

MSM ARTISTS IN RESIDENCE

AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

Peter Winograd and **Laurie Carney**, violin

Daniel Avshalomov, viola

Wolfram Koessel, cello

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GORDON K. AND HARRIET GREENFIELD HALL

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PROGRAM

LUDWIG

VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770–1827)

Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, no. 2

Allegro

Adagio cantabile; Allegro; Tempo I

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro molto, quasi presto

DMITRI

SHOSTAKOVICH

(1906–1975)

String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 108

Allegretto

Lento

Allegro – Allegretto

Intermission

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

(1841–1904)

String Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96 (“American”)

Allegro ma non troppo

Lento

Molto vivace

Vivace ma non troppo

PROGRAM NOTES

Quartet in G Major, Op. 18, no. 2 Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven had been approached about writing string quartets by Count Apponyi in 1795, but no works surfaced as an immediate result of this offer. When he began composing quartets in 1798 he was well aware that he was entering a hallowed and well-populated arena, represented at its best and therefore most daunting by Mozart and Haydn. He was particularly cognizant of the six quartets Mozart dedicated to Haydn, Mozart's *Prussian* Quartets, and Haydn's own Opus 20, 71, 74, and 76 quartets. Only with the composition and publication of piano trios, piano sonatas, cello sonatas, string trios, and violin sonatas under his belt did Beethoven feel ready to begin writing quartets in earnest. His sketchbooks show that he composed Quartets Nos. 3, 1, 2, and 5 in that order; there is some indication that No. 6 was composed last, but little information exists as to where No. 4 fits into the scheme.

The Opus 18 Quartets were commissioned by Beethoven's new patron, Prince Lobkowitz, who at the same time commissioned six from the aging Haydn, who was unable to produce more than two and part of another. Beethoven must have felt the heat of competition on many levels, and the task, which took him two years to complete, involved much revision. He is famously quoted as writing to his friend Karl Amenda in 1801 about an early version of Opus 18, no. 1, saying not to circulate it, explaining, "I have greatly changed it, having just learned how to write quartets properly." The Quartets were published in 1801 by Mollo, one of three publishers kept busy by Beethoven that year. As a measure of how far Beethoven had come by the time he wrote the Opus 18 Quartets we should remember that his First Symphony, also published in 1801, came into existence alongside the Quartets.

The G Major Quartet, a work of elegance and light, was known in Germany as the "Komplimentier" Quartet, which conjures up a picture of salon patrons greeting and bowing. The sketchbooks show that this witty, lighthearted work, however, caused Beethoven considerable struggle. It begins and ends with a sonata form movement, as do most of the Opus 18 Quartets, but with the kind of inventiveness that we would expect from the master. In the first movement the delicate violin flourish of the opening returns first in a false recapitulation, and then in the proper key with more force, now in the cello and with new contrapuntal garb.

The Adagio, grave and formal, suddenly launches an exuberant middle section that makes one suspect the slow opening was its introduction. The return of the opening, again featuring the cello, dispels that notion and keeps the listener attentive with its newly enriched ornamentation.

In the Scherzo Beethoven becomes downright humorous, though he never loses sight of the quartet's eighteenth-century grace. The opening seems to mock the openings of both the first and second movements, and the interplay of the first and second violins, later transferred to other instruments, suggests some imagined witty repartee. The trio contrasts more forceful pronouncements with a stream of remarks by the first violin, into which the other instruments try to interject their opinions.

Beethoven builds his fleet-footed finale from a sprightly wisp introduced by the cello. Whenever he interrupts the boisterous spirits with a momentary lull it is only to make sure the listener is ready to catch his next joke. Though sonata form rules, he reintroduces his merry main theme enough times to give a suspicion of rondo. The movement concludes with a brief coda that saves its fortissimo rush of notes for the end.

String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 108 Dmitri Shostakovich

When Shostakovich announced the completion of his First Cello Concerto in the summer of 1959, he also mentioned that he had composed one and a half movements of a new quartet. He completed this—his Seventh—in March 1960, possibly having also worked on it the previous month while hospitalized for one of many treatments of his weakened right hand. (Only later was his condition diagnosed as a rare form of poliomyelitis.) The Beethoven Quartet (Dmitri Tsiganov, Vasili Shirinsky, Vadim Borisovsky, and Sergei Shirinsky) premiered the work on May 15 at Leningrad's Glinka Concert Hall. From the time of Shostakovich's Second Quartet they had become his friends and collaborators, premiering all his remaining quartets until the death of the cellist prevented them from premiering his last, the Fifteenth. The composer was the first to credit the influence of their performing style on his music.

