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Guest Artist Recital: The New Zealand String Quartet

New Zealand String Quartet

James Campbell

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**Ithaca College Concerts:
The New Zealand String Quartet
James Campbell, clarinet**

Ford Hall

November 16, 2010

8:15 p.m.

Program

String Quartet No. 13 in B flat minor,
Op. 138

Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906-1975)

Adagio, Doppio movimento, Tempo primo

Quintet for Clarinet & Strings,
K. 581

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Allegro
Larghetto
Menuetto
Allegretto con Variazioni

Intermission

String Quartet Opus 18, No. 2 in
G Major

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Allegro
Adagio cantabile, Allegro, Tempo I
Scherzo: Allegro
Allegro molto, quasi presto

Suite from the Sound
for string quartet & clarinet
(commissioned by James Campbell)

Allan Gilliland
(b. 1965)

Parry's Ground
Waltz for Mr. Evans
Sketches

Management for James Campbell: GAMI/SIMONDS, LLC

www.gamisim.com

Management for New Zealand Quartet: Jonathan Wentworth Associates, Ltd.

www.jwentworth.com

Biographies

The New Zealand String Quartet

With its dynamic performing style, eloquent communication and beautiful sound, the New Zealand String Quartet has forged a major career in the busy international chamber music field, earning the acclaim of critics and the delighted response of audiences. The Quartet has particularly distinguished itself through imaginative programming, insightful interpretations of the string quartet repertoire including cycles of composers' music from Mozart to Berg, and the development of an international audience for important new works from New Zealand composers.

Recent career highlights have included acclaimed debuts in London at Wigmore Hall and in New York at the prestigious Frick Collection. International tours and festival successes have taken the group to Canada and the US for twice-yearly visits as well as to Mexico, Korea, Australia, Scotland, Germany and the Netherlands, with debut performances planned in Poland and the Czech Republic. Much-loved by audiences in New Zealand, the engaging musicians of that country's premier chamber ensemble present over eighty concerts there and overseas each year.

The New Zealand String Quartet participates regularly in a number of international chamber music festivals, including recent appearances at the Festival of the Sound, Parry Sound, Ontario, Music Mountain in Lakeville, Connecticut and the Australian Festival of Chamber Music in Townsville, Queensland. Quartet members play a central role in the biennial Adam Chamber Music Festival in Nelson, New Zealand; two members of the Quartet are Artistic Directors of this Festival and the ensemble plays in many of the concerts of the two week event, working with international guest artists. In 2007 these included the Michelangelo Quartet and James Campbell, clarinet.

Dedicated teachers as well as performers, the group has been Quartet-in-Residence at Victoria University of Wellington, now the New Zealand School of Music, since 1991. In North America they have been artist/teachers-in-residence at the Banff Center, Quartet Fest West, and the Quartet Programme at Bucknell in Pennsylvania.

James Campbell, clarinet

James Campbell has followed his muse to five television specials, more than 40 recordings, over 30 works commissioned, a Juno Award for Stolen Gems [Marquis Records], a Roy Thomson Hall Award, Canada's Artist of the Year and the Order of Canada. Most recently, Campbell received The Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. This was given on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the accession of Her Majesty the Queen to the throne.

Called by the Toronto Star "Canada's pre-eminent clarinetist and wind soloist", James Campbell has performed in most of the world's major concert halls and with over 50 orchestras, including the London Symphony, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and the Russian Philharmonic. During the 2003–2004 season he performed with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Pops in the premiere of *Dreaming of the Masters*, a jazz concerto by Allan Gilliland, commissioned by the Edmonton Symphony and written for James Campbell.

Campbell has collaborated and performed with many of the world's great musicians, including Aaron Copland and the late Glenn Gould; as well as chamber music tours with over 30 string quartets, including the legendary Amadeus String Quartet, the Guarneri, Vermeer, New Zealand, St Lawrence, Fine Arts, and Allegri String Quartets.

Of Campbell's extensive discography many releases have won international acclaim. Most recent include Brahms's Clarinet Quintet with the Allegri Quartet, voted "Top Choice" by BBC Radio 3, the world premiere recording of Brahms's Sonata op. 120, no. 1 (orchestrated by Luciano Berio), with the London Symphony Orchestra (both on Cala Records), and the Sony Classical re-release of Debussy's *Première Rhapsodie*, with Glenn Gould.

