



P R E S E N T S

Tesla Quartet



Ross Snyder,
violin

Michelle Lie,
violin

Edwin Kaplan,
viola

Serafim Smigelskiy,
cello

Saturday, October 13, 2018
7:30 p.m.

Kathleen P. Westby Pavilion
Tulsa Performing Arts Center

Salon Concert

String Quartet Op. 33, No. 1 in B Minor, Hob.III:37
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Allegro di molto – Trio
Andante
Presto

Joseph Haydn
(1732–1809)

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92
Allegro sostenuto
Adagio
Allegro

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891–1953)

The Tesla Quartet concert weekend is underwritten by Lydia Kronfeld in memory of Ted Kronfeld.
Additional funding honoring Ted's memory was received from Janie and Earl Funk and Helen Jo and Jim Hardwick.

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About the Program

by Jason S. Heilman, Ph.D., © 2018

Joseph Haydn

Born March 31, 1732, in Rohrau, Lower Austria
Died May 31, 1809, in Vienna

String Quartet Op. 33, No. 1 in B Minor, Hob.III:37
Composed in 1781; duration: 18 minutes

One of the remarkable things about Joseph Haydn is that he managed to become the most celebrated composer in all of Europe while working in relative isolation near the small Austrian town of Eisenstadt. There, he served as *Kapellmeister* to the powerful Esterházy family, a position that required Haydn to produce new compositions regularly for the amusement of the noble court. This was the only reliable route to a stable musical career during the 18th century, and Haydn was no doubt grateful when he secured the position in 1766. Yet it also meant that Haydn's compositional output would not be entirely his own: all of the works Haydn would compose during this time would technically belong to his employer, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, who could allow or forbid their circulation as he saw fit.

Fortunately for Haydn, Prince Anton was generous in that regard: he had allowed the publication of Haydn's groundbreaking Opus 20 string quartets in 1772, which helped to define the emerging genre throughout Europe. This in turn helped to fuel Haydn's own growing reputation – which also reflected well upon his employer. In fact, the reception of Haydn's published works was such that he was able to renegotiate his contract with the Esterházy family in 1779 and secure a significant measure of control over the distribution of his music.

Just two years later, in 1781, Haydn returned to the string quartet genre with a new set of six works, which he would publish together as his Opus 33. Haydn himself viewed these pieces as a giant leap forward in his conception of the string quartet, and he touted them in his letters to prospective buyers as composed in “a new, altogether special way”. While this was a bit of an exaggeration for marketing purposes, the Opus 33 quartets did represent a significant step in the evolution of the genre.

Where Haydn's earlier quartets relied heavily on the first violin, the Opus 33 pieces brought greater balance to the four instruments, especially the long-neglected cello. The new quartets also relied less on counterpoint, abandoning one more vestige of the baroque era. Haydn's Opus 33 quartets would go on to influence a generation of composers – particularly Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who spent much of the next five years composing his “response” in the form of six extraordinary quartets dedicated to Haydn.

The six Opus 33 works are often referred to as Haydn's “Russian” quartets, but they are not especially Russian in character; rather, Haydn dedicated the collection to the visiting Grand Duke Paul of Russia, who would later rule

the Russian Empire as Tsar Paul I. The quartet that Haydn's publishers chose to lead the Opus 33 set is one of only about a dozen of Haydn's quartets in a minor key, though Haydn does his best to conceal that fact at the outset. The first of its four movements, marked *allegro moderato* (“moderately fast”), takes several measures to arrive at its key of B minor, but then unfolds in the customary sonata form, presenting two closely-related themes that are then developed melodically before returning. The *allegro di molto* (“very fast”) second movement is a *scherzo*: another new innovation Haydn introduced in the Opus 33 quartets to replace the stodgy minuet. This brief movement is unusually aggressive for Haydn, but it is set off by a gentle central “trio” section in B major. The *andante* third movement has a jaunty demeanor appropriate for its walking tempo, and even recalls the old minuet in its dancelike character. The finale, marked *presto* (“instantly”), is more intense, driven by two contrasting melodies in the first violin: one deep and brooding, the other high and flashy, with both building to a virtuosic climax.

Sergei Prokofiev

Born April 27, 1891, in Sontsivka, Ukraine
Died March 5, 1953, in Moscow, Russia

String Quartet No. 2 in F Major, Op. 92
Composed in 1941; duration: 22 minutes

Born in what is now eastern Ukraine, Prokofiev showed musical talent early on. He started taking composition lessons with Reinhold Glière age 11, and enrolled in the St. Petersburg Conservatory at 13, where his teachers included Alexander Glazunov, Anatoly Lyadov, and the venerable Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Soon, however, Prokofiev developed a fondness for the dissonant modernist sounds of his time, which often put him at odds with the faculty but earned him praise from abroad. His flashy First Piano Concerto caught the attention of the ballet impresario Serge Diaghilev, who invited Prokofiev to compose a piece for his famous Ballets Russes in Paris. He returned to St. Petersburg at the outbreak of the First World War, but when the opportunity to leave Russia presented itself again after the Bolshevik Revolution, Prokofiev took advantage; after spending a couple of years in the United States, he settled in Paris, where he remained for more than 15 years.

