

Emerson String Quartet

The College of Wooster
Gault Recital Hall
525 E. University Street
Wooster, Ohio 44691

Sunday, March 21, 2004
3:00 P.M.

provided an alternate *finale* for the Op. 130 quartet. The fugue was subsequently published in its original form as Op. 133 (and in a two-piano arrangement as Op. 134). Initially dismissed as impossibly difficult, the *Grosse Fuge* gradually grew in reputation in the late nineteenth century. Today many performances of the Op. 130 quartet restore the fugue as the true closing movement, although the replacement *finale* carries the distinction of being the last piece of music that Beethoven wrote before his death.

Opening the fugue is an introductory "*Overtura*." Though very brief, it exhibits several changes of tempo and mood; the powerful opening chords are followed by a number of "false starts." The wide leaps and sharply dotted rhythms of the principal subject indicate the start of the fugue proper. The first of the fugue's three main sections, marked *Allegro*, features a double fugue. Lively and robust, the fugue rushes onward, its two subjects engaged in a raucous struggle for prominence.

The energetic *Allegro* abruptly grinds to a halt, replaced by a subdued interlude marked *Meno mosso e moderato*. Also a double fugue, this section borrows one of the "false start" ideas from the introduction as its primary subject. The *Allegro* quickly returns, setting off an intense struggle for "control" over the piece's direction. Many already-introduced ideas interrupt, and ultimately the section collapses into an uneasy series of trills offset by profound silences. Ultimately the optimistic *Allegro molto e con brio* prevails, and the original section reappears triumphantly and carries the *Grosse Fuge* through a few more musical surprises to reach its powerful conclusion.

Program Notes by Brian Biddle



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Eugene Drucker, violin (1st in Mozart, Beethoven)

Philip Setzer, violin (1st in Mendelssohn)

Lawrence Dutton, viola

David Finckel, cello

The Emerson String Quartet, renowned for its brilliance, insight, and mastery, is one of the world's most highly acclaimed chamber ensembles. It tours throughout North America, Europe, and Asia, playing such well-known venues as Alice Tully Hall, Wigmore Hall in London, Brovard Auditorium in Los Angeles, Tanglewood, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Smithsonian Institution. The Emerson Quartet has become a regularly anticipated event for the Wooster Chamber Music Series, delighting us annually with its performances here.

Eugene Drucker and Philip Setzer, the two violinists, alternate playing the first chair position, an approach initially considered unusual, but now also practiced by other quartets. In another interesting twist, the Emerson began to experiment with standing up during performances as a result of their experience premiering Wolfgang Rihm's "Dithyrambe for Quartet and Orchestra," with Christoph Von Dohnanyi and the Cleveland Orchestra. They now stand for all performances, the cellist playing on a small podium. David Finckel is the Quartet's cellist and Lawrence Dutton is violist.

The Emerson has received six Grammy Awards, for its recordings of the complete cycles of quartets by Shostakovich, Bartok, and Beethoven, and for its "American Originals" (works by Ives and Barber). Other awards include Musical America's "Ensemble of the Year" in 2000, a Smithson Award from the Smithsonian Institution, honors from the Governor of Connecticut for outstanding cultural contributions, University Medal for Distinguished Service from the University of Hartford in 1994, and honorary doctoral degrees from Middlebury College in Vermont in 1995.

The group has achieved excellence in its approach to both the classical and contemporary repertoire. Deutsche Grammophon recordings, in addition to those mentioned above, include works by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Dvorak, Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky, Borodin, Debussy, Ravel, Webern, and Barber, and favorite encore works. Commissions and premieres include works by Andre Previn, Joan Tower, Ellen Taaffe Zwillich, Edgar Meyer, Ned Rorem, Paul Epstein, Wolfgang Rihm, Gunther Schuller, and more. The Emerson Quartet's newest collaboration is with physicist Brian Greene, author of "The Elegant Universe," demonstrating the principles of string theory through lecture, video presentation, and musical performance.

Taking its name from American poet and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Quartet was formed in 1976 and is based in New York City. It has been Quartet-in-Residence at Stony Brook University since 2002, and gives frequent master classes there and elsewhere.

Written by Sarah Buck

PROGRAM NOTES

Central to today's performance is the *fugue*, a compositional approach which has been in the vocabulary of Western music for at least seven centuries. The term has always referred to a type of music which employs contrapuntal imitation, a practice in which two or more instruments repeat the same musical ideas in close succession. In the time of Bach, however, the term was used to describe a more specific set of compositional practices; a cursory look at some characteristics of the fugue as we commonly know it today will greatly enhance the enjoyment of these celebrated pieces.

The essential "building block" of the fugue is the subject, a short musical idea which is offered successively by each instrument part at the beginning of the fugue. The remainder of the fugue is devoted to alternating sections which do not contain the subject (known as episodes) and restatements of the subject in one or more voices. This interplay of subject and non-subject form the fundamental backbone of fugal practice, though there is no standard "form" for fugues and many variants are found. Many fugues, for example, employ two or even three subjects. These are known, respectively, as double or triple fugues.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

THE ART OF FUGUE, BWV 1080 (Composed 1742-50) (Selections) –

Much about *The Art of Fugue* remains uncertain. Bach died before completing the piece, and his son, Carl Philipp Emanuel, published the work as he found it the year after his father's death. Bach himself provided no definite order for the collection of contrapuntal pieces. Virtually the entire extant portion was written in open score, providing only unlabeled staves with no indication of desired instrumentation. These uncertainties have led to a multitude of varying editions of *The Art of Fugue*, occasionally adding and omitting certain movements, and the piece has been performed by almost every combination of instruments capable of producing the notes on the page.

