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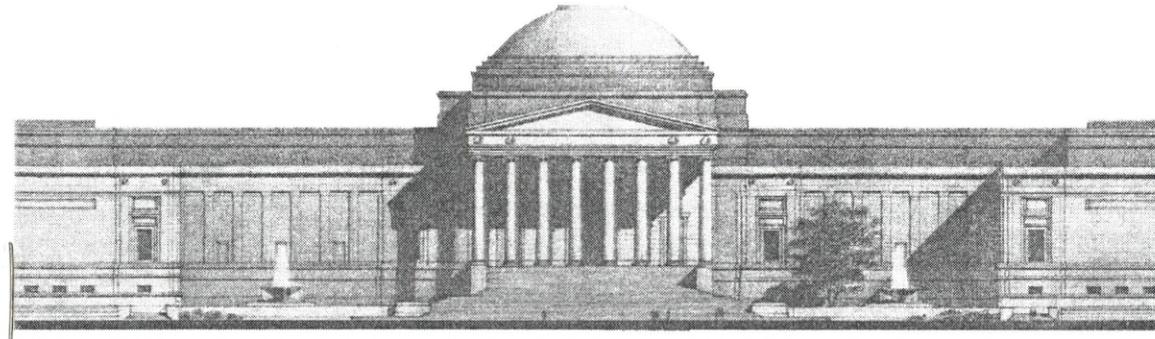
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Please note that late entry or reentry after 6:30 pm
is not permitted.

Music Department
National Gallery of Art
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Washington, DC

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The Sixty-third Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,536th Concert

The St. Petersburg String Quartet

Alla Aranovskaya, *first violin*

David Chernyavsky, *second violin*

Boris Vayner, *viola*

Leonid Shukayev, *cello*

May 15, 2005
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

String Quartet no. 2 in A Minor, op. 13 (1827)

Adagio; allegro vivace

Adagio non lento

Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto

Presto

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–1975)

Quartet no. 4 in D Major, op. 83 (1949)

Allegretto

Andantino

Allegretto

Allegretto

INTERMISSION

Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884)

Quartet no. 1 in E Minor (“From My Life”) (1876)

Allegro vivo appassionato

Allegro moderato a la polka

Largo sostenuto

Vivace

The Musicians

In the twenty years since its founding, the St. Petersburg String Quartet has established a reputation as one of the world’s leading ensembles of its kind. Founded in 1985 as the Leningrad Quartet by Alla Aranovskaya and Leonid Shukayev, both graduates of the Leningrad Conservatory, the quartet blazed a trail through international chamber music competitions, winning first prize at the All–Soviet Union String Quartet Competition, the silver medal and a special prize at the Tokyo International Chamber Music Competition, first prize and both special prizes at the Vittorio Gui International Competition in Florence, Italy, and first prize and the Grand Prix Musica Viva at the Melbourne [Australia] International Chamber Music Competition.

When the city of Leningrad reassumed its historic name, the quartet changed its own name to the St. Petersburg String Quartet. The group has continued its ascendancy, earning a Grammy nomination, “best record” honors in both *Stereo Review* and *Gramophone* magazines, and the Chamber Music America/WQXR Prize for best CD of 2001. In 2003 the St. Petersburg String Quartet proudly commemorated the 300th anniversary of its namesake city by performing around the globe in events honoring the arts of St. Petersburg. From 1996 to 2003 the ensemble held the respected position of quartet-in-residence at the Oberlin College Conservatory of Music, and this year it is in residence at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Following the group’s recordings of the complete string quartets of Shostakovich, Borodin, and Prokofiev as well as Nadarejshvili’s *String Quartet no. 1*, and Glazunov’s *Quartet no. 5*, avid classical CD collectors are eagerly awaiting its soon-to-be-released recording of the complete works of Tchaikovsky for string quartet. The St. Petersburg String Quartet appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Lisa Sapinkopf Artists of Emeryville, California.

Alla Aranovskaya, the first violinist and a founding member of the St. Petersburg String Quartet, is a native of St. Petersburg. She was the second-prize winner in the 1985 All–Soviet Union Violin Competition. She has played with the Kirov Opera Orchestra under Yuri Temarkanov and Valery Gergiev and has taught at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music. Her students have won prizes at prestigious international competitions, including Jugend Musiziert and the St. Petersburg International Chamber Music Competition.

Violinist David Chernyavsky, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music, the Indiana University School of Music, and the Juilliard School of Music, has performed with the Indiana University School of Music Orchestra and the Spoleto USA Festival Orchestra, of which he was the concertmaster in 2001 and 2002. A native of St. Petersburg, he has won prizes in several competitions, including first prize in the 1998 Indiana University Concerto Competition.

The violist in the quartet, Boris Vayner, was born in 1977 in Novosibirsk, Russia, and began to play the violin at age seven. He studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and the Berliner Hochschule für Musik. He has twice been a prize winner in the Gartow Fund Chamber Music Competition, once as a member of the Krasny Quartet and once as a soloist. Since 2003 he has been studying at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.

Cellist Leonid Shukayev is a native of St. Petersburg and a founding member of the quartet. He studied at the Rimsky-Korsakov Music College and at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he was a pupil of the famous Russian teacher Boris Pergamenshikov. Shukayev has played in the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra and the St. Petersburg Trio. He and pianist Helena Kurdina won the first prize in the chamber music competition for all of the music colleges in Russia.

