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TillesCenter

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KRASNOFF THEATER

– Sunday, April 16, 2023 at 3 PM –

Ying Quartet



Sponsored by the Hon. Roger B. Tilles

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PROGRAM

- Mozart String Quartet in B-flat major, K. 589
Allegro
Larghetto
Menuetto. Moderato – Trio
Allegro assai
- Puts *Dark Vigil* (Commissioned by the Ying Quartet)

Intermission

- Dvořák String Quartet in G major, Op. 106
Allegro moderato
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
Finale: Andante sostenuto

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

String Quartet in B-flat major, K. 589

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born: January 27, 1756, in Salzburg

Died: December 5, 1791, in Vienna

In the summer of 1788, at a time of terrible reversals and disappointments for Mozart, he composed his last three symphonies, powerfully assertive and profound works. In the spring of 1789, his pupil, Prince Carl Lichnowsky, who was later to be involved with Beethoven, was almost the only member of the Viennese nobility who continued to be interested in Mozart, who understood his greatness, and, as a result, tried to rescue his failing career. Lichnowsky took Mozart on a trip to Berlin to meet the King of Prussia, Frederick Wilhelm II, a devoted music lover and amateur cellist. It is thought that the King paid Mozart a moderate fee for a private concert at court and then commissioned six string quartets for himself and six piano sonatas for his young daughter. When Mozart returned to Vienna, he begged some loans from his friends, to be repaid, he said, when he had completed the commission. Although Mozart was in his prime, he was never able to fulfill the commission even though he could have written the required works in a few months. Although he quickly completed the first quartet, K. 575 in D, he composed no more of Frederick William's quartets for another year. In part that may have been as a result of an intervening commission he received for the opera *Così fan tutte*, in late 1789. He did not completely neglect the earlier commission; he composed a quartet for the King in June, a sonata for the Princess in July, and this quartet in May of 1790; following that, he wrote another in June, and then no more.

There is, in fact, no evidence that Frederick William ever saw or played the three quartets that Mozart completed. Mozart received no money from him for them, but they were sold to the publisher Artaria for what Mozart called despairingly “*Spottgeld*,” a pittance, and were not published until after the composer’s death in January 1792.

Mozart told friends that the quartets were difficult and troublesome, but it is not clear whether he meant difficult to write or difficult to play. The cello, since it was the royal instrument, is given unusual prominence. This quartet is a masterpiece of great maturity and seriousness of purpose, although it may be based in part on ideas sketched years earlier.

The opening Allegro, a quiet rather introspective movement, uses a classic sonata-structure with fine detail. The main theme and the subsidiary themes are cantabile in style. They each feature the cello, sometimes rising high into its upper range. Next comes a slow movement, Larghetto, a relatively brief movement that is a beautiful aria for the cello. In the Minuet, Moderato, a surprise is the long, highly developed, virtuosic central section. The compact rondo finale, Allegro assai, although witty, is full of highly complex counterpoint and is an original technical tour-de-force. It replaces an earlier idea for a variation movement and allows the cello to have a share of the attention again.

Dark Vigil

Kevin Puts

Born: 1972, in St. Louis, Missouri

Dark Vigil was commissioned by the Ying Quartet through the Institute for American Music in Rochester, New York.

The composer writes:

Dark Vigil is a reaction to the unrelenting pattern of violence that has plagued our country’s elementary and high schools during the past year. The title was inspired by news footage I saw of a high school in the Midwest whose students and faculty staged a shooting as a means of preparation for such an event. This conjured up a horrific image of the students as soldiers on a battlefield, their eyes and ears always alert to the threat of attack.

Written in one movement, the work explores the emotional complexities and turmoil of adolescence as well as my own struggle to understand the capacity of America’s teens to commit these acts. In the broadest sense the piece depicts a conflict between innocence and evil. This central conflict fades away in the concluding section, in which quietly pulsing harmonies are superimposed by lyrical counterpoint to represent both a memorial to those whose lives have been cut short by their peers, and a spiritual transcendence by those who are forced to come to terms with the loss of their loved ones. The work lasts about seventeen minutes and is dedicated, with many thanks and great admiration, to the Ying Quartet.

- Kevin Puts, 1999

String Quartet in G major, Op. 106

Antonín Dvořák

**Born: September 8, 1841, in Nelahozeves, Bohemia
(now the Czech Republic)**

Died: May 1, 1904, in Prague

Antonín Dvořák began life modestly as the son of a village innkeeper and butcher, whose aspirations were limited to hoping that his son would take over the family trade, but Dvořák chose to make a career in music instead. He studied the violin and organ locally as a child, and at the age of sixteen, left home to study in Prague. Five years later, he joined the orchestra of the National Theater as a violist (in those days an instrument usually taken up only by failed violinists), but he was almost thirty before he had his first successful performance of one of his own major compositions. Then his career took off, and as he wrote more music, his fame grew. He eventually became a figure of world importance. Chamber music had an important place in Dvořák's life; he played many of his earliest works with his colleagues and friends while developing his craft. He held a post as professor of Composition at Prague Conservatory, was the recipient of honorary degrees from Cambridge University in England and the University in Prague, and, during his three-year residence in the United States, he was director of a conservatory in New York.

