri Duparc (1848–1933), for example, is characterized by balance, pleasant sonorities, and flowing lines, but these composers also explored the darker side of musical expression. One thinks of the contemplative *Andante* from Fauré's *String Quartet*, op. 121, the enigmatic Scherzo from Franck's *String Quartet in D Major*, or such Duparc

songs as *Chanson triste* (Sad Song), *La Vie antérieure* (The Former Life) and *Soupir* (Sigh).

Several comparisons can be made between the music on this program and prints on display in *The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy 1850–1900*. As described in the exhibition catalogue, many European artists of the late nineteenth century sought to draw attention to unsettling social problems lurking beneath the shining veneer of a new industrial era. In the case of Sergei Prokofiev's *String Quartet no. 1 in B Minor*, the quartet opens with a cheerful, dance-like *Allegro* arranged in rondo form. A playful, comic mood prevails in the second movement, *Andante molto*, which contrasts a lyric primary theme against crisp pizzicato accompaniment. But the third movement, *Andante*, contains a fascinating juxtaposition of moods in which lush tranquility gives way to stormy tribulation. In the end, Prokofiev achieves a sense of finality without an ostentatious finish; the music simply dies away. A proponent of neoclassical and modernist styles, Prokofiev in this movement recalls the moodiness of late romanticism.

The joviality of the first and second movements of Prokofiev's *String Quartet no. 1* may be compared to the naïve bourgeois eroticism of Max Klinger's etchings *At the Gate* and *In the Park* from his series *Eine Liebe* (1887) which depict lovers flirting coyly in a garden. It could also be viewed as a reference to the passing of a nostalgic and sentimental era, just as Louis-Ernest Barrias' bronze sculpture *Nature Unveiling Herself before Science* (1900) mourns the loss of innocence in the modern age.

In 1909 Anton von Webern composed *Five Movements for String Quartet*, op. 5, one year after completing his formal studies with Arnold Schoenberg. Webern arranged the work for string orchestra in 1928 and completed a further revision the following year. The score often calls for muted strings and employs a variety of bowing techniques ranging from *col legno* (with the wood of the bow) to *am steg* (at the bridge). Throughout the work, Webern uses the term *zart* to indicate that the music should be played tenderly, yet a general mood of inner discontent and torment prevails over tenderness. Only the final movement brings the hope of solace, and even that is tentative.

When Claude Debussy's *String Quartet in G Minor* received its first performance in 1893 at the Société Nationale de Musique, Debussy was as yet unrecognized by French critics and the public. The work was received by only a small group of friends and supporters, much like the drawings and sculptures in the exhibition. The vigor of the main theme of the opening movement, *Animé et très décidé* (lively and very decisive), is contrasted by a delicate second theme, stated in a soft dynamic at a slower tempo. After the return of the principal theme, the movement concludes with a pentatonic flourish—a testament to the influence of Indonesian gamelan music, which Debussy heard at the Paris Exposition in 1889.

Pizzicato is employed liberally in the second movement, *Assez vif et bien rythmé* (fairly lively and rhythmic). The muted strings and soaring lead melody of the third movement, *Andantino doucement expressif* (slightly slower than andante, sweet and expressive), evoke a quintessentially romantic experience. It is this movement that perhaps best embodies the intimate, erotic atmosphere of the *fin de siècle* Parisian boudoir, elegantly depicted in Albert Besnard's etching *Woman with a Vase* (1894) and Mary Cassat's drawing *The Coiffure* (1891), both included in the exhibition.

In the final movement of Debussy's quartet, *Très modéré* (greatly moderated), a state of tension is highlighted by a tonally ambiguous theme and tremolo effects. According to Debussy scholar Déirdre Donnellon, the quartet exhibits the influence of César Franck, who was Debussy's organ instructor at the Paris conservatory. In turn, Debussy's string quartet provided a model for Maurice Ravel's *String Quartet in F Major*, composed between 1902 and 1903.

Program notes by Matthew Thomas

Upcoming Concerts at the National Gallery of Art

National Gallery of Art Piano Trio

Music by Franck, Jongen, and Vieuxtemps

October 18, 2009

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

Presented in honor of

The Darker Side of Light: Arts of Privacy, 1850–1900



Carmina

Instrumental music from the Golden Age of The Netherlands

October 21, 2009

Wednesday, 12:10 pm

West Building Lecture Hall

Presented in honor of

Judith Leyster, 1609–1660