

Duke Arts Presents,
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Doric String Quartet

Friday, April 26 | 8 PM
Baldwin Auditorium



DukeArts
Presents

Doric String Quartet

Alex Redington, violin
Ying Xue, violin
Hélène Clément, viola
John Myerscough, cello

Program

Quartet in A Major, op. 41, No. 3	Robert Schumann
Andante espressivo – Allegro molto moderato	(1810–1856)
Assai agitato – Un poco adagio – Tempo risoluto	
Adagio molto	
Finale: Allegro molto vivace	

Quartet in G Major, op. 18, No. 2	Ludwig van Beethoven
Allegro	(1770–1827)
Adagio cantabile; Allegro	
Scherzo; Allegro	
Allegro molto, quasi presto	

— *Intermission* —

Quartet in G Major, op. 161, D. 887	Franz Schubert
Allegro molto moderato	(1797–1828)
Andante un poco moto	
Scherzo: Allegro vivace	
Allegro assai	

Program Notes

Schumann: Quartet in A Major, op. 41, No. 3

Schumann saw the form of the string quartet as an exciting compositional opportunity, heralding it as ‘by turns beautiful and even abstrusely woven conversation among four people.’ His Third String Quartet was written in 1842, in what is now thought of as his ‘chamber music year.’ He noted in his diary at this time that he had ‘constant quartet thoughts.’ It was very typical of Schumann to compose during these short, intensive periods, often focusing on one genre or musical form at a time. At this time, his compositions were predominantly made up of piano miniatures and song cycles for voice and piano. Other than dabbling in writing for larger forces in his ‘Spring’ Symphony – written the year before – he hadn’t yet explored the potential of chamber or larger-scale works.

Schumann wrote his Third Quartet in July 1842, following straight on from the first two of the opus, which had been written in June. During this time, Robert Schumann had been accompanying his wife Clara on a concert tour. The pair had only recently married and were likely navigating a new life together with Clara managing a busy schedule as a touring musician. Many have noted the use of the downward-falling two-note motif, which is often referred to as the ‘Clara’ motif. Robert spent time alone in Leipzig, which was where he began studying the great masters of the form and having, as he puts it, ‘quartet-ish thoughts.’

All three quartets in this opus were written over a span of just a couple of months and were dedicated to Mendelssohn. They were given their first performance by an ensemble led by Ferdinand David, a violinist who Mendelssohn had previously appointed to the role of leader of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. It was David for whom Mendelssohn later dedicated his inimitable Violin Concerto. After the first run-through of these quartets, Schumann wrote to his publishers, saying, ‘We have played them several times at David’s house, and they seemed to give pleasure to players and listeners, and especially also to Mendelssohn. It is not for me to say anything more about them; but you may rest assured that I have spared no pains to produce something really respectable – indeed, I sometimes think my best.’

It was during this time that Schumann was studying the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven – all of whose influence is felt in this work. Schumann prefaces the opening movement with a slow introduction, which foreshadows the quartet’s main theme. This is a very Beethovenian technique, while the tonal ambiguity and chromatic harmony

of the piece also bring to mind the stylings of the great Romantic composer. Complete with a dreamy introduction, lyrical and rhapsodic middle section, and frenetic but thrilling final movement, this quartet is perceived to be the most popular of all three Op. 41 quartets.

Beethoven: Quartet in G Major, op. 18, No. 2

Of the six quartets written in the Op. 18, it is this exuberant work which is most rooted in 18th-century musical tradition, taking its lead from composers like Haydn. One of Beethoven's early quartets, this was written between 1798 and 1800 when the composer was in his early thirties. His agile writing and deft handling of counterpoint make this an engaging and dynamic listen.

The work has the nickname 'Komplimentier-Quartett', which can be translated as the 'quartet of bows and curtseys.' This nickname may have originated from one of Haydn's last string quartets, which was written around the same time and carried the same name. Haydn was Beethoven's teacher at this time, and the two quartets have similar compositional styles, manner and character, are both written in the key of G major.

The entirety of Beethoven's Op. 18 was dedicated to Prince Joseph Franz Lobkowitz, the employer of Beethoven's friend, the violinist Karl Amenda. Despite being labeled as the second in the series, this quartet was actually composed third in the run. Beethoven later rewrote the second movement, but sketches of the first remain and are occasionally performed.

The quartet's first movement has a playful exchange of themes between parts, while the second movement is more stripped back and 'plain' in quality, perhaps a reference to the musical stylings of Haydn. The third movement is a thrillingly unpredictable scherzo, featuring a triplet-stacked trio. The final movement is another hat-tip to Haydn, featuring various inversions and diminutions of themes.

Schubert: Quartet No. 15 in G Major, op. 161, D. 887

The String Quartet No. 15 is Schubert's final quartet, written in 1826 and published posthumously, after the composer died at just 31 years old. His life may have been short, but Schubert began writing string quartets when he was just 15. The piece has been compared to the late string

quartets of Beethoven, written over a period of about ten days (the same time, incidentally, as Beethoven took to write many of his later quartets). Schubert was a long-time admirer of Beethoven's, and even carried the torch at the great composer's funeral in 1827, just a year and a half before his own untimely death in 1828.

Clocking in at around 45 minutes, the Fifteenth Quartet is a substantial work and therefore heard less frequently than many of Schubert's other chamber works. Its scale is as far-reaching as its content, with vastly contrasting dynamics and textures in a richly harmonic language. Lyrical ideas are modal in approach, something Schubert didn't tend to explore in much of his other music. The tonality is often fast-changing, with restless modulation between major and minor. Pizzicato and tremolos are used freely to create moments of hushed intensity.

A haunting first movement gives way to a similarly tense second, featuring ominous shrieks. The third movement brings us to a more peaceful trio and a light, fizzing scherzo. The final movement is a sonata rondo in 6/8 meter, perpetually moving. It is packed full of surprises, with sudden key changes and rhythmic shifts. As is typical of Schubert's style, there is a constant juxtaposition between light and dark, agony and ecstasy in this quartet, endlessly oscillating between two extremes in emotion and mood.

Program notes by Freya Parr

About Doric String Quartet

Doric String Quartet brings an elegance and intimacy both to the Classical canon and new music and as they go into their 25th anniversary this season, the players continue to deepen their interpretations and win fans across the world. Having performed cycles of Haydn, Mendelssohn, Britten and Bartók at famous venues around the world, including Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Vienna Konzerthaus and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, this season they turn their attention to Beethoven, embarking on a recording project for Chandos, with the first instalment out this year, and culminating in 2026–27 with the 200th anniversary of the composer's death.

Their intellectual rigor has led them to use specially made original-style bows for performing Classical repertoire from Haydn to Mendelssohn, and while they are known for their refined performances of this repertoire, they are also committed to new music, performing works

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