

Natchitoches String Quartet

Roman Carranza & Jonathan Andino, violins

Cesia Corrales, viola - Milovan Paz, cello

Program Notes by Jackson Harmeyer

The second day of our festival closes with a performance by the Natchitoches String Quartet, a group of alumni and students of Northwestern State University. These are musicians who have performed with us before, either at our festival or at the monthly series, *Nachtmusik von BrainSurge*. Most participated in the sextet performance this past fall, playing Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence* and the String Sextet by Dvořák. This evening the Natchitoches Quartet performs Schubert's String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, subtitled *Death and the Maiden*, and Mozart's youthful String Quartet No. 5 in F major, one of his so-called *Milanese Quartets*. Enjoy!

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

String Quartet No. 14 in D minor, D. 531, *Death and the Maiden*

The Austrian composer Franz Schubert was not only an inheritor to the great Viennese Classical tradition of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven but also one of the first Romantics, pioneering many of the expressive, shorter genres that had typically remained an afterthought for his predecessors. Among these shorter genres, Schubert brought new insight to both the German art song (*Lied*) and the character piece for piano, enriching these genres with a melodic brilliance not heard before his contributions. Only in his final years, however, as the young man saw his health declining, did Schubert become a master of the extended genres of the symphony, string quartet, and piano sonata, inspired in this direction by the model of



Franz Schubert

Beethoven. Previously, Schubert had shunned Beethoven, as had much of post-Napoleonic Europe, his music still too associated with those dashed hopes of autonomy. Within a few years though, Beethoven's reputation had been restored, and Schubert, calling himself "a worshipper and admirer," had recognized in this predecessor's music a handling of larger forms that he wished to emulate.

The musicologist Maynard Solomon considers the year 1822 a turning point in Schubert's career. His compositions were beginning to find widespread acceptance, but he had also contracted syphilis and knew, therefore, his time was limited. Refocusing on his art, he composed in his final seven years the majority of his largescale masterpieces, including the Symphonies Nos. 8 and 9; the final three string quartets and the Quintet in C major; piano works like the *Wanderer Fantasy*, the impromptus, and several crucial sonatas; as well as the song cycles, *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*. As Solomon has observed, "In many of the masterpieces of his last years, Schubert succeeded in effecting a fusion of his special perception of Beethoven and Biedermeier, creating a personal style that has both absorbed and synthesized its germinating

sources." Schubert did not abandon the melodic fluency he had achieved in smaller forms (Solomon's appeal to the Biedermeier movement). Instead, he combined this lyricism with the larger forms he had inherited from his Classical-era predecessors and, most of all, Beethoven.

The String Quartet No. 14 in D minor was composed in March 1824. This quartet and the A-minor written immediately prior were the first string quartets Schubert had completed since childhood, those youthful works reflecting a culture of domestic musicmaking in which Schubert's own family participated. The A-minor and D-minor Quartets are, on the contrary, much more ambitious works, designed for professional musicians. Indeed, Vienna's most respected violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh who had premiered many of Beethoven's quartets gave the premiere of the A-minor on March 14, 1824; it was published that autumn. The D-minor Quartet, however, was neither premiered nor published in Schubert's lifetime: its premiere had to wait until March 12, 1833 when it was given in Berlin by Karl Moser and his quartet. It owes its subtitle, *Death and the Maiden*, to its quotation of a song by that name which Schubert had composed in 1817. The quotation became the theme of its second movement, but certainly the mood of the entire quartet seems fixated on death. To this end, Schubert noted, "What I produce is due to my understanding of music and to my sorrows."

The first movement, *Allegro*, launches with a harrowing, chordal gesture which sets the ominous mood that predominates over the Quartet. This introduction presents two motivic cells that reoccur throughout the movement: insistent notes repeated at the same pitch and descending triplets; while the former builds tension, the latter evokes despair. The first violin introduces the first theme presently, initiating the sonata principle that guides this movement. Chromatic sequences propel us through the transition to the second theme, a more hopeful melody in the relative key of F major played together by the violins. The second theme is subjected to a miniature development of its own before the exposition itself ever ends, growing darker in the process. The sequences are again impressive, but so are the sixteenth-note runs, mostly in the first violin and cello parts, and the stops which sometimes occupy all four strings for dense quadruple stops.

The development begins with a moment of uncertainty where the propulsion of much of the exposition is missing; this returns, however, as the intensity builds. A climax is reached toward the end of the development on a dominant-seventh chord, before a rebuilding process takes us back to the harrowing gesture which had launched the movement and now opens the recapitulation. The recapitulation is no less insistent in its transformations, although much of the material is now familiar. There are more relaxed sections especially as we approach the coda. Something fearful inhabits this coda as the pulse slows and we hear only fragments of the preceding music. Though the movement ends on tonic, the feeling is not of resolution but surrender.

The second movement, marked *Andante con moto*, is a theme and variations. The theme which lasts the first twenty-four bars is derived from the piano introduction and accompaniment to Schubert's song, "Death and the Maiden." The texture of this theme is chordal, and progresses much like a four-part chorale harmonization. Likewise, most of the note values are straight half and quarter notes with the first real rhythmic distinction coming as the theme ends. Five variations on this theme follow in which different instruments add motivic elements to the basic harmonic pattern established in this theme. The first violin acts as a soloist in the first variation with the other instruments providing a light accompaniment. The cello, playing in its higher register, takes the melody in the second variation. The third variation is vicious in feeling like much of the first movement had been. The fourth variation reaches into the parallel key of G major with the first violin becoming an imploring soloist. The first violin remains a soloist for much of the fifth variation, although the music shifts back into minor and the cello begins to rise in dynamics. A relaxed coda closes the movement with its final chord sounding on G major.

