

About the Music.

“The magic of chamber music lies in the exchange of ideas — listening to how someone shapes a phrase, watching the way they approach sound, or simply observing the energy they bring into a rehearsal,” said violinist Clara Neubauer, one of eight early-career musicians invited by Artistic Director Marcy Rosen to take part in Caramoor’s annual Rising Stars concerts. Joined by Rosen and two distinguished artists who act as mentors — violinist Ani Kavafian and violist Rebecca Albers — the musicians come together for an intensive week focused on chamber music and artistic exchange.

Rosen curates two concerts in which each mentor leads works with different combinations of young artists, giving everyone the opportunity to play with each other. For violinist Cherry Choi Tung Yeung, who returns to Caramoor for this year’s Rising Stars, it can also be an opportunity explore familiar music in new way. Last year she got to play a Beethoven string quintet that she was more familiar with in its original form, a piano trio. “I think it’s really interesting to get to work on the same piece but in a different format, a different group, and with different friends,” she said. “Even if you play the same piece, with different people it will create different chemistry.”

Rosen’s programming choices also draw on her own artistic exchanges with mentors. “I had the privilege of studying and learning Dvořák’s Sextet with Felix Galimir at the Marlboro Music Festival,” she noted. “He was a

real lover of Dvořák, and he instilled that love and a love of this piece into anybody he played it with.”

On this afternoon’s concert, the musicians perform works by three composers who deeply understood that the interaction among individual musicians really is the “magic of chamber music,” whether through musical texture — the term for how a composer coordinates individual musical lines — or by sharing music with friends and peers.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote his **Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, K. 478**, in 1785, during his most prolific and professionally successful years in Vienna. After writing two extremely successful operas at the start of the 1780s, *Idomeneo* for Munich and then *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* for Vienna, he was able to cut ties with Salzburg, move to Vienna full time, and work as a freelance composer and performer in the cosmopolitan Imperial capital.

Chamber music offered two paths for his new freelancing life. On the one hand, he wrote works in an increasing variety of instruments based on the practical needs of his and his friends’ performance opportunities, such as his innovative wind serenades. On the other hand, he worked directly with publishers who commissioned him to write works they could sell as sheet music to amateur musicians. His Piano Quartet in G Minor represents the latter. It was the first work Mozart composed with publication in mind rather than a live performance,

but his experience as a performer nonetheless informs the work.

Rosen explained that the first movement, in G minor, has the turbulent mood associated with that key, foreshadowing some of the intrigue of Mozart's masterpiece G-Minor Symphony. The lyrical second movement continues the somber mood before ending with a happier Rondo in G major.

What Mozart fundamentally understood about chamber music — learned from Haydn — was that it allows greater freedom among individual players. Once again, this is the magic of the genre. Uniquely talented with musical texture, Mozart unites its expressive qualities with larger expectations of form.

In the first movement, in sonata-allegro form, Mozart follows his format for piano concertos, which he performed often. The strings work as a unit (like a ritornello), marking off sections between soloistic piano flourishes. For the slow movement, he switches to simplified aria texture, giving the piano sentimental melodies against very sparse accompaniment from the strings. The final movement returns to the concerto style of the first, as the piano and strings play a game of follow-the-leader, the piano introducing a larger group of question-and-answer phrases that are repeated almost verbatim by the strings. When the strings start the conversation, however, the piano interjects with embellishments and elaboration. Drawing on styles and

forms of concertos and professional orchestras, Mozart crafted a work whose apparent simplicity belies its sophistication and depth.

On January 26, 1936, about two years into the Great Terror — Joseph Stalin's mass purges that especially targeted writers — Stalin went to the opera. Two days later, the Soviet Communist Party's official newspaper, *Pravda* ("Truth"), published an unsigned review condemning **Dmitri Shostakovich** and his work *Lady MacBeth of the Mtsenk District*. He was accused of "formalism," suggesting the opera was too Western and abstract and not approachable to the average listener. ("Muddle instead of Music" was the headline.) From that point on, Shostakovich's music cannot be separated from the political context in which it was written. Even after Stalin's death in 1953, in the era known as the Thaw, uncertainty around political intervention in the arts remained. Shostakovich found that the more he acquiesced to officials, the more artistic freedom he enjoyed, including performances of works that had been suppressed earlier. So he accepted a position in the Composers Union and let ghost writers publish letters in his name and hand him speeches to deliver. In 1960, he also wrote his **String Quartet No. 7 in F-sharp Minor**.