Shostakovich had set up a tonal structure for his cycle of quartets, intending to write one in each of the twenty-four keys. He placed each quartet a third below the previous, beginning with C major (C–A–F–D–B-flat–G), but he broke his scheme by choosing F-sharp minor for his Seventh. (He would resume with Nos. 8 and 9, but in reverse, C minor and E-flat, then continue without break

through No. 15.) Commentators speculate that he associated F-sharp minor with the Quartet's dedicatee, Nina, his first wife and mother of his two children; she had died six years previously from undetected colon cancer. He had recently extricated himself from his unfortunate second marriage of four years, and had perhaps grown nostalgic about his first wife. Nevertheless, their twenty-two year marriage had been anything but smooth, perhaps reflected in the work's conflicting moods—impish, agitated, haunted, belligerent, and introspective.

Shortest of his fifteen quartets, the Seventh unfolds in three compact movements, linked not by continuous sound but by the “attacca” directive between movements so as to prevent disruptive pauses. The first movement begins impishly with the first violin descending in little three-note grouplets until it knocks three times on the home pitch. Not only does the light texture and soft volume add to the mischievous character, but Shostakovich plays metric games that keep the two types of three-note groupings delightfully off-kilter. The cello presents the stealthy second theme, agitated by the inner instruments' insistent repeated notes—a Shostakovich hallmark. He cleverly alters the return of the first theme by evening out the rhythm and featuring pizzicato (plucked strings). Before the first theme ends, the players don their mutes, keeping them on through the return of the agitated music and into the hushed ending with the three repeated notes.

Still muted, the second violin initiates the slow movement with a rocking arpeggio, which provides a perfect backdrop for the haunting theme of the first violin. The viola and cello's eerie theme in octave unison receives another of Shostakovich's insistent repeated-note accompaniments in the second violin, which continues as the first violin floats in. The concluding somber four-note descent leaves the movement sounding open-ended.

The finale crashes in with unexpected violence, whereupon we hear the slow four-note descent again. Shostakovich then launches a belligerent, thrilling fugue of irresistible forward momentum. Just when the intensity becomes nearly unbearable, he suddenly brings back the main theme from the first movement in a terrifically aggressive version, reminiscent at times of the Cello Concerto he had just completed. Miraculously, he then turns his fugue theme into a gentle, muted waltz. With a kind of nostalgic look at the impish material of the first movement, the piece dies away introspectively.

String Quartet No. 12 in F Major, Op. 96 (“American”) Antonín Dvořák

Beginning in the fall of 1892 Dvořák served as artistic director and professor of composition at the National Conservatory of Music in America (in New York City) at the urging of the institution’s president, Jeannette Thurber, who offered him twenty-five times the amount he was being paid at the Prague Conservatory. His life in the U.S. was hectic with teaching, public appearances, and engagements as a guest conductor, so he happily accepted an invitation to spend the summer of 1893 relaxing in a small farming community (300 residents) of Czech immigrants in Spillville, Iowa.

Overjoyed to be reunited with four of his children who had just arrived from Czechoslovakia with their aunt and a maid, Dvořák traveled to Spillville by train in a party that also included his wife, his two oldest children, and his secretary Josef Jan Kovařík who had grown up there. His delight at being in a rural setting among his countrymen immediately erupted in the composition of his *American* Quartet, which he sketched in only three days, June 8–10. At the end of the sketch he wrote: “Thanks to the Lord God, I am satisfied, it went quickly. Completed June 10, 1893.” Polishing the score occupied him until June 23, and members of the Kovařík family assisted in trying out the Quartet with the composer himself making his way through the first violin part. The Kneisel Quartet gave the premiere in Boston on New Year’s Day 1894 and in New York on January 12.

By far the most popular of Dvořák’s fourteen quartets, the *American* reflects his aim “to write something really melodious and simple.” As several scholars have pointed out, however, his effortless-sounding result masks remarkable unifying and thematic procedures. The first, second, and fourth movements all begin with an accompanimental backdrop before the main thematic material emerges. The first movement’s viola solo rising confidently over bass pedal and upper-string shimmer specifically brings to mind the opening of another famous Czech string quartet, Smetana’s “From My Life,” which Dvořák knew well.

Dvořák chose the “pastoral” key of F major for his work, in which pedals or drones and permeating pentatonic themes (based on five “white-key” notes, F, G, A, C, D) help transmit a rural, “simple” flavor. We should note, too, that these traits relate to American, Slavic, and many other folk traditions. Just one example, however, shows the kind of sophistication at work: the lovely pentatonic melody in the violin that closes the exposition begets the related but altered expressive theme for the cello just after the start of the recapitulation.

