

SAVANNAH MUSIC FESTIVAL PRESENT:

Philip Dukes & Escher

String Quartet Program II

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 6 PM
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



SAVANNAH
MUSIC FESTIVAL
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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM BY
KEN MELTZER

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

String Quartet No. 5 in E-flat Major,
Opus 44, No. 3 (1838)

- I. *Allegro vivace*
- II. *Scherzo. Assai leggiero vivace*
- III. *Adagio non troppo*
- IV. *Molto Allegro con fuoco*

GEORGE WALKER (1922-
2018)

***Lyric for Strings* (1946)**

WOLFGANG AMADEUS
MOZART (1756-1791)

String Quintet No. 5 in D Major,
K. 593 (1790)

- I. *Larghetto; Allegro*
- II. *Adagio*
- III. *Menuetto. Allegretto*
- IV. *Allegro*

Philip Dukes, viola

Escher String Quartet:

Adam Barnett-Hart, violin

Brendan Speltz, violin

Pierre Lapointe, viola

Brook Speltz, cello

STRING QUARTET NO. 5 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 44, NO. 3 (1838)

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

Approximate performance time is 33 minutes. This is an 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. Mendelssohn was also enjoying great success as a composer, pianist, and conductor of the superb Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Mendelssohn dedicated the trio of Opus 44 String Quartets to the Crown Prince of Sweden. Although the E-flat Major Quartet bears the catalogue listing of Opus 44, No. 3, it was the second of the trio that Mendelssohn composed. Mendelssohn completed the works in the following sequence: Quartet in E minor, Opus 44, No. 2 (June 18, 1837), Quartet in E-flat Major, Opus 44, No. 3 (February 6, 1838), and Quartet in D Major, Opus 44, No. 1 (July 24, 1838).

I. *Allegro vivace*—The expansive opening movement is unified by the briefest of motifs; the scurrying sixteenth note figure played by the first violin that serves to open the work. An extended

treatment of that motif finally resolves to the second principal theme, played by the second violin, viola, and cello (while the first violin repeats the sixteenth note motif). The concluding principal theme is a radiant descending melody, marked *dolce*, and played by the first violin. The cello's brusque invocation of the sixteenth note figure launches a rich and intense development section. While the first violin engages in yet another flight of sixteenth notes, the second violin leads the start of the recapitulation. The viola's repetition of the opening motif, punctuated by remaining instruments' pizzicato response, marks the start of the final coda, leading to the movement's joyous close.

II. *Scherzo. Assai leggiero vivace*—The composer maintains an atmosphere of hushed, restive mystery throughout the Quartet's remarkable *Scherzo*. The movement, in C minor, comprises three central themes. The first violin heads the introduction of the insistent first theme. The second theme, like its predecessor, is based upon repeated notes, but now punctuated by brief pauses. The third theme, launched by the viola, explores contrapuntal writing. Four unison pizzicato notes bring this magical excursion to a hushed close.

III. *Adagio non troppo*—The Quartet's slow-tempo movement, cast in 3/4 meter and the key of A-flat Major, opens with a pulsating figure in the second violin, viola, and cello. This is the accompaniment to the first violin's heartfelt, soaring melody. Repeated sixteenth notes soon make their presence felt, and as in the opening

movement, they remain a unifying force for the duration. An agitated central episode leads to a reprise of the opening portion, culminating in the *pianissimo* final measures.

IV. *Molto Allegro con fuoco*—The finale comprises a pair of contrasting themes. The first, the embodiment of carefree spirit, features both scurrying sixteenth notes and a playful octave ascent. The first violin introduces the second theme, a sighing *cantabile* melody. But the prevailing mood is one of unrestrained joy, often expressed in virtuoso writing for the ensemble, who sprint headlong to the exuberant close.

LYRIC FOR STRINGS (1946)

George Walker was born in Washington, DC, on June 27, 1922, and died in Montclair, New Jersey, on August 23, 2018.

Approximate performance is 6 minutes. This is an SMF premiere.

During his long and distinguished career, the American musician George Walker was celebrated as a composer, pianist, and educator. Walker attended Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied piano with Rudolf Serkin and Mieczyslaw Horszowski, chamber music with William Primrose and Gregor Piatigorsky, and composition with Rosario Scalerò. In 1945, Walker became the Curtis Institute's first African-American graduate of Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, earning artist diplomas in both piano and composition. That same year, Walker gave his piano recital debut at Town Hall, and made his orchestral debut as soloist in the Third Piano Concerto of Sergei Rachmaninoff, performing with the Philadelphia Orchestra and conductor Eugene Ormandy.

George Walker taught at such institutions as Dillard University, the New School of Social Research, Smith College, the University of Colorado, Boulder, Rutgers University, and the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. His honors include Fulbright, Whitney, Guggenheim, and Rockefeller fellowships, an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and a 1996 Pulitzer Prize for his composition, *Lilacs*.

Walker's beloved *Lyric for Strings* originated

as second movement of his String Quartet No. 1. Walker later arranged that movement as an independent piece for string orchestra; originally titled *Lament*, and dedicated to the memory of his grandmother. The brief and haunting *Lyric for Strings* has earned a prominent place in concerts and recordings.

