

Sundays with the St Lawrence

*St. Lawrence String Quartet with
Anne-Marie McDermott and Anthony Manzo*

WHEN:
SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 14, 2018
2:30 PM

VENUE:
BING
CONCERT HALL



Artists

St. Lawrence String Quartet

Geoff Nuttall, *violin*

Owen Dalby, *violin*

Lesley Robertson, *viola*

Christopher Costanza, *cello*

Anne-Marie McDermott, *piano*

Anthony Manzo, *double bass*

Program

Quartet in C-minor,
op. 18 no. 4 (1799–1800)

Allegro ma non tanto

Andante: Scherzoso quasi Allegretto

Menuetto: Allegretto

Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piece for Piano and String Quartet (1991)

O Sacrum Convivium (1937)

Praise to the Eternity of Jesus, from the *Quartet for the End of Time* (1940–41)

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)

—Intermission—

Sextet in D,
for piano, violin, two violas, cello, and bass, Op. 110 (1824)

Allegro vivace

Adagio

Minuetto: Agitato

Allegro vivace

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Sundays with the St. Lawrence is presented in partnership with Music at Stanford.

About the Program

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

When Beethoven wrote his Op. 18, his earliest collection of quartets, Vienna considered itself the string quartet capital of the world. He was already 30 by the time he completed the six quartets in 1800. He had carefully prepared the way with 17 publications, the majority of which included the piano, the instrument he played the best. When the time came to publish the Op. 18 collection, in two instalments the following year, Beethoven also released his impressive First Symphony and the first two piano concertos which he had been revising and polishing for some years. These publications in 1801 catapulted the young man from Bonn as a worthy successor, if anyone then doubted it, to his revered Viennese predecessors, Mozart and Haydn.

C minor was the key of choice when Beethoven wished to convey something of particular urgency and drama. And C minor is the key of today's quartet, the only quartet of the set in a minor key. The opening movement is full of driving force and purpose. Its architectural scope is broad and its two contrasting themes are closely related. The second movement finds Beethoven continuing to experiment with the inherited structure of the string quartet. It does double duty, as a moderately paced Scherzo in spirit and—with its light, precise scoring and dynamics—as the traditional slow movement it replaces. The three-note motif played at the very beginning by the second

violin recurs in countless contrapuntal webs, as Beethoven displays dry wit and conscious simplicity. The key of C minor brings more intensity to the Menuetto and the main weight of the quartet culminates in an impulsive finale, a rondo with a Hungarian feel.

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)

The sound-world of French composer Olivier Messiaen, one of the most influential of 20th century composers, is vast, complex and exotic. Its building blocks are multifaceted and bound together by the composer's devoutly Catholic beliefs—he was organist at the church of La Trinité in Paris from 1931 until his death over 60 years later. Messiaen's faith could summon spiritual certainty and eternal freedom, in the *Quartet for the End of Time*, even though he wrote it within the confines of a prisoner-of-war camp. On the other hand, his ten-movement *Turangalila* Symphony projects the most sensuous, joyous symphonic writing to be found in the 20th century catalog. In one of his last works, the short, single-movement, somewhat enigmatic *Pièce pour piano et quatuor à cordes* (Piece for Piano and String Quartet) which opens this afternoon's Messiaen set, brittle chords frame a fast and furious central section built around the song of one of Messiaen's favorite birds, the Garden Warbler. Birdsong is an integral element throughout Messiaen's music. On the one hand, he has spoken of it as a symbol of the resurrected soul in flight. On the other, it provides a springboard for the very rhythm, melody, timbre and structure of a score. The 1991 *Pièce* was one of 20 contributed by leading composers to celebrate the 90th birthday of the long-time head of the

Vienna-based Universal Edition classical publishing house.

From the early years of the French composer's career, the meditative *O Sacrum Convivium* (O sacred feast in which Christ is consumed) looks back to Gregorian chant. Heard without words, the hypnotic, rapt spirituality of Messiaen's only liturgical motet is laid bare. Its four lines, written in the luminous key of F-sharp major, appear to transcend time, as does the *Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus* (Praise to the Eternity of Jesus), for cello and piano. This is the first of two ecstatic paeans that anchor one of the seminal chamber works of the 20th century, Messiaen's eight-movement *Quartet for the End of Time*. The slow tempo of the movement, stretching of the pulse of the music and its feeling of finality disorient our expectations of how a piece of chamber music should unfold. "This is the subject of the Quartet," Messiaen's second wife, the pianist Yvonne Loriod said after his death. "At the end of Time, when the universe is no more, it will drift into Eternity. And this is the riddle that fascinated my husband."

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

As an adolescent, growing up in Berlin, Mendelssohn was a gifted all-rounder. He painted, he fenced, he wrote verse as well as a copious quantity of letters. By the age of 15, his main teacher, Carl Zelter, considered that he was ready to graduate. He said as much in a letter to Goethe, declaring him "a brother in the name of Mozart, Haydn and in the name of the venerable Bach." Mendelssohn wrote his Sextet a few weeks after this auspicious day, in a two-week period, between April and

early May, 1824. (Its high Opus number, 110, was assigned only when the work was published after the composer's death, in 1868).

