



SCHUBERT, BARBER, & MENDELSSOHN
THURSDAY, JULY 30, 2020

GERALD R. FORD AMPHITHEATER

CONCERT 7PM

Dover Quartet

Joel Link, violin
Bryan Lee, violin
Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola
Camden Shaw, cello

Oliver Neubauer, violin
Clara Neubauer, violin
Paul Neubauer, viola
Brook Speltz, cello

Amy Yang, piano

SCHUBERT

Sonata for Viola and Piano in A minor, D. 821, "Arpeggione" (21 minutes)
Allegro moderato
Adagio —
Allegretto

BARBER

Adagio for String Quartet (8 minutes)

MENDELSSOHN

Octet for Four Violins, Two Violas and Two Cellos in E-flat major, Op. 20 (32 minutes)
Allegro moderato, ma con fuoco
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro leggierissimo
Presto

Sonata for Viola and Piano in A minor, D. 821, “Arpeggione” (1824)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

The guitar player Vincenz Schuster was among the regular participants in the evening musical salons that Ignaz Sonnleithner held at his Viennese townhouse during the 1820s. It was there that Schuster met Franz Schubert, whose compositions and piano playing were the chief attractions of those convivial soirées. When Schubert returned to Vienna in September 1824 after spending the summer as music master to a branch of the Esterházy family in Zseliz, Schuster pestered him to write a piece for a new instrument, a curious hybrid of guitar, cello and viola da gamba called an “*arpeggione*,” that a local inventor, Georg Stauer, had devised the year before. The *arpeggione* was about the size of a modern cello, but had a smooth waist, a series of some two-dozen frets fixed to the fingerboard (like a guitar), six strings tuned in fourths, and an elaborately carved scroll (like the old gamba). The instrument could either be bowed or strummed. Schuster had become one of its first exponents, and he must have envisioned a future for the instrument because he not only cajoled Schubert into composing his “Arpeggione” Sonata, but also wrote a tutorial for it. Schuster’s faith quickly proved to be misplaced, however, and the *arpeggione* became extinct within a decade. Schubert’s piece, dedicated to Schuster, is the only one known to have been composed for the instrument. When the score of the Sonata was first published in 1871 as part of the collected edition of Schubert’s works, it was issued in a version for cello, the form in which it has become the best-known of his few compositions for solo instrument and piano, though practitioners of violin, viola, flute, double bass and clarinet have also appropriated it for their repertoires.

The “Arpeggione” Sonata is a friendly and ingratiating specimen of Biedermeier *Hausmusik*, exactly the tuneful and easily likeable sort of creation that made the composer’s *Schubertiads* such a draw for his friends. The opening movement, more wistful than dramatic, is one of the most compact realizations of sonata form that Schubert devised during his later years, eschewing the glorious prolixity — the “heavenly length” Schumann attributed to the C major Symphony — that marked the quartets, piano sonatas and symphonies from 1822 to the end of his life. The *Adagio* is a song of sweetness and simplicity that leads without pause to the finale, constructed in a sectional design buttressed by the returns of the lyrical main theme.

Adagio for String Quartet (1936)
Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Samuel Barber was among those many talented American musicians who lived, studied and worked in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, not only polishing their professional skills but also proving to the world that their country had come of artistic age. Barber spent much time overseas after 1928, thanks to such emoluments as the American Prix de Rome and Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship. In Rome, he wrote a *Symphony in One Movement*, which was premiered there in 1936 and given its first American performance in Cleveland by Artur Rodzinski early the next year. Rodzinski also played the *Symphony* at the Salzburg Festival in 1937, making it the first American work to be heard at that prestigious event. The chief conductor of the Salzburg Festival at that time was Arturo Toscanini, who was to begin his tenure with the NBC Symphony in New York later that year. Toscanini asked Rodzinski if he could suggest an American composer whose work he might program during the coming

season, and Rodzinski advised that his Italian colleague investigate the music of the 27-year-old Samuel Barber. By October, Barber had completed and submitted to Toscanini the *Essay No. 1 for Orchestra* and an arrangement for string orchestra of the slow movement from the String Quartet (Op. 11, in B minor) he had written in Rome in 1936 — the *Adagio for Strings*. Toscanini accepted the pieces for performance, and broadcast them on November 5, 1938 with the NBC Symphony. The *Adagio* was an instant success. It was the only American work Toscanini took on his tour of South America. Sibelius praised it. The audience at its 1945 Russian premiere, in Kiev, would not leave the hall until Stokowski encoored it. It was the music broadcast from New York and London following the announcement of the death of President Roosevelt. The *Adagio for Strings*, with its plaintive melody, rich modalism, austere texture and mood of reflective introspection, is among Samuel Barber's greatest legacies, a 20th-century masterwork.

Octet for Strings in E-flat major, Op. 20 (1825)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

It was with the Octet for Strings, composed in 1825 at the tender age of sixteen, a full year before the Overture to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that the stature of Mendelssohn's genius was first fully revealed. He wrote the work as a birthday offering for his violin and viola teacher, Eduard Rietz, and premiered it in October at one of the household musicales the Mendelssohns organized to showcase young Felix's budding gifts; Rietz participated in the performance and young Felix is thought to have played one of the viola parts. (Rietz and his family remained close to Mendelssohn. Eduard's brother, Julius, succeeded Mendelssohn as director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts upon the composer's death in 1847 and edited his complete works for publication in the 1870s.) The scoring of the Octet calls for a double string quartet, though, unlike the work written in 1823 for the same instrumentation by Louis Spohr (a friend of the Mendelssohns and a regular visitor to their family programs), which divides the eight players into two antiphonal groups, Mendelssohn treated his forces as a single integrated ensemble, a veritable miniature orchestra of strings. Even allowing that Mendelssohn, by age sixteen, was already a veteran musician with a decade of experience and a sizeable catalog of music to his credit, the Octet's brilliance and originality are phenomenal.

The Octet is splendidly launched by a wide-ranging main theme that takes the first violin quickly through its entire tonal range; the lyrical second theme is given in sweet, close harmonies. The development section, largely concerned with the subsidiary subject, is relatively brief, and culminates in a swirling unison passage that serves as the bridge to the recapitulation of the earlier melodic materials.

The following *Andante*, like many slow movements in Mozart's instrumental compositions, was created not so much as the fulfillment of some particular formal model, but as an ever-unfolding realization of its own unique melodic materials and world of sonorities. The movement is tinged with the delicious, bittersweet melancholy that represents the expressive extreme of the musical language of Mendelssohn.

The composer's sister Fanny noted that the featherstitched *Scherzo* was inspired by gossamer verses from Goethe's *Faust*, to which Mendelssohn's fey music is the perfect complement:

*Floating cloud and trailing mist,
O'er us brightening hover:
The rushes shake, winds stir the brake:
Soon all their pomp is over.*

The closing movement, a dazzling *moto perpetuo* with fugal episodes, recalls Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony (No. 41, C major, K. 551) in its rhythmic vitality and contrapuntal display, simultaneously whipping together as many as three themes from the finale and a motive from the *Scherzo* during one climatic episode in the closing pages.

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