Ames Piano Quartet

Borivoj Martinic-Jercic, violin
Joanna Mendoza, Guest Artist, viola
George Work, cello
Mei-Hsuan Huang, piano

Sunday, November 14, 2021
7:30 pm
Martha-Ellen Tye Recital Hall
Program

Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op.16
   Grave-Allegro, ma non troppo
   Andante cantabile
   Rondo: Allegro, ma non troppo

Ludwig van Beethoven
   (1770-1827)

Quartet in D Major, Op. 23
   Allegro moderato
   Andantino
   Finale: Allegretto scherzando

Antonin Dvorak
   (1841-1904)

Intermission

Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 47
   Sostenuto assai--Allegro ma non troppo
   Scherzo: Molto vivace
   Andante cantabile
   Finale: Vivace

Robert Schumann
   (1810-1856)
Program Notes

Composed in 1796, Beethoven's *Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 16* for piano and strings stands beside his three piano trios Op. 1 and six string quartets Op. 18 as the master's first chamber music masterpieces. Beethoven simultaneously wrote a version of this work concurrently under the same opus number. A close examination of the two reveals few differences. Indeed, the piano part is identical. Most noticeably different are the string solos in the second movement, which are far more florid than their counterparts in the wind version.

The Quartet opens with a dignified and stately Grave that gives way to a spirited sonata-style first movement. The Andante cantabile is a remarkable rondo in which the theme returns three times in the piano, each time more florid and ethereal, which alternates with deeply expressive and plaintive solos for the respective string instruments, mentioned above. The third movement is another rondo, emphasizing the virtuosity of the pianist.

The D major *Piano Quartet* of Antonin Dvorak was written in 1875 when the composer was 34 years old. It preceded his “breakthrough” to international prominence, brought about by the publication of the *Slavonic Dances*, by several years. His situation at the beginning of that year had been somewhat uncertain, both financially and in terms of reputation, but in February he received the Austrian State Prize for his third and fourth symphonies, which buoyed his confidence greatly. He subsequently produced a series of notable works, including the string *Serenade*, the opera *Vanda* and the present *Quartet* among others.

Formally ambitious, experimental and filled with the characteristically sunny melodies that are Dvorak's hallmark, the *Quartet* breathes youthful optimism. The opening Allegro movement juxtaposes the home key of D major with B major, an unusual but highly effective choice. The second movement, a theme and variations in the related key of B minor explores a wide range of characters, including a surprising harbinger of the Cello Concerto in the penultimate variation. The final movement is the most adventurous formally, being an amalgamation of what would normally be two independent movements, a scherzo in triple meter and a duple finale. The resulting incongruity is triumphantly resolved in a rollicking coda that brings the piece to a joyful conclusion.

1840 had been, for Schumann, the year of song, during which he wrote *Myrthen; Dichterliebe*; both *Liedekreis* cycles; *Frauenliebe-und-Leben*; the *Kerner, Reinick*, and *Rückert* songs; and more. “I can’t free myself from vocal music,” he wrote. There followed an intense reaction in favor of large, abstract instrumental works: 1841 saw, along with much else, the composition of both Schumann’s first symphony and of the first version of the noble work in D minor which we know as his fourth; and 1842 was, decidedly, the year of chamber music, giving rise to the three string quartets, the piano quintet, and the present piano quartet.

The *Quartet* has many delights, including the exuberant lyricism of much of the first movement, the interesting syncopations of the scherzo’s second trio section, the soaring lyricism of the third movement, and the headlong momentum of the fugal finale.
Biography: Joanna Mendoza

Noted for her “lush, sonorous and assertive tone” (NY Stringer Magazine), and “eloquent phrasing” (New York Concert Review), violist Joanna Mendoza has performed throughout North America, South America, Europe and South Africa and has given master classes in Beijing, China. Summer festival appearances include Interlochen Arts Camp, Madeline Island Music Camp, Killington Music Festival, Mammoth Lakes Chamber Music Festival, and Bellingham Festival of Music.

Joanna Mendoza is the violist of the Arianna String Quartet and Associate Professor of Viola at the University of Missouri - St. Louis. Their national and international performances have been praised for their “emotional commitment and fluent virtuosity,” (Pretoria News) and “tonal warmth, fastidious balance...expressive vitality” (Chicago Tribune). The Arianna Quartet can be heard on National Public Radio’s “Performance Today,” and “Live from Music Mountain” which broadcasts to 125 stations in the U.S. and to 25 countries. Current projects include a long-term, multi-disc recording contract with Centaur Records and a concert tour in South Africa in August 2013.

Prior to joining Arianna Quartet, Ms. Mendoza performed with the Harrington String Quartet for 10 years. During that time, they premiered “String Circle,” a viola quintet by composer/violist Kenji Bunch, commissioned and written for Ms. Mendoza. The Harrington Quartet was featured in a PBS television documentary, “A Sound Collaboration-The Harrington String Quartet,” and recorded the complete string quartets of Daniel McCarthy on the Albany Record label.

Ms. Mendoza earned her degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she studied with members of the Pro Arte Quartet and at the Juilliard School where she studied with William Lincer and the Juilliard Quartet. She plays a viola made by Christophe Landon in 1991.