

Parker Quartet

Hailstork, Kurtág, Berg and Schumann

Sunday, Nov. 21, 4 p.m.

Monday, Nov. 22, 7:30 p.m.

Grusin Music Hall

Program

Adagio from String Quartet No. 1

Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941)

Aus der Ferne V

György Kurtág (b. 1926)

Lyric Suite

Alban Berg (1885-1935)

- I. Allegretto gioviale
- II. Andante amoroso
- III. Allegro misterioso – Trio estatico
- IV. Adagio appassionato
- V. Presto delirando – Tenebroso
- VI. Largo desolato

— Intermission —

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 41 No. 3

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

- I. Andante espressivo – Allegro molto moderato
- II. Assai agitato
- III. Adagio molto
- IV. Finale. Allegro molto vivace – Quasi Trio

PLEASE NOTE

- Masks are required in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus, regardless of vaccination status.
 - Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager.
 - Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
 - Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus.
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Program notes

By Marc Shulgold

Adagio from String Quartet No. 1

Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941)

New York-born and now a longtime resident of Virginia, Adolphus Hailstork combines composition, conducting and teaching in Norfolk (currently at Old Dominion University). Music for orchestra and various chamber ensembles dominates his list of works, though much of his creative inspiration comes from the spirituals and other traditional melodies he has embraced as a leading voice among African American composers.

A fine example of that choral influence can be found in the slow movement of the first of his three string quartets, a piece written in 2002 and dedicated to the Virginia Chamber Players, who premiered the work. The poignant *Adagio* is based on a choral piece Hailstork had written for his choir at a Norfolk Unitarian church. Commenting on the first string quartet, Hailstork observed, “All the material in this work was derived from the melody of the (*Adagio*).”

The original choral piece, *I Am Only One*, uses a brief text by the author and Unitarian minister Edward Everett Hale, best known for *The Man Without a Country*. The words are simple and direct—lovingly captured in Hailstork’s melody: “I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something...” After a gentle statement of a B-major chord that evolves into a short spurt of dissonance, the choral melody emerges. Hale’s text ends as simply as it began: “...because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

Aus der Ferne V

György Kurtág (b. 1926)

Described as “one of the last living giants of 20th-century music,” the 95-year-old Hungarian composer/pianist/teacher continues to be a major presence. Until his beloved Márta’s death in 2019, Kurtág and his wife had teamed up to perform his music, along with his settings of Bach for piano four-hands, for over 40 years. One can point to three significant 20th-century composers as important influences on Kurtág’s early development: Olivier Messiaen, Darius Milhaud, his

teachers in Paris during the pivotal years of 1957-58, and his close friend and fellow student György Ligeti. Another important figure in his life came from outside the music world: A bout of deep depression and writer’s block was relieved by therapy he received from psychologist Marianne Stein.

His excited discovery of Anton Webern’s music during those years in Paris led to an intense study of Webern’s tightly constructed works. That influence reveals itself in a series of short, clipped phrases, notably in Kurtág’s chamber works, particularly his string quartet. Such is not the case in two works for quartet dedicated to his Viennese publisher Alfred Schlee, a champion of the avant-garde who had rescued innumerable scores from the hands of the Nazis.

Each of those brief pieces, *Aus der Ferne III* (translated as “From Afar”) and *Aus der Ferne V*, begins with repeated plucked notes from the cello, quietly suggesting a heartbeat, while sustained notes hover over that ominous pulse. *Aus der Ferne V* was written following Schlee’s death in 1999. Its opening cello pizzicatos (marked *Öd und traurig*—“barren and sad”) are set in E-flat, honoring the late publisher with the first letter of his name (in German, es). Unfolding in slow motion, the music retains its peaceful atmosphere, suddenly interrupted by a short outburst of anguished chords, before subtly evolving into barely-audible rising notes that perhaps suggest an ascent to heaven. Those long-held notes continue until they evaporate and are heard no more. In its three minutes, this work demonstrates Kurtág’s mastery of intimate music that is matched in its brevity with intense, understated emotions.

