

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

For the convenience of concertgoers, the Garden Café remains open for light refreshments until 6:00 pm on Sundays.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
Sixth Street and Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC

www.nga.gov

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COVER: Jeanne Herron Richards, *Iowa Landscape*, etching, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rosenwald Collection



The Seventy-Third Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
3,024th Concert

The Ciompi Quartet of Duke University

Eric Pritchard and Hsiao-mei Ku, violins
Jonathan Bagg, viola
Fred Raimi, cello

November 23, 2014
Sunday, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

American Landscapes

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

Lullaby (1919)

Samuel Barber (1910–1981)

String Quartet in B Minor, op. 11 (1936)

Molto allegro e appassionato

Molto adagio

Molto allegro (come prima)

Melinda Wagner (b. 1957)

My Tioga (2014)

1. Damsel Fly
2. Rock Run
3. Bug
4. Milkweed (memento mori)
5. Mad Bramble
6. Little Church in Nauvoo

INTERMISSION

Antonin Dvořák (1841–1904)

String Quartet no. 12 in F Major, op. 96, “American” (1893)

Allegro ma non troppo

Lento

Molto vivace

Finale: vivace ma non troppo

The Musicians

The Ciompi Quartet was founded at Duke University in 1965 by the renowned Italian violinist Giorgio Ciompi. Its members are professors at Duke and play a leading role in the university’s cultural life, in addition to traveling widely for performances. Over its long career, the Ciompi Quartet has gained a reputation for performances of authentic intelligence and musical sophistication, and for a warm, unified sound enhanced by each player’s strong individual voice. With a maturity and insight born of wide experience, the Ciompi projects the heart and soul of the music, in a repertoire that ranges from well-known masterpieces to works by today’s most communicative composers.

Recent concerts have included the United States, France, Italy, Germany, the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Albania. The quartet has made four visits to China, most recently in December 2013. During summertime, the quartet has performed at Monadnock Music in New Hampshire, the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival in Michigan, and North Carolina’s Eastern Music Festival and Highlands Chamber Music Festival. Collaborations have included the distinguished talents of pianists Bella Davidovich, Menahem Pressler and James Tocco, the Borromeo String Quartet, oboist Joseph Robinson, saxophonist Branford Marsalis, soprano Susan Narucki, and jazz vocalist Nnenna Freelon. The latter four performed world premieres with the Ciompi, reflecting the quartet’s commitment to creative programming, which often mixes the old and the latest in exciting ways. The quartet’s extensive record of commissions includes many strong works, and its close ties to composers Paul Schoenfield, Stephen Jaffe, Scott Lindroth, and Melinda Wagner continue to furnish important contributions to the repertoire. In 2015 the quartet premieres Stephen Jaffe’s *String Quartet no. 3*. The group’s latest recording (2013) is on Toccata Classics, featuring a string quartet by nineteenth-century violin virtuoso Heinrich Ernst. Naxos will release a new quartet by Chiayu Hsu in 2015; Naxos online features a recording of the quartets of Paul Schoenfield, including the popular *Tales from Chelm*. Numerous other discs are on the CRI, Arabesque, Albany, Gasparo, and Sheffield Lab labels, with music from Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and other composers to the present day.

Program Notes

GERSHWIN AND BARBER

George Gershwin was nineteen when he wrote *Lullaby*, a single movement work, originally a composition assignment, and his only piece for quartet. It was clear, even from that early age, that the young prodigy's musical gift inhabited a different world from that of his contemporaries. He was unfettered by the conventions that guided them and instead moved firmly in the world of popular music, which at that moment was being transformed by jazz. If Antonin Dvořák had lived long enough to know the young Gershwin, he might have proclaimed him the “real thing”—a composer with a truly American voice (see program notes below on Dvořák's “American” quartet.)

Samuel Barber's string quartet premiered in 1936 in Europe, where the twenty-six-year-old was staying after receiving an American Academy in Rome prize. When he completed the piece's now famous slow movement, he wrote to the cellist of the Curtis Quartet, for whom it was intended, that it was “a knockout.” He was right, for the movement became one of the most widely performed and beloved pieces of American music, most often heard in the version for string orchestra known as *Adagio for Strings*.

