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Shanghai Quartet

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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September 19, 2001, at 7:30 pm

Modlin Center for the Arts

Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

****Revised Program****

Shanghai Quartet

Weigang Li, *violin* Honggang Li, *viola*
Yiwen Jiang, *violin* Nicholas Tzavaras, *cello*

Adagio for Strings, from Op. 11, 1938

Samuel Barber
(1910 - 1981)

Quartet No. 1 in E minor, "From My Life"

Bedrich Smetana
(1824-1884)

—*Intermission*—

Quartet in D minor, "Death and the Maiden"

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

*Tonight's concert is being recorded for future broadcast on
National Public Radio by MobilMasters.*

The use of cameras—with or without flash—recorders or other
electronic devices inside the theatres is strictly prohibited.

About the Artists

Shanghai Quartet

Weigang Li, *violin*

Yiwen Jiang, *violin*

Honggang Li, *viola*

Nicholas Tzavaras, *cello*

Since its New York debut at Town Hall in the spring of 1987, the **Shanghai Quartet** has been hailed by the press and the public alike as one of the leading quartets of its generation. It now performs annually to exceptional critical acclaim in major music centers throughout the United States and abroad.

Formed at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1983, the quartet took second place representing its country at the Portsmouth International Quartet competition. In 1987 the ensemble won the prestigious Chicago Discovery Competition and embarked on an extensive touring career. It has been ensemble-in-residence at the Tanglewood and Ravinia Festivals and has appeared on three occasions at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival.

The quartet has played at Lincoln Center on the "Great Performers" series, in addition to appearing in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, Detroit, Toronto and many other cities. Its annual appearances in New York City have included a sold-out three-concert series with pianist Ruth Laredo at the Metropolitan Museum. The quartet's other distinguished collaborators include pianists Peter Frankl and Lillian Kallir, guitarist Eliot Fisk, flutist Eugenia Zukerman, violist Arnold Steinhardt and cellist Carter Brey. The ensemble has also



made several tours of Europe, giving concerts throughout Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The Shanghai Quartet may be heard on Delos International compact discs. Its 1994 debut release, featuring works of Grieg and Mendelssohn, received exceptional critical acclaim. Recent releases feature quartets by Alan Hovanes and the "Song of the Ch'in" by Chinese composer Zhou Long, as well as works for strings and flute with Eugenia Zukerman. Since 1989, the Shanghai Quartet has been ensemble-in-residence at the University of Richmond.

A native of Shanghai, **Weigang Li** began violin studies with his parents at age 5 and went on to attend the Shanghai Conservatory at age 14. He came to the United States in 1981 to study at the San Francisco Conservatory. He has been a soloist with the Shanghai Conservatory Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Scottish Symphony. Upon graduating from the

Shanghai Conservatory in 1985, he was appointed assistant professor of violin there. Shortly thereafter he left China to continue his education at Northern Illinois University. From 1987-1989, Mr. Li studied and taught at the Julliard School as teaching assistant to the Julliard Quartet. His other teachers have included Shmuel Ashkenasi, Pierre Menard, Shu-Chen and Isadore Tinkleman.

Born in Beijing, **Yiwen Jiang** began his violin studies with his father at age 6. In 1981 he was accepted into the class of Professor Han Li at the Central Conservatory of Music. In 1985 he came to the United States where his teachers have included Taras Gabora, Jaime Laredo, Michael Tree, Pinchas Zukerman, and Arnold Steinhardt of the Guarneri Quartet. A prize winner at the Mae M. Whitaker and Montreal competitions, he has appeared at many international music festivals. He also appeared with the Central Opera House Orchestra in China, the Victoria Symphony and the Montreal Symphony. Mr. Jiang has performed for NBC and PBS television specials, National Public Radio, CPB in Beijing, WQXR in New York and KFUM in St. Louis. He has recorded for the Record Corporation of China.

