

and at the same time lucid, finely worked out, and always in the quartet idiom." Schumann was so enamored with the final outcome of his endeavor that he wrote to the publisher, Gottfried Christoph Härtel, saying: "I...regard them as my best work of the earlier days, and Mendelssohn often spoke to me in the same sense." (Mendelssohn was the dedicatee of the *A Minor Quartet*.) The work opens with an introductory statement (*Andante espressivo*) in a polyphonic setting. Atypically, the introduction includes no thematic reference to the following *Allegro*, in which chromatic major sixth chords "provide a foretaste of Loge's motive in the Ring cycle" (James Lyon, editor, *The American Record Guide*). The second movement (*Scherzo: Presto*) is a spirited galop, unrelenting in its forward drive except for the trio section, which gives a moment of reprieve before the return of the driving rhythm. The third movement (*Adagio*) pays homage to Beethoven with its melodic theme that mimics the third movement of his *Ninth Symphony*. The finale (*Presto*), in sonata-allegro form, "fairly cries out for a full orchestra, and, in fact, its sound and fury are just barely contained in the quartet frame" (Lyon).

Programs notes by Elmer Booze

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.

The Sixty-second Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2485th Concert

YSAÏE STRING QUARTET

GUILLAUME SUTRE, violin **LUC-MARIE AGUERA, violin**
MIGUEL DA SILVA, viola **FRANÇOIS SALQUE, cello**

Sunday Evening, 15 February 2004
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1743–1805)

Quartet in D Major
Op. 54, No. 2 (1788)

Vivace
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegretto
Finale: Adagio; presto; adagio

Anton Webern
(1883–1945)

Five Movements for String Quartet
Op. 5 (1909)

Heftig bewegt
Sehr langsam
Sehr bewegt
Sehr langsam
In zarter Bewegung

Intermission

Anton Webern

Six Bagatelles for String Quartet
Op. 9 (1911–1913)

Mässig
Leicht bewegt
Ziemlich fliessend
Sehr langsam
Äusserst langsam
Fließend

Robert Schumann
(1810–1856)

Quartet in A Major
Op. 41, No. 3 (1842)

Andante espressivo; allegro molto moderato
Assai agitato
Adagio molto
Finale: Allegro molto vivace

The Musicians

One of the world's most widely traveled quartets, the **Ysaÿe String Quartet** has been invited to perform throughout Europe, the United States, Central America, and Asia, in such renowned venues as Carnegie Hall, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, the Théâtre de la Ville and the Théâtre des Champs Elysée in Paris, Wigmore Hall in London, and the Musikverein in Vienna. Formed in 1984, the Ysaÿe String Quartet is named after the violinist and composer Eugene Ysaÿe (1858–1931), who was a powerful influence on the music world of his day. In 1988 the quartet captured international attention when it became the first French quartet ever to win the grand prize at the Evian (now Bordeaux) International String Competition. An extraordinary 1989 debut at the Salzburg Festival resulted in an immediate reengagement for the following summer. By 1992 the group had established itself as one of Europe's preeminent ensembles, thanks to highly acclaimed cycles of the six Mozart quartets dedicated to Haydn in both Salzburg and Vienna. In 1994 the quartet appeared at the National Gallery in connection with the Gallery's salute to the Louvre Museum on the occasion of its 200th anniversary.

The Ysaÿe String Quartet has recorded on the Harmonia Mundi, Philips, and Decca labels. For the latter label the quartet recorded the complete string quartets of Félix Mendelssohn and the piano quartets and quintets of Gabriel Fauré with pianist and fellow Frenchman Pascal Rogé. The members of the quartet are on the faculty of the Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique de Paris, where they have established a special class for string quartets. The quartet members perform on vintage string instruments by Guadagnini (Parma 1770), Storioni (Cremona 1790), and an anonymous eighteenth-century Italian luthier. The Ysaÿe String Quartet appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Melvin Kaplan, Inc., of Burlington, Vermont.

Program Notes

Written in 1788 and published the following year, Haydn's *Quartet in C Major, Op. 54, no. 2*, is the product of his second compositional period (1781–1803). This work, which possesses an impassioned second movement and is considered a masterpiece of quartet writing, is nevertheless infrequently performed. The first movement (*Vivace*) is bound in an asymmetric sonata-allegro form in which only two themes are presented. The short rhythmic first theme stems from the descending notes of the opening chord and lasts for only five measures. The second theme appears at the end of the exposition. Materials from the two themes in the exposition inform a laconic but adept development section. The second movement (*Adagio*) presents a limpid, lachrymose theme, first in a chordal presentation and then in an embroidered version in the first violin. The mood continues to intensify, manifesting the passion for which the movement is famous among Haydn's works. The third movement is a minuet with a trio that is punctuated with unusual sounds. Crackling, harmonically colorful intervals of the fourth lend an air of modernity to an otherwise classical trio. The finale (*Adagio; presto; adagio*) hints at an ABA format. However, the short presto segment, with its slightly developed melody, is thought to be merely an episode in an extended adagio. After the return of the opening adagio, a coda finalizes the movement and the quartet as a whole.

In his *Guide to Chamber Music*, Melvin Berger writes: “[Anton Webern's] *Five Movements*, also called *Five Pieces*, seems like the most abstract of compositions, with its brief wisps of melody, its many strange, though gripping tonal effects, and the absence of many of the conventional musical devices used to express emotion in music. Yet Webern confessed to composer Alban Berg that the work was related to the death of his mother on 7 September 1906, an event that affected him profoundly, and which remained paramount in his thoughts for many years. Despite its revolutionary sounds, *Five Movements* is firmly rooted in the traditional string quartet. The opening movement, for example, is a highly compressed sonata form....The slow second movement is only thirteen measures long. An expressive, lyrical melody over a simple

accompaniment is divided between the viola, second violin, first violin, and finally back to the second violin, to complete a neat arch form. A scanty thirty-five seconds in length, the third movement has the character of a scherzo....The fourth movement, equal in length to the second, opens with two cryptic measures, followed by a descending four-note theme in the first violin that is quickly echoed in the second violin and cello....After a few notes of a wide-ranging melody that opens the final movement, the other instruments play whispered chords and melodic fragments based on an undulating motion in the cello. Bits and pieces of this material, as well as remembrances of previous movements, continue until the music quietly fades away. Begun in the spring of 1909 and completed on 16 June 1909, *Five Movements* was first performed in Vienna on 8 February 1929. In 1929 Webern arranged the work for string orchestra.”

Webern's *Six Bagatelles, Op. 9*, were composed between 1911 and 1913 and are even more epigrammatic than his *Five Movements, Op. 5*. Webern's mentor, Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), in an introduction to the 1924 Universal Edition publication of this work, wrote: “Though the brevity of these pieces is a persuasive advocate for them, on the other hand that very brevity itself requires an advocate. Consider what moderation is required to express one's self briefly. You can stretch every glance out into a poem, every sigh into a novel. But to express a novel in a single gesture, a joy in a breath—such concentration can only be present in proportion to the absence of self-pity. These pieces will only be understood by those who share the faith that music can say things which can only be expressed by music. These pieces can face criticism as little as this—or any—belief.”

Schumann wrote his three string quartets in one year (1842) and never returned to the string quartet again, except to combine it with the piano. In 1838 he wrote to his fiancée, Clara Wieck, that the pleasure he derived from hearing quartet music inspired him to write some of his own. Clara was presented with the first hearing of the *A Minor Quartet* on her birthday, 13 September 1842. She was highly impressed with his writing, noting: “My respect for his genius, for his intellect, altogether for the whole composer grows with each work. Here everything is new