Throughout the Soviet era, chamber music sat in an ambiguous position. The official aesthetic of "socialist realism" remained mostly undefined, left up to the ever-changing leadership of different agencies, such

as the Composers Union, to uphold. “Formalism” was forbidden, but beyond that there was essentially a single recommended dictum: “Soviet in form, nationalist in content.” In practice, this meant large-scale genres (hence, socialist) for orchestra or choir with patriotic themes (hence, nationalist). Chamber music largely flew under the radar so long as it was not overtly “formalist.”

In his String Quartet No. 7 — one of his most formally taut works — Shostakovich walked a fine line. By maintaining Austro-German string-quartet conventions, including Mozartian transparent textures, he helped ensure the work’s approachability. By hinting at an extra musical narrative (also known as a “program”), he further buffered himself from criticism.

No documents reveal any specific program for this string quartet, but the work nonetheless sounds as though it tells a story. It was written during an increasingly difficult time in Shostakovich’s life and is dedicated in memory of his first wife, Nina, who died of cancer in 1954 after two decades of marriage. In the interim between Nina’s death and the string quartet’s completion, he lost his mother as well; proposed to and was rejected by his student, the composer Galina Ustvolskaya — twice; and married and divorced his second wife, Margarita Kaynova. His long-standing health problems also were getting worse: chest pains, lung inflammation, diphtheria, and a form of polio. This work’s dedication to Nina adds

intrigue and invites us to speculate that marriage was on his mind.

In the first movement, Shostakovich follows the outline of sonata-allegro form, juxtaposing a Baroque-style descending line for the first theme in a contrapuntal texture with a driving homophonic texture for the second theme, wherein the cello takes the lead. At the beginning, the simplicity of the Baroque style makes it rather innocuous, but as the work progresses, it returns transformed into a pizzicato 6/8 melody. In the haunting Allegretto movement, a somber descending melody is passed around among performers against unstable (arguably “formalist”) harmonies and tremolos as the music seems on the verge of collapsing in exhaustion. In the final movement, a loud, brief introduction (derived from the first movement’s Baroque-style theme) gives way to a driving, tense fugue (another traditional form). It ends with quotations of both of themes from the first movement, functioning like a nostalgic reminiscence of halcyon days gone by after a difficult, perhaps transformational, journey.

Nearly a century separates Mozart’s Piano Quartet in G Minor from **Antonín Dvořák’s 1878 Sextet in A Major, Op. 48**. In that time, chamber music underwent major changes, especially in the mid-1800s. First, it was no longer presumed to be a genre for amateurs. Even salon performances given in private homes often featured professionals. Second, chamber music became increasingly common on the public concert stage.

When Dvořák wrote his Sextet, he was mostly known as a regional Czech composer. However, in 1875, he submitted works to the Austrian State Stipendium and was awarded a grant. The following year he won again, and this time Johannes Brahms was on the judging committee.

Immediately taken with Dvořák's works, Brahms connected him with German publishers and friends in Berlin. Growing in acclaim, Dvořák wrote more chamber music for his international network, including this Sextet, which Joseph Joachim, a famed violinist and close friend of Brahms, performed in 1878. It is a work that appealed to the demand for chamber music in a style that was simultaneously elevated, refined, and individual. The six-voice texture gives the work an almost orchestral grandeur throughout, while also showing the new standard of chamber music that kept professional musicians top of mind.

Dvořák won over his German fans by appealing to their tastes. He believed that Austro-German music provided universal forms into which he could insert his personal nationalistic folk style. The elegant first movement, a perfect sonata-allegro form, shows his mastery of the Austro-German idiom and his gift for melody. The remaining movements highlight his Czech heritage by drawing on folk music from his homeland.

The result is one of his most nationalistic works. Rather than a traditional slow second movement, Dvořák composed a *dumka*, a folk

genre originally from Ukraine that could be either a melancholy elegy or a narrative ballad featuring melismatic melodies. Despite its moderate tempo, the movement's emotional transparency simulates the sentimentality associated with slow movements. The third movement replaces the conventional minuet with another folk style, the Bohemian *furiant*, but the analogue is much closer. Capturing the *furiant*'s characteristic mixture of duple and triple meter, Dvořák's stylized version maintains its triple meter throughout but emphasizes beat two in every other measure. In the final movement, a theme and variations, an array of textures come to the fore in each variation. Eastern European styles appear throughout, especially in the fifth variation and in the closing *stretta* that builds in drama to the conclusion.

Remaining true to his aesthetic principles, Dvořák won over the Central European tastemakers with a sextet that was ultimately Austro-German in form but Czech in content.

— Eric Lubarsky

Eric Lubarsky works at Carnegie Hall as a managing editor, where he oversees publishing projects for the Hall's educational and social-impact programs and creates program books for main-stage presentations. He holds a PhD in musicology from the Eastman School of Music; his research focused on performance revivals, concert life, and the twentieth-century Early Music movement.