Campbell has been the subject of numerous features and cover stories in *Clarinet Magazine* (United States), *Clarinet and Sax* (UK), *Piper Magazine* (Japan), *Gramophone*, and in the book *Clarinet Virtuosi of Today*, by British author and clarinet authority Pamela Weston. In 1984, James Campbell was named artistic director of the summer chamber music festival, *The Festival of the Sound in Parry Sound*, Ontario. As artistic director, Mr. Campbell has taken the festival to England on three occasions and it has been the subject of documentaries by BBC Television, CBC Television and TV Ontario.

Program Notes

Shostakovich: String Quartet No. 13 (Op. 138)

“The fifteen symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich amount to a secret history of Soviet Russia...The 15 string quartets are a private account of the torments of its greatest composer.”

--Norman Lebrecht

For many, Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich was the voice of Russian music during some of the most turbulent times the world has known, and when he died in August 1975, he was celebrated as one of the finest composers of the 20th century.

Shostakovich grew up in the flush of the Russian revolution and achieved international fame with the daring precocity of his First Symphony, performed before he was 21. His aim was to write ‘realist’ music, accessible, with a progressive edge, but this brought him into conflict with political leaders, who viewed art as a social force and a tool in brutal programs of suppression.

In 1936, Stalin stormed out of Shostakovich’s opera "Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk" and a Pravda article attacked it as ‘Chaos instead of Music,’ intimating that things could end badly for a composer of such a work. By now Shostakovich’s music was reaching millions of people and, with his fast-growing reputation, he had become a silent threat to the State and to Stalin and his henchmen. It is no exaggeration to say that “his life literally hung on the notes he wrote”.

The political background of Shostakovich’s life provided a huge canvas for his music, and the life he experienced is reflected in his compositions, with their juxtapositions of tragedy, wit, bleakness, beauty, darkness, humour, sarcasm, loneliness and savagery. At the same time, he remained committed to the Russian people, to express what they could not, the despair, anger, and ongoing desire for the freedom of their country.

It was only in 1936 after his Fifth Symphony that Shostakovich wrote his first string quartet. It was another six before he wrote a second. From then on, the quartet form became increasingly important as the means for expressing his private thoughts, as it had for Beethoven.

String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat minor, Op. 138 (1970)

Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony of 1969 is steeped in anguish and pessimism, and preoccupied with death. The melancholic mood permeates his final three string quartets (1970/4), composed in a world of pain and drugs as his health continued to fail, the music set in keys not usually associated with string writing.

Paul Epstein writes that by this time: "Shostakovich no longer bothered with masks or mirrors; the music seems beyond even technique or theory – masks, of course, in themselves. Its subjective unfolding makes formal analysis difficult – or unnecessary... It is extreme, at the edge of expression, on the brink of danger."

The one-movement Thirteenth Quartet was composed while Shostakovich was at a clinic at Kurgan undergoing periods of orthopaedic treatment, which temporarily restored some of the use of his hands. His mind turned increasingly inward as he faced his deepest thoughts and beliefs, and his musical language is compressed and communicated through deceptively simple means. There was no slowing down of his creative power but the early flamboyance has gone.

The quartet starts and ends with viola solos, the first, a strangely beautiful 12-note theme, the final, high B-flat in a crescendo in which the violins join to end the piece. Elsewhere, there are eloquent solos and duos, unconventional effects, thick chords, a 'jazzy' episode where the players produce various percussion effects, and, eventually, the devastating last note, that swells to bursting with the accumulating drama.

The Thirteenth String Quartet was dedicated to Vadim Borisovsky, the violist of the original Beethoven Quartet, who had recently retired as violist of the Beethoven Quartet. It was premiered by the Beethoven Quartet in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in December, 1970.

Mozart: Quintet for Clarinet & Strings, K. 581

The most original and beautiful of Mozart's chamber music with clarinet, the Quintet in A major for Clarinet, two Violins, Viola and Violoncello K. 581, has survived only in secondary sources. It was originally composed for Anton Stadler, a close friend of Mozart and one of the most famous clarinetists of his day, who used a basset clarinet with an enlarged bass register. Alas, this original version has not survived, although it has now been reconstructed despite textual problems which could not be solved definitively in the absence of any primary sources.

To Mozart belongs credit for introducing the clarinet into chamber music in fully fashioned, non-reticent, and mature use. There is no faltering in his handling of the instrument, nor any lack of appreciation. His fondness for the instrument is evident in the use he accorded it - one of his major contributions to trio literature uses the clarinet, and his later symphonic work and magnificent concerto show expertness in the realization of its capabilities.