This String Quartet is a late work, which Dvořák wrote in 1895, when he had become one of the world's most honored composers. In 1892, Dvořák was appointed the head of a new conservatory in New York, where he wrote some of the best music of his mature years: the *New World* Symphony and the Cello Concerto as well as the *American* String

Quartet and a String Quintet in E-flat. Despite his enthusiasm for the young society on our continent, he knew that his art was rooted in his own homeland, and, after spending a five-month leave there, in 1894, he decided that he could not remain in America much longer. In March 1895, he began a string quartet in New York, but he soon put it aside, and in April, he started on the journey back to Prague.

His first months in Prague were quiet, but when he began to teach at the Prague Conservatory again in the autumn, the creative urge returned. He completed this String Quartet in less than a month; he was so pleased with his work that he then took up the other that he had begun in New York, and in a few weeks, he had finished that one too.

Dvořák's chamber music was in great demand, thus both works were quickly published, with the Opus 105 designation given to the one begun earlier in the United States, but finished after this one, No. 106. In the manuscript of the Quartet in G Major, Dvořák noted happily, "first composition after second return from America."

The quartet is a work of warm and spontaneous invention, reflecting Dvořák's comfort and happiness at being home. The beginning of the optimistic first movement reflects this joy. Although some find the music of this work sounds very Czech, Dvořák rarely incorporated actual folk songs in his music, but rather composed new melodies that had the style or feeling of folk songs. The main theme of the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, does not have a conventional melody but instead a complex of carefree melodic motives that explore several keys and add up to something like a bird song; everywhere a rustling under-

current of sound like that heard in even the quietest places in nature is evoked. The second theme is smooth; a lilting third theme, characterized by flowing triplets, is also introduced. The development makes use of all three themes, with rich harmony and modulation. In the recapitulation, a more delicate counter melody is added to the first theme, while the second theme forms the basis of the coda.

The lyrical slow second movement, *Adagio ma non troppo*, is a freely formed meditation on a theme that Dvořák elevates to grand and passionate climaxes. It has been singled out as one of the most glorious creations the composer ever achieved. The next movement, *Molto vivace*, a scherzo, he developed and extended beyond the usual limits of the form. It has extraordinary vibrancy. A hopping Czech dance (*skočná*) provided the rhythmic inspiration for the movement.

The quartet ends with a Finale whose brief, slow introduction, *Andante sostenuto*, becomes transformed into the theme of a lively dance in the Czech *furiant* style, *Allegro con fuoco*, in the form of an ebullient rondo, during the course of which the first movement is recalled artfully.

MEET THE ARTISTS

Ying Quartet

“The ensemble replicated the sounds of water.”
– *The New York Times*

The Grammy Award-winning Ying Quartet occupies a position of unique prominence in the classical music world, combining brilliantly communicative performances with a fearlessly imaginative view of chamber music in today’s world. Now in its third decade, the Quartet has established itself as an ensemble of the highest musical qualifications. The Quartet’s performances regularly take place in many of the world’s most important concert halls; at the same time, the Ying’s belief that concert music can also be a meaningful part of everyday life has drawn the foursome to perform in settings as diverse as the workplace, schools, juvenile prisons, and the White House.

The Ying Quartet first came to professional prominence in the early 1990s as the first recipient of an NEA Rural Residence Grant which led to it serving as the resident quartet of Jesup, Iowa, a farm town of 2,000 people. Playing before audiences of six to six hundred in homes, schools, churches, and banks, the Quartet had its first opportunities to use music and creative endeavor to help build community and authentic human connection. The Quartet considers its time in Jesup the foundation of its present musical life and goals.

The Quartet’s recent seasons have featured performances in major halls throughout the world including in New York,

Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, and multiple tours throughout China. The Ying also collaborates regularly with jazz pianist Billy Childs, bassist Xavier Foley, and PUSH Physical Theatre.

The Ying's ongoing *LifeMusic* commissioning project, created in response to its commitment to expanding the rich string quartet repertoire, has already achieved an impressive history. Supported by the Institute for American Music, the Ying Quartet commissions both established and emerging composers to create music that reflects contemporary American life.

Recent works include Billy Childs' *Awakening*; Lera Auerbach's *Sylvia's Diary*; Lowell Liebermann's String Quartet No. 3, *To the Victims of War*; Sebastian Currier's *Next Atlantis*; and John Novacek's *Three Rags for String Quartet*. In August 2016, the Ying Quartet released a new Schumann/Beethoven recording on Sono Luminus with renowned cellist Zuill Bailey, and in that season the five toured with the Schumann Cello Concerto transcribed for cello and string quartet along with Beethoven's "Kreutzer Sonata," also reimagined for cello quintet.

The Ying Quartet's numerous other recordings reflect many of the group's wide-ranging musical interests and have generated consistent, enthusiastic acclaim. The group's CD *American Anthem* (Sono Luminus), heralding the music of Randall Thompson, Samuel Barber, and Howard Hanson, was released in 2013 to rave reviews; its 2007 Telarc release of the three Tchaikovsky Quartets and the *Souvenir de Florence* (with James Dunham and Paul Katz) was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Chamber

Music Performance category.

As longtime quartet-in-residence at the prestigious Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY, the Ying Quartet teaches in the string department and leads a rigorous, sequentially designed chamber music program. One cornerstone of chamber music activity at Eastman is the noted "Music for All" program, in which all students curate opportunities to perform in community settings beyond the concert hall. The Quartet is also the ensemble-in-residence at the Bowdoin International Music Festival, and from 2001-2008, the members of the Ying Quartet were the Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University.