Barber struggled to compose a suitable finale. He eventually abandoned his plan for a full-sized third movement and reverted to the first movement's rich material, which he telescoped into a short reprise for the ending. The result is a quartet in large-scale A-B-A form that highlights the adagio as its centerpiece—an effective choice.

Notes by Jonathan Bagg

MY TIOGA

Composing for string quartet can be a daunting project for any composer; the ghosts of Beethoven, Bartok, and other illustrious artists hover in the background. The quartet genre often brings to mind music of dignity and gravitas, and indeed, when composing what would become *My Tioga*, I had anticipated an extended, developmental work of substantial breadth. Instead

I found myself writing music that became increasingly whimsical and nostalgic as I went along. When the work was nearly finished, I realized that certain memories I have of the Pennsylvania countryside, in particular Tioga County where my mother grew up, had been whirling about in my mind. As a result, each of the quartet's six movements evokes for me a moment spent in the hills and valleys of Pennsylvania's Endless Mountains.

“Damsel Fly” begins with a sad melody that becomes entwined with the other voices, then dissipates, reminding me a bit of the fleeting visits made by delicate, cobalt-tailed damselflies as my brother and I fished for blue gills and sunnies (my grandmother called these insects Devil's Darning Needles). “Rock Run” is a part of a beautiful Pennsylvania stream that has, over the years, carved chutes, slides, and ledges out of the bedrock, culminating in various spectacular waterfalls. The music of this movement is appropriately craggy and angular, ending with a receding pulse.

While “Bug” is never still, with many dynamic shifts and moments of rhythmic complexity, I find it to be purposeful and stubborn, like a June bug clinging to the porch screen. In contrast, the music of “Milk Weed (memento mori)” is lilting and melancholy, bringing to mind the delicate parachutes sent out by an expired milkweed. “Mad Bramble,” a rushing tangle of notes, makes me remember the thicket of weeds, burdock, and thistle out beyond the barn. Finally, “Little Church in Nauvoo”—a hymn of sorts—reminds me of the white clapboard church that sits atop a nearby hill, surrounded by cornfields.

Notes by Melinda Wagner

DVOŘÁK

In the summer of 1893, Dvořák and his family escaped from New York's lower east side, where they had been living, to the open prairies and welcoming arms of a Bohemian enclave in Spillville, Iowa. The change of scenery profoundly affected the composer's mood and morale, and the music he wrote while residing there bears the distinct imprint of his positive experience. One of those pieces was the *String Quartet*, opus 96, nicknamed the “American.”

Dvořák had been lured to the United States to direct the fledgling National Conservatory of Music (later reborn as the Juilliard School), which

came with a large salary. It was hoped that he would impart some of his European erudition to the Americans, but also provide leadership—as exponent of Musical Nationalism—for an “American style” of composition. Dvořák did his best, taking time to steep himself in what he considered the indigenous American music: plantation spirituals from the South and Native American melodies. Pentatonic tunes, drone accompaniments, rhythmic *ostinati*, and syncopated rhythms were among the devices he latched onto as appropriately American. All of these elements show up in the “American” string quartet.

Dvořák sought a deliberately simplified style in the F Major quartet, hoping to reflect what he felt was something direct, even naïve, in the young nation’s character. In adopting this fresh approach, he was able to liberate something in himself—perhaps his lingering ties to Wagner’s heavy chromaticism. Dvořák had made a career of balancing the simple cadences of his own native folk music with a pan-German cosmopolitan style, and here, across the Atlantic on the prairies of Iowa, he found the courage and the means to suppress his European academicism, allowing the folk element to dominate and even define the music’s harmonies and rhythms, as well as its larger shapes. The format of the F Major quartet may be quite typical: four movements including a scherzo, but there is also something new for Dvořák—a greater integration of the thematic material into every musical parameter. In this way it is a true precursor to the modernism of Janáček and Bartók, only a few years away.

Notes by Jonathan Bagg

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