

# SANIBEL MUSIC FESTIVAL PROGRAM NOTES

## **Rolston String Quartet**

**Luri Lee, violin ~ Emily Kruspe, violin ~  
Hezekiah Leung, viola ~ Joshua Halpern, cello**

Saturday, March 7, 2020

~ PROGRAM ~

**Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, No.  
(H. III:74), "The Rider"**

*Allegro (non troppo)  
Largo assai  
Menuet: Allegretto  
Finale: Allegro con brio*

**Joseph HAYDN  
(1732-1809)**

**Quartet in A minor, Op. 13,  
"Ist Es Wahr?"**

*Adagio — Allegro vivace  
Adagio non lento — Poco più animato — Tempo I  
Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto — Allegro di molto Tempo I  
Presto — Adagio non lento — Adagio*

**Felix MENDELSSOHN  
(1809-1847)**

~ INTERMISSION ~

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

*Allegro  
Andante con moto  
Scherzo: Allegro molto  
Presto*

**Franz SCHUBERT  
(1797-1828)**

## **About Rolston String Quartet**

The 2018 recipient and first international ensemble chosen for the prestigious Cleveland Quartet Award from Chamber Music America, Canada's Rolston String Quartet continues to receive acclamation and recognition for its musical excellence. In 2016, a monumental year, it earned First Prize at the 12th Banff International String Quartet Competition (BISQC). In that same year, the Quartet's prizes included Astral's National Auditions and Grand Prize of the 31st Chamber Music Yellow Springs Competition. The ensemble was also a prizewinner at the 2016 Bordeaux International String Quartet Competition and the inaugural M-Prize Competition and named among CBC Radio's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30" in 2016.

On the heels of its Banff win, the Rolston String Quartet embarked on the BISQC Winner's Tour, taking it to Germany, Italy, Austria, Canada, and United States. The Canadian music web site *Ludwig van Toronto* wrote, "They performed with a maturity and cohesion rivaling the best string quartets in the world." In the 2017-2018 season, the Rolston hit the 100-concert milestone with performances throughout Canada, the United States, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and Israel. Highlights included the Smithsonian, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Koerner Hall, and Esterházy Palace in Hungary. The 2018-2019 season included debut performances at Carnegie Hall, Freer Gallery, Wigmore Hall, Chamber Music Houston, two major tours in Canada under the Prairie Debut and Debut Atlantic touring networks, and three European tours with engagements in Leipzig, Berlin, Lucerne, Heidelberg, Barcelona, Graz, and other music centers.

Rolston String Quartet began its two-year term as the Yale School of Music's Fellowship Quartet-in-Residence in 2017. The ensemble has also served as the Graduate Quartet-in-Residence at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and participated in residencies and fellowships at the Académie Musicale de Villecroze, Aspen Music Festival, Banff Centre, McGill International String Quartet Academy, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Robert Mann String Quartet Institute, St. Lawrence String Quartet Seminar, and Yehudi Menuhin Chamber Music Festival.

The Rolston's notable collaborations include performances with Andrés Díaz, Gilbert Kalish, Mark Morris, Arthur Rowe, Robert McDonald, Donald

Palma, Jon Kimura Parker, and Miguel da Silva, as well as songwriter Kishi Bashi and composers John Luther Adams and Brian Current. Primary mentors include the Brentano Quartet, James Dunham, Norman Fischer, and Kenneth Goldsmith. The Quartet received additional guidance from the St. Lawrence String Quartet, Barry Shiffman, Miguel da Silva, and Alastair Tait.

The Rolston String Quartet was formed in summer 2013 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity's Chamber Music Residency. It takes its name from Canadian violinist Thomas Rolston, founder and long-time director of the Music and Sound Programs at the Banff Centre. Luri Lee plays a Carlo Tononi violin, generously on loan from Shauna Rolston Shaw. Emily Kruspe plays a 1900 Stefano Scarampella violin, generously on loan from the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank. The Rolston String Quartet is endorsed by Jargar Strings of Denmark.

