

**Monday, June 9, 2014
Unity Chapel, 7:30 pm**

**Kipperton String Quartet
Timothy Kamps, violin; Wes Luke, violin
Paul Alan Price-Brenner, viola
Kevin Price-Brenner, cello**

Dimitri Shostakovich: *Quartet No. 1 in C major for Strings, Op. 49*

Benjamin Britten: *Three Divertimenti for String Quartet*

--Intermission--

Alexander Borodin: *String Quartet No. 2 in D Major*

The Music

Dimitri Shostakovich *Quartet No. 1 in C major for Strings, Op. 49 1938*

A quick starter in most fields – Shostakovich completed his first symphony at the age of nineteen and his first opera when he was twenty-two, but he was into his thirties before he finished his first string quartet, in the summer of 1938. He made it a short piece, in four movements of compact, classical form: a slow-ish opener, then variations on a folk-style melody, followed by a rushing scherzo and an exuberant, dancing finale – a progression from unease to exhilaration taking not much more than a quarter of an hour. The atmosphere is, he said, spring-like. Some of the music came from one of his film scores, for “The Girl Friends,” about three girlhood friends growing up before World War I who eventually become nurses. One of those sequences gave him his start, for the music used in the opening credits was to take its place as the second movement of this First Quartet.

By his own account, he stumbled into the genre. He started a quartet movement as an exercise, he said, not imagining it would lead anywhere, but then found himself captivated by the project and finished it quickly, inside six weeks. However, this story leaves out the prior existence of the “Girl Friends” movement, and perhaps Shostakovich slanted his reminiscence in order to emphasize the casualness with which he entered on a path that would lead him such a long way.

Lasting around fifteen minutes, and cast in simple C major, the work is thoroughly unpretentious. Since finishing his Fifth Symphony, almost a year before, Shostakovich had been busy composing film scores, and perhaps he found it a relief to be back writing music that existed just for itself.

Being not only Shostakovich's first string quartet but also his first work since the Fifth Symphony – presented as a “reply to just criticism” after the denunciation of his opera “The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District” – the piece was widely and lengthily reported by Soviet critics. Some modern commentators have heard in the music a response to the Stalin terror, then at its height; hence this cautious entry into an atmosphere of danger. However, if we bear in mind the film behind at least the second movement, and its vision of a childhood summer before the First World War, the music could equally be expressing innocence recalled from the perspective of darker days. Then again, wandering tonality is entirely typical of Shostakovich at all periods.

The opening movement has a middle section that jumps away from tremulous calm with pulsing from the viola, glissandos from the cello, and the first violin zooming in, eventually to move into a waltz. Unaccompanied, the viola plays what sounds like a folk song to start the slow movement, which proceeds as a short succession of variations leading to an altered reprise. In a letter Shostakovich sent to the Beethoven Quartet to help them prepare, he asked that the C sharp minor scherzo, played with mutes, go as fast as possible, “very quiet and fantastical.” The last movement, brings the springlike mood back full force, in the form of an energetic finale. The opening immediately sets a cheerful mood with trills and light-hearted melodies. There is, however, still a darker side which clashes with the happy mood in the exciting development, which leads to the vibrant recapitulation and coda.

Benjamin Britten

Three Divertimenti for String Quartet 1933/36

Benjamin Britten has come to be regarded as one of the great 20th composers and certainly among the greatest British composers of all time. His musical talent became evident early with a penchant for composing that resulted in over 100 numbered compositions before the age of eighteen. Britten's mature fame rests primarily on his vocal and stage works: art songs, choral compositions, highly praised operas and the monumental war requiem. But Britten was a skillful instrumental composer as well, producing a compelling variety of chamber music from his youth to his final years. Particularly prized are his string quartets, a Phantasy for oboe and string trio, a cello sonata and his three remarkable suites for solo cello dedicated to Rostropovich. His mature string quartet cycle comprises three numbered quartets and the *Three Divertimenti for String Quartet* written in 1933 when Britten was in his early twenties but subsequently revised quite extensively a few years later in 1936.

The *Three Divertimenti* are, as the title suggests, a set of three individual character pieces meant as "pleasing entertainment" without necessarily any serious import or larger formal considerations as might be implied by a multi-movement string quartet. The bristling rhythms, glissandi (sliding notes) and colorful harmonics of the first piece "March" immediately place the music in the 20th century in terms of style, but as with most of Britten's compositions, the music is tonal, accessible and broadly appealing. Nonetheless, suggestions of Stravinsky, Bartók and Britten's primary teacher Frank Bridge prevail. The second movement "Waltz" is a bit more tame technically with compelling textures and traditional chamber dialog with a whiff of English pastoral character. The last piece titled "Burlesque" reprises the unmistakable vibrancy of 20th century rhythms, techniques and sonorities in a mini-masterwork of color and dynamic contrast. It is immediately obvious, even in his twenties, that Britten was a composer of great skill, imagination and originality. He was dedicated to the mission of writing music for the public, a refreshing stance among so many early 20th century composers who seemed to retreat into isolated intellectual esoterica. These three small character pieces serve as appetizers for the three larger scale numbered quartets Britten produced in 1941, 1945 and 1975 respectively but are tasty on their own!

