



the
Jasper
string
quartet



THE KERNIS PROJECT: SCHUBERT

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STRING QUARTET IN D MINOR, D. 810 “DEATH AND THE MAIDEN”

– FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

- [1] I. ALLEGRO – 11:29
- [2] II. ANDANTE CON MOTO – 13:23
- [3] III. SCHERZO: ALLEGRO MOLTO – 3:58
- [4] IV. PRESTO – 9:33

STRING QUARTET NO. 1 “MUSICA CELESTIS” (1990)

– AARON JAY KERNIS (b.1960)

- [5] I. FLOWING – 14:45
- [6] II. “MUSICA CELESTIS” - ADAGIO – 11:00
- [7] III. SCHERZO - TRIO SEMPLICE - SCHERZO – 3:25
- [8] IV. QUASI UNA DANZA – 5:41

TOTAL TIME – 73:14

*I distinctly remember the pop interrupting the silence
just before the coda of Schubert's “Death and the Maiden”.*

This sound was not an extended technique called for by Schubert; it was my E string snapping in two during the final round of a competition! With no other options and just a few lines to go, we raced to the finish while I endeavored to play the stratospheric first violin part up the A string. This sounds heroic, but I am sure it makes a much better story than how it actually sounded.

Despite this less than fortunate incident, Schubert's “Death and the Maiden” holds a special place in our quartet's heart. It is one of the first pieces we learned as an ensemble and it is the piece we have performed more than any other. One of the great challenges we encounter as a young string quartet is interpreting the master works of the genre and living up to their eminent recordings – often made by our teachers. It is our distinct honor to record “Death and the Maiden” and, in pairing it with Kernis' “musica celestis”, we hope to illuminate a new vantage point into both works.

The celestial connection between the two quartets on this album struck us immediately upon hearing Kernis' first quartet. Not only do Schubert and Kernis both ruminate in the angelic and spiritual realms for these works, their overall compositional structures are strikingly similar. Both feature monumental opening movements, transcendent slow movements, short and driving scherzos, and devilish finales. Though different in many respects, these two works have startling parallels despite the 166 years between them.

We would like to dedicate this album to Julian Rodescu – an incredible mentor to us who, as the Artistic Director of Astral Artists, first introduced us to Kernis' music. He died suddenly this past fall and we were fortunate to have known him for the last two years. Mr. Kernis told us that the second movement of “musica celestis” represents the sound of angels singing – a music so divine that it is inaudible to humans. If there are angels out there singing, Julian has certainly joined the choir.

— J Freivogel

SCHUBERT: STRING QUARTET IN D MINOR, D.810 “DEATH AND THE MAIDEN”

Franz Schubert, known for his numerous and masterful Lieder, fulfilled his talent as a great composer of string quartets when he composed the *Death and the Maiden* and *Rosamunde* quartets in 1824. Accustomed to using poems as inspiration for his works, Schubert set a Claudius Matthias poem for his 1817 lied, *Death and the Maiden*, and for this string quartet of the same name. Matthias' portentous poem reads as follows:

Das Mädchen:

Vorüber! Ach, vorüber!
Geh, wilder Knochenmann!
Ich bin noch jung! Geh, lieber,
Und rühre mich nicht an.
Und rühre mich nicht an.

Der Tod:

Gib deine Hand, du schön und zart Gebild!
Bin Freund, und komme nicht, zu strafen.
Sei gutes Muts! ich bin nicht wild,
Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen!

Maiden:

Pass by! Oh, pass by!
Go away, fierce man of bone!
I am still young! Go, my dear,
And do not touch me.
And do not touch me.

Death:

Give me your hand, you beautiful and delicate form!
I am a friend, and have not come to punish.
Be of good cheer! I am not savage,
You will sleep softly in my arms.

The quartet opens boldly with a unison 5-note statement, reminiscent of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. From the beginning, it is clear Death is inescapable. This striking opening motive, which develops throughout the *Allegro*, contrasts with a pastoral second theme of classic Schubertian lyricism. Ultimately, the opening motive prevails over the sweet recollections of the second theme and brings the movement to an unsettling close.

In the opening chorale of the *Andante con moto*, Death coaxes the Maiden gently toward her fate, singing to her on a single hypnotic note. The ensuing variations lead us through the Maiden's journey, but as we know from the opening chords of the first movement, Death's lure is inevitable. This is the only one of the quartet's movements to end on a major chord and, on this final sonority, one can hear the last wisps of the Maiden's soul depart her body.

The third movement contrasts a driving scherzo with a gentle, Viennese-style trio. The ensemble pairs into upper and lower strings for the Scherzo and the driving energy leads to the last movement, a Tarantella. The fiery *Presto* is a dramatic finish to this work, but not before Schubert's lyricism and spirited voice shine in the final dance of death. Schubert was only 27 when he composed one of the great quartets in the history of the art form; one can only imagine the heights his composition may have reached had Death not visited him only 4 years after finishing this work.

