

Tokyo String Quartet

with Geraldine Walther, viola
Max Levinson, piano

Sunday, January 19, 2003, 3 pm
Hertz Hall

TOKYO STRING QUARTET

Martin Beaver, violin
Kikuei Ikeda, violin
Kazuhide Isomura, viola
Clive Greensmith, cello

with guest artists
Geraldine Walther, viola
Max Levinson, piano

PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms Viola Quintet in G major, Op. 111
Allegro non troppo, ma con brio
Adagio
Un poco Allegretto
Vivace ma non troppo presto

INTERMISSION

Brahms Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34
Allegro non troppo
Andante, un poco Adagio
Scherzo: Allegro
Finale: Poco sostenuto

The Tokyo String Quartet has recorded for Angel-EMI, CBS Masterworks, Deutsche Grammophon, Vox Cum Laude, and BMG Classics/RCA Victor Red Seal.

Exclusive representation for the Tokyo String Quartet by Kirshbaum Demler & Associates, Inc.

The Tokyo String Quartet performs on the four Stradivarius instruments known as "The Paganini Quartet," generously on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation since 1995.

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Viola Quintet in G major, Op. 111

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

For many years, Brahms followed the sensible Viennese custom of taking to the countryside when the summer heat made life in the city unpleasant. In 1880, he first visited the resort of Bad Ischl in the lovely Salzkammergut region east of Salzburg, an area of mountains and lakes widely famed for its enchanting scenery (and in more recent years the site of the filming of *The Sound of Music*). There he composed the Academic Festival and Tragic overtures and the Piano Trio, Op. 87, cantankerously telling his friends that he was encouraged to such productivity because the

miserable weather confined him constantly to his villa. Two years later, however, he again chanced Ischl, again found the weather poor, and again composed; the String Quintet, Op. 88, dates from the summer of 1882. Brahms then stayed away from Bad Ischl until 1889, but thereafter it became his annual country retreat until his last summer, seven years later. In his biography of the composer, Walter Niemann explained the town's attraction for the composer: "Half of Vienna and the whole circle of Brahms' friends and acquaintances would gather here round the master as years went by, and so at rainy Ischl he felt quite secluded, and yet with much to stimulate him. He was particularly fond of making an excursion from Ischl to the lovelier, but even rainier, Gmunden, where he would visit his faithful friend Viktor von Miller zu Aichholz and his wife, Olga, in their splendid villa, surrounded by a great park. Here he would meet [the composer Karl] Goldmark, Eduard Hanslick, and other friends and colleagues from Vienna, or would bury himself in the great library with black coffee and his well-known enormous cigars, and he was treated by the Millers as one of the family." It was at Ischl during the summer of 1890 that Brahms composed what Niemann called "the most passionate, the freshest, and the most deeply inspired by nature" of all his works—the Viola Quintet in G major, Op. 111.

Brahms was 57 years old in 1890. By that time, he had acquired the great hedgerow of beard that is so familiar from the photographs of him in later life, a pronounced corpulence, and a feeling that he had "worked enough; now let the young people take over." When he submitted the score of the new quintet to his publisher, Fritz Simrock, in December 1890, a month after it had been premiered in Vienna by the Rosé Quartet, he attached a note to the manuscript: "With this letter you can bid farewell to my music—because it is certainly time to leave off." His dear friend and faithful correspondent Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, reminding him that his health was excellent and that he was at the peak of his popularity, wrote to him, "He who can invent all this [i.e., the Quintet in G major] must be in a happy frame of mind! It is the work of a man of 30." Still, Brahms was not to be swayed, and he announced his retirement as a composer. When he heard the celebrated clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld at Meiningen the following spring, however, his resolve was broken, and he again took up the pen to produce the resplendent valedictories of his last years: the Trio (Op. 114), Quintet (Op. 115), and Sonatas (Op. 120) for Clarinet; the Fantasies and Intermezzi for Piano (Op. 116–119); the Four Serious Songs (Op. 121); and the Chorale Preludes for Organ (Op. 122).

