

**Smithsonian American Art Museum Steinway Series**  
**McEvoy Auditorium**  
**3 PM March 14, 2010**

Program notes by Bonnie Jo Dopp

**Leon Kirchner**                      **String Quartet No. 4 (2006)**  
(1919–2009)

Works from artists in all fields may fall into stylistic periods that reveal their times. In his *New York Times* obituary on Leon Kirchner, Anthony Tommasini wrote that the composer's four string quartets are good signposts for his changing expressive tastes:

The first quartet, from 1950, though full of jazzy restlessness and spacious lyricism, is awash in the sound world and gritty harmonic idiom of Bartók. The second, from 1958, is steeped in Schoenberg. The third, from 1966, scored for string quartet and tape, which pits episodic, fitful string music against cool, unruffled electronic sounds, earned Mr. Kirchner the Pulitzer Prize for Music. The fourth, from 2006, a tumultuous, compact piece of just 12 minutes, ingeniously synthesizes diverse strands of Mr. Kirchner's language.

Mr. Kirchner himself wrote:

In the Fourth Quartet I pursued ... [an] intricate and profound connection between past and present, and, utilizing what I have learned concerning the characteristic elements of contemporary music, I have experimented with the idea that Schoenberg tossed out: "One can write a masterpiece in C." Whether this is possible or not, it is certainly a worthy trial .... Whether or not this is successful in my piece is unknown to me at present. It was a seductive idea, one that I have been pursuing of late, to possibly reveal the necessary intimacies between the past and present which keep the art of music alive and well.

This energetic, succinct one-movement work, written 198 years after Beethoven's Op. 70 trios (and which certainly does not sound like your grandmother's key of C Major), was jointly commissioned by the La Jolla Music Society for SummerFest, Kirshbaum/Demler Associates on behalf of Orion String Quartet, Santa Fe Music Festival, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and Philadelphia Chamber Music Society.

The URL for a recording, along with Leon Kirchner's full note on his fourth string quartet, is:

[http://www.schirmer.com/Default.aspx?TabId=2420&State\\_2874=2&workId\\_2874=35423](http://www.schirmer.com/Default.aspx?TabId=2420&State_2874=2&workId_2874=35423)

**Ludwig van Beethoven**                      **Piano Trio in E Flat Major, Op. 70, No. 2 (1808)**  
(1770–1827)

In a review of a German book titled *1808: ein Jahr mit Beethoven*, music scholar Barry Cooper wrote:

If one had spent an imaginary year with Beethoven in 1808 as a kind of fly-on-the-wall observer, one would have witnessed much activity that still leaves traces today. ... He spent much of his time that year sketching the 'Pastoral' Symphony and two piano trios and writing out their full scores. At the start of the year he was also finishing off his Cello Sonata Op. 69 and probably making a few adjustments to the score of the Fifth Symphony.... Other activities that kept him very busy in 1808 involved writing letters (nearly thirty survive); negotiating with publishers; playing the piano at concerts and privately; checking proofs; making new friends (notably [Countess] Maria Erdödy and Archduke Rudolph); renewing old friendships ... ; parting with others; ... and changing lodgings, moving from the Pasqualati House to Heiligenstadt, then Baden for the summer, before returning to Countess Erdödy's for the winter. Beethoven also devoted much time and effort trying to arrange a big public concert featuring his latest works: an effort that eventually succeeded on 22 December. Accounts of all these diverse activities could be assembled into a single narrative in a book that ... would be a useful contribution to Beethoven scholarship ... . An ideal title for that book would be *1808: A Year with Beethoven*.

Of course the book Cooper was reviewing already had that title, but he goes on to say that it does not resemble his ideal year-with book: that one is still to be written.

Perhaps a music-lover in the audience for any of the works Beethoven penned in 1808 will be inspired to take up the challenge: there were many relatively serene and perhaps some completely happy days for the composer that year; investigating them could be a pleasant task. Take, for example, Beethoven's comfort at being cared for by Countess Maria Erdödy while he composed the piano trios of Op. 70.

We do not know intimate details of their relationship, but the composer played the trios for the Countess during Christmas holidays in 1808, when he was living at her address. Someone from the same apartment house left a record of his impressions of these two works: "heavenly," "songlike," "the most lovely and most graceful [music] which I have ever heard; it uplifts and melts my soul every time I remember it." This witness said Countess Maria had a similar response and expressed it so enthusiastically that he enjoyed watching her almost as much as he did listening to the music.

This season, with the Op. 127 string quartet in the Left Bank Concert Society's second concert, we have already presented a Beethoven work in E-flat major, a key that seemed to express "the mellow, chivalrous side" of the composer, "the god of the golden lyre." His first piano trio, Op. 1, No. 1 (1794) was in that key, so we must be careful to cite opus numbers when we speak of his E-flat works for this combination of instruments. Op. 70, No. 2 is a 'second period' work – when chamber music pieces outnumber Beethoven's symphonies or piano sonatas. It is in four movements.

Poco sostenuto – Allegro ma non troppo

The first movement opens quietly, with a slow, dramatic introduction in four that leads to a spirited sonata allegro in 6/8. Rapid passage work develops the opening themes, which are slowly echoed in the Coda before the second tempo delivers the last delicately cheerful word. Beethoven asks the cello to begin many of the phrases of this movement and he gives the pianist's right hand a workout, with trills on every page.

