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The Westchester Chamber Music Society



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The Westchester Chamber Music Society (WCMS)
is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

Sunday, April 21, 2024
Congregation Emanu-El of Westchester
Rye, New York

The Westchester Chamber Music Society
presents

MOMENTA QUARTET

Emilie-Anne Gendron, *violin* Alex Shiozaki, *violin*
Stephanie Griffin, *viola* Michael Haas, *cello*

SEAL STRING QUARTET

from White Plains High School

Lucas Rhode, *violin* Emiliano Juarez, *violin*
Aria Mukhopadhyay, *viola* Saskia Aikman, *cello*



Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in D Minor, Op. 76, No. 2 ("Quinten")
Allegro

PAUSE — Please remain seated

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in F minor, "Sun Quartets," Op. 20, No. 5
Allegro moderato • Minuetto • Adagio • Finale: Fuga a due sogetti

Elizabeth Brown (1953-)
Just Visible in the Distance (2013)
I. Slowly Toward the North – Glimpse – A Halo for ADDA – Harmony, no Protagonist – Slowly Toward the North
II. Through a Barren Landscape – Harmony – Respite – Aria – Harmony, no Protagonist

INTERMISSION

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
String Quartet No. 13 in A Minor ("Rosamunde") D. 804, Op. 29
Allegro ma non troppo • Andante • Menuetto: Allegretto – Trio • Allegro moderato

*Following the concert, there will be a Question & Answer session
with the professional and student musicians.*

About This Performance

Momenta: the plural of momentum – four individuals in motion towards a common goal. This is the idea behind the Momenta Quartet, whose eclectic vision encompasses contemporary music of all aesthetic backgrounds alongside great music from the recent and distant past. The New York City-based quartet has premiered over 200 works, collaborated with over 250 living composers, and was praised by *The New York Times* for its “diligence, curiosity, and excellence.” In the words of *The New Yorker’s* Alex Ross, “few American players assume Haydn’s idiom with such ease.”

The quartet came into being in November 2004, when composer Matthew Greenbaum invited violist Stephanie Griffin to perform Mario Davidovsky’s *String Trio* for events celebrating Judaism and Culture at New York’s Symphony Space and Temple University in Philadelphia. A residency through the composition department at Temple University ensued, and the rehearsals and performances were so satisfying that the players decided to form a quartet. Through this residency, Momenta gave two annual concerts highlighting the talents of Temple University student composers alongside 20th-century masterworks and works from the classical canon, repeating the programs at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture. From the outset, Momenta treated all music equally, devoting as much time, care, and commitment to the student works as to the imposing musical monuments.

Emilie-Anne Gendron, *violin*, enjoys an active and versatile freelance career based in New York. A deeply committed chamber musician, she has been on the roster of the Marlboro Music Festival and the touring Musicians from Marlboro since 2011. She has appeared frequently with Talea Ensemble, A Far Cry, Argento Ensemble, Sejong Soloists, and has served on numerous occasions as concertmaster of ensembles including Orpheus, IRIS Orchestra, and Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia. She is a founding member of Ensemble Échappé, a new-music sinfonietta, as well as the Gamut Bach Ensemble, in residence with the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. Gendron’s extensively varied international appearances have included recitals in Sweden and at the Louvre in Paris; festivals in Russia, Finland, and Jordan; and recently, major venues in China, South Korea, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. She was trained at the Juilliard School where her teachers were Won Bin Yim, Dorothy DeLay, David Chan, and Hyo Kang. A dual U.S.-Canadian citizen, she holds a B.A. in Classics from Columbia with Phi Beta Kappa honors, and a Master of Music degree and the coveted Artist Diploma from Juilliard.

Alex Shiozaki, *violin*, is a strong advocate for the music of today. At home with music new and old, he has appeared as a soloist with orchestras including the Sapporo Symphony, Sendai Philharmonic, AXIOM Ensemble, and the Juilliard Orchestra. Other highlights include summer residencies at the Tanglewood Music Center as a New Fromm Player and a Japan tour with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. A member of the Momenta Quartet since 2016, he also regularly performs with the IRIS Orchestra, Contemporaneous, and Mimesis Ensemble. As part of the Shiozaki Duo with his wife, the pianist Nana Shi, Alex has given recitals in New York, Boston, Washington D.C., and California. Holding a B.A. from Harvard College and an M.M. and D.M.A. from the Juilliard School, he counts among his teachers Ronald Copes and Joseph Lin of the Juilliard String Quartet, Lynn Chang, and Robin Sharp. In addition to his performance activities, he is on faculty at the Juilliard School, State University of New York at New Paltz, and Interlochen Center for the Arts.

