



## **Rolston String Quartet**

**Saturday, October 23, 2021**

**Queens University's Sarah Belk Gambrell Center for the Arts**

**Luri Lee, Violin**

**Jason Issokson, Violin**

**Hezekiah Leung, Viola**

**Peter Eom, Cello**

**Josef Haydn (1732-1809) String Quartet in B minor Op 33 no 1 (1781)**

**Gabriela Lena Frank "Leyendas"**

**Antonín Dvořák - String Quartet No. 12 in F, Op. 96, "American"**

### **String Quartet in B minor, Op.33, No.1 (Hob.III:37)**

Franz Joseph Haydn  
1732-1809

For nine years after the publication of his string quartets Op.20, Franz Joseph Haydn wrote no others. He was extremely busy as composer and music director to the court of Prince Nicolaus Esterházy, whose taste and voracious musical appetite ran primarily to opera. Early in 1779 Haydn signed a new contract with his employer, which gave him more freedom and more prestige. One of the benefits of the contract was that it allowed him to accept commissions from outside Esterházy's court, something that previously had been strictly forbidden. In today's parlance, Haydn could freelance.

The six string quartets Op.33 were composed in 1781. Haydn intended them to be issued for private subscriptions before publication by Atraria. However, Haydn was hot property, and to his chagrin, Atraria jumped the gun and advertised the quartets immediately.

We have always been told that it was Beethoven who replaced the genteel minuet with the livelier scherzo. But Haydn did it already in all six of the Op. 33 quartets, thereby signaling his desire for a faster and more vigorous tempo. The term "scherzo" had been used for various musical genres since the early seventeenth century, but with the Opus 33 quartets – sometimes nicknamed "*Gli Scherzi*" – it became part of the Classical form. It must be added that most of the minuets Haydn wrote later resembled lively peasant dances rather than the stately minuets of aristocratic Vienna.

Conforming to the tradition of the time, the minor key confers on Op. 33/1 a seriousness absent in the other five Op. 33 quartets. The stately graciousness of the *andante* third movement is perhaps a consolation for the absent minuet.

American composer and pianist Gabriela Lena Frank was born in Berkeley, California, to parents of widely mixed background: Her mother is of Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and her father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent. A graduate of Rice University in Houston and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Frank has traveled extensively in South America drawing on its folk culture as inspiration for her compositions. The recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2009, she is currently a free-lance composer living in California's Mendocino County, where she founded her own music school.

Frank composed *Leyendas: An Andean Walkabout* in 2001. The inspiration was "... the idea of *mestizaje* as envisioned by the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, where cultures can coexist without the subjugation of one by the other..."

Composed originally for string quartet, Frank later expanded *Leyendas* for string orchestra. It recalls the sounds and imitates Andean indigenous instruments, interpolating traditional melodies, harmonies and rhythms into a European "Classical" ensemble. Its six movements are:

"*Toyos*" Depicts the panpipe, the most familiar instrument of the Andes. The *toyos* is one of the largest, requiring great stamina and lung power.

"*Tarqueda*" imitates the sound of the *tarka*, a heavy wooden duct flute that is blown harshly in order to split the tone.

"*Himno de Zampoñas*" describes a particular type of panpipe ensemble that divides up melodies through a technique known as hocketing – the sharing of a melody between two or more voices playing alternately. The characteristic sound of the zampoña panpipe is that of a fundamental tone blown fatly so that overtones ring out on top, hence the unusual scoring of double stops in this movement.

"*Chasqui*" depicts a legendary figure from the Inca period, the *chasqui* runner, who sprinted great distances to deliver messages between towns separated from one another by the Andean peaks. Although we know of no indigenous Inca music, Frank has created a musical fantasy in which she imagines the musical and instrumental palette of an ancient civilization.

"*Canto de velorio*" is the song of the professional weeping mourner woman, hired for funerals to enhance the sadness. Frank quotes here the *Dies irae* to stress the comfortable mix of Quechua Indian religious rites with those from Catholicism.

"*Coqueteos*" is a flirtatious love song sung by gallant men known as *romanceros*, who sing in harmony against a backdrop of what Frank envisions as a *vendaval de guitarras* ("storm of guitars").

### **String Quartet in F major, Op. 96, "American"**

Antonín Dvořák  
1841-1904

In 1892, Antonín Dvořák accepted the invitation of the philanthropist Mrs. Jeanette Thurber to take up the directorship of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York, which she sponsored. While the composer was intrigued by the possibilities of the venture, he found America strange and suffered extreme homesickness for his native Bohemia. To feel more at home, he spent the summer of 1893 in Spillville, a small Czech community in Iowa. He was happy there, playing the organ for the settlers in their little church and quartets with his students. But coming from the small farms of his native land, the vastness of the Iowa landscape overwhelmed him: "We often went to visit Czech farmers 4-5 miles away. It is very strange here. Few people and a great deal of empty space. A farmer's nearest neighbor is often 4 miles off, and especially in the prairies (I call them Sahara) there are only endless acres of fields and meadows and that is all you see, you don't meet a soul." he wrote to a friend back home.

Dvořák put his stay in Spillville to good use, and within a month composed what was to become his most popular chamber work, the String Quartet in F, Op. 96. Usually known as the "American" Quartet, it makes use

of a pentatonic scale (a mode that has only five notes to the octave and no semitone intervals). Pentatonic scales were common in the African-American music he heard in New York. Nonetheless, they can be found all over the world, from China to Scotland, including in Dvořák's native Bohemia. Whatever the ethnic source of the scale, Dvořák uses it as a unifying quality for this quartet. Pentatonic themes also feature prominently in the Symphony No. 9 ("New World"). The quartet was premiered in Boston in 1894.

The quartet opens with the pentatonic theme on the viola, accompanied by a syncopated violin accompaniment. The flowing second theme is distinctly Bohemian, far removed from any American influence. Most of the development involves the first theme.

The plaintive, soaring violin melody of the slow movement is considered the highlight of the quartet. It is a beautiful love song without words. During the course of the movement the other instruments take up the melody one by one over a delicate accompaniment.

The vigorous theme of the *Scherzo* again makes use of the pentatonic scale, but the rhythm and shape of the theme imitate the song of the scarlet tanager, a bird common to Iowa woodlands. The Trio, however, is a plaintive cantilena in the minor mode, harking back to the mood of the second movement.

The high-spirited finale is a sonata-rondo structure recalling lively country dances and music-making. The rondo theme and first episode are pentatonic, but Dvořák subtly darkens the mood with an inexact but still recognizable reference to the melancholy violin theme of the second movement. In the middle the movement he sharply suspends the merrymaking with a sad variant of the Trio in the third movement. Although one always walks on dangerous ground trying to relate the events of a composer's life with his or her music, it is a fact that Dvořák was homesick during his sojourn in the United States. This somber diversion has its parallel in the Finale of the Ninth Symphony.

Program notes by:  
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn  
Wordpros@mindspring.com  
www.wordprosmusic.com



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