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The Shanghai Quartet with Yolanda Kondonassis, harp, and Claire Bloom

Department of Music, University of Richmond

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January 21, 1998 at 8pm

Modlin Center for the Arts

Camp Concert Hall
Booker Hall of Music

ICM ARTISTS, LTD
presents

THE SHANGHAI QUARTET

Weigang Li, *Violin*

Yiwen Jiang, *Violin*

Honggang Li, *Viola*

James Wilson, *Cello*

YOLANDA KONDONASSIS

Harp

CLAIRE BLOOM

Narrator

and Richmond Symphony guest winds

Mary Boodell, *flute*

David Niethamer, *clarinet*

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New York, NY 10019

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Tonight's Program

Yolanda Kondonassis, *Harp*

The Shanghai Quartet

Weigang Li, *Violin*

Yiwen Jiang, *Violin*

Honggang Li, *Viola*

James Wilson, *Cello*

Claire Bloom, *Narrator*

Quartet in F Major

Ravel

Allegro moderato—Tres doux

Assez vif—Tres rythme

Tres lent

Vif et agite

The Shanghai Quartet

Introduction and Allegro

Ravel

Ms. Kondonassis, The Shanghai Quartet & Richmond Symphony guest winds

INTERMISSION

Conte fantastique (after Poe's *Masque of the Red Death*)

A. Caplet

Ms. Kondonassis, Ms. Bloom & The Shanghai Quartet

Ms. Kondonassis can be heard on Telarc. The Shanghai Quartet can be heard on Delos International, Inc.

About the Artists



J. HENRY FAIR

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 KFYO 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 five hundred applicants. He continued his training at the Shanghai Conservatory and was appointed a faculty member there in 1984. He also

has 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 Pegreffi 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.

A native of Ann Arbor, Mich., **James Wilson** began cello studies at age 11 and went on to graduate from the University of Michigan where, as a student of Jeffrey Solow, he was the recipient of the music school's highest honor. He continued his studies with Stephen Kates at the Peabody Institute of Music and was twice selected as a participant in the Piatigorsky Seminar of Cellists. Mr. Wilson has appeared as soloist with the Ann Arbor Symphony and has recorded for Access Records.

Since making her debut at age 18 with the New York Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta, **Yolanda Kondonassis** has become recognized as one of America's foremost harpists, performing extensively as a concert soloist and recitalist throughout the United States, the Far East and Europe. Praised by *The New York Times* for her "powerful playing and musicianly energy," she has appeared as soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, the English Chamber Orchestra, the Detroit Symphony, the Houston Symphony, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the North Carolina Symphony, the Virginia Symphony and the New World Symphony, among numerous other ensembles. Her recent engagements have included successful recital debuts at New York City's 92nd Street Y and Taiwan's National Concert Hall. Ms. Kondonassis made her debut as a Telarc recording artist in 1993 with a critically acclaimed release of



TANIA MARA

music by French Impressionists entitled "Scintillation." Her latest Telarc discs include "A New Baroque" and "Sky Music," which was selected by the New York *Daily News* as one of the "Ten Best Classical CD's of 1996." Her recording of Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp with the English Chamber Orchestra was released in 1997.

Ms. Kondonassis' long list of national and international honors include the distinction of being first harpist ever to win first prize in competitions open to all instrumentalists such as the Ima Hogg National Young Artists Competition and the Nafzger Competition. Her other competition credits include top prizes in the Maria Korchinska International Harp Competition in Great Britain and the Affiliate Artists National Auditions. The first harpist to receive the Darius Melhaud Prize, she is also the recipient of two Solo Recitalists Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. She has been featured on CNN and PBS television as well as National Public Radio's "Performance Today" and "All Things Considered." In addition to her active concert and recording schedule, Ms. Kondonassis heads the harp departments at the Cleveland Institute of Music and Oberlin College Conservatory.

