



**2007-2008 Season
Program V**

**The Afiara String Quartet:
Valarie Li, violin
Yuri Cho, violin
David Samuel, viola
Adrian Fung, cello**

**Grace Presbyterian Church
June 1, 2008 3pm**



Dmitri Shostakovich
(1906 - 1975)

String Quartet No. 7 in F Sharp Minor, Op. 108
(1960)

- I Allegretto
- II Lento
- III Allegro

John Zorn
(1953 -)

Cat o' Nine Tails for String Quartet
(1988)

Intermission

Ludwig Van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

String Quartet No.15 in A Minor, Op.132
(1825)

- I Assai moderato – Allegro
- II Allegro ma non tanto
- III Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit,
in der lydischen Tonart: Molto adagio – Andante
- IV Alla Marcia, assai vivace
- V Allegro appassionato

The Afiara String Quartet:
Valarie Li, violin Yuro Cho, violin
David Samuel, viola Adrian Fung, cello



In February 1960, Shostakovich found himself, bored and lonely, back in the hospital for further treatment of his right hand. He entertained himself by rereading a period novel of the 1920s and penning long missives of sardonic political commentary to friends.

Laurel Fay ⁽¹⁾

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906 – 1975)
String Quartet No. 7 in F Sharp Minor, Op. 108 (1960)

Those of you who are not terribly fond of Shostakovich's string quartets, may be pleased to learn that this, the Seventh of his fifteen quartets, is the briefest of the lot. It contains only three movements, and two of these clock in at a little over three minutes each. The work is a marvel of clarity and concision.

The first movement opens with a rather wry theme ending in three "bumps". Bump-bump-bump. This motif will recur throughout the brief movement. In addition to a vigorous theme announced by the cello, and developed throughout the movement, there is a wistful descending chromatic theme that contrasts with these themes. Throw in some great pizzicatos (pizzicatti?) and there you have it.

The second movement has a spooky, nocturnal quality. Over a restless repeated figure floats a sad melody passed among the instruments. The third movement begins with an agitated fugal section, in Shostakovich's best 'Ooh, I hate that Stalin' manner, after which a version of the opening theme of the first movement is introduced, along with those "bumps". There follows a dreamlike quasi-dance, reminiscent of the mood of the *lento*. More pizzicatos. The movement gradually winds down and seems to evaporate.

The Seventh String Quartet was dedicated to the memory of Shostakovich's first wife, Nina Vasilyevna, on what would have been her fiftieth birthday. The Beethoven Quartet premiered the work on May 15, 1960 in then Leningrad, now St Petersburg.

(1) Shostakovich: A Life - Laurel E. Fay Oxford University Press, 2000 NY

"We do not torture."

George W. Bush

John Zorn (1953 -)
Cat o' Nine Tails for String Quartet (1988)

John Zorn is an extremely prolific contemporary composer, performer and producer, recording his own works and those of other composers and performers on his Tzadik label. In 2006 he was named a MacArthur Fellow (that's the genius award). In 2007



he was awarded Columbia University's School of the Arts William Schuman Award; a lifetime achievement award.

Zorn allows himself the freedom to explore many different musical styles and genres; from Jazz (his primary instrument is alto saxophone), to hardcore punk, film and documentary music, thrash metal, Klezmer, as well as 'avant-garde', conceptual, noise, and classical music, often combining these into striking recombinations. For instance, his jazz quartet Masada has produced recordings of Klezmer inspired Jazz. Indeed, much of his music has been an exploration of his Jewish roots. Improvisation plays a major role in most of his music. However, in his "Classical" pieces, (and what is more classical than a string quartet), he accommodates classically trained musicians, nonetheless demanding the utmost of the players. You may find that you may absolutely hate some of his music, but given the range of his works, you may also find that there is some of it that you absolutely love.

Cat o' Nine Tails, which he subtitled *Tex Avery meets the Marquis de Sade* ⁽¹⁾, was originally written for the famed Kronos Quartet, as were most of his other works in this medium. The work has been described as a series of "jump cuts", a term from film editing, to describe abrupt cuts that deliberately break the continuity in time. The technique, considered a flaw in traditional editing, was used by, and is associated with Jean-Luc Godard and the French New Wave Cinema of the '60s.

There is also a visual component to this work. I'm quite sure that the audience will want to see how the musicians wring these sounds out of their instruments. It's as much a part of the performance as the auditory part.

