

Brandeis
SPRING 2023

CONCERT SERIES

Slosberg Music Center

LYDIAN STRING QUARTET:

MOZART, ZOHAN-MULDOON, & MENDELSSOHN



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER HUANG

ANDREA SEGAR & JULIA GLENN,
VIOLINS

MARK BERGER, *VIOLA*

JOSHUA GORDON, *CELLO*

TUESDAY, MAY 16th, 2023 | 8 PM

SLOSBERG MUSIC CENTER

LYDIAN STRING QUARTET

TUESDAY, MAY 16, 2023 | 8 PM

Slosberg Recital Hall

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet in E-flat Major, K. 428 (1783)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Menuetto. Allegro
- IV. Allegro vivace

Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon (b. 1962)

Alebrijes (2022) ~ *world premiere*

- I.
- II.
- III.
- IV.
- V.
- VI.

**Winner of the Lydian String Quartet Commission Prize

- INTERMISSION -

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel (1805-1847)

String Quartet in E-flat Major, H.277 (1834)

- I. Adagio ma non troppo
- II. Allegretto
- III. Romanze
- IV. Allegro molto vivace

PROGRAM NOTES

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) **String Quartet in E-flat Major, K. 428** (1783)

If one could go back in time and be a fly on the wall at a great moment in music history, one choice would be a string quartet party at the Vienna apartment of Stephen and Nancy Storace, siblings who were friends of Constance and Wolfgang Mozart. Stephen was a composer, Nancy was a noted opera singer and Mozart's Susanna in the premiere of *The Marriage of Figaro*, whose cast included Michael Kelly, an Irish tenor and frequent billiards partner of Wolfgang. The party was documented by Kelly who reported, "The players were tolerable; not one of them excelled on the instrument he played, but there was a little science among them, which I dare say will be acknowledged when I name them" as the players in the quartet were all composers: Joseph Haydn on first violin, Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf on second, Mozart on viola, and Johann Baptist Wanhal on cello. However much punch was consumed before their sightreading began, the event certainly showed the degree of friendship and camaraderie among these composers regardless of the different degrees of fame and stature they enjoyed in the Viennese and greater European music world.

Much has been written about Mozart's relationship with Haydn, and biographer Wolfgang Hildesheimer points out the accrual of a certain degree of idealization and myth making in some descriptions of their friendship. But Mozart's respect for Haydn the composer was the root of an admiration stronger than for any other figure in Mozart's lifetime. Haydn's sets of string quartets op. 17 and op. 20 published in 1771-2 were a source of inspiration for Mozart's 1773 set, while Haydn's op. 33 set from 1781 with its greater equality of instrumental voices would influence Mozart's set of six quartets dedicated to Haydn (Artaria, 1785), including tonight's quartet in E flat major, K. 428. When Mozart completed the full set, his dedication to the older composer was double-edged in its demand for respect, describing them as the "fruit of a long and laborious effort." Indeed, the compositional process in these six quartets led to more corrections of dynamics and tempo markings in the manuscripts (and even in the engraver's plates) than in perhaps any other of his works. The demand for recognition was rewarded in Haydn's famous comment in a letter to 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.”

Hildesheimer points out that but for Haydn’s generosity, he could have added, “But, you know, without me and my quartets, your good son would never have been able to accomplish anything like that,” and been accurate. Haydn was certainly aware of the younger composer’s greater accomplishment in the genres of the concerto and opera, both of which highlight a single voice (or two to four voices) against a larger ensemble sonority, whether only orchestral or a combination of choral and orchestral. Haydn was capable of writing virtuosic parts in both chamber and large scale works, and knew tone-painting, surprise modulations, and other musical effects better than anybody. But Mozart’s understanding of long-range motion of tonality as a mass to be manipulated allowed him to create dramatic energy in a chamber music setting as well as on stage or in a concerto, and make sure that the large scale harmonic motion didn’t get ahead of more inner detail equivalent to stage action. A Haydn quartet typically moves away quickly from the tonic, and creates an immediate sense of instability. Mozart more typically combines a framework of harmonic stability juxtaposed with more dissonant details.

The opening of K. 428 is a sublime example of Mozart achieving this balance. The opening upward octave leap with all four players in unison is the perfect frame, and one that not many composers over the next 150 years would use, even if Mozart himself had turned to it a year earlier in the opening of his “Haffner” symphony (in the 20th century on the other hand, it became the frame for one of the most famous songs of all time, Harold Arlen’s “Over the Rainbow”). The two E flats having formed a sense of tonal space, the third note is the first radical dissonance (held a tritone away from either end of the octave leap). All the remaining notes of the first four bars stay within that octave which provides a basis for implying consonance or dissonance; the notes resolve to the third of E flat major.



