Celebrity Series of Boston

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Friday | January 27 | 8pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

Danish String Quartet

Frederik Øland violin
Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin
Asbjørn Nørgaard viola
Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin cello

Haydn String Quartet in G minor, Op. 20, no. 3 (Hob.III:33)
Allegro con spirito
Minuet: Allegretto– Trio
Poco adagio
Allegro molto

Shostakovich String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108
Allegro
Lento
Allegro – Allegretto

Britten Three Divertimenti for String Quartet
March: Allegro maestoso
Waltz: Allegretto
Burlesque: Presto

INTERMISSION

Arrangements by Danish String Quartet of **Nordic Folk Music**, with details to be announced from the stage.

This evening's program will end at approximately 9:45pm.

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Celebrity Series of Boston is supported by Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
String Quartet in G minor, Op. 20, no. 3 (Hob.III:33)

The String Quartet in G minor, Op. 20, no. 3, by Franz Joseph Haydn announces its intentions immediately. Three uneven phrases mark the first statement of the work, two of seven measures and one of nine measures (the norm in the Classical era was four). A surprise short phrase in unison replies as an afterthought, almost like the ensemble has stuttered. So begins one of the most enigmatic works in the string quartet repertoire. To anyone used to Haydn's reputation as a humdrum composer, this pronouncement will seem impossible. The quartet, though, along with the set it belongs to, is a milestone in the history of the genre, one that marked a new way of thinking about the possibilities of these instruments.

Haydn, for much of Western music history, was siloed by composers as almost goofy, a bumbling, avuncular figure of only marginal artistic value and a simple historical signpost—John the Baptist to the Messiah of Mozart. His nickname, Papa Haydn, originally given out of respect by contemporaries, became a pejorative representation of everything old-fashioned. Older performances of the String Quartet in G minor can reflect this bias, featuring rote accents on every bar, no variations in tempo or dynamics, and no creative applications of bowing and articulation. This poor understanding has shifted among critics in the last 50 years and performances even more recently have followed suit, increasingly becoming fresher, more exciting, and more richly interrogated. As will be the case in tonight's program, renditions now evoke what should be the prominent feature of this work: passion.

As the star composer of his day, Haydn was one of the preeminent Enlightenment intellectuals who closely followed the cultural developments of his contemporary Europe. His work here echoes one of the prominent artistic movements of the time, known as *Sturm und Drang* ("storm and stress", in English). The features of this genre are aptly demonstrated by the first statement of this quartet—suddenness, irregularity, shock, and drama. Where one phrase might invoke sweetness, a juxtaposed phrase will seem comparatively violent. The first and fourth movements are especially reminiscent of this style in general and act as two opposing mirrors sandwiching the piece. By turns announcing the material for the entire quartet and recycling it, the palindromic structure provides unity to the work's otherwise apparent chaos.

Haydn is not generally considered to be a great opera composer, but his application of dramatic norms here crafts a profound emotional narrative. Even the delicate third movement, which at first feels perfunctory, is lavishly decorated with incandescent texture in the upper strings and flowing accompaniment in the cello. The second movement could, too, as a minuet, feel common and plodding, but

Haydn imbues both inner movements with increasingly intense dramatic drive and constant surprises. In all movements, Haydn confronts the listener with uneven phrasing, sudden unisons, intricate counterpoint, and melodies that are quickly passed between instruments.

The Opus 20 collection that the G minor Quartet belongs to is nicknamed the Sun Quartets, a moniker given because a rising sun was imprinted on the first published edition. The name, however, serves as a perfect metaphor for the freshness, brilliance, and creative potential that characterizes this quartet.

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp minor, Op. 108

Though many of Dmitri Shostakovich's string quartets carry dedications, the dedication to his first wife Nina Vassilyevna Varzar on his String Quartet No. 7 is especially personal. Vassilyevna Varzar had died in 1954, and 1960, when Shostakovich composed this piece, would have been the year of her 50th birthday. It is a unique work in the composer's quartet oeuvre. At about 13 minutes, it is his shortest quartet, and its key of F-sharp minor breaks with a strict key sequence that he had followed when composing his quartets and would continue to follow after writing this one. This is possibly because of a perceived association of F-sharp minor with melancholy in the history of Western Classical music. Whatever Shostakovich's reason, this was a chaotic and difficult time in the composer's life, and it's plausible that he wanted to explore his fraught emotions in his music.

The music from the start is intense but condensed. A lone violin states the downward-skipping first theme and the cello responds not with a full phrase, but by repeating the last three knocking staccato notes the violin finished with, material that will become a central motif throughout. A languorous, upward moving melody appears soon after as counterpoint to the initial statement. These three themes represent the full content that Shostakovich develops in the first movement.