Stephanie Griffin, *viola*, is an innovative violist and composer with an eclectic musical vision. Born in Canada and based in New York City, her musical adventures have taken her to Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, and Mongolia. Stephanie founded the Momenta Quartet in 2004, and is a member of the Argento Chamber Ensemble and Continuum; principal violist of the Princeton Symphony; and viola faculty at Hunter College. She was a 2019 Composition Fellow at the Instituto Sacatar in Brazil, and has received prestigious composition fellowships and commissions from the Jerome Foundation, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Bronx Council on the Arts. As an improviser, she has performed with Henry Threadgill, Wadada Leo Smith, Butch Morris, and Adam Rudolph, among others, and was a 2014 Fellow and 2021 Alumna-in-Residence at Music Omi. She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from The Juilliard School where she studied with Samuel Rhodes.

Michael Haas, *cello*, leads a varied musical life. He is equally at home performing chamber music and orchestral repertoire both old and new. He has recently performed at Symphony Space, the New York Live Arts Theater, Le Poisson Rouge, as well as for Tertulia, a new series bringing chamber music to intimate settings around New York City. In addition to his work with Momenta Quartet, he performs regularly with the Princeton Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and American Ballet Theater Orchestra. He holds degrees from the Curtis Institute of Music and the Juilliard School.

Program Notes

by Joshua Berrett, Ph.D.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

String Quartet in D Minor, Op. 76, No. 2 (“Quinten”)

String Quartet in F Minor, “Sun Quartets,” Op. 20, No. 5

As part of our Youth Initiative, it is our pleasure this afternoon to welcome the SEAL String Quartet from White Plains High School, a group mentored by Zachary May. They will be opening our concert with a performance of the first movement of Haydn’s *String Quartet in D Minor, Op. 76, No. 2* (“Quinten”). The nickname Quinten refers to the pair of falling perfect fifths announced by the first violin in the opening two measures; they then serve as a vital unifying element in much of this sonata-form movement. Embedded in the texture, they can sometimes be heard in inverted form as well.

This string quartet is one of a group of six late masterworks composed 1796-7 on a commission from Count Jozsef Erdödy, a member of the Hungarian-Croatian nobility. The Opus 76 set was followed in 1799 by only two more string quartets, the two that make up the valedictory Op. 77. In truth, at this point in his career, string quartet-composition was a marginal interest of Haydn. Shortly after the death in 1790 of his long-standing patron Nikolaus I, Prince Esterházy, Haydn had been approached by impresario-conductor Johann Peter Salomon to come to London to conduct a number of concerts. Two highly successful visits to England resulted, in 1791-2 and 1794-5. Haydn was very much the international celebrity, adored by his public and honored by the intellectual elite; he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Oxford University.

A little over twenty years earlier, in 1772, we encounter a very different Haydn, one intent upon proving his bona fides as a string-quartet composer. This was the year in which his six “Sun Quartets” Op. 20 were published. The F Minor, on today’s program is the fifth of the set. And by a happy coincidence his publisher, Johann Julius Hummel of Amsterdam, had the gift of prophecy, publishing the string quartets with a title page flanked by two garlanded pillars and a sun at the apex. With these string quartets, Haydn set the template for many generations to come: four contrasting movements with first and second violins, viola, and cello engaged as equals—more or less—in musical discourse about the many facets of human experience.

The opening movement of the F-minor quartet is intense and emotional. Haydn’s writing is richly expressive in its

chromatic turns and its embedded sighing appoggiaturas, that is, non-harmonic tones that “lean on” a chord. As a counterfoil, listen for the more sprightly second theme, first heard in the relative major key of A-flat. After the development section and recapitulation, Haydn launches into a coda that takes the form of a mini-development of this second theme—a precursor to the developmental power with which Beethoven and Brahms were to later imbue their own codas. Haydn closes his movement with a hushed ending.

The earnest F-minor feeling continues in the minuet movement, while the trio in the parallel major, F Major, offers welcome contrast. The part-writing here is noteworthy for the little solo turn given to the viola, not to mention the duetting of second violin and cello. A beguiling *Adagio* follows; it is a cavatina with an infectious repeating strain, a 6/8 siciliano centered in F major, with first and second violin trading phrases and a proliferation of embellishment in the first violin.

Haydn’s finale, like two of the other quartets in the “Sun” set, is fugal. Built on two subjects, the movement is a masterly polyphonic realization of the ideal of total four-part equality. At the same time, it seamlessly synthesizes Baroque and Classical practice; one of its subjects was lifted note-for-note from Handel’s *Messiah*—from the F-minor choral fugue “And with his stripes we are healed.”