Mozart waits for the first consequential phrase to add a literal harmonization, and does so by highlighting the distant ii chord against the still present and more active E flat in the second violin, in counterpoint

with a new melodic pattern in the first violin. And so the harmonic and melodic adventure of the work begins, with the possibility of subsidiary modulation and remote tonalities being explored even within the expression of the exposition. The Andante movement's chromaticism and upward resolutions have been described as anticipating Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. The Minuet pays homage to Mozart and Haydn's shared love of asymmetrical phrasing and extreme dynamic changes, while the closing Rondo surely captures the ebullient spirit and humor of that quartet party, with its many capricious turns and dramatic flair including its use of silence.

-Joshua Gordon

• • • •

Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon (b. 1962)

Alebrijes (2022) ~ world premiere

Alebrijes was written thanks to a commission from the Lydian String Quartet. The work is dedicated to this wonderful ensemble, which I have admired for many years. I wrote *Alebrijes* shortly after the death of George Crumb, with whom I had the honor to study composition at the University of Pennsylvania. He was very much in my mind as I composed the work, which became in this way a private memorial to deal with my sadness about his passing.

I would describe *Alebrijes* as a “dynamic network” of short movements, in that each movement follows through on possible ramifications posited by other movements, thus engaging in a kind of compositional conversation across the work. The work is thus highly structured, but open to growth over time. This is a kind of musical architecture that I have enjoyed exploring in some of my recent works, which have kept “alive” and continued to grow over the years. I named the work after the well-known artisanal “alebrijes” that have become so popular in México in the past few decades. These are very colorful, garish, and fantastical zoomorphic sculptures that are made of wood or papier-mâché and which are intended for ornamental purposes. The typical alebrije is an imagined hybrid creature that, like a chimera, reunites features of different animals. This particular process of imagination resonates with the way that I composed my work, as did their highly detailed construction, intense coloration, and playful nature.

-Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon

Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel (1805-1847)
String Quartet in E-flat Major, H.277 (1834)

Hearing Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel's compositions without knowledge of her background, one feels tenderness, wonder, and appreciation for her distinctive and probing voice. Knowing how constrained she was by her gender, class, and culture and how withered her sense of self-worth was as a composer, this sense of wonder and appreciation deepens - importantly, though, unaccompanied by a need to take pity on her or make excuses for the quality of her music.

One of only three multi-movement chamber music works she wrote, Fanny completed her String Quartet in E-flat Major H.277 in 1834, based on an unfinished piano sonata she had begun before marrying the painter Wilhelm Hensel five years earlier. Since her culture and father would not permit her to be a public-facing professional composer, performances of her works were largely restricted to private salon gatherings. She heard her quartet performed only once and was disappointed by her brother Felix's feedback on its lack of discipline in handling form and bizarre harmonic turns in larger sequences. Though he perhaps meant some of this constructively, she took it to heart and replied to him in a letter of 1835:

It's not so much a certain way of composing that is lacking as it is a certain approach to life, and as a result of this shortcoming, my lengthy things die in their youth of decrepitude; I lack the ability to sustain ideas properly and give them the need[ed] consistency.

While this work is clearly influenced by Beethoven's *Harp* Quartet Op. 74 and her brother's Quartet No. 1, Op. 12, its unique approach to form and at times tonality distinguish it. Set in a baroque-style slow-fast-slow-fast four movement structure, we hear light battling with shadow and tenderness battling with angst. After an ebbing first movement and fairy-like second, the heart of the quartet is borne in the soulful third movement. An energetic last movement carries us with winds of perpetual motion to a triumphant close of optimism and joy - an optimism that, if Fanny could not feel for herself professionally, we can carry on as performers and listeners of her music.

-Julia Glenn

ABOUT THE LYDIAN STRING QUARTET

From its beginning in 1980, the **Lydian String Quartet** (Andrea Segar and Julia Glenn, violins; Mark Berger, viola; Joshua Gordon, cello) has been acclaimed by audiences and critics across the USA and abroad for embracing the full range of the string quartet repertoire with curiosity, virtuosity, and dedication to the highest artistic ideals of music making. In its formative years, the quartet studied repertoire with Robert Koff, a founding member of the Juilliard String Quartet who had joined the Brandeis University faculty in 1958. Forging a personality of their own, the Lydians were awarded top prizes in international string quartet competitions, including Evian, Portsmouth and Banff, culminating in 1984 with the Naumburg Award for Chamber Music.

