



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

School of Music

College of Visual and Performing Arts

2020-2021 Season Presented by
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Faculty Recital Series Avalon String Quartet

Blaise Magnière, violin
Richard O. Ryan Endowed Chair in Violin
Marie Wang, violin
Anthony Devroye, viola
Cheng-Hou Lee, cello

String Quartet in D Major, Op. 18, No.3
Allegro
Andante con moto
Allegro
Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Bagatelle

David Maki
(b. 1966)

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp"
Poco adagio-Allegro
Adagio ma non troppo
Presto
Allegretto con variazioni

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

-INTERMISSION-

Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout (2001)
Toyos
Tarquedas
Himno de Zampoñas
Chasqui
Canto de Velorio
Coqueteos

Gabriela Lena Frank
(b. 1972)

Biography

The Avalon String Quartet was in the midst of a complete Beethoven quartet cycle this year in honor of Beethoven's 250th anniversary, when everything was put on hold in March due to the pandemic. As we resume the cycle and return to public performance for the first time in six months, we feel that we cannot continue our programming as originally planned. We have each felt shaken by the evidence of ongoing brutality towards Black citizens in this country and want to express our support for Black Lives Matter. We have restructured our programs for the year to showcase substantial works by Black composers from different eras alongside Beethoven's quartets, as well as including other composers of diverse backgrounds. While we have always valued diversity in our programming, we pledge to work harder to be more inclusive in our programming, our collaborations, our commissioning, and the environment that we foster at the NIU School of Music.

Program Notes

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3 (1798-99)

Although published third in the Op. 18 set, the D-Major quartet was the first composed. In these works, Beethoven comes to terms with the legacies of Haydn and Mozart, learning to use their procedures in his own way. To such characteristics as Haydn's continual development of material and Mozart's lyricism, Beethoven adds a drive and energy that is uniquely his own. The mood of this quartet is largely gentle and lyrical, though spiced with numerous disruptions. The first, second, and fourth movements are dominated by their opening themes.

The primary theme opens with an upward leap of a seventh in the first violin, followed by a gentle descent. The transition features a momentary dramatic intrusion. Beethoven begins the chordal secondary theme in C Major (rather than the expected A Major) and punctuates it with frequent offbeats and sforzandi. Starting in D Minor, the development plays with the primary and transitional passages and leads to an energetic C#-E dyad. Beethoven shortens the recapitulation, omitting much of the transition; the secondary theme again begins in the "wrong" key—F Major—before ending in D Major. The coda repeats the secondary theme, once more in an unexpected harmony: E-flat Major, the Neapolitan key (one half-step above the tonic).

Beethoven sets the second-movement rondo in another unusual key, B-flat Major. He decorates each repeat of the refrain with new contrapuntal combinations, often in 32nd-note subdivisions. Dynamic and harmonic disruptions appear throughout. At the end, the theme fragments and dissolves, the same process he will use in the famous funeral march of the Eroica Symphony. The Scherzo returns to D Major; its second section features off-beat accents. These carry over into the D-Minor Trio, which pits swirling scales in the violins over slower-moving notes in the lower strings. Beethoven varies the repeat of the Scherzo.

The finales of many classic-era quartets feature energetic rhythms and witty surprises recalling Italian comic opera. In this movement, Beethoven playfully combines the fast 6/8

rhythm of a tarantella with further disruptions: sforzandi interjections, sudden changes of mode, and the secondary theme in an unexpected key (F Major this time). At the same time, he shows his command of Haydn's procedure of motivic development: much of the movement derives from its opening three notes (note how the instruments toss them around like a hot potato at the end of the exposition and beginning of the development). As the development quiets down, a sudden burst of energy introduces the recapitulation, in which Beethoven will magnify the humor. The coda combines themes contrapuntally and then ends with the three-note gesture.

