Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

String Quartet in G Minor, Opus 74, No. 3 "Rider"
FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau
Died May 31, 1809, Vienna

Haydn served for thirty years as *Kapellmeister* to Prince Nikolaus von Esterhazy, one of the most distinguished patrons of music ever. When the prince died in 1790, Haydn was offered a generous pension and might reasonably have been expected to retire after an honorable career. Instead, the 58-year-old composer found a wellspring of vital new energy–he made two lengthy visits to London in the years 1791-2 and 1794-5, where he discovered new audiences and new avenues of expression. For the enthusiastic London audiences, he composed twelve symphonies, six quartets, and a vast amount of other music. Rather than drifting comfortably into the shadows, the aging composer became instead the "young" lion of a new musical world.

Between the London visits, Haydn lived quietly in Vienna, composing music for his second trip. It was during this period, in 1793, that he wrote the six quartets of his Opus 71 and Opus 74. These quartets are dedicated to Count Franz d'Apponyi, and while they are sometimes called the "Apponyi Quartets," they were written with London audiences in mind, first performed in that city, and published there.

H.C. Robbins Landon has noted the special conditions in London that made these quartets different from Haydn's other quartets. In London, his quartets were performed in an 800-seat hall on the same program with symphonies. Accordingly, Haydn conceived them not so much as intimate and subtle chamber music but as more public utterances, and Landon sees the extroverted first violin parts, the brilliant writing, clear textures and transitions, and general tunefulness of this music as evidence that Haydn was consciously trying to write a different kind of string quartet.

The *Quartet in G Minor*, the last of the cycle, has long been the most popular with audiences. The energy and galloping rhythms of its outer movements have earned it the nickname "Rider" (and sometimes "The Horseman"–neither originated with Haydn). Beyond this, the quartet is distinguished by unusual key relationships and an expressive slow movement. The energy of the opening of the *Allegro*, complete with chirping grace-notes, helped gain the quartet its nicknames, but the true first theme rises somberly out of the lower voices after a lengthy rest. The second idea waltzes agreeably in the first violin as the second violin accompanies with a shower of triplets; in an unusual reversal, Haydn then has them exchange roles, and now the second violin soars high above the accompanying first. The waltz tune and its triplet accompaniment lead to a close in G major.

The *Largo* has come in for special praise, some even hearing premonitions of Beethoven here. The unexpected key of E major gives it a surprising sound, a sonority enhanced by Haydn's rich harmonies. The movement is in ternary form, and the middle–which moves

to equally unexpected E minor–is unusually expressive. It is a measure of Haydn's craftsmanship that this center section grows out of an inversion of the *Largo* theme; the reappearance of that original theme is treated to florid decoration by the first violin. The *Menuetto* moves along gracefully (again, Haydn builds his second phrase by inverting the first); its dark trio is in G minor.

Haydn's unusual marking for the finale–*Allegro con brio*–is the key here. This brilliant sonata-form movement rips along happily on a main idea full of off-the-beat accents and dynamic contrasts. A graceful second idea provides nice relief, and the music sails home on a virtuoso part for the first violinist.

String Quartet No. 2, Opus 10
ZOLTÁN KODÁLY
Born December 16, 1882, Kecskemet
Died March 6, 1967, Budapest

Zoltán Kodály wrote a comparatively small number of chamber works, completing them early in his career–all were composed during the second decade of the twentieth century. During these years, Kodály was teaching at the Academy of Music in Budapest, collecting folksongs with his friend Béla Bartók, and composing; and those two composers were fortunate to have as their champions the Waldbauer-Kerpely Quartet. Made up of four distinguished young musicians who had dedicated themselves to the cause of Hungarian music (and of new music in general), the quartet gave the premières of the first string quartets of both Bartók and Kodály in 1910 (and that same year gave the Budapest première of the Debussy *String Quartet*, with the composer present). The quartet continued its support of Bartók and Kodály during the difficult years of World War I, and in 1918 it gave the first performances of the second quartets of Kodály and Bartók. Bartók, who remained interested in chamber music throughout his life, would go on to write four more quartets, but Kodály changed course about 1920, turning first to orchestral music and later to choral works. He wrote no more quartets after his *Second Quartet*.