In the years to follow, the quartet continued to build a reputation for their depth of interpretation, performing with “a precision and involvement marking them as among the world’s best quartets” (Chicago Sun-Times). Residing at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts since the group’s founding, the Lydians continue to offer compelling, insightful, and dramatic performances of the quartet literature. From the acknowledged masterpieces of the classical, romantic, and modern eras to new remarkable compositions written by today’s cutting edge composers, the quartet approaches music-making with a sense of exploration and personal expression that is timeless.

The Lydian String Quartet has performed extensively throughout the United States at venues such as Jordan Hall in Boston; the Kennedy Center and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.; Lincoln Center, Miller Theater, and Weill Recital Hall in New York City; the Pacific Rim Festival at the University of California at Santa Cruz; and the Slee Beethoven Series at the University at Buffalo. Abroad, the Quartet has made appearances in France, England, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Russia, Armenia, and Taiwan.

The Lydians have created intriguing thematic programming such as “Around the World in a String Quartet,” a multi-year concert series that explores string quartet music from local world musical traditions in and beyond the western European art music setting; and “Vienna and the String Quartet,” a project surveying the heart of the Western classical string quartet repertoire by juxtaposing new and old Vienna. In addition

to traditional concerts, the quartet offers programming with themes exploring concepts of time, place, the vernacular, and identity, as well as single composer programs, all-contemporary programs, cross-cultural collaborations, and mixed media programs (video, electronics, live painting projections). The Lydians enjoy working with other artists, in traditional configurations as well as in boundary-crossing performances. Most recently, these included such musicians as tabla player Sandeep Das, pipa player Chen Yihan, Syrian clarinetist/composer Kinan Azmeh, and others.

The Lydians have long championed the commissioning, performing and recording of new works. They enjoy working with young composers at the quartet's Brandeis home as well as in mini-residencies at universities across the US. Their five-year "American Originals" Project, from 1995-2000, featured music drawn from the rich repertoire of the 20th-Century American string quartet. During that time they performed and/or recorded over sixty works by American composers from the early twentieth century onward, accompanying concerts with workshops, lectures, and discussions. The Lydians were the first to record many of these works, helping to bring them to the forefront of the American contemporary quartet repertoire. In recognition of their work, the quartet has received numerous Chamber Music America/ASCAP Awards for Adventurous Programming, grants from the Meet the Composer/Rockefeller Foundation/AT&T Jazz Program in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Aaron Copland Fund for Music.

In 2012 their first Lydian String Quartet Commission Prize drew over 400 applicants; as a result, first prize-winner Kurt Rohde wrote his epic string quartet treatises for an unrecovered past for the Lydians, who premiered it in 2013 and recorded it in the summer of 2015. The 2015 LSQ Commission Prize was awarded to composer Steven Snowden, who wrote *Bird Catching From Above* for the Lydians' premiere in the spring of 2016. The 2017 LSQ Commission Prize was awarded to Saad Haddad, who wrote his *String Quartet* for the Lydians' premiere in the spring of 2018. The 2020 LSQ Commission Prize winner is Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon.

The Lydians' 29 currently available commercial recordings reflect their diverse and far-reaching repertoire, including works by Beethoven,

Brahms, Ives, Ornstein, Persichetti, and Schubert as well as American contemporary composers they have long known and collaborated with such as Martin Boykan, Eric Chasalow, Peter Child, John Harbison, Lee Hyla, Steven Mackey, Kurt Rohde, Harold Shapero, and Yehudi Wyner. Their recording of John Harbison's String Quartet No. 3 and "The Rewaking" was chosen by both The New York Times and The Boston Globe as one of the best classical recordings of 2001. Harbison recently wrote of the quartet: "Each time I encounter the Lydian Quartet my admiration for their technical, structural, and communicative power continues to grow. They are the complete package, and the wider my travels, the deeper goes my conviction."

Of their recently released (2012) recording of Beethoven's late quartets, Paul Rapoport of Fanfare magazine writes: "these are fine and distinctive performances, recorded in very realistic sound... The dense counterpoint of the Grosse Fuge benefits especially from the textural clarity characteristic of these performances, and the Lydian players turn in one of the most cleanly executed and precisely articulated renditions of this difficult movement in my experience." The Boston Globe's Jeremy Eichler wrote, of the release: "These distinguished readings are full of subtlety, tonal refinement, and a sense of accumulated musical wisdom."

The members of the Lydian String Quartet are on the faculty of Brandeis University, in Waltham, Mass. Learn more at lydianquartet.com.

• • • •

**Don't miss a
downbeat!**

Follow us:

**Instagram: @slosbergmusic
facebook.com/SlosbergMusicCenter**

**And join the Arts at Brandeis
Email List:**



Brandeis
SPRING 2023

CONCERTSERIES

Slosberg Music Center

brandeis.edu/concerts