

1995th Concert

February 10, 1991

JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET

ROBERT MANN, *Violin*

SAMUEL RHODES, *Viola*

JOEL SMIRNOFF, *Violin*

JOEL KROSNICK, *Cello*

J.S. Bach Die Kunst der Fuge
(1685-1750) (The Art of the Fugue)

Contrapunctus I - IV

Contrapunctus V

Contrapunctus VI (in stile francese)

Contrapunctus VII (per augmentationem et diminutionem)

Contrapunctus VIII - XI

INTERMISSION

(Twelve minutes)

Canone all'ottave

Canone alla decima (in contrapunto alla terza)

Canone alla duodecima (in contrapunto alla quinta)

Canone per augmentationem in motu contrario

Contrapunctus XIII: rectus
inversus

Contrapunctus XII: rectus
inversus

Contrapunctus XIV

Chorale: *Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit*

The JUILLIARD STRING QUARTET first appeared at the National Gallery on May 1, 1949, at which time its membership consisted of Robert Mann, violin, Robert Kopf, violin, Raphael Hillyer, viola, and Arthur Winograd, cello. The quartet's return in honor of the Gallery's fiftieth anniversary is one of several retrospective concerts in its 1990-91 season. It also returns to Carnegie Hall as a part of that institution's 100th anniversary celebration and commemorates Mozart's 200th death anniversary with concerts at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall. The ensemble has a vast reper-

toire of more than four hundred works, many of which are by American composers. In fact, its 1949 appearance at the Gallery was a program of American works which contained the Washington premiere of a string quartet by Harold Shapero. The Juilliard Quartet has made more than 100 recordings, among which its complete Beethoven and Bartok cycles have won international awards. It records exclusively for Sony Classical and appears at the Gallery by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management, Inc., New York.

Bach's *The Art of the Fugue*, written at the very end of his life, is a fitting choice for the Juilliard Quartet to play in this retrospective anniversary concert. Bach can be said to have summarized in this work the sum total of his knowledge of the technique and expression of fugal counterpoint, drawing upon some fifty years of experience. *The Art of the Fugue* contains all of the contrapuntal devices possible in the context of Western music, all stemming from the simplest possible subject, which is heard at the very beginning of the work. The true miracle of Bach is that these intellectual aspects are not empty virtuoso devices. They are truly integral parts, each of which contributes to a drama of emotional experience that sounds the depths of the human soul. Listeners who are not well acquainted with this work may be caught by surprise by the abrupt interruption of the final *Contrapunctus*. Bach became too ill to finish what was intended to be the Parnassus of this great work, but did have the strength to dictate from his deathbed the short but exquisitely composed chorale prelude, *Before Thy Throne I Now Appear*, which is a traditional close for performances of *The Art of the Fugue*.

The work is written in open score for four abstract voices, which are identified only as Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T) and Bass (B). The instrumental combination used in any given performance depends on the point of view of the performers involved and the forces available. The string quartet is an especially appropriate medium for this work, since its voices can be easily distinguished from one another, yet can also blend into a homogeneous texture. The occasional *divisi* passages, which require voices to split and play two tones at once, are no problem for bowed string instruments. In addition, each voice has a wide range of expression and tone color, which can enhance the dramatic impact of the work.

There is one seemingly insurmountable obstacle to the performance of this work by a modern string quartet, which the Juilliard has solved in an ingenious way. Both the alto and the tenor voices go below the range of the modern violin and viola, respectively. In the case of the alto, the second violinist simply switches over to a viola for certain passages, while the violist, who plays tenor, uses for these Bach concerts a specially built viola which can go a fourth lower than the standard instrument. Built by master luthier Marten Cornelissen, this oversize viola has proven to be an instrument of exceptional tonal beauty.

(Notes on *The Art of the Fugue* from material provided by Samuel Rhodes)