

Dover Quartet

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 5 PM
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465, “Dissonance” (1785)

- I. *Adagio; Allegro*
- II. *Andante cantabile*
- III. *Menuetto. Allegro*
- IV. *Allegro molto*

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)

String Quartet No. 2, Opus 17 (1915–7)

- I. *Moderato*
- II. *Allegro molto capriccioso*
- III. *Lento*

INTERMISSION

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809–1847)

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 44, No. 1 (1838)

- I. *Molto Allegro vivace*
- II. *Menuetto. Un poco Allegretto*
- III. *Andante espressivo ma con moto*
- IV. *Presto con brio*

String Quartet No. 19 in C Major, K. 465, “Dissonance” (1785)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756, and died in Vienna, Austria, on December 5, 1791.

🕒 Approx. performance time: 30 mins.

📅 SMF performance history: 3/24/06

Mozart completed the C Major String Quartet, K. 465, in Vienna on January 14, 1785. It is the last in a series of six Quartets (Nos. 14–19) that Mozart dedicated to his friend Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809). Mozart’s biographer, Franz Xaver Niemetschek, wrote in 1808:

Mozart also soon became the most devoted admirer of the great unforgettable Joseph Haydn, who was even then already the pride of music, and who now, after Mozart’s death, remains our sole darling and our joy. Mozart often referred to him as his teacher.

Mozart and Haydn, both accomplished string players, often performed in chamber music recitals. In his 1829 *Reminiscences*, Mozart’s friend, the Abbé Maximilian Stadler, recalled:

Mozart and Haydn frequently played together with (Stadler) Mozart’s Quintettos; (Stadler) particularly mentioned the 5th in D Major (K. 593)...the one in C Major (K. 515), and still more that in G minor (K. 516)...1st Viola either Mozart or Haydn in turn.

It appears that the 1781 publication of Haydn’s Six String Quartets, Opus 33, served as inspiration for Mozart to compose a similar collection. Mozart composed these superb chamber works during a period that spanned from late 1782 to early 1785. The esteemed Viennese company, Artaria, published the Six “Haydn Quartets” in 1785. The score included this dedication by Mozart, written in Italian:

Vienna, 1 September 1785

To my dear friend Haydn,

A father who had decided to send out his sons into the great world, thought it his duty to entrust them to the protection and guidance of a man who was very celebrated at the time and who, moreover, happened to be his best friend.

In like manner I send you my six sons to you, most celebrated and very dear friend. They are, indeed, the fruit of a long and laborious study; but the hope which many friends have given me that this toil will be in some degree rewarded, encourages me and flatters me with the thought that these children may one day prove a source of consolation to me.

During your last stay in this capital, you yourself, my very dear friend, expressed to me your approval of these compositions. Your good opinion encourages me to offer them to you and leads me to hope that you will not consider them wholly unworthy of your favor. Please then receive them kindly and be to them a father, guide and friend! From this moment I surrender to you all my rights over them. I entreat you, however, to be indulgent to those faults which may have escaped a father’s partial eye, and in spite of them, to continue your generous friendship toward one who so highly appreciates it.

The extensive revisions Mozart penned during the creation of his “Haydn Quartets” reflect the seriousness with which he viewed these works, and his reverence for their ultimate dedicatee.

On February 11, 1785, in Vienna, Mozart was the soloist in the world premiere of his Piano Concerto No. 20, K. 466. The following evening, Mozart offered a private concert of the last three

of the six Quartets dedicated to Haydn, who was in attendance. Haydn, then the most esteemed musician in Vienna, told a beaming Leopold Mozart: “Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name. He has taste and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

In 1790, Haydn accepted a lucrative invitation to travel to London. Mozart tried to talk his friend out of making the voyage. According to Haydn biographer A.C. Dies, Mozart exclaimed:

“We are probably saying our last adieu in this life.” Tears welled in both men’s eyes. Haydn was deeply moved, for he applied Mozart’s words to himself, and the possibility never occurred to him that the thread of Mozart’s life could be cut by the inexorable (Fates) the very next year.

