

theme separated by two contrasting episodes. The third movement (Prestissimo) is unabashedly operatic. The first part brings to mind the sense of excitement as the opera house curtain rises and the stage slowly fills with singers who soon launch into the lusty opening chorus. The middle section features an exquisite tenor aria for cello, accompanied by the other instruments playing pizzicato in imitation of a guitar. Verdi then repeats the opening section. The finale (Scherzo-Fuga: Allegro assai mosso) is indeed a scherzo in the original meaning of joke or jest. Fuga refers to the prevalent melodic imitation, in which the tunes are gaily tossed from one instrument to another. This high-spirited movement, with its energetic, forward-pushing motoric action, provides a joyful conclusion to the entire quartet.

Program notes by Elmer Booze
Notes on Verdi adapted by the Quartetto di Venezia
from *Guide to Chamber Music* by Melvin Berger
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The Sixty-second Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

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2483d Concert

QUARTETTO DI VENEZIA

ANDREA VIO, *violin* ALBERTO BATTISTON, *violin*
LUCA MORASSUTTI, *viola* ANGELO ZANIN, *cello*

Sunday Evening, 1 February 2004
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program Notes

Boccherini's *Quartet in D Major, op. 52, no. 2*, is one of more than three hundred quartets that he composed. This astounding accomplishment, alongside the estimated three hundred quintets and three hundred chamber works for other ensembles that are attributed to him, makes him one of the most fecund composers in the history of chamber music. In his own time (the Viennese Classical period) he was considered the pre-eminent Italian chamber music composer. His style, according to Stanley Sadie (*Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Music and Musicians*), "became increasingly personal and even idiosyncratic over the forty-four years in which he composed, to an extent that he sometimes seems to be repeating himself (even if more subtly)." Idiosyncratic as some of it may be, Boccherini's music possesses a certain harmonic and melodic inventiveness that unfolds with charisma and gracefulness. Such musical attributes have endeared Boccherini's string compositions to chamber music lovers over the centuries and solidified his position in the pantheon of distinguished Italian composers.

Gian Francesco Malipiero's *String Quartet No. 8* ("Per Elisabetta") is one of ten compositions that he dedicated to the American music patron Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge (1864–1953). The work is Malipiero's last in this genre and takes the form of a one-movement work. In his four-volume compendium, *The Literature of Chamber Music*, Arthur Cohn writes: "There is his usual sectional arrangement of structure [as well as] his ability to provide a natural, fully resonant instrumental sound. One point to be noted is a freer approach to line writing—the intervallic widths are much larger than in his other string quartets."

Although he is best known for songs that perpetuate the spirit of Franz Schubert, Hugo Wolf left for posterity two of his best efforts in instrumental writing, the *Italian Serenade* and the *String Quartet in D Minor*. First performed in Vienna in 1904, the *Italian Serenade* was composed in 1887 and arranged for chamber orchestra in 1903. It was the first and only movement completed for an intended suite for string quartet. The format for this intriguing work is that of a rondo, wherein

the principal theme, appearing three times, alternates with two subsidiary interludes. A highly original and resonant work, the *Italian Serenade* is a recognized masterpiece, an amalgamation of idyllic utterance and intractable caricature. Wolf, who suffered a great deal of personal anguish, succumbed to the tragic hold of mental illness in 1898 and was placed in an asylum, where his difficult life ended at the early age of forty-three.

Verdi's *Quartet in E Minor* is his only exclusively instrumental composition, but it is a work of unquestionable authority and great appeal. His letters make it clear that he was very well acquainted with the great quartet scores of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. He is said to have kept them constantly by his bedside and to have advised his students to use the classical string quartets as models of clear and concise organization.

The quartet received its premiere on 1 April 1873, just one day after the opening of *Aida*, at an informal concert at his hotel. The performers were identified only as the Pinto brothers, violins; Salvador, viola; and Giarritiello, cello. A few weeks later, Verdi set down these words: "I've written a quartet in my leisure moments in Naples. I had it performed one evening in my house, without attaching the least importance to it and without inviting anyone in particular. Only the seven or eight persons who usually come know that it's a quartet! I don't know whether the quartet is beautiful or ugly, but I do know that it's a quartet." Despite Verdi's cavalier attitude, the quartet has become a staple of the string quartet repertoire, famed for the skillful way the composer combined brilliant theatrical and melodic techniques with extremely fluent and idiomatic string writing.

The dramatic first theme of the opening Allegro is stated immediately by the second violin and conveys a sense of quiet, suppressed urgency. In a departure from traditional first movement form, the theme is immediately repeated and then developed, ending the movement with a comparatively brief restatement of the second subject. The main theme of the second movement (Andantino) is lyrical and charming. It is marked to be played *con eleganze* (with elegance). The movement is organized in rondo form, with the three appearances of the