So, who's getting flogged here? The instruments by the musicians, the musicians by the composer, or the audience by the musicians? All of the above? But... if there's no organ failure, why there's no torture.

Enjoy, as the Marquis would say. Oh, and if there are any dominatrices in the audience, please, please, please see me after the performance.

Just kidding.

(1) Tex Avery (1908 – 1980) American animator, cartoonist and director. Creator and developer of such Looney Tunes stars as Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny and Porky Pig. That's all folks.

Let's make some funny pictures.

Tex Avery

What's up, doc?

Bugs Bunny



They tried to make me go to rehab but I said 'no, no, no'

Amy Winehouse

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
String Quartet No.15 in A Minor, Op.132 (1825)

The A minor quartet was one of a set of three commissioned by the Russian Prince Gallitzin, one of Beethoven's patrons.

Though it has the highest Opus number, it was actually the second of the three to be composed. Its composition took place as Beethoven was recovering from a serious illness, one of many. Beethoven was an absolute wreck. Besides having lost his hearing, he had chronic problems with his eyes, and suffered throughout his life from diarrhea, bowel inflammations, gastric problems and a really messed up liver, which eventually killed him. (On the other hand, there are also those who believe that all of these ailments were symptomatic of syphilis. I don't know what kind of credence that theory is currently given by experts in the field). His liver was described thusly in his autopsy: "The liver appeared shrunk up to half its proper volume, of a leathery consistence and greenish–blue color, and was beset with knots, the size of a bean, on its tuberculated surface, as well as in its substance; all its vessels were very much narrowed, and bloodless." (1) In addition to the terrible state of his body, he also had the prescribed "cures" to contend with. In those days, if the disease didn't kill you, the cure possibly would. Part of the recovery of this particular bout with illness, required Ludwig van to abstain from alcohol and coffee. Given the state of his liver, that wasn't a bad idea.

I mention all of this about Beethoven's illness and liver is because of the fact that the centerpiece and most famous movement of this quartet is the *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit in der lydischen Tonart (Song of Thanksgiving to the Deity on Recovery from an Illness, in the Lydian Mode)*.

But first: The first movement Assai moderato – Allegro is an expansive piece which, in the service of expressivity, goes beyond the formal sonata plan. Though opening in a rather gloomy manner this movement cover a lot of emotional ground

The second movement, Allegro ma non tanto is not one of those vigorous scherzos one might expect at this point. Rather, it is a kind of dance, in ¾ time, built by the constant repetition of a motif on various tones and passed back and forth to the members of the quartet. There is a contrasting center section which evokes the sound of a hurdy-gurdy or drehleier, with its drone over a folk-like tune. This is then followed by a return of the opening section.

The third movement, the aforementioned Song of Thanksgiving, is the main event in this quartet. It consists of two parts; one a long hymn or chorale in the Lydian mode.



The Lydian mode is an old church mode. On the piano, it would include the white keys from F to F an octave higher. It differs, importantly from the F Major scale in that it contains B natural rather than the B Flat of the F major scale. This seemingly small difference is actually a large one, for it means that the scale contains three whole tones in a row, so it sounds like neither major, nor minor scale. In fact these three whole tones (if you're not interested in this part, feel free to skip it) result in an augmented fourth; a tritone "The Devil in Music". In a church mode?

Now, while composers like Debussy, Scriabin and Bartok luxuriated in this sound, (in fact you could have heard it in some of the scale passages in the Shostakovich quartet performed today), Beethoven does not approach it head on. He does not use the first notes in a row F-G-A-B. When he does reach the B natural it is approached from a note above, thus eliminating the sound of the triton.

The Song of thanksgiving is a rather long one. He had much to be thankful for. This is contrasted with a new theme in D Major marked by the composer "Neue Kraft fühlend" (feeling new strength). The movement progresses as a set of double variations (two themes which alternate, and are also varied with each return—the third movement of the Ninth Symphony is his most famous and familiar example of this device). The last return of the Song of thanksgiving is marked "Mit inniger Empfindung" (with sincerest feeling). It is truly music of transfiguration.