Many commentators have singled out the nostalgic Lento as the crowning movement of the Quartet, and Dvořák scholar Michael Beckerman has drawn attention to the Schubertian quality of its endless melody. Unfolding in a broad arch that comes to one of chamber music's most exquisite climaxes, the movement relies primarily on the simple texture of the violin or cello carrying the melody with constant undulating support from the other instruments. Occasionally the second violin joins the first in a melodic role, as at the poignant climax. The final keening of the main theme by the cello against simple repeated chords rather than the former busy accompaniment lends an air of tragedy.

Dvořák bases his entire scherzo on the same theme, with a variant serving as the contrasting section, which appears twice. Kovařík suggested that the quiet high violin tune that enters shortly after the opening was inspired by a bird call Dvořák heard outside his home in Spillville. Though the exact species of bird has never been determined beyond question, the most likely candidate is the scarlet tanager.

The composer offsets the cheerful main theme of the rondo finale with episodes of more reflective quality. Toward the center, one of these quieter passages suggested to Dvořák scholar John Clapham an occasion when the composer enchanted the St. Wenceslas congregation of Spillville by spontaneously playing the organ during their typically music-less morning mass. The ebullient high spirits cannot be suppressed for long and the movement ends with a plethora of affirmative phrases.

—Program notes ©Jane Vial Jaffe

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

American String Quartet

Internationally recognized as one of the world's foremost quartets, the American String Quartet marks its 50th season in 2023–24. Critics and colleagues hold the Quartet in high esteem and many of today's leading artists and composers seek out the Quartet for collaborations. The Quartet is also known for its performances of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartók, and Mozart. The Quartet's recordings of the complete Mozart string quartets on a matched set of Stradivarius instruments are widely held to set the standard for this repertoire. To celebrate its 35th anniversary, the Quartet recorded an ambitious CD, *Schubert's Echo*, released by NSS Music. The program invites the listener to appreciate the influence of Schubert on two masterworks of early 20th-century Vienna. In addition to quartets by European masters, the American naturally performs quartets by American composers. Their newest release, *American Romantics* (Apple Music, 2018), is a recording of Robert Sirota's *American Pilgrimage*, Dvořák's "American" quartet, and Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. The American also champions contemporary music. The Quartet has commissioned and premiered works by distinguished American composers Claus Adam, Richard Danielpour, Kenneth Fuchs, Tobias Picker, Robert Sirota, and George Tsontakis. The Quartet has recorded on the Albany, CRI, MusicMasters, Musical Heritage Society, Nonesuch, RCA, and Apple Music labels. The Quartet's discography includes works by Adam, Corigliano, Danielpour, Dvořák, Fuchs, Prokofiev, Schoenberg, Sirota, and Tsontakis. The Quartet's innovative programming and creative approach to education has resulted in notable residencies throughout the country. The Quartet continues as artists in residence at Manhattan School of Music (1984–present) and the Aspen Music Festival (1974–present). The ASQ also teaches in Beijing, China, and travels widely abroad. Formed in 1974 when its original members were students at the Juilliard School, the American String Quartet was launched by winning both the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Chamber Music Award in the same year.

Peter Winograd, violin

Peter Winograd joined the American String Quartet, Artists in Residence at Manhattan School of Music, in 1990. He gave his first solo public performance at the age of 11, and at age 17 he was accepted as a scholarship student of Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School. Recognized early as an exceptionally promising young artist, Winograd was a top prizewinner in the 1988 Naumburg International Violin Competition. He then made his New York debut to critical acclaim and has since appeared as a guest soloist with numerous orchestras and in recital across the country and abroad, including annual collaborative performances with cellist Andrés Díaz at the Florida Arts Chamber Music Festival. In 2002 Winograd performed the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Hartford Symphony; his father, Arthur Winograd, was the featured guest conductor. Peter Winograd has been a member of the violin and chamber music faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and the Aspen Music School (where the American is Quartet in Residence) since 1990. Born into a gifted musical family, Winograd began his studies with his parents. His mother was a professional pianist, and his father was the founding cellist of the Juilliard Quartet and a conductor of the Hartford Symphony in Hartford, Connecticut, where Winograd grew up. He holds Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Juilliard. His wife, violinist Caterina Szepes, is a regular participant in the Marlboro Festival and a member of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. His violin is by Giovanni Maria del Bussetto (Cremona, 1675).