String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 "Harp" (1809)

The first half of 1809 was unhappy for Beethoven. A marriage proposal was refused. Napoleon besieged Vienna and took it in May after two days of shelling; a famous story has the composer hiding in his brother's cellar and covering his ears with pillows to protect his failing hearing. Beethoven's patrons (and financial support) fled the city. Finally, his teachers Haydn and Albrechtsberger died. After a while, Beethoven's inspiration returned and he completed his tenth string quartet that summer. Little in this work reflects its chaotic times. As he did with the Op. 18 set, Beethoven dedicated this work to his faithful supporter Prince Lobkowitz. The nickname "Harp" comes from the pizzicato arpeggios in the first movement.

Most of the introduction is tonally ambiguous. At the end, the first violin inches up an octave by half steps. Harmonic disruptions continue throughout the ensuing sonata. The "harp" arpeggios appear in the transition. Sixteenth-note runs culminate in an energetic closing motive stressing offbeats. The development features motivic interplay between the first violin and cello as inner voices move in sixteenths. "Harp" arpeggios sweeping up three octaves in accelerating rhythm usher in the recapitulation. The movement closes with vigorous runs in the first violin and a final set of arpeggios.

With each return, the lovely central melody of the second-movement rondo becomes more ornamented and its accompaniment more active. The wistful first episode veers to the minor. The second episode places the violin melody in counterpoint with the cello, against 32nd-note runs in the inner voices. These subdivisions continue into the final statement of the refrain. The coda is very calm. The C-Minor Scherzo, on the other hand, is tempestuous. The opening—a speeded-up version of the famous motto of the Fifth Symphony—leads to a plaintive violin theme. The trio exhibits Beethoven's so-called "rough humor": moving even faster, the music becomes a sardonic parody of counterpoint exercises of the day. Beethoven repeats both the scherzo and the trio in full; as in the Fifth, the last statement of the scherzo gives way to a transition to the finale.

True to its generally placid nature, the "Harp Quartet" ends with a simple theme and six variations on its rhythm. The variations are alternately loud and soft. The first moves in staccato eighth notes while the second features a legato triplet viola line. The third sets the melody in broken rhythm over energetic runs. The fourth emphasizes quarter notes and the fifth violin flourishes. Variation 6 moves in cross rhythms between the upper strings and the cello. A sudden acceleration brings the quartet to an end.

—Brian Hart, Professor of Music History, Northern Illinois University

Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout draws inspiration from the idea of mestizaje as envisioned by Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, where cultures can coexist without the subjugation of one by the other. As such, this piece mixes elements from the western classical and Andean folk music traditions.

“Toyos” depicts one of the most recognizable instruments of the Andes, the panpipe. One of the largest kinds is the breathy toyo which requires great stamina and lung power, and is often played in parallel fourths or fifths.

“Tarqueda” is a forceful and fast number featuring the tarka, a heavy wooden duct flute that is blown harshly in order to split the tone. Tarka ensembles typically also play in fourths and fifths.

“Himno de Zampoñas” features a particular type of panpipe ensemble that divides up melodies through a technique known as hocketing. The characteristic sound of the zampoña panpipe is that of a fundamental tone blown fatly so that overtones ring out on top, hence the unusual scoring of double stops in this movement.

“Chasqui” depicts a legenday figure from the Inca period, the chasqui runner, who sprinted great distances to deliver messages between towns separated from one another by the Andean peaks. The chasqui needed to travel light. Hence, I take artistic license to imagine his choice of instruments to be the charango, a high-pitched cousin of the guitar, and the lightweight bamboo quena flute, both of which are featured in this movement.

“Canto de Velorio” portrays another well-known Andean personality, a professional crying woman known as the llorona. Hired to render funeral rituals even sadder, the llorona is accompanied here by a second llorona and an additional chorus of mourning women (coro de mujeres). The chant Dies Irae is quoted as a reflection of the comfortable mix of Quechua Indian religious rites with those from Catholicism.

“Coqueteos” is a flirtatious love song sung by gallant men known as romanceros. As such, it is direct in its harmonic expression, bold, and festive. The romanceros sing in harmony with one another against a backdrop of guitars which I think of as a vendaval de guitarras (“storm of guitars”).

-Gabriela Lena Frank