The Department of English and Fine Arts
and
The Timmins-Gentry Music Society

present

The Audubon Quartet

Akemi Takayama, violin Doris Lederer, viola
Ellen Jewett, violin Clyde Shaw, cello

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PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach . . . . . The Art of Fugue (selected movements)

Gideon Klein . . . . . Fugue

Charles and Elliot Weiss . . . . . Fantasies on Themes of Jerome Kern

Intermission

Antonín Dvořák . . . . . Quartet No. 10 in E-flat major (Op. 51)

1. **Allegro ma non troppo**
2. **Dumka (Elegie). Andante con moto**
3. **Romanze. Andante con moto**
4. **Finale. Allegro assai**

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Jackson Memorial Hall, V. M. I.
February 2, 2005, 7:45

J. S. BACH, THE ART OF FUGUE. The word "fugue" irresistibly evokes the name Bach. For good reason. Not only did Bach write many fugues, but in his *Art of Fugue*, a portion of which we are about to hear, he systematically explored many of the expressive possibilities of the form. ("Systematically" does not exaggerate, as the marginalia for several of the movements indicate: "By augmentation and diminution," "Inverted," etc.) Completed in about 1742 and published posthumously in 1751, the work includes fourteen fugues and four canons, all of which share a single key (D minor) and unwind from a single melody.

Each of the fugues is headed *contrapunctus* ("counterpoint"), which identifies its essential structural feature: the combination in a single musical passage of several different melodies. Fugal counterpoint is imitative, meaning that a single brief melody (the "subject") is first played by one instrument, then, in close succession, by a second, a third, and so forth, each instrument continuing uninterrupted until all have finished playing. In most fugues, this "exposition," as it is called, will be repeated two or more times. Between the statements of it lie sections of freely invented counterpoint, in which repetitions of the theme, or motives derived from it, alternate with contrasting "episodes." Every fugue ends with a coda, a brief, emphatic closing passage that has no fixed form.

The canon may be thought of as an unevolved fugue, which in both structure and sound it somewhat resembles. It is contrapuntal, it has only one melody, and its several parts have staggered entrances, but it lacks the structural complexity and harmonic subtlety of the fugue.

Because each of the movements composing it is within easy reach of two hands, *The Art of Fugue* was probably written for keyboard performance. As the Audubons are about to demonstrate, however, it also works well as a multisectional chamber piece.

Gideon Klein, Fugue. Klein was born in P□erov, Moravia (now the Czech Republic) in 1919. A piano prodigy, he moved to Prague at age eleven to pursue studies in piano and the liberal arts. By 1938, when he enrolled in both the Prague Conservatory and Charles Univer-sity, he had begun to give public recitals and to compose. In March of the following year the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia and soon afterward banned public performances by Jewish musicians. Klein continued for awhile to perform under an assumed name, but in December 1941 he was arrested and sent to Terezín concentration camp where he remained for almost three years. In October 1944 he was transferred to Fürstengrube, a satellite of Auschwitz. He died there the following January, not long before the camp was liberated by Soviet soldiers.

Ironically, it was at Terezín that Klein came into his own as a composer. To help relieve the tedium and discomfort of camp life, the musicians among the inmates, using instruments smuggled past the camp guards, gave recitals and concerts. Klein and such of his fellow composers as Victor Ullman and Hans Krása provided the music. Despite the appalling distractions of camp life, he managed to complete a string trio, a piano sonata, part of a song cycle, two choral works, incidental music for a play (now lost) and the Fantasy and Fugue for string quartet.

Tonight we will hear the Fugue alone. It is not the purposeful, richly tonal fugue of Bach, to whom, as Einstein says, "every false note was an offense against the cosmic sys-tem," but an austere, densely chromatic, somewhat episodic piece that, in John Henken's words, "suggests evolutionary searching rather than mechanical predestination." Its unpromisingly dissonant subject—an artifact, perhaps, of the 12-tone method of Schoenberg —is wholly appropriate to the expression of suffering and angst. What lies between its restatements is sometimes quietly reflective but more often darkly despairing, and more than once rises to a pitch of near-frenzy. It requires little imagination to hear in the piece echoes of the Terezín inmates' suffering. Indeed, its terseness and stark power recommend it as the essential musical utterance of the Holocaust.

