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Shanghai Quartet with Anthony McGill, clarinet

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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Wednesday, September 27, 2006 • 7:30 pm

Camp Concert Hall,
Booker Hall of Music

Modlin Center for the Arts
presents

Shanghai Quartet

Weigang Li, *violin*
Yi-Wen Jiang, *violin*
Honggang Li, *viola*
Nicholas Tzavaras, *cello*

with

Anthony McGill, *clarinet*

Exclusive Management for Shanghai Quartet:
ICM Artists, Ltd.

40 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019

Lee Lamont, Chairman • David V. Foster, President & CEO

*The Modlin Center thanks Style Weekly and Richmond.com
for media sponsorship of the 2006-2007 season.*

Tonight's Program

- Clarinet Quintet in A Major, K. 581 (September 29, 1789)..... W. A. Mozart
I. *Allegro* (1756-1791)
II. *Larghetto*
III. *Menuetto*
IV. *Allegretto con Variazioni*

—Intermission—

- Clarinet Quintet in b Minor, Op.115Brahms
I. *Allegro*
II. *Adagio*
III. *Andantino*
IV. *Con moto*



Please silence cell phones, digital watches and paging devices before the performance. The use of any recording device, either audio or video, and the taking of photographs, either with or without flash, are strictly prohibited.

About the Artists



Shanghai Quartet

"The whole performance was superb," says *The New York Times*. Originally formed in Shanghai more than 20 years ago, this versatile ensemble is known for their passionate musicality, impressive technique, and multicultural innovations. The Quartet's elegant style of melding the delicacy of Eastern music with Western repertoire allows them to travel the genres, from traditional Chinese folk music to Brahms, Shubert, and new commissions by Lowell Lieberman and Bright Sheng, among others.

The Shanghai Quartet has performed on the world's most prominent concert stages, and regularly tours the great music centers of Europe, North and South America, and Asia. Recent seasons have included tours of Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe. As part of their 20th Anniversary tour, the Quartet performed the "Beethoven Project: East Meets West," the complete Beethoven string quartets in six concerts around the world. This tour included the first performance ever in China of the complete Beethoven quartet cycle.

The Shanghai Quartet has a long history of championing new music. Projects include a commission with Chamber Music America, and a premiere of Lowell Lieberman's Quartet in honor of the National Federation of Music Clubs' 100th Anniversary. Among others, they commissioned a new work from Bright Sheng for the University of Richmond and the Freer Gallery to celebrate their 10th Anniversary.

This season the Quartet will appear at Carnegie Hall, the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, among many other prestigious engagements on three continents. The Quartet's repertoire will span Eastern and Western sounds, and will range from contemporary works by Ligeti, Bright Sheng, and Zhou Long

("Poems from Tang") to traditional works by Schubert, Brahms and Mozart. They will perform the complete Beethoven cycle at the new Kassar Theater at Montclair State University in New Jersey, and premiere a commission by the young American Composer, Takuma Itoh, with the New York Youth Symphony at Carnegie Hall.

Recording for several labels, the Quartet has built an extensive discography that now totals 20 recordings. Recently, the Quartet released two discs: Mendelssohn Octet (Camerata), and Zhou Long's "Poems from Tang" Quartet and Orchestra (BIS). In 2003, The Quartet released its most popular disc to date: A 24-track collection of Chinese folk songs, titled *ChinaSong*, featuring music arranged by Yi-Wen Jiang reflecting childhood memories of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Their current project includes the recording of the complete Beethoven string quartets to be released during their 25th Anniversary season. The Shanghai Quartet performed the Bartok Quartet No. 4 on screen and for the soundtrack recording in the Woody Allen film, *Melinda and Melinda*, which was released in the spring of 2005.

The Quartet has a distinguished teaching record. They serve as the Quartet-in-Residence at Montclair State University in New Jersey. They also serve as visiting professors at the Shanghai Conservatory and the Central Conservatory in China. The Quartet has made regular appearances at Carnegie Hall, and also served as ensemble-in-residence at the Tanglewood and Ravinia Festivals. They have made appearances at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and on PBS's Great Performers television series. The Quartet also appears regularly on National Public Radio.

