Viola Quintets of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91)

Quintet in C major, K. 515 [1787]
- Allegro
- Menuetto: Allegretto
- Andante
- Allegro

Quintet in G minor, K. 516 [1787]
- Allegro
- Menuetto: Allegretto
- Adagio ma non troppo
- Allegro; Allegro

Quintet in D major, K. 593 [1790]
- Allegro; Larghetto; Tempo I
- Adagio
- Allegro

Jeff Thayer, violin
Anna Skálová, violin
Che-Yen Chen, viola
Che-Hung Chen, viola
Charles Curtis, cello

Violist Che-Hung Chen has been a member of The Philadelphia Orchestra since the spring of 2001, when he was hired by then-Music Director Wolfgang Sawallisch, becoming the first Taiwanese citizen ever to join the Orchestra. He has also served as acting associate principal viola under former Music Director Christoph Eschenbach. A three-time top-prize winner at the Taiwan National Instrumental Competition, Mr. Chen began his studies at the age of six with Ben Lin in his native Taipei, and he later entered the Curtis Institute of Music at age 14, where he studied with Joseph de Pasquale, retired Philadelphia Orchestra principal viola. As a vivid chamber musician, Mr. Chen was a participant at the Marlboro Music Festival from 1998 to 2000, performed on its 50th anniversary concerts in Boston and New York’s Carnegie Hall in 2000, and toured with Musicians from Marlboro from 2001 to 2003. He has collaborated in chamber music settings with members of the Guarneri, Orion, Mendelssohn, and Tokyo string quartets, and artists such as Martha Argerich, Yefim Bronfman, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Lang Lang, Leonidas Kavakos, and Hilary Hahn. Performing annually at the Kingston Chamber Music Festival in Rhode Island, Mr. Chen has also participated in such festivals as the Ravinia, Caramoor, Saratoga, and Bridgehampton chamber music festivals and Music from Angel Fire. Mr. Chen currently serves on the faculty of Temple University’s Esther Boyer College of Music and its Preparatory Division. He performs on a viola made by Carlo Antonio Testore in Milan, Italy, c. 1756.

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 Piatigorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society, and received prizes in the Naumburg, Geneva, Cassado and Viña 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, Éliane 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.

Upcoming concerts

**January 15 (Tuesday)**
- Beethoven: Piano trio in E-flat, WoO 58
- Brahms: Piano quartet in G minor, Op. 25

**March 4 (Monday)**
- Beethoven: Variations for piano trio on “Ich bin der Schneider Kakadu”
- Mozart: String quintet in G minor, K. 406

**April 3 (Wednesday)**
- Beethoven: Piano trio in B-flat, Op. 11
- Bach: Brandenburg concerto No. 5

**May 14 (Tuesday)**
- Mozart: String quartet in A minor, Op. 152
- Beethoven: Piano trio in E-flat, WoO 58

**Tonight’s concert will be broadcast Saturday, December 15th at 9 pm on KPBS-FM 89.5 or streaming at kpbs.org.**
The three late Viola Quintets we hear in tonight's program may not be as famous, nor as frequently performed, as some of Mozart's signature late works - the last three symphonies, the late piano concertos, the Requiem or The Magic Flute, for example. But they are nonetheless every bit the equal of their more famous brethren; in certain senses, “poor for pound” as they say, “phrase for phrase,” they may even be superior, if that were possible. That they have escaped the desensitizing effects of cloying familiarity is a blessing. They are not iconic; we actually have to listen to them. This may partly be due to the simple fact that they are chamber music, and perform their miracles on a more intimate stage. No technicolor, no special effects, no bombast - fates are spun, measured and trimmed in the quiet interchange of five voices.

Not only are the Quintets definitive elaborations of Mozart's art, they can be seen as unsurpassed examples of the style and form of Viennese classicism. This may seem an implausible statement, given that much of Haydn and all of Beethoven and Schubert had yet to be composed. But consider that classical sonata form, that special hybrid of dance, aria, narrative and tonal architecture, came into its first flush of radical, overwhelming bloom at the hands of the late Mozart; and that all that followed responded to Mozart. One can see in these works both the initiation of sonata form in its fullest incarnation, and its last appearance as an idea unto itself. Virtuosic first violin part is voluble and bustling, animated by sheer ebullience and suspended aloft by the gentle volley of the ensemble.

Many listeners are surprised by the seemingly breezy 6/8 swing and sin-gong simplicity of the Finale. Charles Rosen notes, “It is a movement that has often disappointed.” Yet there is somehow here in Mozart’s part, it should be observed that the theme is not snappy, but yeaming, striving toward the heights and again. And the darkness of the preceding movements has not been entirely banished, as moments of introspection recur and passages repeat in the minor. The weight of the Quintet is concentrated irreversibly in the successive slow movements; the hopefulness of the major Finale does nothing to change that.

In atmosphere, the D major Quintet K. 593 returns to the tranquil expansiveness of the C major; but what is unique to the D major is the specifically Mozartean fusion of high ceremony and high comedy - comedy understood as an emotional state in which deeply human characteristics and foibles are exposed and framed, such that their recognition elicits laughter itself may be the source of the theme, a quick 6/8 in jig time. This may partly be due to the simple fact that they are chamber music, and perform their miracles on a more intimate stage. No technicolor, no special effects, no bombast - fates are spun, measured and trimmed in the quiet interchange of five voices.

According to Charles Rosen (and he has counted up all the measures), the first movement of the Quintet in C major K. 515 is the longest sonata allegro before Beethoven, longer than any other first movement in Mozart's entire output. One can see in these works both the initiation of sonata form in its fullest incarnation, and its last appearance as an idea unto itself. Virtuosic first violin part is voluble and bustling, animated by sheer ebullience and suspended aloft by the gentle volley of the ensemble.

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The Magic Flute...