**Joseph HAYDN — Quartet in G minor, Op. 74, No. 3 (H. III:74),  
“The Rider” (1793)**

Haydn's first triumph in London ended in July 1792 and it took little effort for the venture's impresario, Johann Peter Salomon, to exact a promise from the lionized composer to return for another series of performances several months hence. The sixty-year-old Haydn spent the intervening time at home in Vienna, recouping his strength after the rigors of the London trip, composing, teaching a few pupils (including Beethoven), and attending to domestic matters, most pressingly seeing to the demand for new quarters of his shrewish wife (whom he referred to, privately, as the “House-Dragon”). Anna Maria had discovered a house in the Viennese suburb of Gumpendorf that she thought would be just perfect, she explained to her husband, when she was a widow. Haydn was understandably reluctant to see the place, but he found it pleasing and bought it the next year. It was the home in which, in 1809, a decade after Anna Maria, he died.

One of the greatest successes of Haydn's London venture was the performance of several of his string quartets by Salomon, whose abilities as an impresario were matched by his virtuosity on the

violin. Such public presentations of chamber works were still novel at the time, and their enthusiastic reception made it easy for Salomon to convince Haydn to create a half-dozen additional quartets for his projected visit in 1794-1795. Though composed for Salomon's concerts, the new quartets were formally commissioned by Count Anton Apponyi, who had come to know Haydn and his music when he married one of the scions of the Esterházy clan, the composer's employer for a half-century. Apponyi was an active patron of the arts in Vienna (he was a subscriber to Beethoven's Op. 1 Piano Trios), owner of a fine collection of paintings, a good violinist, and a founder and president of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, the city's principal concert-giving organization. The six Quartets, divided into two sets as Op. 71 and Op. 74 when they were published in London in 1795, were dedicated to Apponyi. Salomon had played them to great acclaim at his Hanover Square Rooms concerts the preceding year.

The most popular of the six Quartets is the Op. 74, No. 3 in G minor, known as "The Rider" because of the galloping rhythms in its outer movements. A gruff unison introduction opens the work. The cello initiates the dark-hued main subject, which is taken up by the other instruments before acquiring the galloping triplet rhythm that energizes much of the movement. The second theme, a dance-like strain reminiscent of the Polish mazurka, turns to brighter harmonic regions. The development section treats motives from the introduction and the second subject. A full recapitulation of the exposition's themes rounds out the movement. The hymnal Largo is simple in form — A (major) – B (minor) – A (decorated) — but profound in expression, "one of Haydn's most solemn utterances," according to his biographer Rosemary Hughes. This music found considerable favor among the composer's contemporaries, and it appeared in at least five piano arrangements during his lifetime. The cheerful elegance of the Menuet is balanced formally and expressively by the movement's somber minor-mode central trio. The sonata-form finale, filled with rushing figurations, unsettling syncopations, and dramatic contrasts, is a harbinger of the dawning Romantic age.

**Felix MENDELSSOHN — Quartet in A minor, Op. 13,  
“Ist Es Wahr?” (1827)**

Mendelssohn possessed a boundless curiosity and enthusiasm about all music, old and new. By age eighteen, he was intimately familiar with the Classical forms and idioms of Mozart and Haydn, and he erected upon them the creative precocities of his youth (including the magical Octet of 1825, perhaps the greatest piece of music ever composed by one so young), but he was also one of the leading Bach scholars of the time. His composition teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, director of the Berlin Singakademie, had guided him fruitfully through *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (whose contrapuntal intricacies he delighted in mimicking in his teenage works), and his musically knowledgeable maternal grandmother, who had known Bach's son Carl Philip Emanuel when she grew up in Berlin, obtained for him a copy of the rare, unpublished score of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1823 or 1824. Before the end of 1827, Mendelssohn had enlisted the town's best vocalists to rehearse the *Passion* and determined to perform it in public — the renewal of interest in Bach's music, and, indeed, the entire Baroque revival, date from that concert, on March 11, 1829 at the Singakademie. Complementing Mendelssohn's antiquarian strain was his interest in the most daring, avant-garde music of the day — the last works of Beethoven. In the years before his death, in March 1827, Beethoven explored uncharted continents of style and expression in his sonatas, quartets, *Missa Solemnis*, and *Ninth Symphony*, and Mendelssohn eagerly studied those amazing and challenging creations.