Mozart died on December 5, 1791 at the age of 35.

I. *Adagio; Allegro*—The Quartet opens with an extended and mysterious slow-tempo introduction (*Adagio*), whose harmonic ambiguities inspired the work’s “Dissonance” nickname. Some of Mozart’s contemporaries and early successors assumed the composer had made errors while transcribing the score. But the genius of Mozart’s bold harmonic explorations in the *Adagio* becomes clear when the ensuing *Allegro* sprints into the brilliant sunshine of C Major. The first violin leads the introduction of the initial principal theme that undergoes an extensive treatment by the quartet. The first and second violins present the second theme, opening with a pair of quarter notes. The opening theme serves to launch the development section that finally concludes with a brief pause. The violins lead the start of the recapitulation of the principal themes. The *Allegro* finally resolves (perhaps a bit surprisingly) to a serene close.

II. *Andante cantabile*—The slow-tempo second movement glows with a rapt lyricism, tinged with pathos. The year after composing this Quartet, Mozart completed his opera, *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*). In that work, much the same kind of heartfelt lyrical expression may be found in Mozart’s writing for the soprano role of the noble Countess Almaviva, who yearns for the resumption of her husband’s affections.

III. *Menuetto. Allegro*—The third movement is a *Minuet* (*Menuetto. Allegro*), a dance in triple meter. The principal *Minuet* offers a compelling juxtaposition of *piano* and *forte* dynamics that is continued in the central C minor *Trio* episode. The movement concludes with a reprise of the *Minuet*.

IV. *Allegro molto*—The finale, like the opening movement, is cast in sonata form (exposition, development, and recapitulation of central themes). The theme that launches the finale also recalls its counterpart at the start of the *Allegro* portion of the first movement. Mozart proceeds to lavish an abundance of thematic material upon a finale notable for its unbounded high spirits, right to the bracing final bars.

String Quartet No. 2, Opus 17 (1915–7)

Béla Bartók was born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now, Sinnicolau Mare, Romania), on March 25, 1881, and died in New York on September 26, 1945.

🕒 *Approx. performance time: 29 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

Hungarian composer Béla Bartók wrote his Second String Quartet during the First World War. Bartók was 33 at the outbreak of the “War to End All Wars.” On October 30, 1914, Bartók wrote to a friend: “I also belong to the age-group which is to be called up for military service. There is a good chance I shall be rejected on health grounds. But nowadays there’s no knowing anything in advance.” Bartók did indeed receive a medical deferment, and spent the war years studying the folk music of his native land, as well as of other regions.

The String Quartet No. 2 was one of the few works Bartók composed during World War I. He dedicated the piece to the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet, who performed the work’s premiere in Budapest on March 3, 1918. Bartók’s friend and fellow Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály described the Second Quartet’s three movements as: “1.) A quiet life; 2.) Joy; 3.) Sorrow.” For his part, Bartók confessed: “My second string quartet was too unaccustomed for the public of the day.” Without question, the Bartók String Quartet No. 2 is a challenging work, both for performers and audiences. But while the challenges are profound, so too are the rewards of this complex, heartfelt, and deeply expressive work.

I. *Moderato*—After a brief, pulsating introduction, the first violin plays the opening movement’s central theme, launched by a three-note motif, and juxtaposing 9/8 and 6/8 meters. The majority of the subsequent themes are derived from the opening material. After a brief pause, the viola launches the development section with the three-note motif, soon repeated by the first and second violins. The development builds to a passionate climax that finally subsides, leading to the first

violin’s *dolce* restatement of the opening theme, the start of the recapitulation. In the final bars, the violins’ ascent is capped by the cello’s arching phrase.