Of all the orchestral instruments, the clarinet, with its warmth of tone mellowed by age, responds most favorably to association with strings. With its evenness of range and consistency of timbre, the clarinet fully blends as it passes through the various sections. On the other hand, no composer uses an instrument in order to hide its personality. Mozart achieves the musical paradox of combining, while also realizing the individual potential of the new color he joins to the string quartet. A warm, genial quality is caught by using the key of A Major, a polarity that is itself of sunny brightness. The fact that the clarinet is given leadership in projecting the work is managed adroitly, since the strings, although they give way to the foreign color, are nonetheless not accompanimental. This feature is heard in the opening movement, where a beautiful theme is introduced by the quartet and the clarinet then brought in by a gentle arpeggio passage - a technique so bound in with the clarinet as almost to be its entire profile. The cantilena of the second movement moves between the clarinet and the first violin; the other voices merely support. Two Trios are in the Minuet - the clarinet being withheld from the first, but taking over in the second. The last movement is a set of variations in which the clarinet technique, of bold leaps as well as swirling runs, is fully recognized.

This autumnal work, written when the shadows over Mozart's cruelly short life were ominously lengthening, is like some

glorious poem. The slow movement, in particular, is of a quiet, resigned sadness which makes us wonder at Mozart's ability to compose such music under such personal and professional vicissitudes. He was losing much of his former public; so it must have heartened him to hear a public performance at the Christmas concert given by Vienna's most prestigious musical organization, the "Tonkuenstler Societat", on December 22, 1789 with Stadler as soloist. -- H. C. Robbins Landon

Beethoven: String Quartet Opus 18, No. 2 in G Major

The G major, the briefest and seemingly least ambitious quartet of Op. 18, emerges as a charming and witty work, very close in style and temperament to the best examples of eighteenth-century Rococo chamber music. Despite its apparent light, happy character, though, Michael Tree of the Guarneri Quartet, among many other musicians, considers it the most difficult of all Beethoven quartets to perform. And Beethoven's notebooks reveal that the lightness was achieved only after a lengthy and arduous struggle, covering thirty-two notebook pages, to blend many disparate elements into a smooth, artistic creation.

The subtitle, "Compliments," comes from the opening of the quartet in which a series of short, balanced phrases of supple elegance conjure up, as described in Theodor Helm's 1885 book on the Beethoven quartets, an "eighteenth-century salon, with all the ceremonious display and flourish of courtesy typical of the period...with bows and gracious words of greeting." A gruff bridge passage, starting with a repeated note, leads to a second subject and a closing theme that are attractive, but not particularly distinctive. The development is devoted exclusively to the melodies of the first subject and the bridge. The original themes are brought back in the recapitulation, but this time they are treated with greater vehemence and more freedom.

The Adagio cantabile features the solo violin at first, with the other instruments playing secondary roles. Before long, though Beethoven takes the closing, cadential figure of this section, quadruples its tempo, and sends the music scurrying off in a parody-like Allegro interruption to the serious business at hand. Ending on a climactic note, the slow, gentle strains of the Adagio cantabile return, now in variation and shared by all players.

The two violins gleefully toss back and forth the melodic flourish of the Scherzo tune until the other instruments join in to introduce a more sober note. But the cheerful idea is not to be repressed,

and in the trio that follows the two contrasting moods, playful and serious, are expanded. In the transition back to the repeat of the Scherzo, the cello plays a descending scale line, and the violins, unable to contain their enthusiasm, anticipate the repeat of the first section.

Beethoven referred to the last movement, which continues the high spirits and good humor of the Scherzo, as “Aufgeknapft” (“unbuttoned”), connoting a free, informal character. Starting with perfectly symmetrical, four-square phrases, it goes on to an impish second theme with a syncopated start and a delightful counter melody. Rollicking along lightheartedly, it builds to a brilliant conclusion.

Notes from: Guide to Chamber Music by Melvin Berger (used with permission)

Gilliland: Suite From the Sound

Gilliland's "Suite from the Sound" was commissioned by clarinetist James Campbell for premiere in 2005. An aptly named work, the piece opens with a plucked cello line above which emerges a smoothly seductive clarinet riff. Lushly harmonic and bluesy, the movement makes smart use of quartet pizzicato.

The Waterloo Record writes: “The second movement, Waltz for Mr. Evans, was particularly lovely with a lush bed of compound chords providing the perfect frame for a gently tragic clarinet melody.

The ease with which Gilliland switches between idioms was even more apparent in Wind Machine. Flitting between bluegrass, tango, minimalism, Penderecki-style dissonance and a cool walking bass groove...the piece was one of the highlights of the evening.”

The Waterloo Record – April 2, 2008