



74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

OCTOBER 11, 2015 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PROGRAM



Photo Francois Sechet

3:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Hermès Quartet

Omer Bouchez, violin

Elise Liu, violin

Yung-Hsin Chang, viola

Anthony Kondo, cello

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 - 1791)

Quartet no. 14 in G Major, K. 387 ("Spring")

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto

Andate cantabile

Molto allegro

Anton Webern (1883 - 1945)

Five Movements, op. 5

Heftig bewegt

Sehr langsam

Sehr lebhaft

Sehr langsam

In zarter bewegung

Intermission

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

Quartet no. 14 in D Minor ("Death and the Maiden")

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

The Musicians

The luminous talent of the Paris-based Hermès Quartet members has consistently brought them acclaim. This season, the quartet performs in the United States at the National Gallery of Art; the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; Hayden's Ferry Chamber Music Series, Tempe, Arizona; Wave Hill, New York; Chamber Music Society of Palm Beach; Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center, Birmingham, Alabama; the Jewish Community Alliance, Jacksonville, Florida; and the Morgan Library and Museum, New York. Their European performance schedule includes festivals in France, Italy, Poland, Germany, Japan, South America, and Switzerland.

The quartet's past performances have included concerts and festivals in Europe, and recitals in the United States at the chamber music societies of Buffalo, Feldman, and Williamsburg; the Lied Center of Kansas, the University of Georgia, the Friends of Chamber Music in Texas, Iowa State University, University of Florida Performing Arts, Peoples Symphony Concerts, the Port Washington Library, the Cosmos Club, Candlelight Concert Society, the Embassy Series, Schneider Concerts at The New School, and at Rockefeller University.

Winner of the 2012 Young Concert Artists International Auditions, the Hermès Quartet made its US debuts at the opening concerts of the Young Concert Artists Series at Carnegie's Zankel Hall and at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater. The quartet has been awarded many prizes, including the 2013 NORDMETALL Ensemble Prize from the Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. They have been first-prize winners at the 2011 Geneva International Music Competition, the 2011 European Young Concert Artists Auditions in Leipzig, Germany, the 2010 European Chamber Music Competition in Paris, and the 2009 Lyon International Music Competition. The quartet currently holds the Helen F. Whitaker Chamber Music Chair of YCA and the Florence Gould Foundation Fellowship, and is the Artist in Residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Brussels.

The members of the quartet met at the Lyon Conservatory and formed the ensemble in 2008, under the tutelage of Zoltan Toth and Reiko Kitahama. They have worked with the Artemis Quartet at the Universität der Künste Berlin, and studied at the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional in Paris with members of the Ysaÿe Quartet.

Program Notes

Completed on December 31, 1782, Mozart's *String Quartet no. 14*, K. 387 would serve as the first of a set of six string quartets the composer would dedicate to Haydn. It had been over nine years since Mozart had composed a string quartet, which, as a genre, was still relatively young in its development. Upon moving to Vienna and encountering Haydn's landmark opus 33 string quartets (published in 1781), Mozart was inspired to return to the medium. Haydn's influence is clearly heard throughout the six "Haydn" quartets, which are still considered Mozart's finest of the twenty-three quartets he wrote. In technique, variety, ingenuity, and sheer musical brilliance, they constitute an important landmark of their own, equal to if not surpassing Haydn's models (at least up to that time). Together, the twelve quartets of Mozart and Haydn combined comprise the first great watershed of Viennese classical chamber music.

The first of these mature quartets opens with an allegro vivace of a technical complexity that may not be apparent to the casual listener, with a much extended central development section. The minuet brings curiously abrupt changes in dynamics, framing a G minor trio. The slow movement introduces delicate melodic embellishment and the appearance of a triplet accompaniment figure, introduced by the cello. The last movement starts with a subject imitated contrapuntally by the other instruments of the quartet, and this element of counterpoint is a continuing and important feature of the movement.

Austrian composer and conductor Anton Webern was a member of the Second Viennese School. As a student and significant follower of Arnold Schoenberg, he became one of the best-known exponents of the twelve-tone technique. His innovations regarding schematic organization of pitch, rhythm, and dynamics were formative in the musical technique later known as total serialism. While he was not a prolific composer — only thirty-one of his compositions were published in his lifetime — his influence on later composers was immense.

Like almost every composer who had a career of any length, Webern's music changed over time. However, it is typified by very spartan textures, in which every note can be clearly heard; carefully chosen timbres, often resulting in very detailed instructions to the performers and use of extended instrumental techniques; wide-ranging melodic lines, often with leaps greater than an octave; and brevity: the *Six Bagatelles for String Quartet* (1913), for instance, lasts about three minutes.

Webern's earliest works are in a late romantic style. They were neither published nor performed in his lifetime, though they are sometimes performed today. Webern composed the *Five Movements* in early summer 1909, a period during which he was in close contact with Schoenberg. They are considered to be his first completely atonal compositions, yet the anguished expressiveness of post-romanticism still lingers, particularly in the slow movements.

By Weberian standards, the *Five Movements* are long: about eleven minutes. The overall structure is roughly akin to an arch form. A central scherzo is flanked by two movements marked *Sehr langsam*, both of which are thirteen measures long. The opening and closing movements are somewhat larger scale, bookending the work. The score is so complex rhythmically, and the parts so closely intertwined, that all four players work from a full score rather than from a single part. Webern's meticulous instructions for dynamics and articulation invest his music with hypnotic power. Listening, you are likely to discover that you have been holding your breath.

By the early 1800s, Vienna was a breeding ground for great composers and innovators in the music world. Continuing in the tradition of Haydn and Mozart, by the 1820s, Beethoven had redefined the string quartet. Meanwhile, Franz Schubert was developing his own underground reputation as a composer of lieder — setting German romantic poetry to expressive songs. He knew that to gain any larger fame as a composer, he would have to take to bigger forms of music, and by the age of nineteen had composed eleven string quartets. Though he took a brief hiatus from the medium, he returned to it in 1824, following a period of serious illness, when he realized that he would not live much longer.

Schubert's 1817 song "Death and the Maiden" uses a poem by German composer Matthias Claudius. In it, a young maiden encounters the figure of Death and pleads for her life to be spared. Death is calmly insistent, convincing her that he is a friend and to come to his arms. While Schubert uses the song as a basis for a set of variations in the quartet's second movement, the overall tone of struggle against death seems to pervade the entire work, perhaps due to his own fear of dying. Now considered one of the great pillars of the chamber music repertoire, the quartet was not received well when it was first performed in a private home in 1826. It was published in 1831.

The Seventy-Fourth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Upcoming Concerts

Poulenc Trio
Music by Copland, Prokofiev,
Stravinsky, and Weinberg
October 18, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Nordic Weekend Celebrating
150th Birthdays of Jean Sibelius
and Carl Nielsen

National Gallery of Art String Quartet
October 23, Friday, 12:00
West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art Piano Trio
October 24, Saturday, 12:00
West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art Orchestra
Peter Wilson, guest conductor
October 25, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Music by Sibelius and Nielsen

General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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