Salon Concert
Saturday, October 24, 2020 - 7:30 p.m.
Pre-Concert Lecture by Kevin Puts - 6:45 p.m.
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Program

String Quartet No. 10 in E-flat Major, Op. 74, “Harp”
Ludwig van Beethoven
(German, 1770–1827)

- Poco adagio – Allegro
- Adagio ma non troppo
- Presto
- Allegretto con variazioni

Credo
The Violin Guru of Katonah
Kevin Puts
(American, b. 1972)
For Ludwig van Beethoven, 1809 was a year of enormous successes and devastating setbacks. He started the year on a high following the triumphant premiere of both his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies on a December 22 concert at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. He had also just received a lucrative offer to become Kapellmeister to the court of the newly crowned King Jerome of Westphalia (actually Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother) in the German city of Kassel – a position that would have stabilized Beethoven's finances once and for all. He was considering it very seriously when a group of Austrian noblemen led by the Archduke Rudolph made a counteroffer: they guaranteed Beethoven an annuity for life if he would remain in Vienna.

Needless to say, the opportunity to stay in Vienna proved much more appealing, and Beethoven accepted the counteroffer by March. In gratitude, he decided to honor the Archduke Rudolph, who also happened to be Beethoven's piano student, with an impressive new piano concerto. Unfortunately, he had only just started sketching out the massive work in the key of E-flat major when reality intervened: Austria had declared war on Napoleon's French Empire in April, and by May, Napoleon's forces had surrounded Vienna. It was during their thunderous siege that Beethoven, forced to shelter in his brother's cellar, had to resort to covering his ears with pillows to protect his tenuous hearing.

Austria quickly capitulated to Napoleon, but the damage was already done. After the trauma of the shelling, the nuisance of French troops patrolling the streets of Vienna, and the jarring news of the death of his former teacher, Joseph Haydn, Beethoven found himself completely incapable of creating any new music for several weeks. It was only after he set aside what would later become known as his “Emperor” Piano Concerto and began to contemplate another new work – a string quartet, also in the key of E-flat major – that he gradually found the strength to compose again. The string quartet he started in the summer of 1809 seemed to have been something of a respite for Beethoven. Rather than reflecting the tumultuousness of its times, it harkened back to the refined and balanced style of his late teacher.

Published as his Opus 74, Beethoven's Tenth String Quartet was his first to appear in print by itself; his nine previous quartets, following tradition, had been collected into sets of six (Opus 18) and three (Opus 59), respectively. The E-flat major quartet opens with a poco adagio introduction that establishes a serious tone while obscuring any sense of the home key. This ambiguity is finally resolved with the downbeat of the allegro main section, and the harp-like pizzicatos that are first heard here give the quartet its nickname. Typical of Beethoven's “heroic” style, the first movement is built out of the development of short musical motifs, with the somber mood of the opening resurfacing at key moments before its conclusion. The adagio ma non troppo second movement is based on a stately melody introduced by the solo violin.
This movement also explores some darker minor-key areas, but the lyrical opening theme always returns. The third movement is a minor-key scherzo that functions much like the scherzo from Beethoven's recent Fifth Symphony. As in the symphony, the vigorous, presto scherzo theme is twice contrasted by more rustic-sounding music, and its final measures transition back to the home key of E-flat, setting up the finale. The last movement is a theme and variations, based on a simple allegretto melody that undergoes six alternatingly languid and lively variations before the piece reaches its subtle conclusion.

Kevin Puts
Born in 1972 in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.

Credo
Composed in 2007; 20 minutes

One of the most widely performed American composers today, Kevin Puts writes music that has been acclaimed as “breathtaking,” “thrilling,” and “emotional, compelling, and relevant” by leading music critics. Born in St. Louis, Puts grew up in Michigan, where he first learned the piano. He studied piano and composition at the Eastman School of Music, then went on to receive his master’s degree from Yale University before returning to Eastman to complete his doctorate in composition. His teachers include Samuel Adler, Jacob Druckman, David Lang, Christopher Rouse, Joseph Schwantner, and William Bolcom.