The *Quartet in A minor* that Mendelssohn completed on October 26, 1827 was the product of this entire congeries of influences — Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, plus, of course, his own genius — which were further inflamed by a *petite affaire de coeur*. The previous spring, shortly before matriculating at Berlin University, Mendelssohn had indulged in a short holiday at Sakrow, the Magnus family estate near Potsdam, and there he fell in love, at least a little. The circumstances, even the maiden's name, are

unknown, but he was sufficiently moved by the experience to set to music a poem of his friend Johann Gustav Droyson that began, “Is it true [Ist es wahr?] that you are always waiting for me in the arboreal walk?” The piece, published two years later under the title Frage (“Question”) as the first number of his Op. 9 set of songs, was woven as thematic material into the new A minor Quartet. The score was published in 1829 as Mendelssohn’s Op. 13.

The Quartet opens with a slow introduction whose A major tonality serves as an emotional foil for the tempestuous main body of the movement. Two arching phrases — the second soaring high in the first violin’s compass — preface the quotation of the searching motto phrase from *Ist Es Wahr?* recognizable by its long–short–long rhythm. The music’s tempo and energy are quickened by scurrying filigree before the viola initiates the principal theme, based on the motto rhythm. The cello posits a lyrical melody as the complementary subject. The scurrying phrases return to mark the onset of the development section, which is remarkable for the intensity of its counterpoint and its nearly febrile mood. The recapitulation serves both to return and enhance the earlier themes before the movement closes with an explosive coda that stops without resolving the music’s strong tensions. The deeply felt *Adagio* offers another paraphrase of the motto theme at beginning and end as the frame for the somber, densely packed fugal episode that occupies the middle of the movement. The third movement, titled *Intermezzo*, uses a charmingly folkish tune, daintily scored, in its outer sections to surround an ethereal passage of musical featherstitching at the center. Both ideas are deftly combined in the coda. A dramatic cadenza-recitative for the violin over tremolo harmonies, reminiscent of the fourth movement of Beethoven’s A minor Quartet, Op. 132, launches the finale. A clutch of highly charged motives is presented and worked out with great intensity as the music unfolds. The work closes not with a wail of tragedy or with a sunburst of redemption, but with a recall of the Quartet’s most introspective moments — first the theme of the *Adagio*, and then the introduction from the opening movement, bringing with it a final reflection upon the music and thought of *Ist Es Wahr?*

**Franz SCHUBERT — Quartet in D minor,  
“Death and the Maiden,” D. 810 (1824)**

When Wilhelmine von Chezy’s play *Rosamunde*, with extensive incidental music by Franz Schubert, was hooted off the stage at its premiere in Vienna on December 20, 1823, the 27-year-old composer decided to turn his efforts away from the theater, where he had found only frustration, and devote more attention to his purely instrumental music. The major works of 1823 — the operas *Fierrabras* and *Der häusliche Krieg*, the song cycle *Die schöne Müllerin*, and *Rosamunde* — gave way to the String Quartets in D minor (“Death and the Maiden”) and A minor, the A minor Cello Sonata (“Arpeggione”), several sets of variations and German Dances, and the Octet. At that time in Schubert’s life, composition may have been something of an escape from the difficulties of his personal situation. He was suffering from anemia and a nervous disorder as the result of syphilis and its treatment (mercury in the early 19th century!), and was constantly broke, living largely on the generosity of his devoted friends, with only an occasional pittance from some performance or publication. In March 1824, he poured out his troubles in a letter to Leopold Kupelweiser, a close friend recently moved to Rome: “In a word, I feel myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and whose sheer despair over this makes things constantly worse instead of better; imagine a man whose most brilliant hopes have perished, to whom the felicity of love and friendship have nothing to offer but pain; whom enthusiasm (at least of the stimulating kind) for all things beautiful threatens to forsake, and I ask you, is he not a miserable, unhappy being?” Schubert then quoted some forlorn lines from Goethe’s poem *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (“*Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel*”), which he had set in 1814: “*My peace is gone, my heart is sore, I shall find it never, nevermore*’ [are words that] I may well sing every day now, for each night on retiring to bed, I hope I may not wake again, and each morning but recalls yesterday’s grief.” Such anguish, however, did not seem to thwart Schubert’s creative muse, and the year 1824, when his physician was able to restore somewhat his health through regular mineral baths, a strict diet,

