



presents...

TETZLAFF QUARTET

Christian Tetzlaff | Violin
Elisabeth Kufferath | Violin

Hanna Weinmeister | Viola
Tanja Tetzlaff | Cello

Friday, March 21, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

MENDELSSOHN

String Quartet in A Minor, Opus 13

Adagio; Allegro vivace
Adagio non lento
Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto
Presto

WIDMANN

String Quartet No. 2 "Choralquartette"

INTERMISSION

DVOŘÁK

String Quartet in A-flat Major, Opus 105

Adagio, ma non troppo; Allegro appassionato
Molto vivace
Lento e molto cantabile
Allegro, non tanto

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This program is made possible in part by the generous support of The Bernard Osher Foundation.

Tetzlaff Quartet is represented by CM Artists
127 W 96th Street, #13B New York, NY 10025 cmartists.com

Recordings available on the Ondine and CAVI Music labels.



ENSEMBLE PROFILE

Tetzlaff Quartet made its San Francisco Performances debut in April 2011. Tonight is the quartet's second appearance.

Christian Tetzlaff debuted here in November 1994, in recital with pianist Leif Ove Andsnes. He has appeared four additional times on various series, including a February 2016 engagement with the Tetzlaff Trio, in which Tanja Tetzlaff made her SF Performances debut.

Praised by *The New York Times* for its “dramatic, energetic playing of clean intensity,” the **Tetzlaff Quartet** is one of today’s leading string quartets. Since 1994 Christian Tetzlaff, Elisabeth Kufferath, Hanna Weinmeister, and Tanja Tetzlaff have toured several times each season performing concerts that regularly receive great critical acclaim.

They are frequent guests at international festivals, perform regularly at the prestigious Wigmore Hall in London and have also appeared at the Pierre Boulez Hall in Berlin, Cité de la Musique in Paris, Vienna’s Musikverein, Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw, the Herkulessaal in Munich and the Gewandhaus in Leipzig.

The Quartet has made four highly acclaimed tours to North America. Each tour included an appearance at Carnegie Hall with additional performances in major

music centers such as San Francisco, Atlanta, Washington DC, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Orange County, UC/Berkeley, and Princeton University.

The quartet’s first recording with music by Schönberg and Sibelius was released by CAVI-music in 2010, while the second recording, with music by Berg and Mendelssohn, received the prestigious “Diapason d’or” in 2015. In 2017 Ondine released a CD with music of Haydn and Schubert, followed in 2020 by a CD with two of the late string quartets of Beethoven.

Christian Tetzlaff, violin. Described as “one of the most brilliant and inquisitive artists of the new generation” (*The New York Times*), Christian Tetzlaff is a regular guest with the world’s leading orchestras and festivals. He also enjoys collaborations with the most distinguished chamber musicians, including recital partners Leif Ove Andsnes and Lars Vogt. He plays a Peter Greiner violin.

Elisabeth Kufferath, violin. Elisabeth Kufferath is a regular guest at international music festivals including Lucerne, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, Ravinia and Aspen. Her regular chamber music partners include Lars Vogt, Antje Weithaas and Isabelle Faust. Currently a Professor of Violin at the Conservatory for Music and Theatre in Hannover, she plays a Peter Greiner violin.

Hanna Weinmeister, viola. Currently First Concertmaster at Opernhaus Zürich, Hanna Weinmeister has worked with Leonidas Kavakos, Heinz Holliger, Gidon Kremer and Benjamin Schmid among others. She plays a Peter Greiner viola.

Tanja Tetzlaff, cello. A frequent guest with many international orchestras, Tanja Tetzlaff is especially dedicated to chamber music and regularly plays with Lars Vogt, Martin Fröst and Carolin Widmann. She plays a violoncello of Giovanni Battista Guadagnini from 1776.

PROGRAM NOTES

String Quartet in A Minor, Opus 13

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809–1847)

Mendelssohn turned 18 early in 1827, a year that was important for many reasons. Already the composer of two masterpieces—the *Octet* (1825) and the *Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1826)—Mendelssohn spent the summer on a walking tour of the Harz Mountains in central Germany and in the fall entered the University of Berlin, where he attended Hegel’s lectures. One other event from 1827 had a

profound effect on the young composer: Beethoven died on March 26.

