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CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF FORT WORTH PRESENTS
“Language of the Soul”
Dover Quartet
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Program Notes by Laurie Shulman ©2023

Quartet in C, Hob.III:77 (Op.76 No.3), Emperor”
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

In music, the nickname “Emperor” initially calls to mind Beethoven’s Fifth Piano Concerto. For chamber music enthusiasts, however, “Emperor” denotes Haydn’s glorious quartet in C major, a masterpiece of his maturity and one of the glories of the quartet literature. The nickname comes from the slow movement, a set of variations on the anthem ‘*Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser,*’ which Haydn had composed early in 1797 as a counterpart to England’s “*God Save the King.*” The quartet followed by a matter of months. It was played at the Esterházy palace in Eisenstadt in September 1797 when the Viceroy of Hungary visited. Unlike Beethoven’s concerto, which acquired its sobriquet decades after the fact, this quartet has been identified with Haydn’s anthem from the beginning. It was referred to as “the quartet based on the song ‘*Gott erhalte Franz den Kaiser.*’”

The C major quartet was one of six published in 1799 with a dedication to Count Joseph Erdödy, an Hungarian nobleman who had commissioned the set in 1796. The “Emperor” is one of Haydn’s most orchestral quartets in its conception. The first and final movements contain an unusual amount of double, triple, and even quadruple stops, thickening the texture and rhetorical impact of Haydn’s music. From the resolute opening gesture, it is clear that Haydn was completely comfortable with the quartet medium. The first movement is characteristic in that it is monothematic, that is, the second theme derives from the first. Dotted rhythms give the music energy and bounce. A series of fermatas [pauses] toward the end heighten the drama, before the *presto coda*.

The variations are straightforward in that you can always hear the theme. The first variation is a duet. Second violin has the theme; first violin embroiders above; the lower two instruments are silent. Hans Keller has written:

The very fact that [the first violin’s] subordinate part *is* the variation imposes a creative duty on him, in that he has to shape it with maximal imagination.

The second variation proceeds with second violin and cello in parallel thirds. This time the cello has the melody, with viola filling in the harmony and first violin, again, commenting above. In the third variation, Haydn awards the viola with the theme, showcasing it by giving the other players academic, quasi-fugal parts. The last variation is slower, almost chorale-like at the

beginning, but changing the harmonies of the song. Haydn writes in an unusually high register, particularly for viola and cello.

The Menuett is well mannered and benign, with flecks of chromaticism. A surprising modulation takes place for the Trio section, which moves to a-minor/A-major for sixteen magical, lovely measures. The concluding Presto uses its opening *forte* chords as part of the thematic material (Haydn does this in some of his late piano sonatas, too). The big surprise, however, is that he opens in *c minor* rather than the home key of C major. The dramatic opening reinforces the overall weight of the quartet and its composer's seriousness of purpose. The finale is another sonata form, rather than a rondo – another indication that Haydn intended this movement to have more weight. And, in a nice touch, he gives the cello first crack at the virtuosic triplets that dazzle throughout the movement. Not one to linger overlong in minor mode, Haydn closes the “Emperor” quartet in a blaze of imperial C-major glory.

String Quartet (in one movement), Op.89
Amy Marcy Cheney Beach [Mrs. H.H.A. Beach] (1867-1944)

Female composers are certainly a part of the contemporary music equation, but at the turn of the 20th century, Amy Beach was one of a kind. Like Felix Mendelssohn's older sister Fanny Hensel, Amy Beach was a multi-talented prodigy in a world that channeled her, after her marriage, into a career out of the public limelight. Unlike Hensel, Beach lived to a ripe old age and was able to achieve several landmarks for women in music.

Shortly after making her *début* as a piano soloist with the Boston Symphony in 1885, Amy Cheney married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a prominent Boston physician. She was 18; he was 43. Although Dr. Beach preferred that his young wife curtail her public performance career, he encouraged her to pursue composition – publishing her works under the name Mrs. H.H.A. Beach. She was the first woman to have original compositions performed by such prestigious organizations as the Boston Handel and Haydn Society, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the Symphony Society of New York.

When her husband died in 1911, Mrs. Beach went to Europe for a couple of years and established an impressive reputation there. By the time of her death, she was the undisputed dean of American female composers, and one of the best known living composers, period. Until 1937, she continued to perform regularly with singers and instrumentalists. After that, as her health declined, she appeared less in public.