Program Notes

Felix Mendelssohn drew inspiration from Beethoven’s monumental late string quartets, which he heard shortly before he composed his *String Quartet no. 2 in A Minor*, op. 13. Mendelssohn paid tribute to the Beethoven quartets by adopting several of the techniques Beethoven used—integrated movements, fugal textures, and adventuresome harmonies. The second quartet makes musical reference to the poem *Ist es wahr?* (Is It True?) by Mendelssohn’s close friend Johann Gustav Droyson (1808–1884), in which the first line reads, “Is it true that you are always waiting for me in the arboreal walk?” In the spring of 1827, having fallen in love while on holiday, the eighteen-year-old Mendelssohn set the poem to music as a lied. The opening three-note phrase of the lied, published as op. 9, no. 1, became the germinal melodic cell of the op. 13 quartet. This motto permeates the entire composition, sometimes in direct quotation, but more often by recalling its rhythms or intervals.

The quartet begins with a slow introduction. After two mood-setting phrases, Mendelssohn presents the all-important three-note motto—*Ist es wahr?* (long-short-long)—a question he endows with great yearning and pain. The *Allegro vivace* introduces a busy sixteenth-note filigree, over which the viola starts the principal theme, based on the motto rhythm. After expansion of this first theme, the cello, playing high in its range, launches into the intense, impassioned second theme. The extremely emotional second movement, *Adagio non lento*, starts with what might be termed a very loose paraphrase of the rhythm and feeling of the original song. A dark, somber fugato follows, its melody introduced by the viola and then imitated by the other instruments. The guileless *Intermezzo* offers a welcome change from the emotionally and intellectually charged atmosphere of the previous movement. The first violin sings the folklike theme, while the others supply a simple pizzicato accompaniment, with only the merest touches of countermelody.

The fourth and final movement, marked *Presto*, begins with a dramatic opening reminiscent of the recitative from the fourth movement of Beethoven's *String Quartet* op. 132. Everyone plays tremolo except the first violin, which plays an agitated *ad libitum* recitative based on the fugato theme of the second movement. At the very end of this vigorous movement, Mendelssohn repeats the introduction to the entire quartet. This time he allows it to continue with a melody that comes closest to the actual *Ist es wahr?* theme, bringing the quartet and the lied together in one final statement.

From time to time during Shostakovich's lifetime, the totalitarian Communist regime in Russia impinged on his work directly. A particularly ferocious intervention occurred with the publication in 1948 of the Central Committee's Decree on Music. Leading Soviet composers were humiliated for failing to "appeal to the people." The decree and the consequential condemnation of compositions previously considered shining examples of Soviet art prevented Shostakovich from releasing his *Quartet no. 4* to the public until four years after its completion. The opening theme of the quartet suggests the folk melodies often chosen as quartet themes by Jean Sibelius or Carl Nielsen. It is given to the first violin, with gentle counterpoint in the second violin and an immense pedal point D in the viola and cello, sustained for more than sixty bars. The theme meanders through D major and minor modes, expanding gloriously in a superb developmental restatement, before the pulse changes to 3/4 and the key to B minor for a new melody.

The second movement sustains the folklike atmosphere with a theme in F minor in first violin, accompanied by second violin and viola. This trio texture is sustained for more than thirty bars, so when at last the cello enters, restating the theme, the music blossoms impressively. The third movement, a delicate *scherzando* marked *allegretto*, is subtly related to the preceding movements in timbre (the strings remain muted throughout) and in tonal inflection. The finale, also marked *allegretto*, capitalizes on latent elements from the first three movements—the uncertain mode of

the "home" tonality, a textural ebb and flow, and recessed timbres—which are brought one by one into the foreground, making the finale the most emphatic movement of the composition. With reference to the beginning measures, the folk elements, presented above deep pedal points, bring the work to its mysteriously satisfying conclusion.

Bedřich Smetana, the founding father of Bohemian-Czech nationalist music, was born in the town of Litomyšl in Bohemia, which was under Austrian rule throughout his lifetime. He received his first musical instruction from his father, who played the violin. At age sixteen Smetana heard Liszt play in Prague and decided to become a professional musician. In 1856 he emigrated to Göteborg, Sweden, where he opened a music school that attracted more pupils than he could accommodate. Despite three years of success in Göteborg as a composer and conductor as well as a piano teacher and pianist, Smetana decided to return to his homeland. His most serious efforts as a composer began after his return to Prague, by which time he had become a wholehearted Czech nationalist. Most of his important compositions mirrored this passion. *The Bartered Bride*, the second of his eight operas, is full of Czech folk elements and rhythmic verve, and his cycle of six symphonic poems, collectively titled *Ma vlast* (My Country), has been called the composer's instrumental monument to his nation. By 1876 Smetana was losing his hearing and having trouble keeping his balance owing to syphilis, which eventually destroyed his health completely. In that year he composed the remarkable string quartet subtitled "From My Life," in which he depicted in vivid musical terms the internal sensation of his growing deafness. By 1884 he became so violent that he had to be confined in Prague's lunatic asylum, where he died. Smetana's crucial importance in the history of his country's music was not properly recognized until many years after his death.