Puts has composed in a wide variety of genres, including three operas, four symphonies, numerous chamber and choral works, and several concertos. In 2006 his Percussion Concerto was premiered by Dame Evelyn Glennie; later that same year, his cello concerto, Night, received its premiere with Yo-Yo Ma. His first opera, Silent Night, inspired by the 1914 Christmas truce during World War I, was honored with the Pulitzer Prize in Music in 2012. More recent works include his 2015 opera The Manchurian Candidate, his 2017 orchestral work The City, which commemorates both the 100th anniversary of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the 125th anniversary of Carnegie Hall, and his 2016 song cycle Letters From Georgia, based on the personal letters of Georgia O'Keeffe. Puts has taught at the University of Texas at Austin and currently serves as Professor of Composition at Baltimore's Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University and as Director of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer's Institute.

His second work for string quartet, Credo, takes its name from the Latin verb meaning “I believe.” Written in 2007, the piece represents an important early collaboration between Puts and the Miró Quartet, as the composer notes:

“When Daniel Ching of the Miró Quartet asked me to write a quartet for a program he was planning exploring ‘the lighter side of America’, I wasn’t sure I could deliver. It was hard to find things to sing about. The government stubbornly and arrogantly continued to pour young lives and billions of dollars into a hopeless war, one to whose protest millions at home and abroad marched with what E.L Doctorow described as the appalled understanding that America was ceding its role as the best of hope of mankind,' that ‘the classic archetype of democracy was morphing itself into a rogue nation.’ Also around this time, a disturbed loner finally enacted his plan to gun down a record-breaking number of his fellow students at Virginia Tech and – amazingly – this failed to prompt any heightened talks over gun control by politicians who feared they might offend their gun-loving constituents before the next election.
“One day on my weekly commute from New York to teach at the Peabody Conservatory, I noticed as the train pulled into Baltimore the word believe emblazoned across a building. I later learned this was part of a campaign by the city of Baltimore to do something about the fact that ten percent of its population is addicted to either heroin or cocaine. As one who relies little if at all on blind faith, I found this to be a rather alarming approach. On the other hand, sometimes it seems all you can do is believe. For example, many of us believe we'll find our way out of the mess. In the meantime, I have found solace in the strangest places:

... in the workshop of a stringed instrument specialist in Katonah, New York, you can believe nothing in the world matters but the fragile art of violins and violas hanging serenely from the ceiling. He listens chin in hand as his clients play excerpts for him, then goes to work on their instruments with sage-like assuredness ...

... on the jogging path along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh, you encounter above and below you the steel girders, asphalt and railroad ties of infrastructure, an immovable network of towering bridges and highways engineered by some deific intelligence...

... from my apartment, I watched in a window across 106th Street a mother teaching her daughter how to dance.

“I would like to thank Amy Anderson of Chamber Music Monterey Bay for commissioning this piece and for her belief in my work. Credo is dedicated by Lowell Figan to the memory of Janie Figan, tireless environmentalist and devoted lover of chamber music.”

About the Miró Quartet

The Miró Quartet is one of America's most celebrated string quartets, having performed throughout the world on the most prestigious concert stages. Based in Austin, TX, and thriving on the area's storied music scene, the Miró takes pride in finding new ways to communicate with audiences of all backgrounds while cultivating the longstanding tradition of chamber music.

The Miró celebrated its 25th anniversary in the 2019-20 season, with its Archive Project, honoring the American string quartet tradition by recreating historic recitals by early 20th-century ensembles, including the Flonzaley, Kneisel, and Kolisch Quartets.

The Miró Quartet has championed the music of Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Kevin Puts for more than a decade, and this season it premieres a new string quartet titled "Home", composed by Mr. Puts for the Miró's 25th anniversary. The work is presented by a consortium of commissioning partners, including the Orcas Island Chamber Music Festival (world premiere), Chamber Music Detroit, and Chamber Music Tulsa.

Formed in 1995, the Miró has been awarded first prize at several competitions including the Banff International String Quartet Competition and Naumburg Chamber Music Competition; and in 2005, became the first ensemble ever to be awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Committed to music education, members of the Miró have given master classes at universities and conservatories throughout the world; and since 2003, has served as faculty string quartet-in-residence at the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas, Austin.
Sponsors
This concert weekend is being held in honor of Emily Wood’s 95th Birthday and in memory of her dear husband, Phil Wood.

This concert weekend is underwritten by Emily Wood, Lobeck Taylor Family Foundation, Ruth Nelson and Tom Murphy, George Krumme and Aldean Newcomb.

With additional assistance from Noam Faingold, Janie and Earl Funk, Kathleen Gerety and James Howard, The Herbert and Roseline Gussman Foundation, Bruce Sorrell, Mollie Williford, and Sharon King Davis.

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