That is our loss, for Kodály's two string quartets are remarkable. Unlike Bartók, who played no string instrument, Kodály played violin, viola, and cello, and his quartet-writing is idiomatic and assured. Further, his quartets show that ideal idiom he and Bartók sought: a fusion of Hungarian folk music with classical form. Kodály does not quote Hungarian folk melodies in his *Second Quartet*–all the thematic material is his own–but the melodic shapes and inflections of the Hungarian folk music (and language) he loved so much give his quartet much of its distinctive flavor.

The structure of the *Second Quartet* is unusual. It opens with a concise sonata-form movement and then concludes with a long movement that performs the function of both slow movement and finale. The opening *Allegro* is built on three separate melodic ideas, all of which proceed along a gently-rocking 6/8 meter. The tone of this movement is subdued (though not somber), and it draws to a quiet close. The concluding section opens with a long *Andante* that Kodály specifies should be *Quasi recitativo*. It is built on a

series of solos structured on *parlando* inflections: mirroring the sound of speech. The music proceeds without pause into the finale, aptly marked *Allegro giocoso* ("fast, happy"). This movement is a series of dances–it is built on six different thematic ideas–and it bursts to life with a vigorous dance over what sounds like the drone of bagpipes. Kodály moves from the swaying 6/8 of the opening movement to the fundamentally duple meter of Hungarian folk music here, leaping between dances and finally driving his *Second Quartet* to an exciting close on a great *accelerando*.

String Quartet in F Major, Opus 96 "American"
ANTONIN DVOŘÁK
Born September 8, 1841, Muhlhausen, Bohemia
Died May 1, 1904, Prague

Dvořák spent the years 1892-95 as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, and while he was burdened with a heavy teaching and administrative load, these years were very productive musically, seeing the composition of the *"New World" Symphony*, the *"American" Quartet*, and the *Cello Concerto*. This issue of a specifically "American" influence on these works has intrigued music lovers for years: how did life–and music–in America influence Dvořák? Nationalistic Americans were quick to claim that here at last was an authentic American classical music based on American materials, but Dvořák himself would have none of that. He denounced "that nonsense about my having made use of original American melodies. I have only composed in the spirit of such American national melodies."

Exactly what Dvořák meant by composing "in the spirit" of American music is unclear, and the tantalizing question of influence remains, especially in a work like the *"American" Quartet*. In the summer of 1893 Dvořák took his family to Spillville, Iowa, for a vacation away from New York City. Spillville was a Czech community, and Dvořák spent a happy and productive summer there, surrounded by familiar language, customs, and food. He sketched the *"American" Quartet* in only three days (June 8-10, 1893) and had it complete in fifteen. Dvořák's comment was concise: "Thank God. It went quickly. I am satisfied."

Generations of listeners have been more than satisfied with this quartet. Quiet string tremolandi provide the foundation for the viola's opening theme–its rising-and-falling shape and sharp syncopations will provide much of the substance of the first movement. A songful second subject in the violin has a rhythmic snap that some have felt to be American in origin, though such a snap is typical of the folk music of many lands. The development contains a brief fugal passage derived from the opening viola subject, but this passes quickly and introduces little complication into this movement's continuous flow of melody.

Many regard the *Lento* as the finest movement in the quartet. It too seems a continuous flow of melody, as the violin's soaring theme–marked *molto espressivo*–arches hauntingly over throbbing accompaniment. This melody passes from violin to cello and

on to the other voices; the ending–where the cello has this theme and the other instruments alternate pizzicato and bowed notes–is especially effective.

The scherzo rips along cheerfully, its main theme sharing the rhythm of the quartet's opening theme; about twenty measures into this movement, Dvořák gives the first violin a melody he heard a bird singing during one of his first walks around Spillville (bird-lovers should know that musicological and ornithological research has identified that bird as the scarlet tanager). The scherzo alternates this cheerful opening section with interludes that are in fact minor-key variants of that opening before Dvořák rounds things off with a da capo repeat. The most impressive thing about the rondo-finale is its rhythmic energy, in both the themes themselves and the accompanying voices. Some of the interludes recall the shape of themes from earlier movements before the blazing rush to the close–the coda of this movement is one of the most exhilarating Dvořák ever wrote.

The issue of American influence–whether spiritual, rhythmic, or in the songs of native birds–on the music Dvořák wrote in this country will probably never be settled. Listeners may decide for themselves the ways in which this quartet seems to embody what Dvořák called the "spirit" of American music.