

# **ATLANTA CHAMBER PLAYERS: "PREMIERES & PRODIGIES"**

## **April 28, 2010 - The New American Shakespeare Tavern**

### **PROGRAM NOTES**

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**  
**Salzburg, 27 January 1756–Vienna, 5 December 1791**

What we know (or think we know) about Mozart is frequently contradictory. His life has been romanticized to such an extent that he is often remembered as no more than the sickly former child prodigy who died in poverty, buried in a pauper's grave. The popular stage play *Amadeus* and the Oscar-winning film based on it have given us the portrait of a Mozart whose personal quirks included thoroughly scatological language and an infantile sense of humor—traits seemingly at odds with the composer of so much sublime music. Personalities are complex things, however, and artistic personalities perhaps more so than those of most mortals. It is true that Mozart was frequently penniless and it is also true that some of his racier correspondence cannot be quoted with propriety. But the reality of the man lies not in romanticized history nor in popular portrayal but in the music itself, the symphonies, concertos, operas, and vast body of chamber music he produced. The fact is that, despite external tragedies and personal shortcomings, Mozart composed some of the greatest music ever written.

#### ***Quintet for Piano and Winds in E-Flat Major, K. 452***

On 30 March 1784, Mozart made an entry in his thematic catalogue to record the completion of a new work, known today as K452, the famous quintet for piano and winds in E-flat. It was first performed two days later, 1 April 1784, at the Imperial and Royal National Court Theater in Vienna. Mozart referred to it in a letter of 10 April 1784 to his father in Salzburg:

“[The] quintet produced the very greatest applause. I consider the quintet to be the best work I have ever composed. It is written for oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon and pianoforte. I wish you could have heard it yourself.”

This quintet was first brought out in Vienna in 1794 (three years after Mozart's death) by Artaria, in a version for piano and string trio. In 1799, Mozart's widow, Constanze, sold the rights to her husband's manuscripts to the publisher Johann Anton André, who noticed that this quintet was missing—by reference to the same thematic catalogue in which Mozart originally recorded its composition. Its whereabouts thereafter are somewhat murky, helped not in the least by Constanze's protestations to André that a certain Polish count had purchased the quintet (and it was he who was responsible for issuing the quintet as a spurious piano trio in 1794!). Constanze later changed this somewhat suspicious story to say that a secretary to the Hungarian consulate had the piece in his possession. Fortunately for music lovers, at some time after Constanze's death in 1842, the original manuscript found its way to Paris' Bibliotheque Nationale.

Of special note is the fact that this is the first major work which employs the clarinet, an instrument which Mozart came to love following his acquaintance of the famed virtuoso Anton Stadler. It was for Stadler that Mozart composed a number of other late works, including the Clarinet Quintet K. 581 and the glorious Clarinet Concerto K. 622.

--Notes by Edmund Trafford

***Rapido!*® A 14-Day Composition Contest  
2009 1st Prize Winner**

***Diverse Variations on A-C-P*  
for Oboe, Violin, Viola, ‘Cello, and Piano (2009-2010)  
Jon Jeffrey Grier**

The three movements of *Diverse Variations* are all based on the notes A-C-B, the “B” serving as a stand-in for the letter “P.” The “B” is derived by going through the musical alphabet of 7 notes (i.e. letters) two times, plus one more A and B, so that this last B lands on the 16<sup>th</sup> letter of the English alphabet, P. This little pattern is the essential DNA of the entire work. Virtually all melodic and harmonic material is somehow generated from it, and it makes possible a whole that is at once highly variable and intensely unified.

The A-C-B pattern is manipulated in various ways to take each of the movements through a similar sequence of melodic and harmonic flavors: octatonic (a fairly tense quality) at the start, whole tone (vague, static) in the middle, and lydian mode (bright, essentially major) toward the end. These contrasts are most obvious in the second movement, which quickly reviews the sequence in its coda. Each movement recycles its introduction in the coda; this material is shared between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> movements. In keeping with the spirit of the Rapido! Competition, each movement is an adaptation of a classical form.

**I. Introduction and Canonic Variations** At the opening the A-C-B(P) motive is morphed into the famous B-A-C-H motive (B flat-A-C-B natural), announcing that this movement will rely on that classic contrapuntal device, the canon—essentially a sophisticated round. After a frantic introduction obsessing with this and the A-C-B motive, a varied series of canons in slow tempo unfolds, each featuring a different length of delay between the parts and a different pair of instruments.

