



CLEVELAND
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM NOTES

Jupiter String Quartet

November 15, 2022 – 7:30 p.m.

Plymouth Church, UCC

The members of the Jupiter Quartet have shared the following thoughts about their program:

The program we would like to offer is a bit unusual in that it includes movements of Ives, Price, and Walker along with complete works of Taylor and Brahms. The 'excerpted' works were carefully considered and help create space in the program for both more variety and connection.

The Ives Chorale is an early piece that uses quotations from Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor and Lowell Mason's *Missionary Hymn*. This Chorale movement appears to have independent origins from the rest of the first quartet (which is sometimes performed without this movement) and was also later included in the Fourth Symphony. Here we offer it as a kind of glorious overture, blending European and American styles. It also stands as a contrast to the contrapuntal writings of Price, who uses American folk songs as her source material. All five Price pieces are wonderful, but we have chosen to excerpt three, for practical purposes of time and contrast. The five pieces, in our opinion, don't necessitate that they be played in their entirety, and this allows us space in the first half to share two other American voices, Taylor and Walker.

Steve Taylor's pandemic composition, *Chaconne/Labyrinth*, was premiered by us in an on-line broadcast in the spring of 2021. It is a haunting, beautiful work that reflects on the loneliness and terror of living through COVID-19. We follow this with Walker's beautiful *Lyric*, which serves, here, as an elegy after the Taylor. Like Barber's famous *Adagio*, Walker's *Lyric* has found life outside its original origins in a string quartet (also as a stand-alone string orchestra piece) and we offer it here as an equally powerful reflection on grief.

The Brahms A minor quartet departs from the American voices of the first half, offers contrast, but also suggests connections with the romantic and contrapuntal writing of many of the first half works.

Taken as a whole, our primary aim for this program, as always, is to offer the listener opportunities to find connection, both emotionally and intellectually, in and across works from a variety of musical voices and backgrounds.

“Chorale” from String Quartet No. 1 **Charles Ives**

Born: Danbury, CT, 1874

Died: New York, 1954

Composed: 1898-1902

While attending Yale as an undergraduate, Charles Ives was also active as a church organist. The first of his two string quartets, written during shortly after his graduation, brings those two worlds together. A string quartet was certainly something any aspiring concert composer would want to write, but in Ives’s case, the piece grew out of his church practice; it is based on the traditional hymns he had grown up with and deeply loved. He was to return to this treasure trove of melodies throughout his entire compositional career.

The first movement of this quartet starts out as a fugue on the hymn melody “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” also known as the “Missionary Hymn,” by Lowell Mason. But many unexpected things happen in the course of this most unorthodox fugal development, not the least of which is the moment when the hymn tune suddenly morphs into a quote from Brahms’s *Alto Rhapsody*, a piece Ives was particularly fond of. The slow and extremely intense ending of the movement is particularly memorable.

Selections from *Five Folksongs in Counterpoint*

Florence Price

Born: Little Rock, AR, 1887

Died: Chicago, IL, 1953

Composed: 1951

The idea of a contrapuntal treatment of traditional American melodies reappears in these recently-discovered gems by Florence Price, the remarkable African-American composer whose music has been having a major renaissance in recent years.

Price’s five short pieces, formerly forgotten, are definitely entering the chamber-music repertoire. Their dating is uncertain; the late Linda Rae Brown, author of a major monograph on Price, believed

that at least some of the pieces dated from around 1927, though she noted that the composer repeatedly revised them, adding new movements so that the work probably did not reach its final form until 1951. It seems that Price had originally intended to include only Negro spirituals but then decided to use the Western ballad “Oh my darling Clementine” and the old English song “Drink to me only with thine eyes” as well. The pieces were first published in

2006 in an anthology of works by women composers. The contrapuntal writing is highly sophisticated throughout, and Price occasionally explored dissonances she

usually avoided in her other works, making the arrangements of the simple tunes quite complex and even dramatic.