A spare, almost lonely texture is constant. All four instruments rarely play together. Rather, they banter and often pair off, trading material as Shostakovich develops it. Loneliness is even more apparent in the second movement, which begins simply with the second violin playing an arpeggiated ostinato. A melody appears in the first violin and, for the rest of the movement, the melody slithers almost continually between instruments with nothing but the ostinato to accompany it. This staid environment is abruptly interrupted by the final movement's emphatic entrance, the start of a vigorous fugue that commands the listener forward with its winding dissonance. As suddenly as the movement began, the music relaxes close to its end and decays as previously stated material from earlier movements is recycled. The knocking staccato motif returns, nagging until the quartet falls sheepishly into an ironic F-sharp major chord to end the piece.

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
Three Divertimenti for String Quartet

Benjamin Britten was a deeply personal composer, evident from the history of his Three Divertimenti. Technically classified as character pieces for their evocation of non-musical moods, this designation was literally true when Britten composed them. The collection was originally intended to be a five-movement work where each movement represented one of Britten's school friends. The composer began writing the piece in 1933 during and just after his time as a student at the Royal College of Music. He substantially revised the work until its official premiere in its current form in 1936. According to Britten himself, the premiere was met with "sniggers and in pretty cold silence." Britten, as he often would, took this reception personally, deciding not to publish the work. It was not performed again until after his death. The piece now has the reputation of being a sparkling example of Britten's early work and is performed increasingly often in concert.

Each movement carries with it the dual characteristics of hyper-modernism and popular accessibility that define so much of Britten's work. The composer's youth is also clearly on display here: like many composers fresh out of university, Britten tries to do as much as possible in the short time he gives himself. Each movement, however graceful and beautiful, is stuffed to the brim with shifting texture and rapidly evolving harmony. Unlike in the Shostakovich, there is hardly a moment when all four instruments are not playing together here. The first movement, March, is a clear thesis statement declaring Britten's ambitions. Forceful bowing in unison and open intervals mark the tirade of sound that introduces the piece. Sudden changes in dynamics and harmony and uneven phrasing keep the March from settling into monotonous ticking as that form might regularly call for. The second movement, Waltz, though more nimble than its predecessor, possesses the same restlessness, making it evocative of the dance without quite being danceable: it demands to be listened to. The final Burlesque, a clear lampoon of various 6/8 meter dance styles, is the most electric of the three movements. Here, the March and Waltz seem to have been combined and supercharged as the piece drives brazenly to a bombastic conclusion.

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Nordic Folk Music
(Arr. Danish String Quartet)

Folk music is the music of all the small places. It is the local music, but as such it is also the music of everywhere and everyone. Like rivers, the melodies and dances have flowed slowly from region to region: Whenever a fiddler stumbled on a melody, he would play it and make it his own before passing it on. You don't own a folk tune, you simply borrow it for a while.

For today's program, we have borrowed and arranged a selection of tunes that are all very close to our hearts. We perform them as a string quartet, one of the most powerful musical vehicles we know of. The string quartet is a pure construct: Four simple instruments made of wood. But in all its simplicity, the string quartet is capable of expressing a myriad of colors, nuances, and emotions—just like folk music. Our idea is to marry these two simple but powerful things; the folk music and the string quartet. Normally the string quartet has been reserved for the classical masters. Now we want to see what happens when we let the Nordic folk music flow through the wooden instruments of the string quartet.

Does it work? We hope so. And remember: We simply borrowed these tunes. They have already been returned.

Note excerpted from the Danish String Quartet's recording, Wood Works.

DANISH STRING QUARTET

The Danish String Quartet celebrates its 20th anniversary in the 2022/23 season, and the Grammy®-nominated quartet continues to assert its preeminence among the world's finest string quartets. Formed when they were in their teens, they are renowned for impeccable musicianship, sophisticated artistry, exquisite clarity of ensemble, and, above all, an unmatched ability to play as one. Performances are characterized by a rare musical spontaneity, giving audiences the sense of hearing even treasured canon repertoire as if for the first time. They exude a palpable joy in music-making that has made them one of today's most highly acclaimed and in-demand classical quartets, performing sold-out concert halls around the world. Their inventive and intriguing programming and repertoire choices have produced critically acclaimed original projects and commissions as well as popular arrangements of Scandinavian folk music.

This season, the Danish String Quartet continues its DOPPELGÄNGER series, an ambitious four-year international commissioning project. DOPPELGÄNGER pairs world premieres from four renowned composers—Bent Sørensen, Lotta Wennäkoski, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, and Thomas Adès—with late major chamber works by Schubert. Each season, the Quartet performs a world premiere on a

program with its doppelgänger—the Schubert quartet or quintet that inspired it—culminating in 2024 in the premiere of a quintet by Adès, after the String Quintet in C major. This season's new work, by Anna Thorvaldsdottir, premieres in April 2023 and is paired with Schubert's String Quartet in A Minor, "Rosamunde." The DOPPELGÄNGER pieces are commissioned by the Danish String Quartet with the support of Carnegie Hall, Cal Performances, UC Santa Barbara Arts & Lectures, Vancouver Recital Society, Flagey in Brussels, and Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam. The Quartet performs 28 concerts in North America this season over the course of three separate tours. Additionally, the group is Artist in Residence at London's Wigmore Hall.