STRING QUINTET NO. 5 IN D MAJOR, K. 593 (1790)

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

Approximate performance time is 28 minutes. SMF performance history: April 1, 2008.

Mozart's career in Vienna as a composer, virtuoso pianist, and teacher reached its apex in the mid-1780s. In a letter to his father, Leopold, written in February of 1784, Mozart proudly exclaimed: "The whole morning is given over to my pupils, and nearly every evening I have to play...Have I not enough to do? I do not think I shall get out of practice in these circumstances..."

The exhilaration of those triumphant years in Vienna soon yielded to profound frustration and unhappiness. Demands for Mozart's services declined. The last years of Mozart's brief life were plagued by financial problems, the product of a number of factors, including the troubled Viennese economy, and the composer's own fiscal irresponsibility.

Mozart was soon reduced to begging for money from acquaintances, including Michael Puchberg, a fellow Mason and ardent music lover. Several of Mozart's letters to Puchberg have survived, and they graphically reflect the composer's humiliating circumstances. In a letter of July 12, 1789 to Puchberg, Mozart confessed:

God! I am in a position that I wouldn't wish for my worst enemy; and if you my best friend and brother forsake me, then I, *unlucky and blameless*, with my poor sick wife and my child am lost. When I was last with you I wanted to pour out my heart to you—but I didn't have the heart for it!—and

indeed I would still not have the courage—I can only dare to write it—and tremble even whilst writing—and I would not even dare to write—if I did not know that you understand me, and that you know my circumstances and that you are wholly convinced of my *innocence* as far as my unhappy, most distressing situation is concerned. O God! instead of thanks I come with new requests!—instead of repayments new entreaties.

Mozart vowed to reverse his dire financial situation. In September of 1790, Mozart wrote to Puchberg: "I will work—work so hard—that no unforeseen accidents shall ever reduce us to such desperate straits again." Mozart's final year was one of incredible productivity, even by his lofty standards. From December of 1790 to his untimely death twelve months later, Mozart composed such masterpieces as his final Piano Concerto, K. 595, the motet *Ave verum corpus*, K. 618, two full-length operas (*Die Zauberflöte*, K. 620, and *La clemenza di Tito*, K. 621), and the Clarinet Concerto, K. 622. In addition, Mozart composed several smaller-scale works, including songs, orchestral dances and cantatas. And when illness claimed Mozart on December 5, 1791 at the age of only 35, he was still at work on his extraordinary *Requiem*, K. 626.

Mozart's two final String Quintets (two violins, two violas, and cello)—D Major, K. 593, and E-flat Major, K. 614—also belong to the final year of the composer's life. Mozart completed K. 593 in December of 1790, and K. 614 on April 12, 1791. The works were published by Artaria in 1793, and described as having been composed "for a Hungarian Amateur."

While scholars are not certain of the individual(s) for whom Mozart may have composed his final two String Quintets, they are unanimous in their praise for these magnificent works. Like the "Jupiter" Symphony, the K. 595 Piano Concerto, and the opera *Die Zauberflöte*, the last two String Quintets represent the fitting summit of Mozart's achievements in the genre of chamber music.

I. *Larghetto*; *Allegro*—The Quintet opens with a slow-tempo episode (*Larghetto*), couched in the form of a dialogue between the cello and remaining instruments. After a brief pause, the ensemble, led by the first violin, launches the *Allegro* with a spirited

theme. For the second principal theme, Mozart takes the same music and presents it in the form of a canon, juxtaposing the first violin and viola with their second chair counterparts. The ensuing development and recapitulation of the principal thematic material adhere to traditional sonata form. Less conventional is the reappearance of the slow-tempo introduction (*Larghetto*) and brief invocation of the ensuing *Allegro* (*Tempo I*) to close the movement.

II. *Adagio*—The Quintet's slow-tempo movement opens with a radiant passage that incorporates striking use of chromatic writing. A turbulent minor-key episode follows, with throbbing statements by the second violin and violas serving as backdrop for exchanges (reminiscent of the first movement's introduction) between the first violin and cello. This juxtaposition of rapt lyricism with moments of storm and stress continues throughout the *Adagio*, a tension finally resolved by the peaceful final measures.

III. *Menuetto. Allegretto*—All suggestions of darkness are swept away in the third movement. The principal *Minuet* spotlights the first violin's broadly-ranging melody, richly accompanied by the remaining instruments. The *Trio* portion opens with the first violin's playful ascent, to which the second violin and the remaining (pizzicato) strings respond. The movement concludes with a reprise of the opening *Minuet*.

IV. *Allegro*—The rondo finale is based upon a tripping theme, cast in 6/8 time, and introduced at the outset by the first violin. Mozart once again infuses the melody with a chromatic flavor, lending it a somewhat insinuating character. To add further spice to the proceedings, Mozart puts the theme through some ingenious contrapuntal paces. The high spirits established at the outset of the finale continue right to the vibrant conclusion.