



Presents

The Daedalus Quartet

With Special Guest

James Austin Smith, oboe

Thursday, March 2, 2023

6:00 PM

Arthur Ross Gallery of the University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Daedalus Quartet's residency is made possible through a generous gift from Andrea Mitchell (CW '67)

Program

The Daedalus Quartet:

Min-Young Kim and Matilda Kaul, violin
Jessica Thompson, viola
Thomas Kraines, cello

String Quartet in A Major, Op. 41, No. 3

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Andante espressivo; Allegro molto moderato
Assai agitato
Adagio molto
Finale: Allegro molto vivace

'Love story in Six Stages' for oboe and string quartet (2017, rev. 2023)

Anna Weesner (b. 1965)

Flight
Timelessness
The questions are of course inevitable
I'm certain that all the songs are about me
Mad Scene
Aftermath (moving toward real warmth)

James Austin Smith, oboe

Program Notes

Robert Schumann

String Quartet No. 3 in A major, Op. 41, No. 3 (1842)

1842 is sometimes referred to as Robert Schumann's "chamber music year," and no wonder; in that year — indeed, in the span of just over six months — he wrote the three String Quartets, Op. 41; the Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44; the Piano Quartet in E-flat major, Op. 47; and the Phantasiestücke, Op. 88, for piano trio. Intense bursts of compositional activity were not unusual for Schumann (in the previous year, he had sketched out his entire "Spring" Symphony in four days), but why the turn to chamber music from a composer known primarily for his piano music and lieder? Evidently, it was something that had been on his mind for some time. Among his earliest full-scale works is a Piano Quartet in C minor (1828-29); sketches for other chamber works exist from that time as well. In 1838, he wrote to his future wife, Clara, that he was beginning to compose string quartets ("the piano has become too restrictive for me"), and that same year he began to hold regular quartet readings at his home in Leipzig, where members of the Gewandhaus Orchestra would play the "latest hits" by Spohr, Cherubini, and others. He started work on two quartets in 1839, which he thought were "as good as Haydn," and finally, after a difficult period of inactivity in the first half of 1842, began furiously sketching the first of the three quartets that would become Op. 41 in early June. (All three would be complete by July 22.)

The *String Quartet in A major, Op. 41, No. 3*, opens with a falling fifth that forms the basis of much of the music to come. (This motif is popularly believed to be a musical reference to "Clara," but there does not appear to be any evidence for this.) The fifth transforms from a sort of meditation in the slow introduction to the beginning of a speechlike main theme in the *Allegro molto moderato*. The entire four-bar theme repeats nine times throughout the movement, and the falling fifth appears many more, including in the singing second theme introduced by the cello (and accompanied by rhythmically disorienting syncopations in the upper three voices).

For the second movement, Schumann writes an inventive set of variations in place of a more traditional scherzo. He piques the listener's interest with the rhythmic ambiguity and melodically fragmented nature of the opening. This time, the underlying motif is a rising fourth — the inverse of the falling fifth of the first movement — but it feels almost as though Schumann begins with three variations before stating the theme in full. Following this theme/fourth variation, Schumann adds one more (the most satisfying and rhythmically sure of itself) and then melts into a glorious, glowing coda reminiscent of Mendelssohn (to whom Op. 41 is dedicated).

In the *Adagio molto*, a simple, scalar theme sets up a beautiful hymnlike movement. This "song without words" repeats three times with successively more intricate figuration. In between are more agitated episodes, marked by a pulsating dotted rhythm and featuring exchanges of rising fourth figures between the voices as well as the development of ideas from the main theme. At the close of the movement, though, the throbbing rhythm is transformed into a tender heartbeat, and the other three lines seem to drift into a sweet sleep.

We are jolted awake by the *Finale*, as Schumann brings a full cast of characters onstage for this movement; the main theme is hyper-energetic and off-balance, and contrasting sections are by turns elegant, nervously brooding, and humorously gruff. A quirkily virtuosic coda brings the work to a close.

Anna Weesner

Love Story in Six Parts

The idea of a standard progression crops up here in two ways. For one, the piece is based loosely on a standard harmonic progression—a cycle of four chords—found in many pop songs. I was curious about exploring a sequence of chords that are common currency in our sonic world as well as elements of song (riffs, refrains) but in the context of a longer form piece for instruments, and without words. The second type of standard progression involves what I think of as the story line of the piece. This has to do with the idea of a "standard" love affair—think of phases in a relationship that are somewhat universally experienced—and that here are reflected in six sections with internal titles: *Flight, Timelessness, Questions, All the songs are about us, Mad Scene, Endings*. The piece is played continuously, mainly without breaks between the sections, and there is some play between the sections as well, so it is not the case that the piece unfolds in ultra-clear movements and certainly not important that anyone hear them as such. My hope is that it arrives as single trajectory that is concerned with beginnings and endings, that makes some turns, and covers a range of emotional terrain.