Chaconne/Labyrinth **Stephen Andrew Taylor**

Born: Murray, KY, 1965

Composed: 2021

Steven Andrew Taylor is a professor of composition at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. He writes both acoustic and electronic music, and has published extensively on the music of György Ligeti. He has offered the following comments on Chaconne/Labyrinth:

“Chaconne” is an old-fashioned word for a repeating chord progression, like the 12-bar blues. My chords are a little weirder, using just intonation to find notes that don’t exist on the piano keyboard. Here the wonderful Jupiter Quartet plays a chaconne, but at the same

time they are lost in a labyrinth. The chords keep returning, only to point in new directions. This is how I’ve felt the past year: stuck in a loop, but at the same time lost in a maze, desperately seeking the way out. At the center of this maze, like the Minotaur of Greek myth, lies a depiction of the coronavirus that has so profoundly changed our world. After this encounter—marked by strange, percussive sounds—the quartet traces their way, like following Ariadne’s thread, back through the labyrinth.

Lyric for Strings **George Walker**

Born: Washington, D.C., 1922

Died: Montclair, NJ, 2018

Composed: 1946

A creative response to Samuel Barber’s celebrated *Adagio*, *Lyric for Strings* was also first written as the slow movement of a string quartet. Walker, who studied with Barber’s teacher Rosario Scalero at Curtis, was not only a prolific composer but also a concert pianist who played Rachmaninoff’s Third Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. He won

many awards and distinctions as the first African-American to be so honored, most notably, the Pulitzer Prize in 1996.

The *Lyric*, first performed under the title *Lament* and later renamed by the composer, became best known in a version for string orchestra. It received many performances in that form both in the United States and Europe, and established Walker’s

reputation. After a period of studies in France under Nadia Boulanger, the composer went on to enjoy a long and distinguished career as a composer and teacher.

In a very slow tempo (*Molto Adagio*), the expressive violin melody rises in register and intensity until it reaches a *fortissimo* climax, from which it gradually descends again. This description would

String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

Johannes Brahms

Born: Hamburg, 1833

Died: Vienna, 1897

Composed: 1873

The two string quartets of Op. 51 were the first Brahms deemed worthy of publication (it is said that he destroyed as many as twenty earlier quartets). The opening motif of the A-minor work, however, goes back a full twenty years: it is none other than the F-A-E motto the 20-year-old Brahms had used in a collaborative violin sonata to which he contributed the scherzo, with Robert Schumann and Albert Dietrich writing the other movements. The notes F-A-E stood for *frei aber einsam* (free but lonely). Brahms could still identify with those words in 1873, and he was able to develop the potential of this simple three-note motif much more completely than he had been able to do at the beginning of his career.

The first movement of the A-minor quartet is a model of balance and harmony where *both* themes in the sonata form are gentle and lyrical; the constant interplay of duple and triple meter provides just enough tension to keep the momentum from flagging at any time. The second movement

apply equally well to the Barber *Adagio*, but Walker employs more rhythmic and textural changes than his older contemporary, and introduces a most delicate and effective key change in the middle of the piece.

Walker dedicated *Lyric for Strings* to the memory of his grandmother, Malvina King, who passed away shortly before the work was written.

continues the soulful singing, this time in the major mode; it also has a more martial-sounding middle section, after which a variant of the F-A-E motif, played by the cello, leads back to the recapitulation of the initial theme.

That same motif is heard again in the third-movement minuet, whose wistful melody recalls the analogous movement in Brahms's Cello Sonata in E minor (1865). The movement has a faster trio section in perpetual motion but, surprisingly, Brahms brings back a short reminiscence of the slow minuet melody in the middle of the trio, before proceeding to the full-fledged recapitulation.

The finale is a free rondo on a dance melody that plays delightful games with the triple meter. (Incidentally, it begins, after a three-note pick-up, with the notes E-B-C, which is an exact transposition of A-E-F, itself a permutation of F-A-E! The connection may be hard to explain but easy to hear.) There are a few lyrical episodes in the finale, including one in a smaller tempo,

transforming the main theme from dance to aria, only to have the idyll disrupted by a breakneck coda, ending the quartet with a

lively *stretto*. (The Italian word for “tight” is used to describe this type of mad rush to the double bar.)

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.