

THE MANDELRING IN MANILA

27 September 2017, 7.30pm
Cultural Center of the Philippines, Little Theater

Mandelring Quartet
Sebastian Schmidt, violin I
Nanette Schmidt, violin II
Andreas Willwohl, viola
Bernhard Schmidt, cello

PROGRAMME

PART I

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

String Quartet in C major, K 465 (“Dissonanzen-Quartett”)

1. Adagio—Allegro
2. Andante cantabile
3. Menuetto (Allegro)—Trio
4. Allegro molto

Jeffrey Ching (1965-)

Quartett-Dissonanzen

Adagio molto—Lentissimo—Fuga I (Allegro)—Fuga II (Allegro)—♩ = 72-92

WORLD PREMIERE

INTERVAL

PART II

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96 (“American”)

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Lento
3. Molto vivace
4. Finale: Vivace ma non troppo

PROGRAMME NOTES

by Jeffrey Ching

The 29-year-old Mozart completed his notorious “*Dissonance*” *Quartet* in Vienna on 14th January 1785, the last of the series of six quartet masterpieces inspired by and dedicated to his friend Joseph Haydn:

To my dear friend Haydn,

A father who had resolved to send his children out into the great world took it to be his duty to confide them to the protection and guidance of a very celebrated Man, especially when the latter by good fortune was at the same time his best Friend. Here they are then, O great Man and dearest Friend, these six children of mine. They are, it is true, the fruit of a long and laborious endeavor, yet the hope inspired in me by several Friends that it may be at least partly compensated encourages me, and I flatter myself that this offspring will serve to afford me solace one day. You, yourself, dearest friend, told me of your satisfaction with them during your last Visit to this Capital. It is this indulgence above all which urges me to commend them to you and encourages me to hope that they will not seem to you altogether unworthy of your favour. May it therefore please you to receive them kindly and to be their Father, Guide and Friend! From this moment I resign to you all my rights in them, begging you however to look indulgently upon the defects which the partiality of a Father's eye may have concealed from me, and in spite of them to continue in your generous Friendship for him who so greatly values it, in expectation of which I am, with all of my Heart, my dearest Friend, your most Sincere Friend,

W.A. Mozart

The four movements comprise highly varied and contrasting character studies—juxtaposing elements of dance, aria, and imitative counterpoint—but tightly unified deep beneath their apparently schizophrenic surface by the fundamental opposition of perfect fifths and chromatic scales. This dichotomy is already the main subject matter of the famous *Adagio* introduction, along with Haydn’s *Representation of Chaos* (1797-98) the most celebrated example of ‘avant-garde’ harmony in Viennese Classicism.

My *Quartett-Dissonanzen* (“Quartet Dissonance”) was composed in Berlin between 8th December 2016 and 18th January 2017, and is dedicated to the Mandelring Quartet. The title reverses the nickname of Mozart’s “*Dissonance*” *Quartet* (*Dissonanzen-Quartett*), to which *Quartett-Dissonanzen* furnishes an analytical commentary of about 24 minutes’ duration. The ‘*Dissonanzen*’ in question are largely concentrated in Mozart’s 22-bar *Adagio* introduction, and are subjected in *Quartett-Dissonanzen* to a close scrutiny:

- Mozart’s dissonances and false relations turn out to conceal stacked perfect fifths (e.g., in the first instance C-G-D-A);
- the main themes of all four movements in fact grow out of these hidden fifths; and—
- the organic relationship of these themes to the *Adagio* makes it logical to combine them not only with it, but also with each other.

These features are successively demonstrated in a ‘quartet’ of movements, first in an extended re-composition of Mozart’s *Adagio* incorporating motifs from all his four movements, then in a pair of quadruple fugues (the second an exact inversion of the first) combining the five main themes of those movements. There follows an aleatory coda, dissolving the original *Adagio* into its constituent fragments. The coda is the only part of the work that alludes to the composer’s Chinese ancestry, though not audibly: the freedom of

the interpreters is restricted by the numerical sequences of the Daoist *Hetu* (a diagram allegedly discovered on the back of a river tortoise by the legendary Emperor Yü in the third millennium BC).

Dvořák's so-called "American" Quartet, Op. 96, has only two indisputably American things about it: First, it was written in the United States in 1893, while Dvořák was on summer vacation as director of the National Conservatory, New York. But it was a summer spent among the Czech immigrant community in Spillville, Iowa, not among Americans, Native or otherwise, so in a sense the pentatonic and Dorian colouring of the quartet could just as well be called 'Czech', or 'Chinese', as 'American'. Second, virtually the whole of the third movement is derived from the call of an American songbird, the scarlet tanager—although its incessant chirping was actually a source of annoyance, not delight, to the composer.

The joviality of the first movement tends to mask its own cleverness: the derivation of the second subject from a free retrograde of the first subject, the compressed but extremely varied development, the symmetrical arrangement of unclassical tonalities (I-III closing as VI^b-I).

By contrast the second movement is, from beginning to end, a subtly harmonised song of mystical inspiration, attaining even as it finishes new depths of pathos in the combination of the cello's bowed melody, the viola's tremolo, and the pizzicati of the violins.

The third movement as it progresses is revealed to be wholly permeated by its birdsong: three notes from it furnish the main theme; then it appears high in the first violin as a counter-subject to the main theme; then it moves to the lowest string of the cello in invertible counterpoint with the main theme; finally an augmented minor-key version of it supplies the double trio. The form is a rather unorthodox rondo: A-B-A¹-B¹-A, where B is the minor-key trio. A-B recur varied as their own development (A¹-B¹), then close with A exactly in its original form.

The folk-like material of the finale is not only ingeniously interconnected, but rich in allusion to older masters—and (whether intentionally or not) to Mozart's A major Quartet, K 464, and "*Dissonance*" Quartet, K 465, in particular. The second theme is a free inversion of the first, and appears first in A-flat and finally in D-flat, exactly the keys of the quiet, mysterious theme in the finale of the "*Dissonance*", with which it also shares an arpeggiated contour. The A minor theme of the middle section is an augmented minor-key version of the first theme (and therefore an augmented inversion of the second theme). Immediately preceding it is a beautiful canonic chorale which in location and mood is unmistakably redolent of the D major chorale from the finale of Mozart's A major quartet, K 464.

ON A MORE PERSONAL NOTE

"I first met the Mandelring Quartet backstage after one of their amazing concerts at the Berlin Philharmonie—it must have been around May 2015—and I was very happy to join them for a post-concert meal. We were introduced by a common friend, Dr Uwe Schmelter, a cultured and erudite man with a long connexion with the Goethe Institutes in Asia, and an enthusiast both of my work and the Mandelring's. He had a hunch that a relaxed social encounter could lead to a musical partnership, and he was right. I tremendously admire the profound and refined way the Mandelring has with both the classical quartet repertoire and

the powerful and original works by Shostakovich and others created on the peripheries of that tradition. And I think the Mandelring in turn were keen to collaborate with a living Asian composer many of whose works are deeply immersed in European tradition, but yet critically comment on it from a certain cultural and psychological distance. They were especially intrigued about a quartet I had written for the chamber music series of the Deutsche Oper Berlin in 2010, which developed motifs from Mozart's E-flat Quartet, KV 428, and readily accepted my suggestion that I compose for them a sequel derived from the same composer's famous *'Dissonance' Quartet.*"

Jeffrey Ching