Titles are something I enjoy—both having them and finding them—though I had a hard time giving this piece an overall title. *Standard Progressions* is fitting, maybe on the nose, and kind of dull. So I've landed instead on *Love Story in Six Parts*. The original title of the piece, which I also ultimately found problematic, was *Love Progression: A Personal Essay*. The piece was commissioned and premiered with that title by the wonderful oboist, Peggy Pearson, and Winsor Music in March, 2017.

--Anna Weesner

This Evening's Performers

A chamber musician praised for his “virtuosic,” “dazzling,” and “brilliant” performances (*New York Times*) and his “bold, keen sound” (*New Yorker*), **James Austin Smith** is driven by the communicative nature of live performance. As an oboist and on-stage host he appears regularly at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, leading national and international chamber music festivals, at Carnegie Hall and on tour as Co-Principal Oboe of the conductor-less Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and as an artist of the International Contemporary Ensemble.

As Artistic and Executive Director of Tertulia Chamber Music Mr. Smith curates intimate evenings of food, drink, and music designed to engage audiences hungry for singular cultural experiences in New York, San Francisco and Serenbe, Georgia, as well as an annual weekend festival of food and music in a variety of global destinations. He mentors graduate-level musicians as a professor of oboe and chamber music at Stony Brook University and the Manhattan School of Music, and as a regular guest at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

James Austin Smith holds a master's degree in 2008 from the Yale School of Music and bachelor's degrees in political science and music from Northwestern University. He spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Conservatory in Leipzig, Germany, and is an alum of Carnegie Hall's Ensemble Connect. Born in New York and raised in Connecticut, Smith's principal teachers are Stephen Taylor, Christian Wetzels, Humbert Lucarelli, and Ray Still.

Praised by *The New Yorker* as “a fresh and vital young participant in what is a golden age of American string quartets,” the **Daedalus Quartet** has established itself as a leader among the new generation of string ensembles. Since winning the top prize in the Banff International String Quartet Competition in 2001, the Daedalus Quartet has impressed critics and listeners alike with the security, technical finish, interpretive unity, and sheer gusto of its performances. *The New York Times* has praised the Daedalus Quartet's “insightful and vibrant” Haydn, the “impressive intensity” of their Beethoven, their “luminous” Berg, and the “riveting focus” of their Dutilleul. *The Washington Post* in turn has acclaimed their performance of Mendelssohn for its “rockets of blistering virtuosity,” while the *Houston Chronicle* has described the “silvery beauty” of their Schubert and the “magic that hushed the audience” when they played Ravel, the *Boston Globe* the “finesse and fury” of their Shostakovich, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* the “thrilling revelation” of their Hindemith, and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* the “tremendous emotional power” of their Brahms.

Since its founding the Daedalus Quartet has performed in many of the world's leading musical venues; in the United States and Canada these include Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center (Great Performers series), the Library of Congress, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C., and Boston's Gardner Museum, as well as on major series in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. Abroad the ensemble has been heard in such famed locations as the Musikverein in Vienna, the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Cité de la Musique in Paris, and in leading venues in Japan.

Playing the flute in the New Hampshire Youth Orchestra as a teenager was a formative experience for **Anna Weesner**, nourishing a love of music that started early with Suzuki method violin lessons at the age of five. Composition was a natural discovery in high school and college for the daughter of a fiction writer and a music teacher. Anna maintains a lifelong relationship with the radio and the presets in her car are heavy on pop. Her recent output includes a set of songs called *My Mother in Love*, commissioned by Cygnus Ensemble for which she wrote music and text, and *The Eight Lost Songs of Orlando Underground* for clarinet quintet, commissioned and premiered by the Lark Quartet with Romie de Guise-Langlois. Winner of a 2019 Independence Foundation Grant, the 2018 Virgil Thomson Award in Vocal Music as well as an Academy Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, she is also the recipient of a 2009 Guggenheim Fellowship and a 2003 Pew Fellowship in the Arts. She has been in residence at MacDowell, the Virginia Center, Weekend of Chamber Music, Songfest, Seal Bay Festival, the Wellesley Composers Conference, and Civitella Ranieri. Her music has been performed widely, including by Cygnus Ensemble with Tony Arnold, the Daedalus Quartet, the Lark Quartet, the Cypress Quartet, the Cassatt Quartet, Prism Saxophone Quartet, Dolce Suono Ensemble, Peggy Pearson and Winsor Music, Counter)Induction, Dawn Upshaw and Richard Goode, Eighth Blackbird, Network for New Music, Orchestra 2001, the American Composers Orchestra and the Riverside Symphony, and has been featured at Tanglewood, the Look and Listen Festival, and the Portland Chamber Music Festival, among others. She studied at Yale (B.A.) and Cornell (D.M.A.) and is Professor of Music at the University of Pennsylvania.