Taiwanese-American violist Che-Yen Chen has established himself as an active performer and educator. He is a founding member of the Formosa Quartet, recipient of the First-Prize and the Amadeus Prize winner of the 10th London International String Quartet Competition. Since winning the First-Prize in the 2003 William Primrose International Viola Competition and the “President Prize” of the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition, Chen has been described by the Strad Magazine as a musician whose “tonal distinction and essential musicality produced an auspicious impression” and by San Diego Union Tribune as an artist whose “most impressive aspect of his playing was his ability to find not just the subtle emotion, but the humanity hidden in the music.” Principal violist of the San Diego Symphony and Mainly Mozart Festival Orchestra, Chen has appeared as guest principal violist with Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Canada’s National Arts Centre Orchestra. A former member of Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society Two and participant of the Marlboro Music Festival, he is a member of Camera Lucida, Concentrant Chamber Players and The Myriad Trio, which just released its début album “The Eye of Night”. Chamber music festival appearances include the Kingston Chamber Music Festival, Chamber Music International, La Jolla Summerfest, Seattle Chamber Music Society and Taiwan Connection. Summer of 2013 will commence the inaugural year for the Formosa Quartet’s Formosa Chamber Music Festival in Taiwan.

Cellist Charles Curtis has been Professor for Contemporary Music Performance at UCSD since Fall 2000. Previously he was Principal Cello of the Symphony Orchestra of the North German Radio in Hamburg, a faculty member at Princeton, the cellist of the Ridge String Quartet, and a sought-after chamber musician and soloist in the classical repertoire. He holds the Piagorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society, and received prizes in the Naumburg, Geneva, Cassado and Viola del Mar (Chile) international competitions. He has appeared as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, the National Symphony, the Baltimore Symphony, the Symphony Orchestra of Berlin, the NDR Symphony, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orquestra de la Maggio Musicale in Florence, the Janacek Philharmonic, as well as orchestras in Brazil and Chile. His chamber music associations have taken him to the Marlboro, Ravinia, Wolf Trap, La Jolla Summerfest and Victoria Festivals, among many others. He is internationally recognized as a leading performer of unique solo works created expressly for him by composers such as La Monte Young, Eliane Radigue, Alvin Lucier, Alison Knowles and Mieko Shiomi as well as rarely-heard compositions by Terry Jennings, Richard Maxfield, Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman and John Cage. Curtis is artistic director of San Diego’s Camera Lucida chamber music ensemble and concert series.

Performing solo and chamber music concerts internationally, Reiko Uchida is recognized as one of the finest, most versatile pianists on the music scene. She has appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Santa Fe Symphony, Greenwich Symphony, and the Princeton Symphony, among many others. As a chamber musician she has performed at the Marlboro, Santa Fe, Tanglewood, and Spoleto Music Festivals; as guest artist with the Borromeo, St. Lawrence and Tokyo Quartets; and in recital with Jennifer Koh, Thomas Meiqueranze, Anne Akiko Meyers, Sharon Robinson, and Jaime Laredo. Her recording with Jennifer Koh, “String Poetic” was nominated for a Grammy Award. She is also a past member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Two, Lincoln Center’s program designed to nurture the careers of outstanding young musicians. A graduate of Curtis Institute of Music, Mannes College of Music and the Juillard School, Ms. Uchida studied with Claude Frank, Leon Fleisher, Edward Aldwell and Margo Garrett. She currently resides in New York City, where she is an associate faculty member at Columbia University.

Artistic director - Charles Curtis

Executive coordinator - Colin McAllister

Program notes - Charles Cross

Recording engineer - Tom Erbe

Production - Jessica Flores
A curiosity of Beethoven's catalog is the proliferation of string trios in the early period - five substantial works before 1798 - and the total absence of this instrumentation from his output henceforth. In fact, with the exception of two slight ventures by the teenage Schubert, the string trio disappears from European chamber music until it is revived by Max Reger in the very early 1900's. Probably Beethoven was warming up some dramatic launch of his Opus 18 string quartets in 1800 by working in the less canonical form of the string trio. All the same, his string trios are elaborate, ambitious works, opulently crafted to impress the circle of aristocratic musical lovers he moved in. Indeed, Beethoven is famous for his dedication of his Opus 18 to the then Princess of Courland, whose name - Lotte - is the palindrome that the trio is actually named after. Beethoven's dedication letter for the Opus 9 trios proclaims them to be “la meilleure de mes oeuvres”, “the best of all my works”, and he may not have been wrong.