CHARLES AND ELLIOT WEISS, FANTASIES ON THEMES OF JEROME KERN. Together with Cole Porter, Irving Berlin and George Gershwin, Jerome Kern was of course one of the titans of the American musical theater. The success of such stage shows as *Roberta* and *Showboat* and the vast popularity of radio and sound films ensured that many of his melodies would become a part of our collective musical memory. How often do we—or at least those of us to whom World War II is not ancient history—find ourselves humming "I Won't Dance" or "Old Man River" while washing the dog or weeding the lawn? Appropriately, Alec Wilder has called Kern's tunes "straight and healthy and ever green."

Charles and Elliot Weiss have imaginatively set several of these ever-green melodies for string quartet. Actually "set" is misleading, for the results of their efforts are not merely settings but highly original *compositions*—"fantasies" they call them—whose harmonic and textural sophistication approaches that of the chamber works of such modern American neoclassicists as Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem.

INTERMISSION

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK, QUARTET IN E-FLAT MAJOR (OP. 51). Dvořák began work on the E-flat quartet on Christmas day of 1878 and finished it the following March. The long period of gestation—unusual for Dvořák, who was a tireless and efficient worker—suggests that he devoted particular care to its composition. Tenth in the series of fourteen string quartets that he allowed to be published, it is the first to warrant the label "mature." Indeed, as Gervase Hughes allows, it compares favorably with the composer's acknowledged master-pieces in the genre, Opp. 105 and 106. Otakar Šourek goes even further, claiming that it is among the best works in the whole literature of chamber music.

It was commissioned by Jean Becker, the first violinist of one of the leading string quartets of the day. Probably hoping to capitalize on the enthusiasm with which concert-goers had recently greeted the premières of Dvořák's orchestral showpieces, the *Slavonic Dances* and the *Slavonic Rhapsodies*, Becker asked the composer for a "Slavonic" string

quartet—that is, one that would, like the dances and rhapsodies, somehow evoke the spirit of his native Czechoslovakia. (In Dvořák's day, "Slavonic" was roughly synonymous with "Czech.")

He must have been delighted with the result, for throughout the E-flat quartet we hear echoes of Czech folk song and feel the rhythms of Czech dance. The crisp, four-note motif with which the genial main theme snaps shut is somewhat folklike, and the second subject enters to the beat of the polka. Except for a brief, hymnlike passage toward the middle of the movement, this rhythm, or some variant of it, persists throughout. Such are its buoyancy and thrust—and so engaging are the melodies that it bears—that we are hardly aware of the symmetry of Dvořák's sonata-allegro structure.

"Dumka," the heading of the second movement, likewise reveals the composer's determination to write something audibly Czech-ish. According to *Grove* "the most promi-nent folk-like element in Dvořák's work," the *dumka* is a lament, and is therefore both slow in tempo and melancholy in mood. Here, however, its twilit mood is twice broken by rapid, lively passages that evoke the spirit of the *furiant,* a sprightly Czech dance. The bipolarity of the movement is emphasized not only by shifts of tempo but also of meter (from 2/4 to 3/4) and key (from G minor to G major).

The brief, simple Romanze, whose mood hovers somewhere between plaintive and passionate, is the least folklike of the movements. However, if we can agree with Hughes that it is a pastoral and with Šourek that it is a nocturne, we can without much effort imagine Czech meadows silvered with moonlight. The languorous, descending six-note melody that appears several measures into the piece and recurs often is one of the most affecting of Dvořák's lyrical utterances.

Like the first movement, the Finale is in sonata-allegro form—a fact that, given the speed and energy with which it unfolds, might well go unnoticed. In *effect*, however, it is a rondo whose beat recalls that of the *skoçnà*—a fast Czech dance in 3/4 time. Its principal theme is an exhilarating, three-bar affair: a group of clipped quarter notes, "defiantly synco-pated in the second bar," says Šourek, and "finished off in the last two bars with a *furiant*-like gesture." At one point the music slips into a minor key, but this has little effect on the exuberance that generally prevails.

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Next concert:

Tobias Werner, cello, and Victor Santiago Asuncion, piano

Wednesday, March 16, 2005, in Jackson Memorial Hall

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