Claire Bloom made her London debut as Alizon Eliot in John Gielgud's pro-



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duction of Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not for Burning*, opposite Richard Burton. Since then she has divided her career between England and the United States. Her films include *Richard III*, *Look Back in Anger*, *A Doll's House*, and *Woody Allen's Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Mighty Aphrodite*. Her most notable stage roles have included Juliet, Ophelia, Viola, Miranda and Cordelia. In 1974 she won the three major theatrical awards for her London portrayal of Blanche du Bois in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Claire Bloom appears with the flutist Eugenia Zukerman and the pianist Brian Zeger in a recital of "Word and Music"; with her daughter, the soprano Anna Steiger, in a recital entitled "Women in Poetry and Song"; and in another recital with Brian Zeger of texts spoken to music by composers Lee Hoibe, Ned Rorem and Robin Holloway, specially commissioned by the Lila Wallace Foundation. Ms. Bloom has appeared as narrator with many leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the BBC Symphony and the London Philharmonic. In May 1996 Ms. Bloom returned to the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to perform in Eugene O'Neil's *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*. Her bestselling memoir, *Leaving A Doll's House*, was published by Little, Brown and Company in 1996.

Mary Boodell, flute

Currently the principal flutist with the Richmond Symphony, Mary Boodell received her Bachelor of Music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and her Master of Music at Northwestern University. Before coming to Richmond in 1990, Ms. Boodell played principal flute in the Knoxville Symphony and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago. She has performed internationally—in Germany, France, England and, most recently, at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy—as well as around the U.S., with the Philharmonic Institute Orchestra of Los Angeles, the Sarasota Music Festival in Florida and the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival in Connecticut.

David Niethamer, clarinet

David Niethamer was appointed principal clarinetist of the Richmond Symphony in 1979. He has appeared twelve

times as soloist, most recently for the world premiere of Allan Blank's *Concerto*, commissioned for Niethamer with funding from the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Niethamer also won critical acclaim and national recognition for the American premiere performances of Andre Casanova's *Ballade for Clarinet and String Orchestra* during his first season with the orchestra. In addition to his orchestral career, Niethamer has maintained a busy schedule of chamber music, recitals and teaching. He has performed at the Albemarle Festival with the Monticello Trio and the Brentano Quartet, with the Kandinsky Trio, the Composers Quartet and the Lenox String Quartet. From 1982 until 1992, Niethamer was the clarinetist and artistic director of the Roxbury Chamber Players. In 1994, he was named artistic director of the Richmond Chamber Players.

Notes on the Program

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

String Quartet in F major

1. Allegro moderato—Tres doux
2. Assez vif—Tres rythme
3. Tres lent
4. Vif et agite

When listening to a work written by Maurice Ravel, it is tempting to be carried away by the sensuous quality of the music. After hearing the endless variety of textures, the gorgeous harmonic language and the colorful use of instruments, there is no doubt that his music is evocative. Yet Ravel once wrote "My objective...is technical perfection. I can strive unceasingly to this end, since I am certain of never being able to attain it. The important thing is to get nearer to it all the time. Artists in my opinion, should have no other aim."

This combination of overt expression and technical perfection can be heard in the opening theme of the String Quartet, written by Ravel at age 28 while studying at the Paris Conservatory. Here the first violin unravels a meandering theme accompanied with rich harmonies, supported all the while by a simple two-octave scale in the cello. The movement goes on to follow the strict regulations of sonata form. However, Ravel defies preconceptions of how a string quartet should sound, inspired by the string quartet written nine years earlier by fellow Frenchman Claude Debussy. The upper voices are often grouped in clusters, chords are broken into shimmering fast notes and trills and the higher range of the cello is favored. These techniques all give a weightless sensation to this traditional combination of instruments.

Following the tenderness and fragility of the first movement, the second begins with all the instruments plucked like guitars. The highly effective uses of pizzicato and minor tonality reflect Ravel's love of Spanish music. Another one of his favorite forms of music, the waltz, is evoked in the dream-like middle section, which employs an almost narcotic use of instrumental color.

The simply titled *Tres Lent* is anything but simple; it is an episodic fantasy, using many contrasts in tempo and mood. One of the more experimental sections alternates angry outbursts by the muted cello with descending clouds of trilled chords. Rhythm and energy return in the last movement, where the whirling 5/8 beat, and the buzzing, frenetic texture go non-stop from beginning to end.

Introduction and Allegro

Ravel applied no fewer than five times for the prestigious composition award, the Prix de Rome. Unfortunately, he failed to ever win the award. His string quartet was one of the works submitted for consideration but was found too reactionary by the judges. The last rejection occurred in 1905. To soothe his wounds, Ravel accepted an invitation to vacation with some wealthy friends aboard their luxurious yacht. Before leaving Paris, he worked frantically to complete a work commissioned by the Maison Erard, a company that built harps and pianos. The resulting work, *Introduction and Allegro*, is a musical confection, written to showcase the fine qualities of the Erard harps.