A native of Shanghai, **Weigang Li** has been a featured soloist with the Asian Youth Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Scottish Symphony. Mr. Li began studying the violin with his parents at the age of five and went on to attend the Shanghai Conservatory at age 14. He then came to the United States in 1981 to study at the San Francisco Conservatory through an exchange program between the sister cities of San Francisco and Shanghai. Upon graduating from the Shanghai Conservatory in 1985, Mr. Li was appointed assistant professor of violin at the school. Shortly thereafter he left China to continue his education at the Northern Illinois University. From 1987-1989, Mr. Li studied and taught at the Juilliard School as teaching assistant to the Juilliard Quartet. His other teachers have included Shmuel Ashkenasi, Pierre Menard, Shu-Chen Tan, and Isadore Tinkleman. Mr. Li was featured in the film *From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China*.

Born in Beijing, **Yi-Wen Jiang (violin)** has appeared as a soloist with the Victoria Symphony and the Montreal Symphony. He has also performed for NBC and PBS television specials, National Public Radio, CPB in Beijing, WQXR in New York and KFUV in St. Louis. Beginning his violin studies with his father at age six, he made his concerto debut with the Central Opera House Orchestra in Beijing when he was 17. In 1981, after winning a top prize at the First China

Youth Violin Competition, Mr. Jiang was accepted into the class of professor Han Li at the Central Conservatory of Music. In 1985 he came to the United States on a full scholarship to the St. Louis Conservatory, where his teachers included Taras Gabora, Jaime Laredo and Michael Tree. He also spent two summers in Dallas, participating in master classes with Pinchas Zukerman. In 1990, with the support of the Ken Boxley Foundation, he went to Rutgers University to work with Arnold Steinhardt of the Guarneri Quartet. A prizewinner at the Mae M. Whitaker and Montreal competitions, Mr. Jiang has appeared at many international music festivals, collaborating with such prominent artists as Alexander Schneider, Michael Tree, Jaime Laredo and Lynn Harrell. He has recorded for the Record Corporation of China.

Honggang Li (*viola*) began his musical training studying the 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. Mr. Li has also served as a teaching assistant at the Juilliard School and 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 Quartetto Italiano at the Paolo Borciani competition in Italy.

Nicholas Tzavaras (*cello*) has been an active soloist and chamber musician throughout the United States. He has made solo appearances with the Tanglewood Festival Orchestra, the National Repertory Orchestra, the SUNY Stonybrook Symphony and the East Iowa Symphony, as well as at Fiddlefest at Carnegie Hall and at the Tonhalle in Zurich. Mr. Tzavaras has previously appeared at the Isaac Stern International Chamber Music Encounters in Jerusalem, and also at the Marlboro, Tanglewood, Taos, Sarasota and Musicorda music festivals. 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 and has studied with Laurence Lesser and Timothy Eddy. In addition to his performing schedule, he is active in music outreach and education. Mr. Tzavaras has taught at many different music schools including the Opus 118 Music Center in East Harlem, where his mother, Roberta Guaspari, is the artistic director. Mr. Tzavaras' family was portrayed in the movie *Music of the Heart*, which starred Meryl Streep.

The principal clarinetist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, **Anthony McGill** is quickly becoming one of classical music's most sought after soloists and chamber musicians. A winner of the highly prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, McGill took his most recent position following a four-year tenure as associate principal clarinetist of the Cincinnati Symphony. Prior



to this, McGill was a student at the Curtis Institute of Music. An experienced chamber musician, he has performed at the Marlboro Music Festival, Sarasota Festival, La Musica, Tanglewood, Music@Menlo and the Grand Tetons festival. McGill has also appeared as soloist with the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, New Jersey and Hilton Head.