The critic and champion of Brahms' music Eduard Hanslick praised the Viola Quintet for "the beautiful warm-hearted solidity of the subject matter, the continuity of the sentiment, and the admirable conciseness of the form. More and more, Brahms seems to concentrate himself; more and more consciously does he find his strength in the expression of healthy, proportionately simple feelings. A full emotional life works in them without strain, without exaggeration. There is nothing of that self-

conscious rending to pieces, that mysterious tone-painting and 'dramatic' representation with which ambitious semi-geniuses of the present day furnish us even in the domain of pure instrumental music."

The opening Allegro is one of Brahms' typically masterful sonata forms, broad in scale and gesture yet enormously subtle and integrated in detail. The cello is entrusted with the task of announcing the main theme through a glowing but dense curtain of accompanimental rustlings from the upper strings. The complementary melody, almost Schubertian in its warm lyricism, is presented in duet by the violas. The development incorporates much of the thematic material from the exposition, but keeps returning, almost like a refrain, to the rustling figurations of the movement's opening. The earlier themes are recapitulated in heightened settings to round out the movement. When Max Kalbeck, the composer's friend and eventual biographer, said that this music reminded him of the Prater, Vienna's famed amusement park, Brahms replied, "You've guessed it! And the delightful girls there."

The Adagio is a set of three free variations based on a touching theme whose most characteristic gesture is the ornamental turn in its opening phrase. The following Allegretto serves as the work's scherzo, though in spirit it is indebted to the popular waltzes of his adopted Vienna that Brahms so loved. The finale combines elements of sonata and rondo, a formal procedure, perhaps borrowed from Haydn, that Brahms employed in several other of his important works.

Piano Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

Johannes Brahms

When Brahms ambled into his favorite Viennese cafe one evening, so the story goes, a friend asked him how he had spent his day. "I was working on my symphony," he said. "In the morning I added

an eighth note. In the afternoon I took it out." The anecdote may be apocryphal, but its intent faithfully reflects Brahms' painstaking process of creation, which is seen better perhaps nowhere in his works than with the Piano Quintet in F minor.

Brahms began work on the Quintet during 1862, the year in which he decided to leave his hometown of Hamburg, where he was frustrated by the slow advances in his professional life, to settle in Vienna. Originally the piece was cast for string quintet with two cellos, the same scoring as Schubert's incomparable Quintet in C major. In August 1862, he sent the first three movements to his friend and mentor Clara Schumann. On September 3rd, she replied: "I do not know how to start telling you the great delight your Quintet has given me. I have played it over many times and I am full of it." When she received the finale in December, she wrote, "I think the last movement rounds the whole thing off splendidly . . . The work is a masterpiece."

The violinist Joseph Joachim also received a copy of the new score from Brahms. At first he was enthusiastic, writing to the composer on November 5, 1862, "This piece of music is certainly of the greatest importance and is strong in character." After playing through the Quintet several times over the ensuing six months, however, he had reservations about it. "The details of the work show some proof of overpowering strength," he noted, "but what is lacking, to give me pure pleasure, is, in a word, charm. After a time, on hearing the work quietly, I think you will feel the same as I do about it." Brahms tinkered with the score to satisfy Joachim's objections, and had it played privately in Vienna, but decided that medium and music were still unhappily coupled.

By February 1863, the Quintet had been recast as a Sonata for Two Pianos, which Brahms performed with Karl Tausig at a concert in Vienna on April 17, 1864. The premiere met with little critical acclaim. Clara continued to be delighted with the work's musical substance, but thought that "it cannot be called a sonata. Rather it is a work so full of ideas that it requires an orchestra for its interpretation. [These were the years before the Symphony No. 1 appeared, when Clara constantly encouraged Brahms to write something in that grand genre.] These ideas are for the most part lost on the piano. The first time I tried the work I had the feeling that it was an arrangement . . . Please, remodel it once more!"

