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**American String Quartet**

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2011 | 8 PM**

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*Program* AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

PROGRAM

Peter Winograd | *violin*

Laurie Carney | *violin*

Daniel Avshalomov | *viola*

Wolfram Koessel | *cello*

Quartet in B-flat Major, K. 458, "Hunt"

Allegro vivace assai

Menuetto: Moderato

Adagio

Allegro assai

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756–1791)

Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 12

Adagio non troppo; Allegro non tardante

Canzonetta: Allegretto

Andante espressivo

Molto allegro e vivace

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809–1847)

INTERMISSION

Quartet in D Minor, D. 810, "Death and the Maiden"

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

Franz Schubert

(1797–1828)

The AMERICAN STRING QUARTET is represented by  
Melvin Kaplan, Inc., 115 College Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401 [www.melkap.com](http://www.melkap.com)  
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# *Biographies* AMERICAN STRING QUARTET



## AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

Peter Winograd | *violin*

Laurie Carney | *violin*

Daniel Avshalomov | *viola*

Wolfram Koessel | *cello*

Internationally recognized as one of the world's finest quartets, the **American String Quartet** has spent decades honing the luxurious sound for which it is famous. The Quartet is celebrating its 35th anniversary in the 2010-2011 season, and in its years of touring, has performed in all 50 states, appearing in the most important concert halls worldwide. Their presentations of the complete quartets of Beethoven, Schubert, Schoenberg, Bartok, and Mozart have won widespread critical acclaim, and their MusicMasters Complete Mozart String Quartets, performed on a matched quartet set of instruments by Stradivarius, are widely considered to have set the standard for this repertoire.

Resident quartet at the Aspen Music Festival since 1974 and at the Manhattan School of Music in New York since 1984, the American has also served as resident

quartet at the Taos School of Music, the Peabody Conservatory, and the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. The Quartet's diverse activities have also included numerous international radio and television broadcasts, tours of Asia, and performances with the New York City Ballet, the Montreal Symphony, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. The 2009-2010 season featured the Quartet's debut at the prestigious Casals Festival, and in the summer of 2010 the Quartet returned to Beijing for its fifth residency at the Great Wall International Music Academy. The 2010-2011 season features a reprise of the Quartet's debut tour of Israel in 2009; after their inaugural visit, the American was immediately reengaged for concerts in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Tel Aviv.

Formed when its original members were students at The Juilliard School, the American String Quartet's career began with the group winning both the Coleman Competition and the Naumburg Award in the same year. Individually, the members devote additional time outside the Quartet's active performance and teaching schedule to solo appearances, recitals, and master classes.

# Program Notes **AMERICAN STRING QUARTET**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

## String Quartet in B-Flat Major, K. 458, “Hunt”

- I. Allegro vivace assai
- II. Menuetto: Moderato
- III. Adagio
- IV. Allegro assai

The subtitle of this quartet, “Hunt” (*Jagd* in the original German), is not Mozart’s invention, and is, in fact, a particularly poor choice. The obvious reference is to the fanfare-like opening of the quartet, despite the fact that the sound produced by the two violins is a far cry from the ringing tones of a brace of hunting horns. The notion of Mozart involved with a hunt also strains credulity; his indoors personality seems much better suited to sitting in stuffy salons than to riding off into wild forests. And if the performers bend the music in style or tone, to conform to the nickname, it can only destroy the work’s essential spirit.

The familiar opening phrase and the following episodes immediately establish the playful, good-humored mood of the first movement. The second theme, little more than a shake — a slow, measured, back-and-forth trill — is tossed from player to player in a game of four-way musical catch. The broad, deliberate Menuetto has a certain antique air about it. Carefully measured phrases conjure up visions of bewigged nobles carefully working their way through the intricate moves of this poised, dignified dance. A light, airy trio sounds like the dancers are now *sur les pointes*. It is the perfect foil for the heavier Menuetto, which is repeated to end the movement.