Honggang Li began his musical training studying violin with his parents at the same time as his brother, Weigang. When the Beijing Conservatory reopened in 1977 after the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Li was selected to attend from a group of over 500 applicants. He continued his training at the Shanghai Conservatory and was appointed a faculty member there in 1984. He has also served as a teaching assistant at the Julliard School. Mr. Li has appeared as soloist with the Shanghai Philharmonic

and the Shanghai Conservatory Orchestra. In 1987, he won a violin as a special prize given by Elisa Pegreff of the Quartetto Italiano at the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy. Mr. Li joined the Shanghai Quartet as a violinist and became its violist with the addition of Yiwen Jiang in the summer of 1994.

Cellist **Nicholas Tzavaras** has been an active soloist and chamber musician performing throughout the United States. Recent solo appearances have included concerto performances with the National Repertory Orchestra, Tanglewood Festival Orchestra, SUNY Stony Brook Symphony and at the Tonnhalle in Zurich. Mr. Tzavaras has previously appeared at the Isaac Stern International Chamber Music Encounters in Jerusalem, as well as the Marlboro, Tanglewood and Musicorda music festivals. He served as principal cellist for groups including the Tanglewood Festival Orchestra, National Repertory Orchestra and the Stony Brook Symphony. His primary teachers and coaches have included Laurence Lesser, Timothy Eddy, Felix Galimir and Alexander Schneider. Mr. Tzavaras holds a bachelor of music degree from the New England Conservatory and a master of music degree from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In addition to his performing, Mr. Tzavaras is also active in music outreach and education, having taught at the Thurnauer School of Music in New Jersey and the Hudson River School of Music in Westchester, N.Y., as well as starting a cello program with his mother, Roberta Guaspari, who is the artistic director and founder of the Opus 118 Music Center in East Harlem.

Program Notes

La Oración del Torero, op. 34

Joaquín Turina

When first listening to *La Oración del torero* (the prayer of the bull-fighter), Spanish musical characteristics are obvious, such as the rhythm and color. Yet, upon further hearing, the listener discovers that Turina simply uses these Spanish qualities to supply a setting and a pictorial image, as if it is almost a symphonic poem.

Turina based this work on two opposing emotions, and thus develops the piece around two distinctly separated styles of musical themes. The first provides the listener with context and is simply referential: the music of the celebration and festivities that surround the bullfighter. This theme begins the work and seems to reappear throughout, as if to signify the constant interruption of the bullfighter's thoughts by the reminder of his celebrated day's tasks. The second theme gives this work its title; gravity permeates this musical unit, expressing the prayer of the bullfighter as he faces death in the midst of celebration. This non-repetitive second musical theme asks the listener to interpret this seriousness in the midst of the previous, referential musical theme.

La Oración del torero was originally written for the popular Aguilar Lute Quartet, but has become more popular in its string quartet and string-orchestra forms. This piece is very characteristic of Turina's composition style as it displays his music's common simplicity and beauty. It is known that he often expressed literary or visual ideas in his music, and this fact is illustrated in this work.

—Program notes by Lauren Bailey, AW '02

String Quartet No. 1 in E Minor, "From My Life" (1876) Bedrich Smetana

Smetana suffered the same tragic fate that befell Beethoven: deafness. Yet, like Beethoven, while deaf he composed some of his greatest works, including the six Symphonic Poems of his cycle *Ma Vlast* (My Fatherland) and the two string-quartets. In Smetana's case, the deafness which struck him at about age 50 was followed by mental deterioration. Both men probably suffered as much from the cures and remedies prescribed by their physicians, from drinks of mercury in Beethoven's case, to electrical treatments in Smetana's. Father of the Czech musical revival, composer of the ebullient *Bartered Bride*, Smetana died in an insane asylum outside of Prague. Yet the spirit of what Smetana pioneered was carried on into our century by Antonin Dvorak, Leos Janacek and Bohuslav Martinu.