What do you follow that up with? A short march, *alla Marcia*, *assai vivace* of course. However, this fourth movement ends with a *recitativo* passage, another device famously used in the Ninth Symphony, played by the first violin, and accompanied by tremolos on the other instruments. This leads to the finale marked *Allegro appassionato*. Here Beethoven spins out one of his loveliest bittersweet melodies. Interestingly, this theme, though in a different key, was originally conceived as the finale to the Ninth Symphony. Not wishing to waste such a melody on a mere sonata *allegro* form, he combines the sonata form with the rondo form, since the rondo requires the frequent return of the main theme. The arc of this quartet as a whole has gone from despair through to belief and onward *Presto* to a manic joy, high spirits and wit, ending it all in the key of A Major. A most amazing comeback.

The A major quartet was given its first performance in a room at the tavern "Zum Wilden Mann", on Sept 11, 1825. Wild man indeed.

Postscript

The following is a review of the A minor quartet published in the *Revue musicale*, of a performance, given on March 6, 1831 in Paris.

"Part of the evening was devoted to one of the last quartets (in A minor) of this extraordinary artist. Here, I must confess, it seemed to me that genius was overwhelmed by fantastic extravagance. Without doubt the work could only have been



written by Beethoven, and one recognizes his style from time to time, but these moments are few and far between. The first movement, the least involved of all of them, is nevertheless full of a harmonic vagueness which offends a sensitive ear. The menuet and trio recall the Master's finest period, and have the greatest novelty of effect. The Adagio is a thanksgiving, offered to the Almighty on convalescence after a long illness; one can only express doubt as to whether the Master was yet quite restored to health...As to the last movement, comment is impossible; one must respect even the aberrations of so great a musician."

(1) Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*: Revised and Edited by Eliot Forbes. Princeton University Press, NJ 1967

Program Notes by Joseph Way

The Musicians

The all-Canadian **Afiara String Quartet** takes its name from the Spanish *fiar*, meaning "to trust". It has been said that chamber music is a conversation between friends. Within the support of friendship, the Afiaras found that trusting each other, in rehearsal and on stage, was vital to the depth and joy of their music-making. As part of the Morrison Center for Chamber Music, they are in residence at San Francisco State University as teaching assistants to their mentors, the Alexander String Quartet. They have worked with the Kronos Quartet, Paul Hersh, Robert Mann, Mark Sokol, and Ian Swensen. The Quartet consists of:

Valerie Li, violin, received her Bachelor's from the Peabody Conservatory and her Master's from the New England Conservatory. She has performed at the Kennedy Center, Carnegie, Jordan and Strathmore Halls. Ms. Li won first prize in Chamber Music at the National Music Festival of Canada and was the recipient of a British Columbia Arts Council Award to study at Peabody, where she won the Marbury Prize and the Hulsteyn Award. Ms. Li has been named a fellow at Tanglewood Music Center and Aspen Music Festival, and has performed at Taos School of Music in New Mexico and the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts. She has played with the Baltimore and Singapore Symphonies and served as Concertmaster of the New England Conservatory Philharmonia, the Peabody Symphony Orchestra and with the National Youth Orchestra of Canada. Ms. Li has studied violin with Miriam Fried, Herbert Greenberg, and Gwen Thompson and chamber music with members of the Takacs, Juilliard, Vermeer, and Borromeo String Quartets.

Yuri Cho, violin, received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School, where she studied with Dorothy Delay, Naoko Tanaka, and Masao Kawasaki as a recipient of the Dorothy Starling Violin Scholarship and the Jean Doyle Loomis Award. Hailed by the *San Francisco Classical Voice* as a musician with virtuosity, she was a featured soloist with the Seoul Royal Symphony in Korea



and Japan, the Concordia Symphony Orchestra in Canada, and has given concerts in New York's Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, and in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Ms. Cho has performed with Norman Fischer, Jean-Michel Fonteneau, Paul Hersh, Jodi Levitz, and Ian Swensen. She was named an Osher Scholar at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where she studied with Ian Swensen and is currently a faculty member of the San Francisco Conservatory's Preparatory Division.

David Samuel, viola, received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School under the Nathan Gordon Scholarship and the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship. He has studied viola with Karen Tuttle, Michael Tree, and Paul Hersh, and chamber music with Emanuel Ax, Joseph Kalichstein, and members of the Juilliard String Quartet. He has performed in Canada, the U.S., and more than a dozen countries in Europe. His concerts have taken him to the Berlin Konzerthaus, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center. As an orchestral musician, Mr. Samuel has been the principal violist of the Juilliard Orchestra and the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival Orchestra. As a chamber musician, he performed with Robert Mann, Bonnie Hampton, Norman Fischer, Martha Katz, and Pinchas Zukerman. Mr. Samuel has been a teaching assistant to Michael Tree and is currently on faculty at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Preparatory Division.