and confinement to his room, was one of the most productive periods of his life. Moritz von Schwind, the artist who captured so well the decorous atmosphere of the Biedermeier period and whose woodcuts for children were to inspire the third movement (“*Frère Jacques*”) of Mahler’s First Symphony sixty years later, reported on Schubert’s absorption with his creative activity at the time:

“Schubert has now long been at work with the greatest zeal. If you go to see him during the day he says, ‘Hello, how are you? — Good!’ and simply goes on working, whereupon you depart.”

The D minor Quartet (popularly subtitled “Death and the Maiden”) was largely composed in March 1824, immediately after the one in A minor had been completed. Though Schubert spoke of these works and the exactly contemporaneous Octet as preparatory exercises for a “grand symphony,” there is nothing tentative or unpolished in the structure, style, or expression of any of these splendid creations. Indeed, these compositions rank with the greatest instrumental works Schubert ever wrote — the D minor Quartet was described by Maurice Brown as “one of the supreme accomplishments of all chamber music.” The first movement opens with a bold, dramatic gesture, founded upon a pregnant triplet-rhythm motive, which Jack Westrup said represents “not acceptance of the world’s misery; it is rather defiance.” The opening motive is whipped to a considerable frenzy before the music quiets, pauses on two chords surrounded by silence, and then launches into the subsidiary subject, a lilting violin duet of contrasting lyrical quality. The development section is a compact and closely worked contrapuntal elaboration of the second theme. A rising wave of expressive tension leads without pause to the recapitulation, which is announced by a stark, barren octave splayed across all four instruments of the ensemble. The music gravitates toward the calmer region of D major for the return of the second theme, but then reverts to the agitated key and mood of the movement’s opening for its extended coda.

The sobriquet of the D minor Quartet — “Death and the Maiden” — is derived from the source of the theme of its second movement, a

song Schubert composed on a poem of that title by Matthias Claudius in February 1817. Claudius' brief text contrasts the terror of a young girl ("Pass by, horrible skeleton! Do not touch me!") with the mock-soothing words of death ("I am your friend. Be of good cheer! I am not fierce! You shall sleep softly in my arms!"). The song begins with a piano introduction depicting the solemn tread of death, continues with the maiden's music of panic and fear, and ends with the words of death set to the strains of the introduction. It is from the opening and closing sections of the song that Schubert borrowed the theme for the Quartet, which he worked as a set of five variations. The *Andante* is, at the very least, the expressive heart of this masterful Quartet, but Sir George Grove went so far as to call this deeply felt movement "the most poetical, the most mournful, the most *musical* thing in the world." The theme, more harmony than melody (and, therefore, the perfect subject for variations), is given in simple chorale texture by the ensemble. The opening variation is devoted to floating arabesques from the first violin. The cello's long, lyrical line is supported by a richly textured accompaniment in the second variation. The third variation is more energetic and vigorous in its rhythms, while the fourth migrates to the expressive purity of G major. The final variation combines lyricism with drama and recalls the triplet figurations of the opening movement before it draws to a sorrowful close.

The *Scherzo*, with its unsettling rhythmic syncopations and restless expression, reinstates the defiant mood of the first movement. Its main theme, bursting with tension and barely contained energy, has been interpreted by some commentators as a precursor to the swaggering Nibelungen theme in Wagner's *Das Rheingold*. The finale, a feverish *tarantella*, combines formal elements of rondo and sonata to close what George R. Marek called "the most consistently inspired and moving quartet that Schubert ever wrote."