Mendelssohn never met Beethoven—he had grown up in northern German cities, far from Vienna, where Beethoven lived the final 35 years of his life. But the young composer regarded Beethoven as a god. In the fall of 1827, only months after Beethoven's death, Mendelssohn wrote his *String Quartet in A Minor*. This quartet seems obsessed by the Beethoven quartets, both in theme-shape and musical gesture, and countless listeners have wondered about the significance of these many references.

The *Quartet in A Minor* opens with a slow introduction. This *Adagio*, which evokes memories of Beethoven's *Quartet in A Minor*, *Opus 132*, also quotes one of Mendelssohn's own early love-songs, "Ist es wahr?" and that song's principal three-note phrase figures importantly in the first movement. The music leaps ahead at the *Allegro vivace*, and Mendelssohn's instructions to the players indicate the spirit of this music: *agitato* and *con fuoco*. The second movement also begins with a slow introduction, an *Adagio* that has reminded some of the *Cavatina* movement of Beethoven's *String Quartet in B-flat Major*, *Opus 130*. The main body of the movement is fugal, based on a subject that

appears to be derived from Beethoven's *String Quartet in F Minor*, *Opus 95*.

The charming *Intermezzo* is the one "non-Beethoven" movement in the quartet. In ABA form, it opens with a lovely violin melody over pizzicato accompaniment from the other voices; the center section (*Allegro di molto*) is one of Mendelssohn's fleet scherzos, and he combines the movement's principal themes as he brings it to a graceful close. The sonata-form finale opens with a stormy recitative for first violin that was clearly inspired by the recitative that prefaces the finale of Beethoven's *String Quartet in E-flat Major*, *Opus 127*. Not only does Mendelssohn evoke the memory of several Beethoven quartets in this finale, but at the very end he brings back quotations from this quartet's earlier movements: the fugue subject from the second movement is heard briefly, and the quartet ends with the heartfelt music that opened the first movement.

What are we to make of the many references to Beethoven's late quartets in this quartet by the teenaged Mendelssohn? Are they slavish imitation? The effort of a young man to take on the manner of an older master? An act of homage? There may be no satisfactory answers to these

questions, but Mendelssohn's *Quartet in A Minor*—the work of an extremely talented young man still finding his way as a composer—is accomplished music in its own right: graceful, skillfully made, and finally very pleasing.

String Quartet No. 2 "Choralquartette"

JÖRG WIDMANN
(B. 1973)

Composer and clarinetist Jörg Widmann received his early training in his native Munich, then spent a year at the Juilliard School studying clarinet with Charles Neidich. He returned to Munich to study composition with Hans Werner Henze and Wilfried Hiller and later with Wolfgang Rihm. Widmann served as Professor of Clarinet at the Hochschule für Musik in Freiburg from 2001 until 2015, and he currently teaches at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin. As a composer, he has won numerous awards, and his music has been performed by such conductors as Pierre Boulez, Valery Gergiev, Franz Welser-Möst, Jonathan Nott, Sylvain Cambreling, Christian Thielemann, and Kent Nagano. Widmann has been compos-

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er-in-residence with the Berlin Philharmonic and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Between 1997 and 2005, Widmann composed a cycle of five brief string quartets. Each of these quartets corresponds to a movement in a large-scale classical composition, and the quartets may be performed individually (as the *Second* is on this program) or as part of the larger cycle. *The Choral Quartet*, composed in 2003, may be understood as the “slow movement” of the cycle, and Widmann himself has described it as “a largo verging on the static.” That last note is important: there is little sense of motion in this 14-minute movement, and in its place sustained string sonorities are penetrated by abrasive interjections. Widmann marks the movement *Sehr langsam, tastend, suchend* (“Very slow, groping, searching”) and then offers performance instructions of unbelievable detail: players are instructed about the exact segment of bow or string to use, the way pizzicatos are to be plucked, the exact kinds of sounds Widmann wants them to produce, as well as dynamic markings that range from *ffff* to *pppp*. Beyond this scrupulous attention to technical detail, the composer sees a larger drama being played out in this music, and he addresses that in his own brief introduction to the *Second Quartet*:

“My second string quartet consists of a single slow movement. Although the work makes no concrete reference to Joseph Haydn’s *Seven Last Words*, it would be inconceivable without prior knowledge of this composition. Haydn’s sequence of movements which (with the exception of the concluding earthquake) are all in slow tempi still provokes a feeling of shocking urgency in our time. For me, even more disturbing is the calm, composed and serene acceptance of death in the Haydn work (the ‘smile’ of the *A major pizzicato thirds*!).

“In my examination of crucifixion themes, the ‘path’ and the ‘final journey’ were for me the essential expressions. My work begins at the end of the path. These are all final tones, phrases from the past which originate from nowhere and do not lead anywhere. The horrifying friction and abrasion of skin on wood forms a central theme and is associated through silence with tonal choral elements. I am interested in investigating how, through the course of the work, sound effects no longer represent desolation, and tonal elements no longer represent confidence.”

—Jörg Widmann

Those interested in this music can find on the internet a very interesting video in which Widmann coaches a young string

quartet through a rehearsal of this movement. That video gives some idea of the composer’s own sense of the music, and it also demonstrates his own respect for the young musicians grappling with the challenges of this formidable score.

String Quartet in A-flat Major, Opus 105

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
(1841–1904)

In 1895 the 54-year-old Dvořák left New York after three years of teaching at the National Conservatory of Music and returned to Czechoslovakia and his family. In America, he had written music showing the influence of that strange new country—the “*New World*” *Symphony*, the “*American*” *Quartet*, and the *Viola Quintet*, with its Indian drumbeats. In March 1895, just before he left America, Dvořák began a new string quartet and wrote about half of the first movement; he finished the quartet quickly in Prague the following December.

The striking thing about this quartet, which contains the last music Dvořák composed in America, is that it shows absolutely no American influences. Instead, saturated with Czech musical forms and the spirit of Czech music, it reflects Dvořák’s relief at being home. As he was completing the quartet that Christmas, Dvořák wrote to a friend: “We are, praise be to God, all well and rejoice at being spared after three years to spend this dear and happy Christmas festival in Bohemia. How different did we feel last year in America, where we were so far away in a foreign country and separated from all our children and friends. But the Lord God has

vouchsafed us this happy moment and that is why we feel so inexpressibly content!” This happy spirit runs through the *Quartet in A-flat Major*. There are of course moments of shade, but the general mood of this music is one of celebration.

The first movement opens with a slow introduction built on terraced entrances; the shape of these entrances leaps ahead at the *Allegro appassionato* to become the movement’s main theme; at this faster speed, the theme has been compared to a trumpet call. Dvořák derives much of the first movement from this theme, though there is an attractive second idea built on triplets and dotted rhythms; the movement drives to a vigorous close.

The scherzo is in ABA form, with the outer sections based on the Czech *furiant*; the violin parts intermesh beautifully, even at a blistering tempo. By contrast, the middle section is calm and melodic; Dvořák derives one of the themes here from the aria “The smile of a child” from his opera *The Jacobin*. The marking for the third movement, *Lento e molto cantabile*, makes clear its character. It too is in ABA form, with a lyric opening and a somewhat gruff chromatic middle section; this rises to a climax marked *molto appassionato* before the return of the opening material, now subtly varied.

Dvořák rounds off the quartet with a finale built on three separate themes. There are some striking features here: tremolos used as accompaniment, fugal entrances, and a distinctly Czech third theme, marked *molto cantabile*. The development of this movement is extended, and Dvořák drives the quartet to its close with a quick-paced coda.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger



ISIDORE STRING QUARTET

Adrian Steele, violin
Devin Moore, viola

Phoenix Avalon, violin
Joshua McClendon, cello

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