#### Allegretto

Here two themes in variation alternate between C major, tiptoeing with elfin sprightliness, and C minor, stamping like a giddy garden gnome. They dance around their subjects, showing off their inventiveness, ending up with a friendly nod to each his own, as the elf flits off and the gnome jumps down.

#### Allegretto ma non troppo

This amiable extend-form scherzo (originally ABABA, but generally shortened to ABA by today's performers) is in A-Flat major. Its initial theme begins like the A-Flat piano sonata Op. 26 (1800) but there the tempo was much slower. The Trio section alternates strings and piano.

#### Finale. Allegro

Back in E-Flat major, this lively fourth movement presents everything we expect from classic sonata-form chamber music: development of several themes, rhythmic vigor, enough harmonic movement to hold our interest, a back-home again wrap-up coda. It brings performers and audience together in downright delight, as perhaps only toweringly good-mood Beethoven can.

For more:

A recording of Op. 70, No. 2 by the Castle Trio performing on historic instruments from the Smithsonian's collection provides listeners with a quieter, but no less lively, experience of this piece than modern instrument recordings. The group, whose cellist is frequent Left Bank Concert Society guest artist Kenneth Slowik, performs all the repeats in the third movement. Smithsonian CD ND036.

Free, printable score and parts for this trio are available online at [http://imslp.org/wiki/Piano\\_Trio\\_No.6,\\_Op.70\\_No.2\\_\(Beethoven,\\_Ludwig\\_van\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Trio_No.6,_Op.70_No.2_(Beethoven,_Ludwig_van))

**Arnold Schoenberg**  
(1874-1951)

**Kammersymphonie, Op. 9 (1906, rev. as Op. 9b, 1935)**  
**transcribed for piano quintet by Anton Webern, 1922-23**

Arnold Schoenberg wrote:

If people speak of me, they at once connect me with horror, with atonality, and with composition with twelve tones. Generally it is always forgotten that before I developed these new techniques, there were two or three periods in which I had to acquire the technical armament that enabled me to stand distinctly on my own feet, in a matter that forbade comparison

with other composers, either predecessors or contemporaries. ... The climax of my first period is definitely reached in the *Kammersymphonie*, Op. 9. Here is established a very intimate reciprocation between melody and harmony, in that both connect remote relations of the tonality into a perfect unity, draw logical consequences from the problems they attempt to solve, and simultaneously make great progress in the direction of the emancipation of the dissonance.” — *Style and Idea* (Faber, 1975)

Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, Op. 9 was written for 15 solo instruments in 1906, a century before Kirchner's 4<sup>th</sup> Quartet. Schoenberg later felt that in deciding to create a piece for such a small group, 'perhaps' he had foreseen future radio broadcasts where "a chamber orchestra would then be capable of filling a living-room with a sufficient amount of sound." Although he also speculated that he had considered the 'forbidding expenses' of rehearsing large ensembles, he created a full orchestra version of this work in 1935 as Op. 9b.

Anton Webern felt that his teacher's one-movement *Kammersymphonie* (which had shocked its early audiences in Vienna) had "the character of a chamber music composition." Schoenberg eventually asked Webern to make a quintet transcription of Op. 9 for piano, violin, and cello with either winds (flute and clarinet) or strings (violin II and viola). The wind version could then be played on the same program as his *Pierrot lunaire* with just the addition of a singer. Webern began work on the project in late 1922 and wrote to Schoenberg in January 1923 that he had finished it. This transcription is considered a testimony to Webern's careful craftsmanship and intimate knowledge of Schoenberg's music, and a significant contribution to the catalog of works for both composers. The wind version premiered in 1925 in Barcelona, with Schoenberg conducting.

At least six technical analyses of the structure of Op. 9 have been published, in addition to Schoenberg's own. In British music commentator Norman Lebrecht's judgment, Op. 9 "stands at a turning point in the history of music and can be analyzed to demonstrate what came before, and what upheavals would follow." One way of thinking about Op. 9 is that it progresses through typical symphonic movements (Sonata-Allegro, Scherzo, Slow movement, Finale) while also mimicking a sonata: Exposition, Development, Recapitulation, Coda. Words such as 'overlapping,' 'interlocking,' 'simultaneous,' and 'juxtaposing' appear often in discussions of the piece, in which Alban Berg discovered 19 separate themes. You will hear major and minor tonality in the work but not in the usual way. "Emancipating the dissonance" requires that expected dominant-tonic resolutions be frustrated.

Schoenberg himself designated these sections:  
Introduction – Exposition [with an E major key signature and in 4/4 time]  
Scherzo ['in 3' – three flats, three-quarter time, with a trio section in 2/2]  
Elaboration [development of what has gone before]  
Adagio [beginning with slow harmonics in the cello]  
Recapitulation and Finale [ending on an E-major chord]

For more:

Catherine Dale's *Schoenberg's Chamber Symphonies: the Crystallization and Rediscovery of a Style* (Ashgate, 2000) analyses both Op. 9 and the second chamber symphony, Op. 38.

Schoenberg's "Program Notes for the First Chamber Symphony" first appeared on the sleeve of a recording (Dial LP 2 – 1950) and is republished in Joseph Auner's *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life* (Yale University Press, 2003)

The Arnold Schönberg Center's program note for Op. 9 is posted in English at [http://www.schoenberg.at/6\\_archiv/music/works/op/compositions\\_op9\\_notes\\_e.htm](http://www.schoenberg.at/6_archiv/music/works/op/compositions_op9_notes_e.htm)

The concept 'emancipation of the dissonance' has its own entry on Wikipedia.

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