Lyric Suite

Alban Berg (1885-1935)

The six movements of Berg’s remarkable work from 1926 can be viewed on two distinct levels—take your pick. On its surface, the *Lyric Suite* represents the composer’s first attempt at working in the newly developed “emancipation of dissonance” that his teacher, Arnold Schoenberg, had introduced. Not every movement here is built on a 12-tone row, but that concept seems to hover over the entire work, bringing it front and center to the beginnings of an era of unblinking modernism. Ah, but then, there’s that other level of engagement for listeners: a passionate, forbidden love affair concealed as an enormous musical secret.

It all began innocently enough in 1925, with Berg's visit to Prague, where he stayed at the home of a Czech industrialist named Herbert Fuchs-Robettin. The composer, a married man, had arrived to hear excerpts of his opera *Wozzeck* conducted by his friend, composer Alexander von Zemlinsky. It didn't take long for Berg to fall madly in love with his host's wife, Hanna Fuchs, who seemed to fall for her house guest as well. The couple agreed to keep things under wraps, but Berg could not contain his passion, and over the following 12 months, created a work for string quartet that was embedded with expressions of his love for Hanna.

A follower of numerology (among other esoteric interests), he assigned the number 23 to represent himself, and 10 for Hanna. Musicologists have had a field day finding those mathematical clues everywhere in the Lyric Suite. The whole secret affair, however, exploded in 1977, when George Perle discovered a miniature score that had been fully annotated by Berg in colored pencil, explaining every nuance of his love, created in cleverly hidden musical terms. For example, the initials of the lovers were revealed in the frequently paired notes A and B-flat (in German, A and B) along with B and F (in German, H and F).

Perle also discovered that the final movement (featuring the opening notes of *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner's tale of immortal love) also contained a disguised song inspired by a poem of anguished passion by Charles Baudelaire. In one of his letters to Hanna, Berg pondered the secrets in his composition: "Will anyone besides you guess what these sounds, casually played by four simple instruments, want to say?" Here's another question: Will our knowledge of their affair bring us closer to this extraordinary quartet? Your call.

String Quartet No. 3, Op. 41 No. 3

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Unlike most composers who juggle genres simultaneously, Schumann seemed to be single-minded in his approach to writing music. Early on, he devoted a ten-year compositional stretch almost exclusively to the piano. In 1840 (the year he married), he wrote more than 150 songs, inspiring music historians to declare it his "Year of Song." At the urging of his wife Clara, he then turned his attention to large-scale music, writing four major orchestral works in 1841. The following year, his focus turned to chamber music, resulting

in his only string quartets, the three of Op. 41, created in a mere five weeks (the third took only a few days). That same year also witnessed the completion of the Piano Quartet and Piano Quintet, along with a set of pieces for piano trio.

In preparation for writing Op. 41, Schumann spent hours devouring the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and, above all, Beethoven—also spending time studying quartets by his friend Mendelssohn (who would become the posthumous dedicatee when Op. 41 was published in 1848). The fact that Schumann's set consisted of three works, as had Mendelssohn's Op. 44, suggested a strong connection. Though both composers had studied the quartets of those three early masters, it's clear that both intended to expand the possibilities of four solo strings.

Schumann's Op. 41 was presented to Clara on her 23rd birthday, Sept. 13, 1842. "I cannot say anything about the quartets except that they delight me in every way," she wrote in her diary that day. "Everything in them is new and, at the same time, clear, finely worked and always suited to the quartet."

There is, indeed, much that is fresh and original. For starters, Schumann had originally intended the first two works to be played in succession, and even wrote out transition passages for such a purpose. This plan was discarded with the completion of No. 3, however.

The third quartet offers an abundance of "new" elements, both in structure and in Schumann's unmistakably personal, romantic language. The very first phrase, the interval of a descending fifth that becomes the seed of the opening movement, can be interpreted as a sigh, perhaps speaking the name of his beloved wife, "Cla-ra." Knowing as we do the composer's unconcealed emotional persona, this is no exaggerated suggestion.