Elizabeth Brown (1953 -)
Just Visible in the Distance (2013)

Composer-performer Elizabeth Brown is a phenomenon in her own right, and a musician who knows few boundaries. Diversity is her North Star. Born in Camden, Alabama, and raised on an agricultural research station, she received a Master’s in flute performance from Juilliard in 1977, and started composing very shortly thereafter. Five years later, she began studying shakuhachi and its music. This has been a major influence on her musical language, a fascinating combination of eastern and western sensibilities, incorporating at other times such instruments as the biwa and the shamisen. It has earned her major composition prizes as well as performances in Japan by Pro Musica Nipponia, Reigakusha, and Orchestra Asia.

Notable too are Elizabeth Brown’s accomplishments involving the theremin. As a thereminist, she has performed with the Boston Symphony, the Minnesota Orchestra, the American Symphony, and the American Composers Orchestra. Among her compositions featuring the theremin are *Arcana* and the chamber opera *Rural Electrification*. There have also been multimedia collaborations involving the visual artist, sculptor, and

printmaker Lothar Osterburg, who also happens to be her husband. They are both on the faculty at Bard College.

Just Visible in the Distance is a 2013 work written for and dedicated to the Momenta Quartet. In the words of Elizabeth Brown, “[it] consists of intuitively assembled small movements, each flowing into the next. Persistent musical material from some of my earlier pieces resurface often. The title is from W.G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*, a book I love and have read many times.” There is a profound analogy to be made between Brown’s work and Sebald’s novel—a walking tour of Suffolk “with meditations prompted by places and people encountered on that tour.” Similarly, Brown’s “small movements,” her “meditations” are clustered into two segments consisting of five “small movements” each. Her chamber music such as this has been described as “luminous, dreamlike and hallucinatory.”

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
String Quartet No. 13 in A Minor (“Rosamunde”)
D. 804, Op. 29

Composed between February and March of 1824, Schubert’s *String Quartet No. 13* is the first of three towering masterpieces coming from his final years; the other two are *Death and the Maiden* and *String Quartet No. 15*. The work is dedicated to Ignaz Schuppanzigh, whose string quartet gave the premiere performance on March 14, 1824. Schuppanzigh’s ensemble, arguably the first ongoing professional string quartet in history, enjoyed tremendous stature in early 19th-century Vienna, premiering virtually all the Beethoven string quartets.

The opening movement, an expansive sonata form, is remarkable in how it reconciles contradictions while maintaining organic unity. This is vividly displayed within the first minute-and-a-half. What catches one’s ear in the opening two measures is a subdued but restless accompaniment figure in the second violin with the underpinning of a repeated rhythmic pattern in viola and cello. It is an accompaniment figure reminiscent of one of Schubert’s earliest lieder, *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (*Gretchen at the spinning wheel*). A song based on a portion of Goethe’s *Faust*, it depicts Gretchen at her wheel spinning fiber into yarn; her heart is heavy as she yearns for Faust, realizing that her life will now never be the same. In this Schubert string quartet, the voice of Gretchen is suggested with the entrance of the first violin starting in measure three with a sighing version of a simple A-minor chord, dropping down from E to C, to A. As phrases unfold, there is sense of melancholy and vulnerability that persists even with a turn

to A major. But there is then a disruption in rhythm, dynamics, and voicing. In an assertive double forte, viola and cello announce in octaves a rhythmically energized version of the A minor triad with an emphatic trill added for good measure. And springing from this is an ascending triplet figure, hinting at a tarantella rhythm. Much of the subsequent drama of the whole movement is driven by a dialectic playing out between this double forte figure and the ascending triplets. Then again, Schubert's development section is stunning as he throws everything into the mix, heightening the tension with his modulations, contrapuntal virtuosity, and touches of frisson of repeated sixteenth notes derived from the very opening measures.

As for the C-major second movement, its primary material is the reason for the "Rosamunde" nickname of this quartet; Schubert repurposes the Entr'acte No. 3 from his incidental music to an 1823 play. He teases out elements of the melody, which happens to show an uncanny resemblance to the basic rhythm of the second movement theme of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

In the minuet movement, Schubert indulges in some more self-borrowing, quoting this time from one of his relatively obscure lieder, "The Gods of Greece." The melody is also used as a means of achieving a kind of cyclic unity both within and between movements. That is, both the beginning of the A-major trio and the opening of the finale, present an inversion of the melody's initial phrase. The finale itself, with its shift to A major and buoyant themes, evokes a sunny soundscape. Schubert works his magic on two main themes, one a gypsy, quasi-Hungarian type, the other a march off in the distance.

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The Callisto Quartet

Tentatively April 27, 2025