It was in Paris that Prokofiev's musical style evolved from an early primitivism to a more refined neoclassicism, paralleling the trajectory of his fellow Russian exile, Igor Stravinsky. But by the mid-1930s, Prokofiev was no longer the composer *du jour*, and his finances were suffering during the Great Depression. When he received a commission for a ballet based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* from the Kirov Theatre in what was now called Leningrad, Prokofiev took the opportunity to return to the Soviet Union permanently in 1936.

If Prokofiev thought he would be greeted as a celebrity – or at least a prodigal son – upon his return to his native country, those ideas were dispelled quickly. In Josef Stalin's USSR, the only celebrity was Stalin himself; artists and luminaries were kept on a tight leash. Prokofiev would receive state support to compose, but he would have to compose music that the state wanted, which often meant songs for workers' choruses, or nationalist scores for propaganda films. During these years, Prokofiev re-absorbed Russian folk influences into his style, but his music often took a bleaker tone. This can be heard particularly in the three piano sonatas (Nos. 6, 7, and 8) he composed on the eve of World War II.

Prokofiev was living in Moscow when Nazi Germany launched their invasion of the USSR in 1941, and the Soviet government quickly decided that it was not safe for him to remain in the city. That summer, he was one of several leading artists, musicians, and writers who were evacuated to the town of Nalchik in the North Caucasus. It was shortly after arriving there that a local official invited Prokofiev to compose a piece based on the folk music of the region and its Kabardian and Balkar people. Prokofiev

responded quickly to this request and produced his Second String Quartet over the course of five weeks in November and December 1941.

The music of the Kabardino-Balkar region was not well known throughout the USSR, and Prokofiev found in its aggressive demeanor and percussive sounds an ideal complement to his own musical aesthetic. The quartet is cast in three movements; the first opens with an *allegro sostenuto* ("fast and sustained") round dance over a wheezing, accordionlike accompaniment. This full-voiced texture is briefly interrupted by more delicate music before returning. The *adagio* second movement opens with a slow Kabardian love song, led by the cello; this segues into a quick and lithe dance melody over a plucked accompaniment, with Prokofiev imitating the sound of a local three-stringed fiddle before returning to the love song melody. The finale opens with an *allegro* folk dance that alternates between a briskly staccato melody and a soaring tune over churning strings. After a cello cadenza, more dramatic music takes over, but this segues back into a subdued echo of the music that opened this movement, leading to a sudden yet optimistic end.

About the Artists

Praised for their "superb capacity to find the inner heart of everything they play, regardless of era, style or technical demand" (*The International Review of Music*), the Tesla Quartet brings refinement and prowess to both new and established repertoire. Dubbed "technically superb" by *The Strad*, the Tesla Quartet recently took Second Prize as well as the Haydn Prize and Canadian Commission Prize at the 12th Banff International String Quartet Competition. The quartet has also garnered top prizes at numerous other international competitions, including the Gold Medal at the 2012 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, Third Prize and the Best Interpretation of the Commissioned Work at the 6th International Joseph Haydn Chamber Music Competition in Vienna, and Third Prize at the 2012 London International String Quartet Competition. The *London Evening Standard* called their rendition of the Debussy Quartet "a subtly coloured performance that balanced confidently between intimacy and extraversion."

The quartet performs regularly across North America, with recent international appearances in Austria, Canada, China, Germany, Hungary, South Korea and the United Kingdom. Notable festival appearances include the 10th Joseph Haydn String Quartet Festival at the Esterházy Palace in Fertőd, Hungary, the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, and the Swannanoa Chamber Music Festival. 2018/2019 season highlights include performances at Stanford University's Bing Concert Hall as winners of the prestigious John Lad Prize, a return to London's Wigmore Hall, and their debuts at New York's Lincoln Center and the Banff Centre International String Quartet Festival. Having served as the Marjorie Young Bell String Quartet-in-Residence at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick,

Canada, from 2016-17, the Tesla Quartet also holds a community residency in Hickory, North Carolina that includes performances and workshops at local colleges, universities, and in the public school system, as well as a dedicated chamber music series.

Community involvement and outreach are integral parts of the Tesla Quartet's mission, and the group has brought inspiring music to children's hospitals, soup kitchens, libraries, retirement communities, and schools. In addition to their current work in North Carolina, the ensemble spent three years in partnership with the Aspen Music Festival's *Musical Odysseys Reaching Everyone* program (M.O.R.E), providing lessons, master classes, workshops, and performances for young string players. The Quartet has also provided community enrichment programs to the Steamboat Springs and Craig, CO communities as Quartet-in-Residence at the Strings Music Festival.

The Tesla Quartet was formed at the Juilliard School in 2008 and quickly established itself as one of the most promising young ensembles in New York, winning Second Prize at the J.C. Arriaga Chamber Music Competition only a few months after its inception. From 2009 to 2012 the quartet held a fellowship as the Graduate String Quartet-in-Residence at the University of Colorado-Boulder, where they studied with the world-renowned Takács Quartet. They have also held fellowships at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and the Aspen Music Festival's Center for Advanced Quartet Studies.

For more information on the quartet's activities, please visit their website, www.teslaquartet.com.

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