As might be expected from this Quartets' subtitle *From My Life*, there is

an autobiographical program to this work, although the music can stand quite on its own without one's knowing the program. (Smetana felt it to be a private matter.) However, he did provide written commentary. As to the choice of the Quartet medium, Smetana wrote, "in a sense it is private and therefore written for four instruments, which should converse together in an intimate circle about the things that so deeply trouble me."

"As regards my Quartet, I gladly leave others to judge its style, and I shall not be in the least angry if this style does not find favor or is considered contrary to what was hitherto regarded as 'Quartet Style'. I did not set out to write a Quartet according to recipe or custom in the usual forms...with me the form of every composition is dictated by the subject itself and thus the Quartet, too, shaped its own form. My intention was to paint a tone picture of my life."

Smetana comments on each of the four movements. "The first movement depicts my youthful leanings toward art, the Romantic atmosphere, the inexpressible yearning of something I could neither express nor define, and also a kind of warning of (my) future misfortune." I placed the word "my" in parentheses because in the course of researching these notes, I found the same quote, with the exception of the word "my" in two different books. One musicologist whose quote did not contain "my" went on to explain that the misfortune alluded to was Smetana's having to flee his homeland for Sweden because of the Revolution of 1848. The other musicologist whose quote included "my" explained that Smetana was referring to his future deafness. Even with the composer's own words, there is disagreement.

Again, Smetana comments on the second movement: "A quasi-polka brings to mind the joyful days of youth when I composed dance music and gave it away right and left to other young folk, being known myself as a passionate lover of dancing." This tune, given to the viola, is to be played, according to the composer, "quasi tromba" (like a trumpet).

The third movement, he continues, "reminds me of the happiness of my first love, the girl who later became my first wife." Smetana's wife died during their exile in Sweden, which could account for the pensive quality of this movement—could this be the misfortune alluded to?

The fourth movement describes "The discovery that I could treat national elements in music, and my joy in following this path until it was checked by the catastrophe of the onset of my deafness, the outlook into the sad future, the tiny rays of hope of recovery, but remembering all the promise of my early career, a feeling of painful regret."

There is a point in this movement where the music abruptly breaks off, followed by a low tremolo. Above this, the violin plays a long high piercing note. "The long insistent note in the finale owes its origin to this (his deafness). It is the fateful ringing in my ears of the high-pitched tones which, in 1874, announced the beginning of my deafness. I permitted myself this little joke because it was so disastrous to me."

After a series of short quotes from the various movements building to a

climax, the music fades away into silence.

The entire work was completed within two months. The first performance was a private one, in Prague, in 1878 with Antonin Dvorak as violist. The official premiere took place in Prague on March 28, 1879 played by Ferdinand Lachner, Jan Pelikan, Josef Krehan and Alois Neruda. The work also exists in a transcription for orchestra by the great conductor George Szell.

—Program notes by Joseph Way, Sierra Chamber Society (1993-94 Season)

String Quartet in D Minor, D. 810
“Death and the Maiden” (1824)

Franz Schubert

This Quartet, which now delights the whole world and is among the most superb creations in the medium, at first did not receive by any means unanimous enthusiasm. The first violinist, Schuppanzigh (Ignaz Schuppanzigh—Beethoven’s “Milord Falstaff,” first violinist of the famed Schuppanzigh Quartet, which premiered many of Beethoven’s Quartets), who was not up to such a task on account of his advanced age, said to the composer after the play through, ‘Brother, this is nothing at all, let well alone: stick to your Lieder’—at which Schubert quietly gathered up the parts and locked them up in his desk forever.

Such is the tale told by one Franz Lachner (1803-1890), composer and conductor, regarding a performance of the D Minor Quartet in his home in February of 1826. This account of the event was published in the Vienna “Presse” in 1881, in an article in which Lachner recounted his memories of Beethoven and Schubert.