The String Trio Opus 9 No.3 uses Beethoven's “gotic” sonority of c-minor, a favorite key throughout his career. In c-minor he would produce histrionic effects of shock, horror and pathos - already tested out to full effect, and to the distaste of Haydn, in his Piano Trio Opus 1, No. 3 of 1793. At the end of the 1793's his c-minor works include the Sonate pathétique Opus 13, the String Quartet Opus 18 No. 4, and the Third Piano Concerto - in fact, c-minor is almost the only minor key Beethoven employed for large-scale works in the early period. Unquestionably a sort of musical pendant to the gothic novels of the period - or, in Ger- man, the Schauerroman, the “shudder novel” - Beethoven masterfully deploys the ringing open strings of the trio for his characteristic sfondo effects, percussion-like thongs and bursts suggesting the delicious emotional jolt of violence and surprise. The vehemence of the style is completely new in European music; and it is matched in this work with feverish speed and a predominantly delicate, violin-like sound in which drama hangs in perpetual suspense. In contrast, the Adagio con espressione slow movement seems to be a kind of romance or ballad, but of a solemnity that nearly crosses the threshold into the realm of sacred music. The Scherzo anticipates the husked and bustling world of Mendelssohn, and the Finale ends not with thumping drama, but with a mysterious disappearance, the music evaporating like a troubled dream on waking.

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Schumann composed the four Maerchenbilder, Opus 113 in the short span of four days, between March 1st and 4th, 1851. On March 15th they were already being rehearsed by Clara Schumann and their dedicatees. Wilhelm von Wasielewski, in his preface to his Opus 114, describes the string trio as “an image of the spires of the forest; its atmosphere is shadowy, its colors ever-changing and permanently twilit. The Scherzo begins delicately, almost secretively, its sonority by nature dappled and shadowy, matches this atmosphere as if born to it. But even beyond its acoustical character, the social identity of the trio might have appealed to Schumann - a Doppelpinjasenger to the violin, a personality shift for the violinist (and Wasielowski) was a violinist, concertmaster of Schumann’s orchestra), a quieter, more ruminate older sibling perhaps, about whom one does not know very much.

Whatever Schumann’s madness might have been, and we will never know, his personality was in the happiest of times matched by willful imaginative swings and a superabundance of interchangeable, invented roles. The attributes of a child, one might note. Schumann’s mass of influences and his prolific genius, his life for ever changing forms. It also accounts for his psychoneurotic facility in setting instruments off to their best advantage. Brahms’ music is far from easy to perform, but it is crafted in such a way that, individually and collectively, a kind of ideal illumination of sonority is achieved. The part-writing in the B-major Trio verges on the heroic, as strings and piano advance and recede, and contrapuntal and harmonic resolutions are far from perfect, harmonious proportions of the upper and lower portions. The surface sheen of the best popular music is there, without any sacrifice in matters of structural complexity or expressive depth.

The opening Allegro con brio sets a tone of ardant anticipation, a burning warmth utterly lost. Monumental in scope, this movement is a continent unto itself, replete with mountain ranges, deserts and oceans. The Scherzo begins distinctly, almost pre-emptively, with fanfare rhythms hinting at sleeping armies. Once awakened, they storm ahead in masses columns spurred by syncopated accents. A trio section, interweaving the Scherzo’s melodic shape but in a lyrical mode (while echoes of the fanfare rhythm reappear in the piano’s left hand), melts into something between a Romantic reverie and an all-out drinking song, aims interrupted at the bar and all sway back and forth. The Adagio presents a mood of near-stasis; byrds-like chords are given enough time to resonate mysteriously, the spaces between chords taking on an equal importance to the chords themselves. A second theme area evokes a mournful gypsy song, exotic chromatic in G-sharp minor. And the Finale composes harmonious confusion with an ambiguously chromatic theme, ghostly at first, finally relentless and savage in its lunatic. The congruency of the opening movement has been left behind, irreversibly, and the Trio ends with a merciless B-minor elucidating all that went before.

about the performers

Violinist Jeff Thayer is currently the concertmaster of the San Diego Symphony as well as concertmaster and faculty member of the Music Academy of the West (Santa Barbara). Previous positions include assistant concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, associate concertmaster of the North Carolina Symphony, and concertmaster of the Canton (OH) Symphony Orchestra. He is a graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, the Eastman School of Music, and the Juilliard School’s Pre-College Division. His teachers include William Preucil, Martin Chalifour, Paul Hager, and James Lyon. He has appeared as soloist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the San Diego Symphony, the Jupiter Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, the Canton Symphony Orchestra, the Pierre Monteux School Festival Orchestra, the Spartanburg Philharmonic, the Cleveland Institute of Music Symphony Orchestra, the Music Academy of the West Festival Orchestra, the Williamosport Symphony Orchestra, the Nittany Valley Symphony Orchestra, and the Conservatory Orchestra of Cordoba, among others. He attended Interlochen, Muskegon, the Music Academy of the West, Aspen, New York String Orchestra Seminar, the Quartet Program, and as the 1992 Pennsylvania Governor Scholar, Interlochen Arts Camp. Through a generous loan from Irwin and Joan Jacobs and the Jacobs’ Family Trust, Mr. Thayer plays on the 1708 “Sir Bagshawe” Stradivarius.