The fervid, even sentimental Adagio is the slowest movement in all the “Haydn” quartets. While most of the melodic burden is borne by the first violin playing a florid, much-ornamented line, the other instruments are sometimes involved with presenting independent contrapuntal melodies; more often they play an accompanying role. The final movement reestablishes the cheerful mood with which the quartet started. Cast in sonata form, the movement has three winning themes, one of which could be traced back to an old Austrian folk song. Mozart mixes, matches, and modifies the three tunes, and finally brings them back to a concentrated

recapitulation and a quick conclusion. Mozart finished the “Hunt” Quartet, probably the most popular of all the “Haydn” quartets, on November 9, 1784, less than two months after he began work on it.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

## Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 12

Adagio non troppo; Allegro non tardante  
Canzonetta: Allegretto  
Andante expressive  
Molto adagio e vivace

Mendelssohn started his three-year post-university tour of Europe by sailing to England in April, 1829. In a letter written to his sister Fanny on September 10, he said, “My Quartet (Op. 12) is now in the middle of the last movement, and I think it will be completed in a few days.” The work carries the lowest opus number of his quartets because it was published before Op. 13, which was actually written two years earlier.

The first movement of Op. 12 is a gentle outpouring of intimate, ingratiating melody. There are four significant musical ideas, all of which have a warm tender quality, thus creating a movement of rare poetic beauty. Mendelssohn models the second movement on the sixteenth-century *canzonetta*, a short, light vocal piece often in the character of a dance song, and substitutes it for the more traditional scherzo. The movement’s fairyland charm and daintiness have probably made it the most popular single movement of all six Mendelssohn quartets, and is particularly favored as an encore piece.

The *Andante expressive* sets out a cantabile theme that ends with a brief, improvisatory recitative for the first violin that Mendelssohn marks *con fuoco*, “with fire.” He then simply repeats the whole statement, although somewhat elaborated, ending with a three-note motto from the introduction to the first movement. The high-spirited finale starts out like a spirited tarantella, a fast, wild dance that was once believed capable of curing the bite of the tarantula spider. Prancing along with gay abandon,

# Program Notes

## AMERICAN STRING QUARTET

Mendelssohn weaves a number of motifs around the onrushing flow of notes. About halfway through, after a high note, the mood grows a bit more serious as the second violin intones the melody that it introduced in the first movement. But the vivacity of the tarantella is not to be denied, and the animation quickly returns. In the concluding coda, the character changes once more, as Mendelssohn transforms the first movement introduction into a march-like melody, along with other references to first movement themes. *Melvin Berger*

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

**String Quartet in D Minor, D. 810**

**“Death and the Maiden” (1824)**

Allegro

Andante con moto

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Presto

The D minor quartet is subtitled, “Death and the Maiden” because **Schubert** borrowed the theme for the second movement from his 1817 song, “*Der Tod und das Mädchen*” (“Death and the Maiden”). The short, simple lied tells of death gently coming to claim the life of a young girl who urges him, “Go on, oh, go on past me!” The melody that Schubert uses in the quartet is actually the quartet that has led several commentators to regard the entire work as an exposition of Schubert’s views on death, and the climax it reaches in the finale as a frenetic Dance of Death. More likely, Schubert borrowed the melody for musical rather than programmatic reasons; according to some evidence, the idea for basing the quartet on the song came from some friends who loved the melody.

The first movement starts with a tense, forceful motif, flung out twice like a bold, repeated challenge. The prominent triplet figure is heard throughout all the motifs that make up the first subject group and furnishes the motoric energy that carries the music surging forward. In the somber second movement, Schubert uses the theme he took from the song’s introduction as the foundation on which to build a set of five variations. The theme is perfect for the purpose; it consists of a simple repeated rhythmic

pattern with minimal melodic and harmonic movement, allowing the composer to add musical complexity and new expressive content in the ensuing variations.

The Scherzo opens with fierce, slashing syncopations, and the rhythmic drive does not slacken throughout the entire first part. There is an abrupt change of character in the trio with its tranquil, warmly sung cantilena line. Schubert brings the Scherzo back in a literal repeat to end the movement. Although the finale starts with a bleak, distant unison, it mounts to several climaxes of feverish gaiety. The high-speed rhythmic pattern derives from the old Italian dance, the tarantella, the frenzied steps of which were believed to counteract the poisonous effects of the tarantula spider’s bite. The movement is propelled forward with great energy and verve, culminating in the brilliant *prestissimo* coda.

Schubert composed the “Death and the Maiden” Quartet in March 1824. Its first performance, actually an unrehearsed reading, was on January 29, 1826, at the Vienna home of Karl and Franz Hacker, two amateur musicians. Schubert, who enjoyed playing viola in chamber music ensembles, could not participate since he was busy copying out the parts and making last-minute corrections. *Melvin Berger*

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