The Danish String Quartet's most recent recording project is *PRISM*, a series of five discs on ECM New Series that explores the symbiotic musical and contextual relationships between Bach fugues, Beethoven string quartets, and works by Shostakovich, Schnittke, Bartók, Mendelssohn, and Webern. Four of the five recordings have been released on ECM, and the fifth, PRISM V, is slated for 2023. The most recently released is *PRISM IV* (2022), which was an "Editor's Choice" in *Limelight* magazine. The Quartet's discography reflects the ensemble's special affinity for Scandinavian composers, with the complete quartets of Carl Nielsen (DaCapo, 2007 and 2008) and *Adès / Nørgård / Abrahamsen*, their debut on ECM in 2016. They also released two discs of traditional Scandinavian folk music, Wood Works (Dacapo, 2014) and *Last Leaf* (ECM, 20127), which was one of the top classical albums of the year, as chosen by NPR, Spotify, and the *New York Times*, among others. A third folk recording is planned for release in 2023 on ECM.

The Quartet takes an active role in reaching new audiences through special projects. In 2007, they established the DSQ Festival, which takes place in intimate and informal settings in Copenhagen. In 2016, they inaugurated a concert series, *Series of Four*, in which they both perform and invite colleagues to appear.

They are the recipients of many awards and prestigious appointments, including *Musical America's* 2020 Ensemble of the Year and the Borletti-Buitoni Trust. The Quartet was named in 2013 as BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists and appointed to the Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two) of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. The Quartet was the awarded the 2010 NORDMETALL-Ensemble Prize at the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany, and in 2011, they received the Carl Nielsen Prize, the highest cultural honor in Denmark.

Violinists Frederik Øland and Rune Tonsgaard Sørenson and violist Asbjørn Nørgaard met as children at a music summer camp where they played soccer and made music together. As teenagers, they began the study of classical chamber music and were mentored by Tim Frederiksen of Copenhagen's Royal Danish Academy of Music. In 2008, the three Danes were joined by Norwegian cellist Fredrik Schøyen Sjölin. www.danishquartet.com.

Celebrity Series of Boston

DREAMERS' CIRCUS

Rune Tonsgaard Sørensen violin
Ale Carr Nordic cittern
Nikolaj Busk piano, accordion



FRIDAY
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8PM **NEC'S JORDAN HALL**

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Celebrity Series of Boston



Dreamers' Circus
February 24

2022/23
Winter/Spring

JANUARY 2023

Company SBB // Stefanie Batten Bland, *Look Who's Coming to Dinner*
Sat | Jan 14 | 8pm
Sun | Jan 15 | 3pm
NEC's Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

LaTasha Barnes' *The Jazz Continuum*
Thu – Sat | Jan 19 – 21 | 8pm
NEC's Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

Emerson String Quartet
Sun | Jan 22 | 3pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

Danish String Quartet
Fri | Jan 27 | 8pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

An Evening with Branford Marsalis
Sat | Jan 28 | 8pm
Berklee Performance Center

FEBRUARY 2023

Chris Thile
Fri | Feb 3 | 8pm
Sanders Theatre

Artemis
Sat | Feb 4 | 8pm
Berklee Performance Center

***What Makes It Great?* with Rob Kapilow Copland's *Appalachian Spring* with A Far Cry**
Sun | Feb 5 | 3pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

Jessica Vosk, *My Golden Age*
Sun | Feb 5 | 5pm
Symphony Hall

Circa, *Sacre*
Thu – Sat | Feb 9 – 11 | 8pm
Boch Center Shubert Theatre

NEIGHBORHOOD ARTS
Sandeep Das & Mike Block *Where the soul never dies*
Sat | Feb 11 | 4pm
Harvard-Epworth Church

Emi Ferguson and Ruckus
Sat | Feb 11 | 8pm
Calderwood Studio at GBH Boston

Jason Moran and the Harlem Hellfighters, *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin*
Fri | Feb 17 | 8pm
Berklee Performance Center

DEBUT SERIES
Alexi Kenney
Wed | Feb 22 | 8pm
Longy's Pickman Hall

Dreamers' Circus
Fri | Feb 24 | 8pm
NEC's Jordan Hall

NEIGHBORHOOD ARTS
Sandeep Das: *Soundscapes of India* - Suhail Yusuf Khan with Boston City Singers
Sat | Feb 25 | 3pm
Multicultural Arts Center, Cambridge

and many more





