

Beo String Quartet

Jason Neukom, 1st violin Andrew Giordano, 2nd violin Sean Neukom, viola Ryan Ash, 'cello

Cary's Ritter Park Program

Tieshan Liu and Yuan Mao (arr. Yiwen Jiang)
Dance of the Yao Tribe

Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936)
Five Novelettes, Op.15 (excerpts)
1. Alla spagnuola: Allegretto
3. Interludium in modo antico: Andante
2. Orientale: Allegro con brio

Marc Mellits (b.1966)
String Quartet No.5, "Waníyetu" (2015)

clear winter^[L]_[SEP]

funk^[L]_[SEP]

distant echo^[L]_[SEP]

playful & steady^[L]_[SEP]

smooth^[L]_[SEP]

energetic

eternal polar vortex^[L]_[SEP]

aggressive

Gabriela Ortiz (b.1964)
Mictlán (Place of the Dead), from "Altar de Muertos"

intermission

Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884)
String Quartet No. 1 in E minor, Op. 116 ("From My Life")
Allegro vivo appassionato
Allegro moderato alla polka
Largo sostenuto
Vivace

Program Notes

TIESHAN LIU & YUAN MAO

In 1951, Liu Tieshan, a teacher at the Central Conservatory in Beijing, and several of his students traveled to southern China to study and collect folk music. Liu gathered several of the melodies they heard into a piece called *Long Drum Dance of the Yao People*, which his colleague Mao Yuan orchestrated in 1952 as *Dance of the Yao Tribe*, a multi-sectional medley of contrasting elements, beginning in haunted yearning song and ending in high energy dance. It has since been arranged in many versions, and inspired several pop songs around the world. It was used in the soundtrack to the '80s video game *The Way of the Exploding Fist*. —John Henken

The Yao are a minority population in Yunnan and Guangxi in China. A programmatic description of the piece follows:

Night has fallen. Dressed up, the people gather in the moonlight beating long drums. The quiet mild theme on the strings sounds like a girl dancing gracefully. With other girls joining in the dance one after another, the mood of the music gradually becomes excited. Suddenly a forceful and enthusiastic melody derived from the theme is heard, as a group of young men, unable to restrain their emotions, rush into the crowd of dancing girls and begin to express their excitement with dance.

In the second part, in triple-time, the melody is sometimes cantabile and sometimes bouncy, just like a young couple in love expressing their affection for each other and looking forward to their happy future.

The third part is a recapitulation of the beginning. The people again join in the dance one after another, bouncing, spinning and singing. The atmosphere becomes more and more ardent, while the people's enthusiasm becomes more and more unrestrained. Finally the ardent tutti drives the music to its culminant ending.

GLAZUNOV:

Musically speaking, Russia has always struggled to find its own voice. It straddles East and West, not quite Asia, but not quite Europe. When Glazunov was coming into his own as a composer, there were two dominant music schools in Russia: the Moscow Conservatory, where Tchaikovsky taught, and which had a “western” orientation and leaned toward Romantic composition, and the St. Petersburg Conservatory, under the aegis of Rimsky-Korsakoff, which remained nationalistic, devoted to folk idioms and to the use of “fantastic” elements in music. Glazunov showed considerable musical ability as a child. He composed eight symphonies, six string quartets, piano and violin concertos, two piano sonatas, ballets, and incidental music. There is no sign of any inward struggle in his scores, which are always serene and beautiful.

Glazunov became director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, and it says much for the esteem in which he was held that he was able to steer the Conservatory through years of great hardship, difficulty and political turmoil, fortified in his task, it seems, by the illicit supply of vodka provided for him by the father of Shostakovich, then a student there.. He found fault with Stravinsky's ear and could not abide the music of Richard Strauss, while the student Prokofiev seems to have shocked him with its discords. His own music continued the tradition of Tchaikovsky and to this extent seemed an anachronism in an age when composers were indulging in experiments of all kinds.

Glazunov left Russia for Paris in 1928 in order to attend the Schubert celebrations in Vienna. Thereafter he remained abroad since, after the death of Lenin, the new regime in Moscow became increasingly repressive. He finally settled near Paris, where he remained until his death in 1936.

Glazunov composed the Five Novelettes as a young man, in 1888, and the subject matter of each indicates that a bit of the “nationalist” impulse did stick to him. He originally gave the set the less evocative title of “Suite,” to be replaced at the suggestion of Hans von Bülow, distinguished pianist and conductor, former husband of Liszt's daughter Cosima. The term “novelette” was first used by Robert Schumann, whose mastery of small forms “must have fascinated a composer so sensitive to formal beauty as was Glazunov,” writes one musicologist. The first of the pieces, *Alla spagnuola* (In the Spanish style) opens with the plucked notes of the cello, in accompaniment to the first melody, with its characteristic rhythm. A trio section starts with a cello melody, but the dance soon resumes. *Interludium in modo antico* is in the Dorian mode, and alludes to Russian church music tradition in its solemnity. The term “Orientale” was used rather loosely in Glazunov's day, and here refers not to East Asia but rather to the Caucasus region. —Keith Anderson

Mellitts:

Composer Marc Mellitts is one of the leading American composers of his generation, enjoying hundreds of performances throughout the world every year, making him one of the most performed living composers in the United States. From Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center, to prestigious music festivals in Europe and the US, Mellitts' music is a constant mainstay on programs throughout the world. His unique musical style is an eclectic combination of driving rhythms, soaring lyricism, and colorful orchestrations that all combine to communicate directly with the listener. Mellitts' music is often described as being visceral, making a deep connection with the audience. “This was music as sensual as it was intelligent; I saw audience members swaying, nodding, making little motions with their hands” (New York Press). He started composing very early, and was writing piano music long before he started formal piano lessons at age 6. He went on to study at the Eastman School of Music, Yale School of Music, Cornell University, and Tanglewood. Mellitts often is a miniaturist, composing works that are comprised of short, contrasting movements or sections. His music is eclectic, all-encompassing, colorful, and always has a sense of forward motion.

Mellitts' music has been played by major ensembles across the globe. He has been commissioned by groups such as the Kronos Quartet, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Holland), Duo Assad, Bang On A Can All-Stars, Canadian Brass, Nexus Percussion, Debussy Quartet, Third Coast Percussion, Real Quiet, Four-In-Correspondence (National Symphony Orchestra), Musique en Roue Libre (France), Percussions Claviers de Lyon (France), Talujon, the Society for New Music, and Syracuse Symphony Orchestra.

Mellitts has composed numerous film scores, including for the PBS mini-series “Beyond The Light Switch” which won a 2012 Dupont-Columbia award, the most prestigious award in documentaries. Mellitts also directs and plays keyboards in his own unique ensemble, the Mellitts Consort. He was awarded the prestigious 2004 Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award. Over 50 recorded works of Mellitts' music can be found on CD. He is an Associate Professor of Music at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"Waníyetu" is the Lakota word for "year," as measured from first snow to first snow. The collection of seven miniature movements alternates between pure, wistful meditations and funky rhythmic romps.

"The American composer Marc Mellits cut his creative teeth transcribing Steve Reich while absorbing the music of post-minimalists such as Michael Gordon . . . [He] holds back during the opening movements before unleashing a blizzard of interlocking patterns over a powerful pulsing chord sequence in a final, impressive flourish." —Gramophone

ORTIZ:

Latin Grammy-nominated Mexican composer Gabriela Ortiz is one of the most vibrant musicians emerging on the international scene. Her musical language achieves an extraordinary and expressive synthesis of tradition and the avant-garde, combining high art, folk music, and jazz in novel, refined, and personal ways.

In 2019, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Gustavo Dudamel, and the Tambuco Percussion Ensemble performed the world premiere of Ortiz's *Yanga*. Other recent orchestral commissions include *Hominum* for the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico (the work was also performed by the New World Symphony), and *Antropolis* for the Louisiana Symphony Orchestra. Her recent opera, *Luciérnaga* (Firefly) premiered in 2018 at the Vertice Festival. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra recorded and performed her work *Hominum* in Fall of 2018, and the LA Phil presented the UK premiere of *Téenek - Invenciones de territorio* in their London tour. Upcoming commissions include collaborations with the Orchestre symphonique de Bretagne and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

The composer writes:

"The tradition of the Day of the Dead festivities in Mexico is the source of inspiration for the creation of *Altar de Muertos* [of which *Mictlán* is one movement], whose ideas could reflect the internal search between the real and the magic, a duality always present in Mexican culture, from the past to the present." "Mictlán" was the name of the Aztec underworld.

SMETANA:

In the summer of 1874, Smetana's health began deteriorating rapidly under the onslaught of advancing syphilis, and by the end of October he was completely deaf. He was forced to give up his conducting position in Prague and move to the country to live with his married daughter, supported by a meager and often delayed pension.

Though in poverty and pain, Smetana continued to compose, turning often to chamber music for intensely personal reflection. He wrote a pioneering programmatic string quartet, *Z mého života* (From My Life), in 1876.

"Concerning the style of my Quartet, I shall gladly leave judgment on this to others and I will not be angry at all if they do not like it, for it is contrary to the conventional style of quartet music," Smetana wrote. "I had no intention of composing a quartet according to a formula or according to the usual conception of the form . . . With me, the form of each composition is determined by the subject. Consequently this Quartet created its own form. I wanted to picture in tones the course of my life."

This deliberate choice of a programmatic direction, though relatively rare in chamber music at the time, was a natural and instinctive one for Smetana. In the course of his operas and the great cycle of orchestral tone poems *Ma Vlast*, he had created templates for musical nationalism, portraying the people and places of Bohemia with vivid authenticity. He also described the work in some detail, even including some directions for interpretation. (When the work was given a private performance in Prague later that year, the prominent viola part was played by the young Dvořák.)

The opening movement, Smetana wrote, depicts the “inclination to art in my youth, romanticism predominating, the unspeakable yearning for something I could not express or definitely imagine, and also a sort of warning of my future disaster.” Here Smetana indicates the portentous main motif, a sharply attacked whole note followed by a bitten-off downward leap. This is also the origin, he says, of the high, sustained tone in the finale. “It is that fateful whistling of the highest tones in my ear, which in 1874 was announcing my deafness. I allowed myself this little game because it was so catastrophic for me.”