— J Freivogel

KERNIS: STRING QUARTET No.1, “MUSICA CELESTIS”

My first String Quartet, “musica celestis” was written in 1990, when I was 30 years old, and marks my first exploration of the traditional four-movement form, which is the foundation of the Classical style of Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven.

At that time I was searching for a new direction for my work, which needed to stretch in expression, melody and form. I found the old forms to be rich in possibilities, and very conducive to the needs of my musical language.

This work is in four movements: *I. Flowing; II. “musica celestis” - Adagio; III. Scherzo - Trio semplice - Scherzo; and IV. Quasi una Danza*. This comes completely out of the 18th-century tradition, but five or even two years before writing it I believed strongly that the use of such forms was outmoded and inapplicable to the music of our time. Then with the formal explorations in this piece and the writing of my first Symphony (Symphony in Waves) I began to feel very differently.

In the early 90's I gradually realized that the music I kept going back to - the music I really loved at that time - was written before 1945 and especially before 1911. I love the emotional inclusiveness of music of the past and wanted everything to be included in music: soaring melody, contrast, consonance, tension, dissonance, drive, relaxation, color, strong harmony and form - and for every possible emotion to be elicited actively by the passionate use of those elements. This brings us to the quartet.

The form of the first movement follows the traditional overall shape of sonata form: exposition-development, and return. There are two primary kinds of themes: the first of rapturous shape and singing quality, the 2nd more nervous and agitated, with various contrasting sections that contrast, link or relax from those themes. Since so much variety and contrast occurs in the opening, the actual “development” is the calmest and most harmonically relaxed part of the movement. The recapitulation brings back all of the various kinds of music from the opening, heightening the contrasts even further before reaching a final culmination and closing with more peaceful motion and stable harmonies.

The second movement, “musica celestis”, is inspired by the medieval idea of celestial music, which refers to the “singing of the angels in heaven in praise of God without end”. Though I don't really believe in angels, I found this to be a potent image that was reinforced by listening to a good deal of medieval music, especially the soaring work of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). This movement follows a simple, spacious melody and harmonic pattern through a number of variations and modulations, framed by an introduction and coda. Shortly after writing this movement I expanded it into a version for string orchestra, which has been performed frequently.

The Scherzo is made of bits and scraps of things, while the Trio is based on a nonexistent ländler. The fourth movement, *Quasi una Danza*, begins in a halting fashion but develops a strong foundation of dance rhythm as it goes on. There are bits of country music, funk and a Beethovenian joke-fugue all wrapped up into the movement, but it is centered around essential elements of classical harmony.

String Quartet #1 (“musica celestis”) was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation for the Lark Quartet.

— Aaron Jay Kernis



THE JASPER STRING QUARTET

J FREIVOGEL, VIOLIN

SAE CHONABAYASHI, VIOLIN

SAM QUINTAL, VIOLA

RACHEL HENDERSON FREIVOGEL, CELLO

Winner of the 2012 Cleveland Quartet Award, the Jasper String Quartet has been hailed as “sonically delightful and expressively compelling” (The Strad) and as “powerful” (The New York Times). They play “with sparkling vitality and great verve, ...polished, engaged, and in tune with one another.” (Classical Voice of North Carolina) Based in New Haven, CT, the Jasper Quartet enjoys prestigious appointments as 2010-12 Quartet-in-Residence at Oberlin Conservatory (Oberlin, OH) and Ensemble-in-Residence at Classic Chamber Concerts (Naples, FL). Their debut album, *The Kernis Project: Beethoven*, was released in 2011 on the Sono Luminus label.

After winning the Grand Prize and the Audience Prize in the 2008 Plowman Chamber Music Competition, the Jaspers went on to win the Grand Prize at the 2008 Coleman Competition, First Prize at Chamber Music Yellow Springs 2008, and the Silver Medal at the 2008 and 2009 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competitions. They were the first ensemble to win the Yale School of Music’s Horatio Parker Memorial Prize (2009), an award established in 1945 and selected by the faculty for “best fulfilling... lofty musical ideals”. And in 2010, they joined the roster of Astral Artists after winning their national auditions.

The Jasper Quartet performs pieces emotionally significant to its members ranging from Haydn and Beethoven through Berg, Ligeti, and living composers. They have already commissioned four string quartets from today’s up-and-coming composers, and critics and audiences continue to commend the Jasper Quartet’s “programming savvy” (clevelandclassical.com). They have performed throughout the United States and in Canada, England, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway and Panama.