Beach was one of the first American composers to develop an interest in American music: the Black spirituals of the antebellum south, traditional folk music, and the music of native Americans. The String Quartet was one of five works she based on native American tunes. She completed the one-movement work in 1929; however, she had sketched it fully eight years earlier during a 1921 residency at New Hampshire's MacDowell Colony.

The quartet's thematic material uses three Alaskan Inuit songs included in *The Central Eskimo*, a collection published by Franz Boas in 1888. Boas assigned English titles to all the songs. The ones Beach adapted are "Summer Song," a quasi-pentatonic melody initially stated by viola; "Playing at Ball," introduced by first violin; and "Ititaujang's Song," a lively tarantella-like segment that develops into a fugal texture. Beach returns to the earlier songs and the slower tempi after the fugue, giving her quartet a modified arch form.

While Beach's earlier music favored rich post-romantic harmonies and quasi-symphonic writing, she took a more austere approach in this quartet. The spare quality of the Inuit material lent itself to leaner textures. Her harmonies are often modal and sometimes veer toward dissonance. Most of Beach's earlier chamber music involves piano. She would have been writing for herself, resulting in rich, technically demanding keyboard parts. That is not the case with the string quartet, which shows Beach to be a skilled composer for strings, and an impressive navigator of thematic development and counterpoint.

Though several informal read-throughs of the quartet took place in the 1920s and 1930s, Beach never heard a professional performance. The piece was programmed on a concert at the Phillips Gallery in Washington D.C. to celebrate Beach's 75th birthday in November 1942. Unfortunately, she was too ill to attend. The quartet remained unpublished until 1994. More than 75 years after Beach's death, it is starting to get the attention it deserves.

String Quartet in E-flat, Op. 51 Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

"Write us a Slavonic work." The request came to Dvořák from Jean Becker (1833-1884), first violinist of the prominent Florentine Quartet. The result was the E-flat Quartet, Op.51, a highly individual, contented work, reflecting Dvořák's healthy outlook on life. Composed in 1878, Op.51 is among the finest of the fourteen surviving string quartets by Dvořák.

With Dvořák, changes in musical style are always most easily perceived in the chamber music. This quartet was a pivotal work in a number of ways. Most important among them are the freedom and spontaneity with which the composer embraced the folk idioms of his native Bohemia and incorporated them into the fabric of the quartet. Every one of its movements adapts Bohemian song and dance in some way; the variety of its invention is a substantial part of its appeal.

From the opening measures of the first movement the melodic luxury envelops the listener. Always a skillful practitioner of sonata form, Dvořák ingeniously interweaves chorale and polka to his more conventional sonata theme, providing a foil for the more substantial drama of the movement. Another unique aspect of this opening *Allegro* is that the recapitulation takes place briefly in G-major--quite distant from the tonic key of E-flat! The journey back to the home key is quite circuitous and makes for good listening.

Dvořák gave this quartet two slow movements, somewhat unusual since his gift for scherzos was by no means negligible. The first is a *dumka*, a sort of elegy interrupted by occasional outbursts of more energetic music. Dvořák favored *dumky* in many of his chamber works. This one starts as a lament, with the viola echoing the first violin's mournful line against the backdrop of pizzicato cello chords. Its contrasting middle section is more like the sparkling *furiant*, whose name implies its rapid, quixotic character. Here, the switch is from slow to fast, from G-minor to G-major, and from duple to triple time with the syncopations and hemiolas so characteristic of the *furiant*. Dvořák unifies the music by adapting the same *dumka* theme to the style of the *furiant*. The technique is Haydnesque in the sense of being monothematic; and Lisztian in the sense of thematic transformation.

The second slow movement is a romance of expressive but modest dimensions, not unlike some of Dvořák's finer songs from the 1880s. For the finale he returns to the dances of Bohemia with a *skocna*, a jumping dance rather like an Irish reel, usually in brisk duple time. Its mischievous high spirits evoke the memory of the Op.46 Slavonic Dances, completed the previous year. Dvořák's seemingly inexhaustible fount of melody serves him particularly well here, and he succeeds in meshing his themes in some fine contrapuntal writing.

Becker's Quartet toured widely with this quartet, which did much to establish Dvořák's reputation abroad. Both brilliant and original, Op.51 is an important milestone in Dvořák's independence from German models and development of a specifically Czech style.