The energetic third movement, *Scherzo. Allegro molto*, is back in D minor. As ferocious as it is fiendish, the scherzo might represent the triumph of death over the maiden. The intersecting trio section, now in D major, is gentler in its intent, although not without motivic reminiscences to the foul scherzo which frames it. The fourth movement, *Presto*, follows a sonata-rondo format, freely blending elements of the two more common forms. Its galloping motion calls to mind Schubert's song, "Der Erlkönig," in which death chases after a dying boy on a horse. The mood has changed: while there are clear elements of struggle between D minor and its parallel major, encapsulated by the first and second themes, respectively, the minor theme seems much stronger, almost triumphant from the very beginning. Only toward the end does Schubert tempt us with the possibility that the major theme might win, that the maiden might escape death, but to no avail.



**Death and the Maiden (1517),
painting by Hans Baldung**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet No. 5 in F major, K. 158

We often speak of Joseph Haydn as the “Father of the String Quartet,” yet he was neither the first nor the only composer active in the mid-eighteenth century to write for the specific combination of two violins, viola, and cello. Though he meticulously cultivated the genre, made it into what we know today, Haydn was not alone in the composition of string quartets. When the young Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart began writing his earliest string quartets around 1770, it was not to the example of Haydn that he looked, but to the Italian masters, especially Giovanni Battista Sammartini. Likely, it was not



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

until a trip to Vienna in summer 1773 that he encountered the quartets of Haydn by which point he had already composed seven string quartets of his own. Mozart’s first seven quartets reflect the influence of Sammartini, then regarded as foremost among the composers of Italian instrumental music, in their melodic character as well as their three-movement format. The inclusion of a fourth movement in his First Quartet, subtitled *Lodi*, was an addition made in 1773 or 1774 only after getting to know Haydn’s quartets for the first time.

The *Lodi* dates from spring 1770, composed just after Mozart’s first trip to Milan where he met Sammartini and evidently came across his music as well. The six quartets which follow were written two years later on what would be Mozart’s third and final visit to this Italian city. For Milan, he had been commissioned to compose an opera, *Lucio Silla*, which was premiered there on December 26, 1772. Inspired by the voice of this opera’s lead castrato, Venanzio Rauzzini, he also wrote the motet, *Exsultate, jubilate*, which is still one of his best-known liturgical works today. The six quartets were also written during his stay in Milan, and they are sometimes called the *Milanese Quartets* for this reason. We do not know precisely when they were written or premiered, although we do know that Mozart’s father, Leopold, mentioned in letters dating from October 1772 and February 1773 that his son was writing quartets.

The String Quartet No. 5 in F major which we hear this evening is the fourth among the six quartets Mozart composed in Milan. Sometimes viewed as a cycle, these quartets do, in fact, follow a key plan of ascending fourths: the first is in D major, the second in G major, the third C major, then F major, B-flat major, and E-flat major. This tidy ordering, nevertheless, might not have originated with Mozart. All six quartets are, indeed, in three movements, according to a fast-slow-fast pattern, as was customary in Italian instrumental music of the era. Other stylistic traits reflecting the influence of Sammartini include the predominance of minor-key slow movements, occurring in four of the six quartets, and the lengthy minuets which close two of the six quartets. Mozart praised the Italian-style minuet in a letter to his sister, Nannerl, commenting that “The minuets in Milan, in fact the Italian minuets generally, have plenty of notes, are played slowly, and have several bars.” Our F-major Quartet possesses both a minor-key slow movement and closing minuet.

The first movement, *Allegro*, follows sonata principle with its first theme in F major and its second in the dominant key, C major. The first theme is marked by a descending triplet arpeggio played initially by the first violin over simple accompaniment from the other instruments. After an authentic cadence is reached, the former accompaniment mimics the triplet figure and effects a quick modulation to C major where the first violin again introduces the second theme. Echoes of the first theme round-out the exposition before its repetition. The development begins in the minor mode, but quickly returns to the major, ushering in the recapitulation in no time at all. The second movement, *Andante un poco allegretto*, is in the closely related key of A minor and also follows sonata principle. The first theme, which begins humbly with an arpeggio on the tonic triad, enters canonically in each of the four instruments until a half cadence is reached. At this point, the second theme enters more cheerfully in the relative key of C major. The development section here is as brief as the development of the first movement had been. The recapitulation enters subtly with the arpeggio in the first violin. Dramatically, we hear the second theme, once so hopeful, transposed into the minor. The third movement, *Tempo di Minuetto*, is longer than either of the preceding movements. In ternary form, the A section is in F major with an intersecting B section in the parallel minor. Motives from the first two movements reoccur here, interspersed with new ideas, to give the quartet an element of circularity. Overall, the sound is witty and carefree.



About Jackson. Jackson Harmeyer is a graduate student pursuing his master's degree in musicology at the University of Louisville where, in April 2017, he was awarded the Gerhard Herz Music History Scholarship. Previously, Jackson graduated *summa cum laude* from the Louisiana Scholars' College in Natchitoches, Louisiana following the completion of his undergraduate thesis, "Learning from the Past: The Influence of Johann Sebastian Bach upon the Soviet Composers." From 2014 to 2016, Jackson served as director of the successful chamber music series, Abendmusik Alexandria, and since that time has remained concert annotator for presenters of classical music across Louisiana. His current research interests include French spectral music and the compositions of Kaija Saariaho. He recently shared this research in March 2018 at the American Musicological

Society South-Central Chapter's annual meeting in Asheville, North Carolina. Also a composer, Jackson has worked to integrate the vocabulary and grammar of modern music into compositions which are not only innovative but also engaging to the general listener. His compositions have been performed at the Sugarmill Music Festival and New Music on the Bayou.

Read additional program notes by Jackson at www.JacksonHarmeyer.com.