The opening movement brims with musical ideas, shared between piano and strings, though the piano takes the lion's share. The strings are generally mellow and defer to the piano's more assertive, virtuoso writing. This is clearly a work that Mendelssohn wrote for his own fingers, as a concerto-like soloist in a chamber-music setting. The piano writing, rich in pearly scales, glittering arpeggios, and always busy in one register of the instrument or another, recalls that of Weber, who was one of his role models at the time. The *Adagio* is a quiet interlude, gentle and reflective, in the distant key of F-sharp, as though the young composer consciously realized that he needed a moment of calm amidst the surrounding turbulence. A minuet follows, too polite for a Beethoven scherzo and too agitated for a Haydn minuet. With the finale, we are back in the company of Weber, or perhaps Hummel. It is a brilliant movement, elegantly written and thoroughly spirited. The music builds and builds until we feel that a piano cadenza is around the corner—only to launch into a wholly unexpected revisiting of the theme of the minuet. It is an unorthodox move, with few precedents. Mendelssohn, however, was always keen to put an individual spin on classical precedents and went on to explore the idea of cyclical form in two of his three early piano quartets and the Octet of the following year. His sextet, to all intents and purposes a miniature piano concerto, concludes with a flourish.

—Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

About the Artists

St. Lawrence String Quartet

"Modern...dramatic...superb...wickedly attentive...with a hint of rock 'n roll energy..." are just a few ways critics describe the musical phenomenon that is the St Lawrence String Quartet. The SLSQ is renowned for the intensity of its performances, its breadth of repertoire, and its commitment to concert experiences that are at once intellectually exciting and emotionally alive. Highlights in 2018–19 include performances with pianist Inon Barnatan, and the long-awaited release of their recording of all six Haydn Op. 20 "Sun" Quartets.

Fiercely committed to collaboration with living composers, the SLSQ's fruitful partnership with Adams, Jonathan Berger, Osvaldo Golijov, and many others has yielded some of the finest additions to the quartet literature in recent years. The Quartet is also especially dedicated to the music of Haydn, and recording his groundbreaking set of six Op. 20 quartets in high-definition video for a free, universal release online in the 2018–19 season.

Established in Toronto in 1989, the SLSQ quickly earned acclaim at top international chamber music competitions and was soon playing hundreds of concerts per year worldwide. They established an ongoing residency at Spoleto Festival USA, made prize-winning recordings for EMI of music by Schumann, Tchaikovsky, and Golijov, earning two Grammy nominations and a host of other prizes before being appointed ensemble-in-residence at Stanford University in 1999.

At Stanford, the SLSQ is at the forefront of intellectual life on campus. The SLSQ directs the music department's chamber music program, and frequently collaborates with other departments including the Schools of Law, Medicine, Business and Education. The Quartet also hosts an annual chamber music seminar, and runs the Emerging String Quartet Program through which they mentor the next generation of young quartets. In the words of Alex Ross of *The New Yorker*: "The St. Lawrence are remarkable not simply for the quality of their music making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection."

Anne-Marie McDermott

For over 25 years Anne-Marie McDermott has played concertos, recitals, and chamber music in hundreds of cities throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. In addition to performing, she also serves as Artistic Director of the Bravo! Vail Music and Ocean Reef Music Festivals, as well as Curator for Chamber Music for the Mainly Mozart Festival in San Diego.

Recent international highlights include a performance of Schumann's piano concerto with the Sao Paulo Symphony at the Cartagena Festival and an all-Haydn recital tour of China. Ms. McDermott gave special performances of works by Charles Wuorinen in New York and at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., in celebration of the composer's seventy-fifth birthday.

Ms. McDermott has performed with many leading orchestra including the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota

Orchestra, Dallas Symphony, Columbus Symphony, Seattle Symphony, National Symphony, Houston Symphony, Colorado Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, League of American Composers, Moscow Virtuosi, Hong Kong Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and Baltimore Symphony, among others. Ms. McDermott has toured with the Australian Chamber Orchestra and the Moscow Virtuosi.

Anthony Manzo

Despite the inherent challenges of travel with a double bass, Anthony Manzo remains a sought-after chamber musician, performing at such noted venues as the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall; Spoleto Festival USA in Charleston, South Carolina; Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, Maine; and the Chesapeake Chamber Music Festival on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Mr. Manzo is also the solo bassist of San Francisco's New Century Chamber Orchestra and a regular guest artist with the National Symphony Orchestra and the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society near his home in Washington, D.C. Formerly the solo bassist of the Munich Chamber Orchestra, he still returns whenever possible to Europe to play, recently performing with the Camerata Salzburg in Austria in collaborations that have included the group's summer residency at the Salzburg Festival as well as two tours as double bass soloist alongside bass/baritone Thomas Quastho in Mozart's *"Per questa bella mano"* (with performances in Salzburg, Paris, Vienna, Budapest, and Istanbul).