In the second movement, he continued, “the quasi-Polka carries me back in retrospection to the happy life of my youth when, as a composer of dance music, I frequented the fashionable world, where I was known as a passionate dancer.” In the slower middle section of the movement – “my impressions of the aristocratic circles in which I lived for many years” – Smetana offers easier alternatives for the chords the violins play over the viola and cello, but pleads for the original version if at all possible.

The ardent, lyrical third movement “brings to mind the bliss of my first love for the girl who later became my faithful wife.”

The finale begins as a vigorous and joyful dance, which is abruptly cut off by that high whistling omen. Snippets from the first movement follow, and the movement ends with a fading echo of the dance. As Smetana described it, the finale presents the “perception of the beauty of national music, and the happiness resulting from this interrupted by my ominous catastrophe – the beginning of my deafness; the view into a tragic future, a slender ray of hope for improvement, but remembrance of the first beginnings of my path still creates a painful feeling. That was approximately the aim of the work, which is almost intimate, and that is why it is written purposely for four instruments, as though in a small friendly circle they are discussing among themselves what so obviously troubles me. That’s all.” —*John Henken*

The Beo String Quartet

The Beo String Quartet, founded in 2015, has created a niche for itself as a daring, genre-defying ensemble. Rigorously trained in the classical tradition, the Beo members also know their way around contemporary music. Their performances of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Shostakovich have been compared to those of the best among 21st century international string quartets.

On January 31, 2023, the Beo String Quartet made an auspicious New York début at the distinguished Morgan Library and Museum. On the same day, the quartet released a new album on their NeuKraft Records label entitled "131," named for Beethoven's celebrated String Quartet No.14 in C-sharp minor, Op.131. In addition to the Beethoven, the recording includes Missy Mazzoli's "Enthusiasm Strategies" and "19/20" by Beo violist and composer Sean Neukom.

George Grella, covering the Morgan Library concert for New York Classical Review, wrote:

"Beo String Quartet makes an outstanding New York debut ... one expects exact intonation and clear articulation from quartets, at all speeds and dynamic levels ... The Beo Quartet had all that technical facility, to which they added a sound that was grainy with a touch of velvet, robust and woody—superior technique wrapped in a classic sound ... the sheer sound of the quartet was invigorating and deeply satisfying. As was their artistry, which came across in both the programming and the playing ... skill, passion, and strength."

And Frank Daykin, had this to say in The New York Concert Review:

"Beo" means: to bless, make happy, gladden, and delight. Based on this one introductory hearing, I believe the Beo String Quartet is poised to do just that, to an ever widening circle of audiences ... absolute purity of intonation ... supernatural one-ness of interpretive intent that animates the best quartets ... Bravo Beo, I hope to hear many more good things from and about you for years to come."

Highlights of Beo's past and current season include two tours of California; being selected to showcase at the Chamber Music America annual conference; a collaboration with Charleston Ballet; Dakota Chamber Music; Lakeside Chautauqua; Chamber Music Raleigh; Colorado State University; and international appearances at the Festival Internacional de Música do Pará, Belém, Brazil; and the Ibagué Festival, Colombia.

The March/April 2023 issue of Fanfare includes several fine reviews of their new album, 131. "In short, this is a hip, full-immersion quartet capable of far-reaching achievements ... this young ensemble has reached the essence of what it means to be inspired by Beethoven ... The fusion of past and present makes this release resonate with our times as few CDs do." – Peter Burwasser. And Ken Meltzer, in the same issue, wrote, "A compelling, thought-provoking, and musically satisfying journey."

Undaunted by artistic or logistical challenges, they play the masters in a variety of settings, collaborate with living composers, and explore technology's capacity to the fullest. Called "absolutely spectacular" by composer Marc Mellits (University of Chicago), and "an ensemble whose music-making speaks to the heart as well as the mind" by composer Richard Danielpour (Curtis Institute of Music), Beo defies categorization. Works such as "Haydn Recycled" and "Projection 1: Triple Quartet" combine virtuosic quartet writing and staging in various forms. To date, Beo has performed more than 100 concert works, including some 45 world premieres, throughout Europe and the United States.

Beo has earned a reputation for its thoughtfully crafted educational programs. Disguised as entertainment, each show is designed to teach real chamber music skills and a love for classical music to students ranging from complete beginners to pre-professionals. Beo has shared these engaging experiences with more than 3,500 students to date. Beo also publishes the student ensemble works of Richard Neukom (the father of Sean and Jason Neukom, and a strings educator with 40+ years' experience) intended for elementary-, middle-, and high-school string ensemble educators.

Beo regularly collaborates with living composers including Richard Danielpour, Marc Mellits, Missy Mazzoli, Lawrence Dillon, Joel Hoffman, and Charles Nichols. As part of its annual residency with the Charlotte New Music Festival, Beo hosts an annual Composition Competition which yields a winning work selected from 100+ submissions. Every year, the quartet then records the composition and makes a point of programming it frequently in subsequent seasons.