One final time, during the summer of 1864, Brahms revised the score, this time as a quintet for piano, two violins, viola, and cello, an ensemble suggested to him by the conductor Hermann Levi. "The Quintet is beautiful beyond words," Levi wrote. "You have turned a monotonous work for two pianos into a thing of great beauty, a masterpiece of chamber music." The Quintet was published by Rieter-Biedermann in 1865, and given its formal public premiere in Paris on March 24, 1868. Unlike the original strings-only version of the work, which he destroyed (Brahms was almost pathologically secretive about his sketches and unfinished works), he also allowed the Sonata for Two Pianos to be published in 1872, though not through normal channels but by Princess Anna von Hessen, to whom the score was dedicated.

Brahms' Piano Quintet in F minor, his only work for this combination of instruments, is perhaps the most serious and epic of his chamber music. It shows the confluence of styles that marks his greatest compositions: the formal strength and developmental ingenuity of Beethoven; the efflorescent counterpoint of Bach; the rich, chromatic harmony of Schumann. Also among the roster of influences in this piece must be counted the music of Schubert, about whom Brahms wrote to Adolf Schubring in 1863, "My love for Schubert is of a very serious kind, probably because it is not just a fleeting infatuation. Where else is there a genius like his?"

The opening movement—tempestuous and tragic in mood, not unlike the Piano Concerto in D minor, completed in 1859—is in a tightly packed sonata form. The dramatic main theme is stated immediately in unison by violin, cello, and piano, and then repeated with greater force by the entire ensemble.

The complementary theme, given in C-sharp minor above an insistently repeated triplet figuration, is more subdued and lyrical in nature than the previous melody. The closing theme achieves the brighter tonality of A-flat major to offer a brief respite from the movement's pervasive strong emotions. The development section treats the main and second themes, and, also like the Piano Concerto No. 1, ushers in the recapitulation on a great wave of sound.

The Schubertian strain rises closest to the surface in the tender second movement. The outer sections of the three-part form (A–B–A) are based on a gentle, lyrical strain in sweet, close-interval harmonies, while the movement's central portion uses a melody incorporating an octave-leap motive.

The next movement is one of Brahms' most electrifying essays. The Scherzo proper comprises three elements: a rising theme of vague rhythmic identity; a snapping motive in strict, dotted rhythm; and a march-like strain in full chordal harmony. These three components are juxtaposed throughout the movement, with the dotted-rhythm theme being given special prominence, including

a vigorous fugal working-out. The central trio grows from a theme that is a lyrical transformation of the Scherzo's chordal march strain.

The Finale opens with a pensive slow introduction fueled by deeply felt chromatic harmonies, exactly the sort of passage that caused Arnold Schoenberg to label Brahms a "modernist." The body of the movement, in fast tempo, is a hybrid of rondo and sonata forms, a formal technique that finds its roots in the music of Haydn. Despite the buoyant, Gypsy flavor of the movement's thematic material, the tragic tenor of this great work is maintained until its closing page.

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The Tokyo String Quartet has captivated audiences and critics alike since it was founded more than 30 years ago. One of the world's supreme chamber ensembles, the Quartet is comprised of violist Kazuhide Isomura, a founding member of the group; second violinist Kikuei Ikeda, who joined the ensemble in 1974; cellist Clive Greensmith, formerly principal cellist of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, who joined in 1999; and first violinist Martin Beaver, who joined the ensemble in 2002.

For the 2002–2003 season, the Tokyo String Quartet performs with pianist Alicia de Larrocha at New York's Carnegie Hall, the McCarter Theatre in Princeton (NJ), and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center in College Park (MD). The Quartet also tours with pianist Max Levinson to Boston, Atlanta, Berkeley, Orange Country (CA), and the Krannert Center in Urbana–Champaign (IL). Other US performances include Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, San Antonio, the Caramoor Festival, and New York's Tisch Center for the Arts. Internationally, the Quartet appears in Milan, Paris, Amsterdam, Beijing, Sydney, Istanbul, Toronto, Lisbon, Valencia, Madrid, London, Ljubljana, Berlin, and Dijon. The group also maintains its position as quartet-in-residence at Yale University, and its deep commitment to music education by giving performances and masterclasses at universities across the country.