Laurie Carney, violin

A founding member of the American String Quartet, Laurie Carney comes from a prodigious musical family. Her father was a trumpeter and educator, her mother a pianist, and her siblings all violinists. She began her studies at home and at the age of 8 became the youngest violinist to be admitted to the Preparatory Division of the Juilliard School. At 15 she was the youngest to be accepted into Juilliard's College Division. Ms. Carney studied with Dorothy DeLay and received both Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from Juilliard. She has shared the stage with many of the world's leading artists, including Isaac Stern, Yefim Bronfman, Pinchas Zukerman, and Frederica von Stade, and been featured in Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante* with the Bournemouth Symphony and the Basque (Spain) Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Carney frequently performed duo recitals with Guarneri Quartet violist Michael Tree. She was featured in the New York premiere of Giampaolo Bracali's *Fantasia*. Robert Sirota wrote his Sonata No. 2, *Farewell*, for Ms. Carney in 2013. She recorded it in 2014 along with an earlier

work, *Summertime*, with pianist David Friend on a CD of Sirota's music entitled *Parting the Veil: Works for Violin and Piano* (Albany Records).

Since receiving the Walter W. Naumburg Award in 1974 with the American String Quartet, Ms. Carney has performed across North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Israel, including special projects with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, New York City Ballet, and Mark Morris Dance Group. The quartet has an extensive discography, ranging from the complete Mozart quartets to the many contemporary works written for them.

A member of the faculty of Manhattan School of Music since 1984 and of Aspen Music Festival since 1974, she has held teaching positions at the Mannes College of Music, Peabody Conservatory, the University of Nebraska, and the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. Her frequent master classes have taken her to California, Colorado, Indiana, Michigan, and New Mexico. Ms. Carney performs the duo repertory with her husband, cellist William Grubb. Her nonprofessional interests include animal rights and environmental concerns. Her violin is by Carlo Tononi (Venice, 1720).

Daniel Avshalomov, viola

Daniel Avshalomov is the violist of the American String Quartet, which enjoys its fifth decade of international acclaim. Recently hailed by *Strad* magazine as "one of the finest occupants of that chair, both instrumentally and musically, of any quartet now active," Mr. Avshalomov finds time each season for concerto appearances, recitals, and collaborative concerts, and returns as a featured performer to festivals across the country.

Before joining the Quartet, Mr. Avshalomov served as principal violist for the Aspen, Tanglewood, and Spoleto festival orchestras, as well as for the Brooklyn Philharmonic, Opera Orchestra of New York, American Composers Orchestra, and as solo violist with the Bolshoi Ballet. He was a founding member of the Orpheus Chamber Ensemble.

His articles appear in *Notes* and *Strings*; he has edited several viola works for publication and contributed to the American String Teachers Association's *Playing and Teaching the Viola: A Comprehensive Guide*. The subject of two articles in *Strad* and one in *Classical Pulse*, Mr. Avshalomov developed "Inside Passages," a lecture-demonstration first presented to the New York Viola Society in 2000; gave the world premiere of Giampaolo Bracali's *Concerto per Viola* and the American premiere of Alessandro Rolla's *Esercizio 3*; and recorded the CD *Three Generations Avshalomov* with pianists Robert McDonald and Pamela Pyle, which

was featured on NPR's All Things Considered. He has been a member of the Manhattan School of Music faculty since 1984 and of the Aspen School faculty since 1976. His instrument is by Andrea Amati, from 1568.

Wolfram Koessel, cello

Since his Carnegie Hall debut in 1994, cellist Wolfram Koessel has performed as a chamber musician, recitalist, and soloist throughout the world. *Strad* magazine praised his “exceptionally attractive cello playing.” As a soloist he has performed concertos throughout the United States as well as with Japan’s Osaka Symphony Orchestra and orchestras in Germany and South America. Cellist of the American String Quartet, Artists in Residence at Manhattan School of Music, he also has appeared often with the New York Metamorphoses Orchestra, which he cofounded in 1994. His collaborations include performances with the legendary tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain, dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov, and cellist Yo Yo Ma, among many others. Koessel also appears with a wide range of ensembles, including the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and Trio+ (a group he formed with violinist Yosuke Kawasaki and pianist Vadim Serebryani), which performs creative and collaborative concerts throughout Japan, the United States, and Canada. Koessel served as music director of the Mark Morris Dance Group from 2004 to 2008 and has toured extensively with the company both nationally and internationally, performing in several performances. In 2018 he travelled with them to Israel performing Bach’s Third Cello Suite in several performances. He resides with his wife, pianist and writer J. Mae Barizo, and his daughter in Manhattan.

ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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Land Acknowledgment

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