**II. Theme and Rapid Variations** This movement mimics a classical theme and variations movement, following the typical pattern of a relatively bold theme, in binary form, followed by more elaborate variations (three, in this case) that each adhere to the binary form. Here, the slow tempo theme is reprised in the coda. This movement was the one first composed as my entry in the Rapido! Competition.

**III. Lyric Variations, Interrupted** This movement is a rondo, a form commonly employed in final movements of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. After a frantic re-working of the intro from the 1<sup>st</sup> movement, a bold and not at all lyrical unison statement is heard. This is a gesture that will return three more times (i.e. a *ritornello*), each time varied and interrupting a series of relatively lyrical solos. Each solo features a different instrument, with a second “helper” instrument providing counterpoint. The oboe, in a briefly slower tempo, gets the last and most lyrical passage of all, as it does in the other movements. The conclusion returns to its introduction, this time in the brighter lydian mode and progressing rapidly through the keys of A, C, and B.

Though there is no descriptive or narrative program behind any of this music, it does honor the ongoing work of the Atlanta Chamber Players by embracing a mix of the old and the new, in a shifting variety of moods, in chamber music scoring in which every player is vital. It is dedicated to them in deepest gratitude.

Jon Jeffrey Grier holds a B.A. from Kalamazoo College, an M.M. from Western Michigan University, and a D.M.A. in Composition from the University of South Carolina. Since 1988 he has been Instructor of Music Theory, Music History, and Composer in Residence at the Greenville Fine Arts Center, a magnet high school of the arts in Greenville, South Carolina. He composes frequently for student and faculty performers at the FAC, usually when he should really be grading papers. Jon has also been a writer/keyboardist with various jazz and jazz-fusion ensembles in Greenville. His sons Benjamin and Daniel are college students; he lives in Greenville with wife Marion, and lab-mix mutt, Sally Mae.

--Notes by Jon Jeffrey Grier

**Jacob Ludwig Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy**  
**Hamburg, 4 February 1809–Leipzig, 4 November 1847**

Mendelssohn was born into a wealthy German family and demonstrated an early ability for music. He was both gifted and ambitious and, unlike other less fortunate musicians, he had the means behind him to pursue his chosen profession. Unfortunately, Mendelssohn died at the tender age of 38, having lived only three years longer than Mozart. Like Mozart, Mendelssohn was a precocious composer, and in fact, many of his youthful works are arguably superior to those of the young Mozart. Outstanding examples include the splendid *Octet in E-Flat for Strings*, Opus 20, of 1825 (when Mendelssohn was just 15), and the exquisite *Overture to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,”* Opus 21, composed just a year later. His mature works are a wonderful synthesis of Romantic and Classic elements. Like many other composers of the period, he frequently drew on various literary and extramusical sources for inspiration, yet the works themselves often exhibit a grace and elegance derived from the best Classic tradition.

A major landmark in Mendelssohn’s career came in the fall of 1835. He left Düsseldorf, where he was city music director, to move to Leipzig to accept the prestigious post of conductor of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. Mendelssohn firmly believed in the value of educating his audiences, attempting to elevate their level of musical appreciation. In a series of “historical concerts” during the 1837-1838 season, he presented to the public the works of an obscure North German Baroque composer named Johann Sebastian Bach, igniting a Bach revival that continues to this day.

***String Quartet No. 4 in E Minor, Opus 44 No. 2***

Mendelssohn’s first string quartets were composed before the age of 15, after which a lapse of nearly another 15 years occurred. It might almost be said that the three quartets of Opus 44 (written in 1837-1838) are his first “mature” works in the medium.

The three quartets in the set numbered Opus 44 were composed during the time Mendelssohn was living and working in Leipzig. The second of the set, in E minor, heard on this program, was actually the first to be composed, in 1837; the nos. 1 and 3 date from 1838. General critical opinion seems to agree that this quartet is not only the best of the Opus 44 set but Mendelssohn’s finest example in the medium. It was premiered by a quartet led by violinist Ferdinand David (for whom Mendelssohn also wrote the Violin Concerto) on 28 October 1837, four months after Mendelssohn finished it; it was published two years later. All three quartets are dedicated to Crown Prince Gustavus of Sweden.

--Notes by Edmund Trafford