The work is in fact a miniature concerto for harp, featuring dazzling technical passages and a cadenza. Inspired once more by the waltz rhythm, Ravel imbued the *Allegro* with a light, breezy character that he developed in later works such as *La Valse*, and the *Valse Nobles et*

Sentimentales. The main concern of the composer was not form but color and orchestration. Indeed, original and beautiful sounds are found throughout this piece; there are fluttering woodwinds, languid strings and a memorable moment in the cadenza when the melody in harmonics is enveloped in a vapor of scales.

Andre Caplet (1878-1925)

Conte fantastique (after Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*)

A contemporary of Ravel and an intimate friend of Debussy's, Andre Caplet began his life with great promise. Having started his career as a professional violinist at age 14, Caplet entered the Paris Conservatory four years later to study composition and soon won the Prix de Rome in 1901, winning over Ravel. His talents were varied indeed; by 1910, he was even conductor of the Boston Opera here in America. But Caplet was forced to concentrate on composing soon after the outbreak of World War I. An early volunteer for service, he was gassed during the war and the resultant health problems required a quiet life.

It is tempting to view his fascination of Edgar Allan Poe's short story, *The Mask of the Red Death*, as a result of his experience with poisonous gas. However, Poe was loved and widely read by the French. Even Debussy wrote a short opera based on *The Fall of the House of Usher*. In any case, the story's color and horror made wonderful fuel for Caplet's imagination.

Using a layered form, very much like the structure of the story, Caplet begins and ends the work with evocative musical descriptions of the ravaging plague. These contrast sparse, lonely music with violent shrieks of dissonance. Contained within these sections is the main body of the piece, conceived as a wild waltz.

The waltz in turn contains a section constructed from a series of beautiful, dreamy cadenzas where the listener is lost, like the story's revelers, in contemplation. The two waltz sections end with marvelous musical descriptions of a clock. The second is particularly evocative, sounding as if the clock's mechanical innards will self-destruct.

As in Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro*, the *Conte fantastique* exploits the sonic possibilities of strings and harp. The string players are required to play harmonics, trills and tremolo, hit the string with the bow, pluck and strum the instruments like a harp. All the while, the harpist provides both melody and accompaniment, imitates the chiming of a clock, and is even required to knock on the body of the instrument. Although the work is

originally without narrator, it has become traditional to combine the reading of Poe's story with the music. This can result in some chilling moments, as in the dream sequence in the middle of the piece, or at the end when the harp unrolls its last eerie scale.

Living in times of incurable poxes and mustard gas, not to mention war, both Poe and Caplet found power in a story about selfishness and retreat in the face of death. In our own era of Ebola, AIDS and other new and frightening diseases, the story retains its cautionary message. In our busy lives, we too are apt to pause like the Mask's revelers and contemplate the fragility of life.

Program notes by James Wilson.

Marsh Art Gallery

Beatrice Riese: Recent Drawings January 28 to March 6, 1998

Contemporary artist Beatrice Riese creates dense abstract drawings using an obsessive grid format. In the ink drawings she employs penned sequences of tiny repeated letters and numbers to encode obscure words and impossible texts, the repetitions revealing subtle shifts in tone and texture. Magic squares in the pencil drawings result from the repetition of several elements where the density of the overlapping ruled lines creates areas of light and dark and an interlacing network pattern.

Anthony Panzera: The Big Picture, Life-Size Scrolls and Drawings January 28 to March 6, 1998

In this exhibition of large scrolls and drawings contemporary artist Anthony Panzera presents the figure life-size. The scroll drawings grew out of his experiences with fresco painting, Japanese scroll painting, and life-size drawing. Drawing the big picture, with each scroll being thirty-three feet long and the other drawings of the figure drawn at full-scale, the artist uses the long, horizontal expanses of the scroll to create stories and the large studies of individual figures to directly engage the viewer.

Interiors: Recent Paintings by Duane Keiser February 26 to April 4, 1998

Duane Keiser, adjunct assistant professor of art at the University of Richmond, presents recent paintings dealing with interiors. His small-scale, intimate paintings investigate the psychological intensity of interior architectural spaces.