Adrian Fung, cello, has given solo recitals in New York's Carnegie Hall, the Goethe Institute, Montreal's Pollack Hall, the Toronto Centre of the Performing Arts, the Living Arts Centre, and Taiwan's National Concert Hall. He has been soloist with Ensemble 212, Columbia Chamber Players, and will appear with the Oakville Symphony next season. Mr. Fung was awarded an Artist Grant from the New York Foundation of the Arts and received the Goodrich Award from the National Arts Centre of Canada. He has performed at Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center and the Orford Music Festival's "Musicians On Tour" and premiered several works, including pieces by Huck Hodge and the International Society of Contemporary Music. A graduate of McGill University and Mannes College, Mr. Fung studied cello with Fred Sherry, Antonio Lysy, David Hetherington, and Susan Gagnon. He is currently an Osher Scholar at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, studying with Jean-Michel Fonteneau.

And I try to be as diplomatic as I can, but it always ends up being a psychodrama up there on stage.

You can't be idealistic in this world and not be crazy.

John Zorn



John Zorn Recordings

Zorn's breakthrough recording was 1985's *The Big Gundown: John Zorn Plays the Music of Ennio Morricone*, where Zorn offered radical arrangements of the Roman composer's themes from movies including *The Big Gundown*, *A Fistful of Dynamite*, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, and *Once Upon a Time in America*. *The Big Gundown* was endorsed by Morricone who is quoted as saying "This is a record that has fresh, good and intelligent ideas. It is realization on a high level, a work done by a maestro with great science-fantasy and creativity... Many people have done versions of my pieces, but no one has done them like this". Zorn's versions of Morricone's compositions incorporated elements of traditional Japanese music, soul jazz, and other diverse musical genres. Zorn's 15th Anniversary re-release of the album featured additional explorations of Morricone's work.

He first released the composition *Godard*, a tribute to French film-maker Jean-Luc Godard whose jump-cut technique inspired Zorn's compositional approach, on the Nato label tribute album *The Godard Fans: Godard Ca Vous Chante?* in 1986. Zorn followed this with his second major-label release *Spillane* in 1987 composed of three different tribute compositions. The title track featured text by Arto Lindsay set to an array of sonic film noir references, 'Two-Lane Highway' a blues-based form to highlight the guitar of Albert Collins and 'Forbidden Fruit', Zorn's tribute to a Japanese film star, performed by the Kronos Quartet. Further exploration of film noir themes were recorded for radio plays and released by Zorn as *The Bribe: variations and extensions on Spillane*. 'Godard' and 'Spillane' were re-released as a single CD on Tzadik in 1999.

All of these albums contain examples of Zorn's "file card compositions", in which Zorn would write down a description of what he wanted on file cards and arrange them to form the piece. This method of organizing sound blocks into an overall structure was still largely dependent on the musicians he chose, and the way they interpreted what was written on the file cards. *(From Wikipedia)*

John Zorn's recordings are available on compact disc at ww.tzadik.com and also as MP3 downloads on Amazon.

My personal favorite is *Bar Kohkba*, jazz chamber music from the Masada songbook. Of this, Zorn said: "The idea with Masada is to produce a sort of radical Jewish music, a new Jewish music which is not the traditional one in a different arrangement, but music for the Jews of today. The idea is to put Ornette Coleman and the Jewish scales together."

Richard A. Gylgayton



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Sunday, October 12, 2008

Gideon Klein, String Trio
Paul Juon, Piano Trio
Brahms, String Quintet No.1

Sunday, December 14, 2008

The Afiara String Quartet plays:
Haydn, String Quartet Op.76 No.5
Beethoven, String Quartet TBD
Shostakovich, Piano Quintet, Op.57

Sunday, February 22, 2009

Haydn, String Quartet Op.71 No.1
Cello Sonata - TBD
Prokofiev, String Quartet No.2

Sunday, April 26, 2009

Francaix, Flute Sonata
Dvorak, Slavonic Dances Two Pianos
Bartok, String Quartet TBD

Sunday, June 7, 2009

Haydn, Divertimenti
Hovhaness, String Quartet "Jupiter"
Schumann, Piano Quintet,
Op.44 in Eflat

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