McGill has performed with the Guarneri String Quartet, the Tokyo String Quartet, the Brentano String Quartet, the Shanghai Quartet, the Miami String Quartet, the Miro String Quartet and Opus One. He has also appeared on Ravinia's Rising Stars Series, toured repeatedly with Musicians From Marlboro, and performed at Lincoln Center as a member of Chamber Music Society Two. McGill also tours regularly with pianist Mitsuko Uchida.



Scintillating Strings: Music of the Pipa and the Harp

by

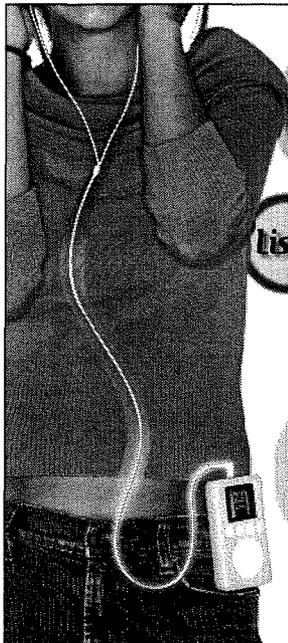
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Notes on the Program

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Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, in A Major, K. 581 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(Born January 27, 1756, in Salzburg; died December 5, 1791, in Vienna)

Mozart's career in Vienna was past its peak when he wrote the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings. He had already been in the capital for eight years, and the novelty of his unusual powers of invention were no longer the rage. He had become just one of a dozen or more composers in town competing for what composing work there was. Many felt that Mozart's music was too difficult, too demanding. It insisted on being listened to, not just heard. Some of his works that are most treasured in the twenty-first century were played only once or twice in the eighteenth and were tolerated by the nineteenth century only for what was considered to be their pretty melodies. The Quintet for Clarinet, surprisingly, is one of those works.

On September 29, 1789, Mozart made an entry in the notebook in which he kept a list of his works with their opening themes, recording the completion of the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings. It had its premiere performance in public on December 22, in Vienna, at a musicians' pension fund benefit concert at the Royal Court Theater. The clarinetist was Mozart's friend and Masonic brother, Anton Stadler, for whom Mozart subtitled the quintet Stadler's Quintet, and the composer performed, too. For Stadler, Mozart wrote many beautiful parts for clarinet and basset horn (a kind of alto clarinet) in his orchestral works and operas. As fellow Masons, Stadler and Mozart played together at lodge gatherings but also had an independent musical friendship, and even though it is known that Stadler took advantage of Mozart financially when Mozart was vulnerable and needed money, the friendship survived somehow.

The clarinet was still very much a modern instrument in Mozart's time, and to Mozart goes the credit for introducing it into chamber music in a fully developed way. It was only a generation since the clarinet, distinguished by its warm, mellow tone, had begun to appear in orchestras with any frequency. It had been accorded a regular place in the outdoor music that was often played by octets of wind instruments, and from the evidence of Mozart's music, it seems to have been an important part of the wind ensembles that accompanied Masonic rites. Two years later, Mozart was to write his distinctive Clarinet Concerto for Stadler. Both the concerto and this quintet are notable for the elegant operatic melodies that the instrument always seemed to inspire in Mozart and the realization of the individual potential of the character, range and color that could be joined to the strings' sound. However, a few awkward passages in these works suggest that Stadler's solo instrument was actually most probably the basset horn, an instrument now no longer played, but

which had some extra low notes in its range, and someone other than the composer made the revision for the standard modern clarinet.

The Quintet for Clarinet is one of Mozart's greatest pieces of chamber music, on a level with his best late string quintets. It is a masterpiece on a much larger scale than the Quartet for Oboe, and it is a much more serious work than are his four Flute Quartets. Some see this as a reflection of the depression Mozart was experiencing and say that one can feel pathos and resignation pervading the music, but others focus on the high-spiritedness that is also present. Throughout this score, Mozart carefully selects ranges and textures calculated to allow the clarinet to blend perfectly with the string ensemble or to come forward as an independent voice. The strings, although they give way to the color of the clarinet, have not been relegated to a subordinate role. It is not a quintet for strings plus clarinet, or a solo work for clarinet with strings, but a work for five equal instruments, one of which is rather different from the others.