The evocative power of the phrase “Death and the Maiden” resonates deeply, from medieval woodcuts to contemporary cinema; and such is the power of this image that commentary on this Quartet is likely as not to be full of blather. The title comes from the fact that the melody used as the theme for the set of variations which constitute the Quartet’s Second Movement is taken from Schubert’s song *Der Tod* and *Das Madchen* (Death and the Maiden) where it appears in the piano introduction representing the approach of Death. It seems that this choice of material from the Quartet was perhaps prompted by a request by friends who loved the melody—rather than Schubert’s musings on mortality. (Such was also the genesis of the Trout Quintet, not Schubert’s interest in ichthyology.)

The work is a powerful one, all of the four movements being in the minor mode, from the opening descending motif with insistent triplet figures in many guises that proceed throughout the movement propelling it forward. The second movement, as previously stated, is a theme; a melody from the song *Death and the Maiden* with five variations based upon it. The third movement juxtaposes a fiercely insistent syncopated rhythmic section (somewhat reminiscent of the motif Wagner would use years later to portray the

enslaved Nibelungs hammering away in the mines in his opera *Das Rheingold*) with a warm long-lined melody as the trio. The final movement (*Presto*) is a frenetic tarantella, a fast Neapolitan dance in 6/8 time. According to legend, the dance was supposed to cure a person of the bite of the tarantula. A more prosaic explanation of the dance has it named after the southern Italian city of Taranto.

The work had its first performance, actually an unrehearsed reading, on January 29, 1824, at the home of tenor Joseph Barth, with Karl Hacker and Josef Hauer, violinists, Josef Hacker, violist, and cellist from the court opera, Bauer. Schubert, who usually played viola on such occasions, was otherwise occupied, copying out and making corrections to the parts.

The work was not published until 1831, some years after Schubert's death. Perhaps he did put it away in a drawer, after "Milord Falstaff's" negative comments.

—Program notes by Joseph Way, Sierra Chamber Society (1995-96 Season)

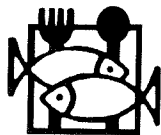
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U p c o m i n g E v e n t s

Los Angeles Guitar Quartet

Monday, September 24, 2001, 7:30 pm

Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

Recognized as one of America's premier instrumental ensembles, the LA Guitar Quartet is one of the most charismatic and versatile groups performing today. Popularly known as the LAGQ, these four virtuosi bring a new energy to the concert stage with their eclectic programs and dynamic musical interplay. Their inventive, critically acclaimed transcriptions of concert masterworks provide a fresh look at the music of the past, while their interpretations of works from the contemporary and world-music realms continually break new ground. *Tickets: \$16 adults, \$14 seniors*

Stevens, Seigel & Ferguson Trio

Featuring Valery Ponomarev, *trumpet*

Wednesday, October 3, 2001, 7:30 pm

Camp Concert Hall, Booker Hall of Music

New York City-based Stevens, Seigel and Ferguson is a jazz trio with a unique and exciting sound. Traveling extensively in the United States and Europe, this group has developed a loyal fan base and received critical acclaim for both its lively performances and numerous CDs. This trio will be joined by Valery Ponomarev, a splendid horn player whose playing is careful and deliberate, with solos that are finely crafted and never given over to abandon. Ponomarev plays the trumpet with breathtaking virtuosity, brilliance of sound, abundance of creativity and great warmth. *Tickets: \$16 adults, \$14 seniors*

Mark O'Connor, *violin*, and the Metamorphosen Orchestra

Scott Yoo, *conductor*

Monday, October 8, 2001, 7:30 pm

Carpenter Center for the Arts

Violinist, composer and fiddler Mark O'Connor is widely recognized as one of the most gifted contemporary composers in America and surely one of the brightest talents of his generation. A product of America's rich aural folk tradition, O'Connor absorbed knowledge and influence from a multitude of musical styles and genres. He has melded and shaped these influences into a new American classical music style the *Los Angeles Times* warmly recognized as "purely personal." He is joined in concert by the Metamorphosen Chamber Orchestra, which has distinguished itself as one of the finest chamber orchestras performing today. *Tickets: \$21 adults, \$19 seniors. On sale through TicketMaster.*

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