The Jasper Quartet has also brought well-over 100 outreach programs into schools and enjoys educational work of all types. In their Melba and Orville Roleffson Residency at the Banff Centre they embarked on “guerilla chamber music,” performing concerts in unusual settings around Alberta, Canada. More recently, the quartet has worked closely with Caramoor and with Astral Artists to bring outreach activities to schools. They recently completed their 2009-2011 Ernst C. Stiefel String Quartet Residency at the Caramoor Center for Music and Arts (Katonah, NY).

Originally formed at Oberlin Conservatory, the Jasper Quartet began pursuing a professional career in 2006 when they studied with James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith as Rice University’s Graduate Quartet-in-Residence. In 2008, the quartet continued its training with the Tokyo String Quartet as Yale University’s Graduate Quartet-in-Residence.

They are named after Jasper National Park in Alberta, Canada and J and Rachel are married. Barrett Vantage Artists represents the quartet throughout the world and Astral Artists represents the quartet in Pennsylvania.

For more information, please visit www.jasperquartet.com or [facebook.com/jasperstringquartet](https://www.facebook.com/jasperstringquartet)



AARON JAY KERNIS

One of the youngest composers ever to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize, AARON JAY KERNIS is among the most esteemed musical figures of his generation. His music is featured prominently on orchestral, chamber, and recital programs worldwide, and he has been commissioned for many of America's foremost performing artists, including sopranos Renee Fleming, Dawn Upshaw, violinists Joshua Bell, James Ehnes, and Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, guitarists David Tanenbaum and Sharon Isbin, and by institutions including the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and Los Angeles and Saint Paul Chamber Orchestras, the Walt Disney Company and Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, among many others. Recent and upcoming commissions include his monumental 3rd Symphony (Symphony of Meditations) for the Seattle Symphony, Concerto in Echoes for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, a trumpet concerto for Philip Smith and the New York Philharmonic, and works for Eighth Blackbird and the Santa Fe Chamber Music, La Jolla and Chamber Music Northwest Music Festivals for David Shifrin and the Orion Quartet. Past seasons have included conducting engagements with members of the San Francisco and Minnesota Orchestras, the New York Philharmonic, with major festivals in Chicago and Portland and for the Pascal Rioult Dance Company.

Kernis' music is widely available. He has won numerous awards in addition to the 1998 Pulitzer Prize, including the 2002 Grawemeyer Award, a Rome Prize, Guggenheim Fellowship, GRAMMY® Award nominations and others.

He has become an especially familiar and much-admired presence in Minnesota's Twin Cities, and served as New Music Advisor to the Minnesota Orchestra for ten years. As an educator he is Director of the Minnesota Orchestra's Composer Institute, a program that gives young composers the opportunity to hear their works played by one of the world's great orchestras. He teaches composition at Yale School of Music and recently was appointed to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797-1828)



Franz Schubert was a remarkably prolific and versatile composer who wrote nearly 1000 pieces during his short lifetime of 31 years. He was born in 1797 in Himmelpfortgrund, Austria to Elisabeth Vietz and Franz Theodor Schubert, a schoolteacher and amateur violinist. From a young age, Schubert showed a great talent for music and was trained in violin, piano, organ, and voice. In recognition of his prodigious ability as a singer, he was awarded a scholarship to join the choir of the Imperial Court in 1808. During his time there, he had the opportunity to study with esteemed composers and musicians of the court, including among others, Antonio Salieri. When Schubert's voice broke a few years later, he was forced to seek a job as a schoolteacher and became an assistant teacher at his father's school. Throughout his short teaching career, Schubert continued to compose prolifically in hopes of making enough money to survive on his compositions alone.

Before the age of 18, Schubert had already composed several Lieder, piano pieces, string quartets, a symphony and a three-act opera. In 1815, then 18 years old, Schubert composed one of his most famous Lieder, "Der Erlkönig", based on the text by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Although the work was much admired and made Schubert famous throughout Germany and Austria, it was unappreciated by Goethe and attempts to garner his approval went unanswered.

Schubert was diagnosed with syphilis at the age of 25 and this led him into a dark, nearly suicidal depression. The shift in his outlook and moods can be felt in the music composed especially in the later years of his illness and it was during this time that Schubert composed some of his most loved pieces. These include the song cycles "Die schöne Mullerin" and "Winterreise", the Octet, the "Death and the Maiden" String Quartet, and his last symphony, No. 9 "The Great".

During his life, Schubert's works were mainly heard in private musical gatherings in Vienna among friends, known as Schubertiads. It was not until after his death in 1828 that Schubert was fully recognized for his musical genius, aided by the efforts of his brother and Robert Schumann to have his music published and performed. Fittingly, Schubert's grave was later relocated along with Ludwig van Beethoven's to Zentralfriedhof in Vienna, where he rests today.

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