The Tokyo String Quartet has released more than 30 landmark recordings, including the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, and Bartók. The ensemble's recordings of works by Brahms, Debussy, Dvořák, Haydn, Mozart, Ravel, and Schubert have earned numerous honors, including seven Grammy nominations. The Quartet has been featured on PBS' *Sesame Street* and *Great Performers*, CNN's *This Morning*, and CBS' *Sunday Morning*, as well as on the soundtrack for the Sidney Lumet film *Critical Care*.

Officially formed in 1969 at The Juilliard School, the Tokyo String Quartet traces its origins to the Toho School of Music in Tokyo, where the founding members were profoundly influenced by Prof. Hideo Saito. Soon after its creation, the Tokyo Quartet won First Prize at the Coleman Competition, the Munich Competition, and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions, and signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. The Quartet performs on "The Paganini Quartet," a group of renowned Stradivarius instruments named for legendary virtuoso Niccolò Paganini, who acquired and played them during the 19th century. The instruments have been loaned to the ensemble by the Nippon Music Foundation.

Martin Beaver (violin) is the newest member of the Tokyo String Quartet, having joined the ensemble in 2002. A prominent chamber musician, he was a founding member of two Canadian chamber ensembles: the Toronto String Quartet and Triskelion. He has appeared with the Boston Chamber Music Society and Bargemusic, as well as at Ravinia, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and Reizend Muziekgezelschap in Amsterdam. As a soloist, Beaver has appeared with the San Francisco Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Montreal Symphony, Toronto Symphony, National Orchestra of Belgium, and Portuguese Radio Orchestra, among others. He was a top prize-winner at the international violin competitions in Indianapolis and Montreal, and won a silver medal at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium. A former pupil of Victor Dachenko, Josef Gingold, and Henryk Szeryng, he has served on the faculties of the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, the University of British Columbia, and Peabody Conservatory of Music of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Beaver has recorded for the René Gailly, Naim Audio, Naxos, SM5000, and Musica Viva labels.

Kikuei Ikeda (violin) was born in Tokyo. He studied violin with Saburo Sumi (at the Toho Academy of Music) and Josef Gingold, and chamber music with Hideo Saito. While still living in Japan, he performed as soloist with the Yomiuri Symphony and Tokyo Metropolitan and Tokyo Symphony orchestras, and toured Europe as concertmaster of the Toho String Orchestra. Ikeda came to the United States in 1971. He studied with Dorothy DeLay and members of the Juilliard String Quartet at The Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student. Ikeda was a prize winner in the Mainichi, NHK, and Haken Competitions in Japan, the Washington International Competition for Strings in Washington (DC), and the Vienna da motta in Portugal. He has played the Mozart Violin

Concerto with the Aspen Chamber Orchestra; given many recitals in Italy, New York, and Tokyo; and performed chamber music with numerous ensembles.

Kazuhide Isomura (viola) is a graduate of the Toho Academy, where he studied with Jeanne Isnard, Kenji Kobayashi, and Hideo Saito. Upon his arrival in this country, he became assistant concertmaster of the Nashville Symphony, but his love of chamber music and the violin led him to The Juilliard School where, on full scholarship, he studied violin with Ivan Galamian and Paul Makanowitsky, chamber music with Robert Mann and Raphael Hillyer, and viola with Walter Trampler. Isomura is a founding member of the Tokyo String Quartet. He also records solo viola repertoire for MusicMasters/Musical Heritage Society.

Clive Greensmith (cello) joined the Quartet in June 1999. A graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music, he has held the position of principal cellist of London's Royal Philharmonic and has appeared as guest principal cellist with the Philharmonia and English Chamber Orchestras. He is a frequent guest at many international festivals, including Aspen, Marlboro, Montpelier, Aldeburgh, and the Barossa Festival in Australia. Greensmith has collaborated with distinguished musicians such as András Schiff, Midori, David Soyer, Claude Frank, and Stephen Isserlis, and has won several prizes, including second place in the first "Premio Stradivari" held in Cremona, Italy. Greensmith has served on the faculties of the Royal Northern College of Music, the Yehudi Menuhin School, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

Max Levinson's (piano) career was launched when he won First Prize at the 1997 Guardian Dublin International Piano Competition, the first American to achieve this distinction. He received overwhelming critical acclaim for his two solo recordings on N2K Encoded Music, and was awarded the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in March 1999.