The entire *Allegro* first movement of the Quintet is elegant and fluid. In this movement the quartet of strings announces a luxuriously beautiful theme, and the clarinet enters with arpeggios (broken chords). Two additional well developed themes follow. Mozart manipulates his thematic material in a flexible and completely dramatic manner. In the development, the main theme receives the most emphasis, but when the themes appear again in the recapitulation, Mozart displaces them strikingly. The principle theme is abbreviated, and the second more poignant theme is enlarged into a deeply affecting pronouncement. The last theme, which had been a brief coda, now expands into an important statement.

The slow movement, *Larghetto*, is an extended cantilena or song for the clarinet alone at first and then in duet with the first violin with the other three voices in supporting roles. This movement has often been labeled "the heart" of Mozart's chamber music, and many believe it inspired the slow movement of Brahms' Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115. The *Minuet*, more intense and expressive than the usual dance third movement, has two contrasting trio-sections. The first, for strings alone, has charming and graceful canonic interplay; the second, with clarinet, is a jovial yet gentle country-dance. The finale is a theme-and-variations movement, *Allegretto*, that is full of subtle reminders of the music heard earlier. The six variations decorate and ornament the original theme as well as develop the initial melody, showing the many sides of its character. It shows off the agility of the clarinet, including runs and bold skips, but before the movement ends, the listener is treated to the cantabile potential of the clarinet equally.

**Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, in B minor, Op. 115Johannes Brahms
(Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, in Vienna)**

In the 1890's, the fashionable Alpine resort town of Bad Ischl had become Brahms's second home. In 1891, on his 58th birthday, he drew up his will there. He subjectively felt old, worried that his creative powers were leaving him, that it was time to prepare for the end, and that perhaps he would write no more. Two months later he sent a new piece to a friend, a trio with clarinet, that he said was "twin to an even greater folly." The "greater folly" was to be one of his most moving works, this Clarinet Quintet. The clarinet had never had an important place in his music before this final burst of inspiration; nevertheless, his last four pieces of chamber music, the Trio, this Quintet and two Sonatas for Clarinet, all resulted from his admiration for a clarinetist. This clarinetist, a man he first met in 1891 and called a "dear nightingale," was Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907).

Mühlfeld was trained as a violinist and taught himself to play the clarinet. In 1873, he joined the violin section of the fine orchestra that the Duke of Meiningen maintained at his court, and in 1876, he became its first clarinetist. In March 1891, Brahms went to Meiningen as an honored guest to hear von Bülow conduct some of his works, and on one of the programs Mühlfeld played a Weber concerto for clarinet. "The clarinet cannot be played better," Brahms, known to be sparing of praise, wrote to Clara Schumann. In July, when he had completed both the trio and the quintet, he wrote to Clara from Ischl, "I look forward to returning to Meiningen if only for the leisure of hearing them. You have never heard a clarinet player like the one they have there. He is absolutely the best I know of." Clara read through the score of the Clarinet Quintet at the piano with her daughter and wrote back that it was a "heavenly work." When she heard Mühlfeld play it in 1893, she wrote to Brahms, "I am not feeling very well, but I must write you a line after having heard your exquisite Quintet at last. What a magnificent thing it is, and how moving! Words are inadequate to express my feelings. He plays so wonderfully, he must have been born for your music."

If Brahms had not encountered Mühlfeld when he did, perhaps some other performer or instrument would have caught his interest and sparked the fire of invention again. There is no way to know, but posterity is grateful to Mühlfeld for these last glorious works, and for the Clarinet Quintet most of all. The music is mellow and warm, even sensuous, but it is also a touching valedictory, introspective and retrospective, a calm and beautiful farewell. The movements of the quintet are interrelated, as had become usual in Brahms's late chamber music, by patterns, motives, turns of musical phrase that appear and reappear in the long course of the work. At the very end, in the coda to the finale, the music that opens the work comes back to round out the score with great elegance.

After the gentle melancholy of the *Allegro* first movement comes a remarkable *Adagio* in a simple three part form. It begins with a floating melody