II. *Allegro molto capriccioso*—Bartók not only studied and maintained a lifelong affection for the folk music of his native land, he believed it was an integral component of concert music. Among the three movements of the String Quartet, the second most profoundly reflects that aesthetic. Over a repeated, insistent accompaniment by the second violin, the first violin plays the movement’s central theme, a vigorous dance, bursting with energy and momentum. That dance returns throughout, couched in a variety of instrumental settings, and alternating with contrasting episodes. A *Prestissimo* setting of the dance provides the whirlwind finish, sealed by the ensemble’s *fortissimo* unison outburst.

III. *Lento*—The slow-tempo finale opens with an introduction by muted strings. The first violin introduces the mournful initial theme. The themes that follow, and their subsequent modified restatement, are all tinged with a pathos that occasionally erupts into cries of pain. Pizzicato notes, uttered by the viola and cello, mark the Quartet’s despairing conclusion.

String Quartet No. 3 in D Major, Opus 44, No. 1 (1838)

Felix Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany, on February 3, 1809, and died in Leipzig, Germany, on November 4, 1847.

🕒 *Approx performance time: 30 mins.*

📅 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

Felix Mendelssohn composed his String Quartets, Opus 44, Nos. 1–3, during 1837–8, an especially happy period in the composer’s life. On March 28, 1837, Mendelssohn wed Cécile Jeanrenaud, and their first child was born the following year. During this time, Mendelssohn was also enjoying great success as a composer, pianist, and conductor of the superb Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Although the D Major Quartet bears the catalogue listing of Opus 44, No. 1, it was the last of the three that Mendelssohn composed. He began work on the D Major Quartet in Leipzig in April of 1838, and finished the piece that July 24, while in Berlin. On July 30, Mendelssohn wrote to violinist Ferdinand David (concertmaster of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, and the soloist in the world premiere of the composer’s immortal 1844 Violin Concerto, Opus 64): “I have just finished my third Quartet, in D Major, and it pleases me greatly. I hope it

may please you, too. I think it will, since it is more spirited and seems to me to be more grateful to the players than the others.”

Mendelssohn dedicated the trio of Opus 44 String Quartets to the Crown Prince of Sweden. The premiere of Opus 44, No. 1, took place at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on February 16, 1839, with a quartet comprising Ferdinand David and C.W. Ulrich, violins, Carl Traugott Quiesner, viola, and cellist Andreas Grabau.

I. *Molto Allegro vivace*—The first violin immediately sings the joyful, wide-ranging initial principal theme. Repetitions of the theme are juxtaposed with more restrained episodes. The first violin also introduces the second principal theme, *pianissimo* and in the minor key. Echoes of the initial theme round out the exposition. An expansive and energetic development section builds to the *fortissimo* start of the recapitulation. The opening theme predominates in the closing bars, capped by a trio of emphatic chords.

II. *Menuetto. Un poco Allegretto*—In Mendelssohn’s time, it was not unusual to reverse the traditional order of a slow-tempo second movement and a dance-inspired third. What is unusual is Mendelssohn’s use of a *Minuet* (*Menuetto. Un poco allegretto*), an elegant dance in triple meter, popular in Haydn and Mozart’s time. The ensemble, led by the first violin, sings the *Minuet*’s lilting melody. A contrasting minor-key episode is based upon an undulating motif. A reprise of both principal components rounds out the *Minuet*.

III. *Andante espressivo ma con moto*—The Quartet’s slow-tempo movement opens with the first violin playing a yearning melody over sixteenth-note counterpoint in the second violin. The second principal melody, marked *cantabile*, is introduced in a similar fashion. A high-flying episode for the first violin leads to a reprise of the opening melody, with the viola now providing a lovely countermelody. The second melody follows in due course, leading to the *Andante*’s hushed conclusion.

IV. *Presto con brio*—As in the finale of his “Italian” Symphony, No. 4 in A Major, Opus 90 (1833), Mendelssohn concludes his D Major Quartet with a lively Italian dance known as a *saltarello*. The ensemble’s opening fanfare launches the finale, and the quicksilver *saltarello* melody. The second principal melody offers far more restraint and intimacy. But the predominant atmosphere is one of a festive celebration that sprints to an exuberant close.