

**IN ASSOCIATION WITH
DUKE PERFORMANCES
THE CHAMBER ARTS SOCIETY OF DURHAM PRESENTS**



QUATUOR AROD

SAT, FEB 6
VIRTUAL PERFORMANCE

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PROGRAM

*Quartet in F major, Op. 59,
No. 1, "Razumovsky"*

I. Allegro

*II. Allegretto vivace e
sempre scherzando*

III. Adagio moto e mesto

IV. Thème Russe: Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1824)

Schubert: *Quartet in D minor,
D. 810, "Death and the Maiden"*

II. Andante con moto

Franz Schubert

(1797-1828)

BEETHOVEN: QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 59, NO. 1

One of the remarkable facts about Beethoven's career is that he worked largely as a freelance composer — one of the first major figures to have done so. The op. 59 quartets are thus indebted to a commission: they were made-to-order works, written in 1806 for the Russian ambassador to Vienna, Count Andreas Razumovsky. To honor the Count, the first quartet's finale is based on a Russian theme that emerges from a work brimming with coolness and poise.

Against all odds, the Allegro begins with its main theme in the cello's baritone range — a bold aural choice, especially since it deprives the texture of a stable bass. In its place, though, we are treated to a particularly mellifluous line that quickly multiplies into other passages of smoothly flowing sound. Indeed, this emphasis on flow is a hallmark of the movement as a whole. Bucking tradition, a repeat of the opening section isn't even suggested, with Beethoven instead focusing on forward development and transformation. Most of the movement is occupied with a free exploration of ideas, leading through many keys, a brief flirtation with fugal counterpoint, and an eventual proper return of the opening material. But so elegant are the transitions that all of this is made to be felt as one grandiose and expressive statement.

Repeated notes were a textural feature of the first movement, but in the second they become a real thematic element. Presented in a martial rhythm, they signal a severe shift in tone. The Allegretto is blocky, skittish, and disconnected, all traits that completely invert the motives of the Allegro. Gradually, the form does smooth itself out, creating an ersatz mirror of the first movement's shape, but the music never shakes completely free from its compartmentalized approach to things.

A flowing approach returns for the third movement, but with a dark turn. Marked *Adagio molto e mesto* — very slow and sad — the quartet finds itself in the deep-hued world of F Minor. Emphasis is placed on lyricism and formal continuity, as in the first movement, but the new dramatic context changes the effect. Rather than come across as an act of continuous growth, there is instead a sense of anguish that emerges. Occasional excursions to major keys help offset the negative feelings, but they are passing oases, and the music seems determined to plumb its emotional depths.

Until the finale! A quick turn of temper and some sparkly trills lead without break to the concluding Allegro. Based on a Russian theme, Beethoven once again explores the premise of formally unconstrained music. The movement is wide-ranging in its tonal and dramatic scope, but with the opposite intentions of the Adagio. Here the goal is a celebratory conclusion; one earned by much hard work, and an extraordinarily rich musical discourse.

SCHUBERT: STRING QUARTET NO. 14 IN D MINOR, D. 810 ("DEATH AND THE MAIDEN")

Composed in 1824, Schubert's second-to-last quartet is often cast against his impending demise. For some time, he'd been contending with a terminal illness, generally believed to have been syphilis. The extent to which this influenced his music, however, is debatable. Schubert was often in good spirits, and displayed great optimism during periods of remission. We also know that he was adept at keeping his own personal emotions separate from those embedded in his music; rarely are his works explicitly autobiographical. Whatever his inner motivations may have been, the quartet is one of his most dramatic and profound offerings. It greatly expands the usual expectations of the genre, in terms of both technique and content, while remaining deeply indebted to accepted conventions.

The second movement, marked *Andante con moto*, is based on a theme of harrowing starkness. Derived from Schubert's song "Der Tod und das Mädchen," D. 531 — literally, "Death and the Maiden," and the source of the quartet's nickname — it initiates a set of variations in G Minor that each work to amplify attributes of this opening material. The first two follow a classical convention of increasing the rate of rhythmic activity, with the second also serving as a lyric cello feature. It leads into the aggressive and swaggering third variation, which drums up a remarkable quantity of rhythmic energy. G Major, a beacon of hope, is invoked for contrast during variation four. Almost pastoral in nature, it leads seamlessly into the fifth and final variation. Initially, it seems preoccupied with vehemently reasserting the theme's minoriness. But eventually the variation undergoes a transformation that is also borrowed from the source song. As the dynamics sink low, the harmonies turn once again to G Major. In the original, this harmonic gesture accompanies Death's invitation to a soft and gentle sleep. Here, the meaning is similar: harmonic anxieties are disarmed and peace is found with the movement's final cadence.

QUATUOR AROD

With all four members only in their twenties, the Paris-based **Arod Quartet** has already dazzled awestruck chamber-music lovers in concerts at such prestigious venues as the Auditorium of the Louvre in Paris and the Verbier Festival in Switzerland. The Arod quickly skyrocketed to international attention when they won the coveted First Prize of the 2016 ARD International Music Competition in Munich, having already taken First Prize at the Carl Nielsen Chamber Music Competition in Copenhagen. In April 2019 the Quartet undertook its American debut tour, which featured its inaugural Carnegie Hall performance – one of the only European chamber ensembles ever to make its Carnegie Hall debut on its first trip to the United States.

Honored with a rare multi-record contract, the Arod Quartet records exclusively for Erato Warner Classics, which released their debut Mendelssohn album in Fall 2017; they joined the prestigious BBC New Generation Artists' roster that same year.

Previous seasons have seen the Arod Quartet – which was named the ECHO Rising Star during the 2018-19 season – perform at the Auditorium of the Louvre, the Philharmonie de Paris, London's Wigmore Hall and Barbican Centre, Salzburg's Mozarteum, the Konzerthaus in Vienna, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, the Oji Hall of Tokyo, and the Berlin Philharmonia.

Their teachers include Mathieu Herzog and Jean Sulem; the group currently serves as the artist-in-residence at the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Brussels with the Artemis Quartet. In recent years the Arod has worked very closely with the Ebène Quartet and the Diotima Quartet, and has collaborated with Alexandre Tharaud, Martin Fröst, and Amihai Grosz, the founding member of the Jerusalem Quartet and now the principal violist of the Berlin Philharmonic. Their sophomore album, a recording of Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, and Webern with the soprano Elsa Dressing, was released in Fall 2019 (Erato Warner Classics).

The group takes its name from Legolas's horse in J.R.R. Tolkien's epic *Lord of the Rings* trilogy; in Tolkien's mythic Rohirric language, Arod means 'swift.' Mécénat Musical Société Générale is the Arod's principal sponsor, and the ensemble is the 2016 HSBC Laureate of the Académie du Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. Jordan Victoria and Alexandre Vu are loan recipients of composite Stradivari and Guaragnini violins through the Beare's International Violin Society.



Alsarah talking to students at Durham School of the Arts.

Last season, **Duke Performances** held over 100 residency events with visiting artists, reaching over 2,000 Duke students and 2,000 members of the Durham community through class visits, public conversations, master classes, workshops, and pop-up concerts, as well as K-12 engagement with Durham Public Schools.

For 2020/21, this work continues in virtual form, through free online series such as 'In Conversation' and special engagements for students and teachers throughout the district.

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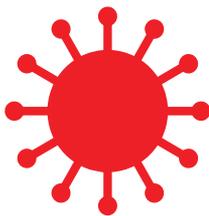
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