Levinson has performed as soloist with numerous orchestras, including the San Francisco Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, and Los Angeles Philharmonic, and has worked with such conductors as Robert Spano, Neeme Järvi, Joseph Swensen, Jeffrey Kahane and Alasdair Neale. Recent recital appearances include concerts at the Kennedy Center, the Tonhalle in Zurich, Ravinia, and Boston.

Levinson's 2002–2003 season highlights include performances with the Colorado Symphony conducted by Pinchas Zukerman, the Oregon Symphony, and appearances with the Tokyo String Quartet in New York, Boston, Berkeley, Atlanta, Orange County (CA), Urbana–Champaign (IL), Saratoga (CA), and Sun City (AZ). In addition, Levinson will make recital appearances in Seattle (WA) and Dayton (OH), and will tour with the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival in the spring.

An active chamber musician, Max Levinson has collaborated with such renowned artists as Benita Valente, Richard Stoltzman, Young Uck Kim, Arnold Steinhardt, David Finckel, Daniel Phillips, Cynthia Phelps, Nathaniel Rosen, Carter Brey, Heiichiro Ohyama, the Tokyo String Quartet, and Marc Neikrug. Major music festival appearances include Mostly Mozart, Santa Fe, Marlboro, and Tanglewood.

Levinson garnered international accolades for his two solo recordings on N2K Encoded Music: Max Levinson, his debut recording of works by Brahms, Schumann, Schönberg, and Kirchner; and Out of Doors: Piano Music of Béla Bartók.

Levinson is on the faculty of the Boston Conservatory and is co-artistic director of the Janus 21 concert series in Boston. He lives in the Boston area with his wife, cellist Allison Eldredge.

Max Levinson's recordings are available on the N2K Encoded Music, Stereophile, Warner Classics/Japan, and Virtuoso Disklavier labels.

Geraldine Walther has been principal violist of the San Francisco Symphony since the 1976–77 season, having previously served as assistant principal of the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Miami Philharmonic, and the Baltimore Symphony. Walther was first-prize winner of the William Primrose International Competition in 1979, and she appears frequently with Bay Area orchestras and chamber music ensembles.

Among the works Walther has performed as soloist with the San Francisco Symphony are Mozart's Sinfonia concertante; Berlioz's Harold in Italy; Hindemith's Kammermusiken Nos. 5 and 6; and the viola concertos of William Walton, Walter Piston, Thea Musgrave, Alfred Schnittke, Bartók, Penderecki, and Telemann. She was soloist in the United States premiere of Toru Takemitsu's A String Around Autumn in 1990. In 1999, she performed the US premieres of both Peter Lieberson's Viola Concerto and, with SFS associate principal violist Yun Jie Liu, George Benjamin's Viola, Viola. Walther has recorded Hindemith's Trauermusik and Der Schwanendreher with the SFS for London/Decca.

Geraldine Walther studied viola with Michael Tree at the Curtis Institute and with Lillian Fuchs at the Manhattan School of Music. She has performed at the Marlboro Music Festival, the Eastern Music Festival, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and the Colorado College Summer Music Festival. Walther was selected by Sir Georg Solti as a member of his "Musicians of the World Orchestra," which performed in Geneva to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in July 1995. Her instrument, created by Lorenzo Storioni of Cremona in 1780, was purchased by members of the San Francisco Symphony's board of governors and is on loan to her from the SFS.

Representation for the Tokyo String Quartet and Max Levinson:
Kirshbaum Demler & Associates, Inc.
711 West End Avenue, Suite 5KN
New York, NY 10025