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**THE NEW ZEALAND STRING
QUARTET**

HELENE POHL, VIOLIN

GILLIAN ANSELL, VIOLA

DOUGLAS BEILMAN, VIOLIN

ROLF GJELSTON, CELLO

**ASSISTING ARTIST
DANIEL EPSTEIN, PIANO**

SUNDAY, JULY 15, 2007 at 3 P.M.

GORDON HALL

MUSIC MOUNTAIN,

FALLS VILLAGE, CONN.

SEVENTY-EIGHTH YEAR

2007

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Steinway Piano

AIR CONDITIONED

PROGRAM

STRING QUARTET IN A MAJOR, OPUS 13 Felix Mendelssohn
"Ist Es Wahr" "Is it True" (1827) (1809-1847)

Adagio; Allegro vivace

Adagio non lento

Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto

Presto

QUARTET IN E FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 44 #3 Felix Mendelssohn
(1838) (1809-1847)

Allegro vivace

Scherzo: Assai leggero vivace

Adagio non troppo

Molto Allegro con fuoco

INTERMISSION

PIANO QUARTET IN A MINOR (1876) Gustave Mahler
(1860-1911)

PIANO QUARTET IN G MINOR, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
K. 478 (1756-1791)

Allegro

Andante

Rondo (Allegro)

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PROGRAM NOTES

STRING QUARTET IN A MAJOR, OPUS 13

"Ist Es Wahr" "Is It True"

by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Felix Mendelssohn was born into a prominent banker's family in Berlin, where life was comfortable and their home was a gathering place for artists and intellectuals. He was an astonishingly gifted child, not only talented in music with perfect pitch and an outstanding memory; he could also paint, write poetry, speak several languages and he was a fine athlete. Although there are many Romantic features in his music, he held on to the Classical concepts of clarity and restraint. His heavy workload both as composer and conductor contributed to his early death at the age of 38.

At the age of 16, Mendelssohn composed his Octet, one of the most popular chamber music works ever written, followed by the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Shortly after, while on holiday, he fell in love and set to music the poem '*Ist es wahr?*' written by his friend Johann Gustav Droyson. It begins: "Is it true that you are waiting for me in the arbour by the vine-clad wall?" Singer Geraint Evans has written: "This ardent hope clearly led to much frenzied anguish, passionate longing, momentary respite and reflection, renewed and heightened yearning and eventual fulfillment. It is just a pity that we aren't sure whose presence in the arbour by the vine-clad wall was so desirable."

The song was published as Mendelssohn's Op 9 and its opening three-note phrase became the musical idea for this A Major Quartet, either quoted in full, or hinted at in a variety of ways. Much of the inspiration came from the late Beethoven Quartets, which he had recently heard and which had overwhelmed him with their advanced ideas, scope and spirituality.

Along with its bold concept and brilliant execution, Mendelssohn expressed all the passion and poignancy he felt and the '*Ist es wahr?*' motto is heard with much yearning. The busy *Allegro vivace* dances until the viola enters with the principal theme, which then leads into an emotional second theme and a climactic ending. The *Adagio* is ardent, with a *fugato* section but respite comes with the *Intermezzo* and its dancing tune to a *pizzicato* backing. The whispered central section recalls Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while the finale hints at Beethoven's great Opus 132 Quartet. The first violin plays an agitated recitative over tremolo accompaniment, many motives tumble out, the '*Ist es wahr?*' motto returns, bringing the music full circle. —Joy Aberdein

STRING QUARTET IN E FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 44 #3

by Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

At the beginning of the 19th century, chamber music began to change from a mainly amateur, domestic pastime to public performances given by professional musicians in concert halls. Mendelssohn's three quartets of Op. 44, composed in 1837-38, were written for this new environment.

The Quartet in E-flat major is notable for introducing thematic linkages between movements; this cyclic form, encountered in Mozart and Haydn, was developed by Beethoven and led to Berlioz's *idée fixe* and Wagner's *Leitmotiv* composition techniques.

The quartet starts dramatically and features characteristic semiquaver figures, and the mood continues in the *Scherzo*, at first fast and fleeting and then moves into a fugue. The third movement in A-flat major is the emotional heart of the work, and the bravura finale combines its two themes contrapuntally. Mendelssohn extensively revised the Op. 44 quartets before their publication as a set in 1839. – *Roger Lloyd*

PIANO QUARTET IN A MINOR

by Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Gustav Mahler is principally known for his large scale orchestral and vocal works, and he is not generally associated with chamber music. But, during his years as a student of the Vienna Conservatory, in addition to at least four "youth symphonies," he composed several chamber works. Unfortunately, much of this early material is missing or was destroyed by the composer himself.

The manuscript of the Piano Quartet Movement has the date "1876" marked on the cover page, along with the stamp of a publisher, Theodor Rattig (who never published the work) and the words: "early compositions" written in Alma's handwriting (Mahler's wife). There are a few references to quartets in some of Mahler's letters but they are quite vague and it is difficult to confirm that he was indeed referring to that particular piece of music.

During his student days in Vienna, the young Mahler was undoubtedly exposed to the music of Brahms, Schubert and Wagner. He was particularly fond of the music of Anton Bruckner. These diverse influences are obvious in the structure and form of this work, but even at such an early stage in his career, Mahler's distinctive voice is the dominant feature of this work. His use of key and the thematic material are original and show clearly, the influence of his Jewish upbringing. The rich texture and harmonic structure could easily be confused with some of the string chamber music of Schoenberg.

This striking work leaves the listener wishing the composer had left us with more music for small ensembles.

PIANO QUARTET IN G MINOR, K. 478

by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

In his biography of Mozart, Georg Nicolaus von Nissen -- who married Constanze after Mozart's death -- gives some background on the piano quartets, K. 478 and K. 493. According to Nissen, in 1785 Mozart had contracted to write three piano quartets for the publisher Franz Anton Hoffmeister, even though at the time, this particular combination was quite unusual -- the piano trio was the norm of the day. And in most cases the piano was used as the continuo, to provide the filled-out bass parts in support of the solo string lines.

In this first piano quartet, the G Minor, Mozart treats the four instruments as equals. The concerto-like piano part is balanced by equally strong string parts and the result is a unified, well integrated chamber work of equals. The publisher, Hofmeister, complained that the Quartet was too difficult and the public would not buy it. He is reported to have told Mozart "Write more popularly, or else I can neither print nor pay for anything of yours." Mozart released Hoffmeister from the contract, saying: "Then I will write nothing more and go hungry, or may the devil take me." Mozart wrote the E Flat Major piano quartet, K. 493, some nine months later, completing it in June 1786. Artaria, who, presumably, had better musical judgment than Hoffmeister, published both in 1787.

The G Minor Piano Quartet was first played at Music Mountain on July 19, 1933 by Emanuel Balaban, piano, with Jacques Gordon, Music Mountain's Founder, violin, Paul Robyn, viola and Naoum Benditsky, cello.

Some of our audience, particularly the record collectors among us, will remember Emanuel Balaban as the conductor of Menotti's The Medium and also as Paul Robeson's conductor on a number of recordings with the Columbia Records Concert Orchestra.