Alexander Borodin

String Quartet No. 2 in D Major 1881

Alexander Borodin was, like many of his now famous Russian composer friends, a composer by avocation; he had a day job. Borodin pursued a distinguished career as a physician and chemist first while composing only when he could in his truly precious spare time. Generally, it would require years for Borodin to finish a work yet he succeeded in writing some astonishing music of great originality and influence including two symphonies, tone poems such as *In the Steppes of Central Asia*, the opera *Prince Igor* featuring the now famous *Polovetsian Dances*, and a handful of chamber works including the equally beloved *String Quartet No. 2 in D Major*. This last work was, unlike the others, written in a rapid flush of activity lasting only a few months during a summer vacation. The quartet was well-received during Borodin's life but managed to "cross-over" into the mega-popular realm when at least two of its themes were used as part of the 1953 musical *Kismet*. Robert Wright and George Forrest used several of Borodin's compositions whose lyrical and exotic musical "orientalisms" accompanied a story set in Persia during the period from the *Arabian Nights*. Two songs in particular, "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" and "This is My Beloved" are based directly on themes from the second and third movements respectively of Borodin's quartet.

The quartet opens with a lyrical, delicate sensibility that immediately suggests its influence on French composers. The sonata naturally introduces a second theme for contrast, the new character stout but vigorous as a counterweight to the lithe, gentle sway of the beginning. A wonderful sense of affection permeates much of the entire quartet: Borodin dedicated the work to his wife on their 25th anniversary. Borodin writes a sparkling scherzo for the second movement. Part Mendelsohn, part Ravel, it glitters with a tensile agility that gives way not to a formal and fully independent trio, but to an interpolated second theme that relaxes into a touch of salon waltz, a finely spun cloth of languid chromatic sequences that became "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," a perfect title to match the musical alliteration of its short rhyming motifs. The slow movement "Notturmo" is an entire musical narrative of its own as the cello and violin explore a tale of lovers complete with opening soliloquy, loving entreaty, an elegant dance, a tragic conflict and a sublime duet aria for the denouement. Although the lovely theme appears wholesale in *Kismet*, only the string quartet contains the ravishing middle section rising to a peak of dazzling contrapuntal writing second only to Mozart in luminous grandeur. Only the string quartet offers such exquisite instrumental texture.

Borodin's finale is novel, arresting, brooding as well as humorous. It is like a Slavic version of a Haydnesque romp. One might sense both the Russian angst and the skittering hysteria of Tchaikovsky here. Borodin's quartet shows outstanding craftsmanship from a gifted composer placed in a unique historical position to add an elegant, new perfume to European chamber music while advancing the continuity and self-awareness of a now-international tradition.

TIMOTHY KAMPS - Violin

Timothy Kamps has been a member of Madison (WI) Symphony Orchestra's first violin section since 2002. In addition to his position in the MSO, Mr. Kamps is Associate Concertmaster of the Dubuque and La Crosse Symphony Orchestras, and a member of the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. Mr. Kamps has studied principally with Vartan Manoogian, Felicia Moye, Roland and Almita Vamos, and Everett Goodwin. He holds a B.A. in Violin Performance from the University of Wisconsin, where he was awarded the Patricia A. Cheney scholarship.

WES LUKE - Violin

Wes Luke is the Concertmaster of the LaCrosse (WI) Symphony, the Principal Second Violinist of the Dubuque (IA) Symphony Orchestra, and a section violinist in the Madison (WI) Symphony Orchestra. He is also a frequent substitute violinist with the Wisconsin Philharmonic and the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra. He has performed widely across the United States, Europe, and Japan. He received his undergraduate degree with honors from the New England Conservatory of Music studying under Boston Symphony concertmaster Malcolm Lowe. He completed his Masters degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying under Felicia Moye. Mr. Luke currently serves on the teaching faculty of the University of Dubuque, the Northeast Iowa School of Music, Divine Word College, and also teaches strings at Clarke University and Loras College.

PAUL ALAN PRICE-BRENNER - Viola

Paul Alan Price-Brenner plays viola and violin in the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra and the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestra. He received his Bachelor of Music Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, his Masters of Music in Composition at DePaul University, and is a Ph.D.candidate in Music Composition at the University of Iowa. His principal teachers are Tyrone Grieve, Rami Solomonow and Christine Rutledge. Formerly, Mr. Price-Brenner was the Violin/Viola Studio Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and is presently, Conductor of the Quad City Youth Philharmonic Orchestra. This group gives young students the opportunity to play in a full orchestra and learn new and challenging repertoire.

KEVIN PRICE-BRENNER - Cello

Newly appointed St. Ambrose University-Community Symphony Orchestra Music Director/Conductor where he also teaches cello, Kevin Price Brenner is also Music Director/Conductor of the Quad City Youth Symphony and Director of Orchestral Activities at Davenport Central High School. Mr. Price-Brenner is Principal Cellist in the Dubuque Symphony Orchestra in addition to playing and the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Symphony Orchestra. Earlier, Mr. Price-Brenner was Cello Studio Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. He has performed throughout Europe and North America. He received his Bachelors in Music and Bachelors in Music Education at Oral Roberts University under Marilyn George and Kari Caldwell, his Masters in Music at the University of Nevada, Reno under John Lenz, and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Iowa where he studied under Anthony Arnone and Hannah Holman.