There are unexpected turns everywhere, noticeably in the second movement—a subtle set of variations, rather than a traditionally structured A-B-A *Scherzo*, with the complete theme's presentation delayed until very near the end. The slow movement is a glorious, richly textured *Adagio*, leading into a joyous, dance-like rondo *Finale*.

About the performers

Daniel Chong, violin | Ken Hamao, violin |
Jessica Bodner, viola | Kee-Hyun Kim, cello

Inspiring performances, luminous sound, and exceptional musicianship are the hallmarks of the Grammy-winning **Parker Quartet**. Renowned for its dynamic interpretations and polished, expansive colors, the group has rapidly distinguished itself as one of the preeminent ensembles of its generation, dedicated purely to the sound and depth of their music. The Quartet has appeared at the world's most important venues since its founding in 2002.

The Parker Quartet is now in its seventh year as faculty members of Harvard University's Department of Music in the group's role as Blodgett Artists-in-Residence. Recent seasons included performances and residencies around the United States and Europe, including at the University of Iowa, the University of Chicago, the Wigmore Hall, the University of South Carolina, the Schubert Club, Skidmore College, and Kansas City's Friends of Chamber Music.

The Quartet has been influential in projects ranging from the premiere of a new octet by Zosha di Castri alongside the JACK Quartet at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity; to the premiere of Augusta Read Thomas's *Helix Spirals*, a piece inspired by the Meselson-Stahl DNA replication discovery; to the "Schubert Effect," in collaboration with pianist Shai Wosner at the 92nd Street Y. Other recent highlights include appearances at Carnegie Hall, the Library of Congress, the Slee Series in Buffalo, and New York's Lincoln Center Great Performers series. The Quartet also continues to be a strong supporter of their friend and frequent collaborator Kim Kashkashian's project *Music for Food* by participating in concerts throughout the United States for the benefit of various food banks and shelters.

The Quartet has been particularly focused on recording projects. They have recorded Dvořák's *Viola Quintet* for ECM Records, joined by Kim Kashkashian, as well as Kurtág's *Six Moments Musicaux* and *Officium breve in memoriam*. Under the auspices of the Monte Carlo Festival Printemps des Arts, they recorded a disc of three Beethoven quartets, released in the fall of 2019. The Quartet's recording featuring Mendelssohn's *Quartets Op. 44*,

Nos. 1 and 3, was widely lauded by the international press, and their debut commercial recording of Bartók's *String Quartets Nos. 2 and 5* for Zig-Zag Territoires won praise from Gramophone: "The Parkers' Bartók spins the illusion of spontaneous improvisation... they have absorbed the language; they have the confidence to play freely with the music and the instinct to bring it off." Their Naxos recording of György Ligeti's complete works for string quartet won the 2011 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance (the last string quartet to win this category).

Recent collaborations include those with acclaimed artists like violist Kim Kashkashian, featured on their recent Dvořák recording; violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg; pianists Anne-Marie McDermott, Orion Weiss, Vijay Iyer, and Shai Wosner; members of the Silk Road Ensemble; Kikuei Ikeda of the Tokyo String Quartet; clarinetist and composer Jörg Widmann; and clarinetists Anthony McGill and Charles Neidich.

Founded and currently based in Boston, the Parker Quartet's numerous honors include winning the Concert Artists Guild Competition, the Grand Prix and Mozart Prize at France's Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition, and Chamber Music America's prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award. Now Blodgett Artists-in-Residence at Harvard University's Department of Music, and also in-residence at the UofSC School of Music, the Quartet's numerous residencies have included serving as Artists-in-Residence at the University of St. Thomas (2012–2014), Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Minnesota (2011–2012), Quartet-in-Residence with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra (2008–2010), and as the first-ever Artists-in-Residence with Minnesota Public Radio (2009–2010).

The Parker Quartet's members hold graduate degrees in performance and chamber music from the New England Conservatory of Music and the Juilliard School, and the Quartet was part of the New England Conservatory's prestigious Professional String Quartet Training Program from 2006–2008. Some of their most influential mentors include the original members of the Cleveland Quartet as well as Kim Kashkashian, György Kurtág, and Rainer Schmidt.