The ambiguities left behind by Bach, however, do not diminish its composer's evident mastery of fugal practices. The work, composed gradually over the last ten years of Bach's life, is comprised of fourteen fugues (all labeled with the general term *contrapunctus*) and a number of additional canons. All are in D minor, and all are based upon a single subject (in addition to a number of ancillary subjects):



Each *contrapunctus* illustrates a progressively complex and difficult fugal technique. *Contrapunctus 3* introduces the inversion of the above theme (as viewed upside-down, beginning with a descending leap instead of an ascending one). The fifth *contrapunctus* introduces a new theme, paired against its own inversion. For the ninth *contrapunctus*, Bach greatly increases the level of complexity, deploying two of the secondary subjects in a double fugue. Subsequent *contrapuncti* introduce

techniques such as mirror fugue (reversing a subject end-for-end, as if viewed through a mirror).

Bach reserves the highest level of sophistication for the final fugue. The composer combines a variant of the principal subject with two new subjects in an immense triple fugue which is considerably longer than any of the other movements. But, rather than drawing the fugue to a conclusion, a fourth subject is added, first stated in the uppermost voice. The first four pitches, B flat-A-C-B natural, rendered in the German notation system, spell B-A-C-H. After the introduction of this theme a developmental section ensues, only to fall silent after just seven measures. At this point Carl Philipp Emanuel inserted the inscription, "At this point in the fugue where name of BACH is introduced as a subject, the author died." Though the inscription is likely a romanticized version of the truth, the unfinished ending of *The Art of Fugue* seems to serve as a fitting musical signature on what many consider the last will and testament of the undisputed master of fugue.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

ADAGIO AND FUGUE, K. 546 (Composed 1788) – The summer of 1788 was a time of intense creative energy for Mozart. Although three years before his death the composer was falling out of popular favor in Vienna, he was producing some of his most memorable work, including the "Great" G minor and "Jupiter" Symphonies. Though it originally appeared at this time, the fugue portion of this work was actually a product of the year 1783. At this time, Mozart was engaged in a serious study of the fugal writing of Bach and his contemporaries. This study produced, among other works, a four-part fugue in C minor for two pianos, K. 426. This skillfully etched fugue plainly exhibits a link with the prior generations' craft; some have commented that its subject shares several musical similarities with the subject of Bach's other late testament to fugal writing, *The Musical Offering*.

Though a well-conceived fugue, some suggested that Mozart's two-piano arrangement was not felicitous to the instrument. Writing for two pianos was not a strong point for the composer; the K. 426 fugue is one of only two in his catalogue. Returning to the fugue five years later, Mozart decided to recast it as a work for string quartet (or string orchestra), and, with the addition of a brief Adagio introduction, re-released it as the piece which will be heard today.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

GROSSE FUGE (Great Fugue), Op. 133 (Composed 1826-27) – Reviews were decidedly mixed following the premiere of Beethoven's String Quartet in B-flat major, Op. 130, on March 21, 1826. Though listeners appreciated many parts of the six-movement work, most did not react favorably to the last movement's sprawling, 15-minute fugue. Beethoven was disappointed by this response; he had intended the fugue as the quartet's supreme musical statement, the culmination of all its parts. The composer's friends urged him to replace the fugue with a *finale* of lighter fare. After much coaxing (and with his publisher's assurance that the fugue would be published as its own separate work), Beethoven

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Program

Art of the Fugue (Selections)

J.S. BACH
(1685-1750)

1. Simple Fugue on the Theme in its Basic Version
3. Simple Fugue on the Inversion of the Theme
5. Fugue in Contrary Motion on a Variant Theme and its Inversion
7. Fugue in Contrary Motion on a Variant Theme and its Inversion in three different Rhythmic Values
9. Double Fugue on a new Theme and the Main Theme
16. 2-Voice Canon at the Twelfth (violin and viola)
11. Triple Fugue on two new themes and a Variant of the Main Theme
13. Mirror Fugue on the varied Theme and its Inversion (3 voices)
14. 2-Voice Canon in Contrary Motion and Augmentation (violin and cello)
18. Unfinished Fugue on Three New Themes (third theme: B-A-C-H)

INTERMISSION

Adagio & Fugue in C minor, K. 546 (1788)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
(1756-1791)

String Quartet, Op. 81 No. 4

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

Grosse Fuge, Op. 133

LUDWIG van BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Overtura

Fuga: Allegro - Meno mosso e moderato -

Allegro molto e con brio - Meno mosso e moderato -

Allegro molto e con brio

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UNDERWRITER

Sarah J. Buck and Nick Amster Fishelson
Mr. and Mrs. Stanley C. Gault
Lois and Raymond McCall
Ruth M. Rhodes
Viola Startzman Robertson
Ken and Jill Shafer
Yvonne and Ted Williams

BENEFACTOR

Louise E. Hamel
Deborah Hilty
Jay Klemme and Anne Wilson
Terry and Stuart Ling
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Clara Louise Patton
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