

***Creative Capitals* (2018) disc 5.**

The sixteenth edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* visits seven of Western music's most flourishing *Creative Capitals*—London, Paris, St. Petersburg, Leipzig, Berlin, Budapest, and Vienna. Each disc explores the music that has emanated from these cultural epicenters, comprising an astonishingly diverse repertoire spanning some three hundred years that together largely forms the canon of Western music. Many of history's greatest composers have helped to define the spirit of these flagship cities through their music, and in this edition of recordings, Music@Menlo celebrates the many artistic triumphs that have emerged from the fertile ground of these *Creative Capitals*.

The fifth disc of *Creative Capitals LIVE* features performances by the Calidore String Quartet. The quartet is joined by flutist Stephanie McNab for the selections from the monumental *Musical Offering*, produced after an aging J. S. Bach traveled to Berlin in 1747 to answer the contrapuntal challenge issued by King Frederick the Great. Mozart subsequently appeared at the same court, this time before King Friedrich Wilhelm II, to honor the new King of Prussia with his set of *Prussian* Quartets. The disc concludes with the Fifth String Quartet of Béla Bartók, who almost singlehandedly established a nationalist Hungarian compositional language through years of devoted and immersive study of his nation's folk traditions.

- 1–4** **Selections from *Musical Offering*, BWV 1079 (1747)**
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750)
Ricercar a 3
Canon 2 a 2: Violini in unisono
Canon 1 a 2: Canon cancrizans
Fuga canonica in epidiapente

STEPHANIE MCNAB, *flute*; CALIDORE STRING QUARTET:
 JEFFREY MYERS, RYAN MEEHAN, *violins*; JEREMY BERRY, *viola*;
 ESTELLE CHOI, *cello*

- 5–8** **String Quartet in D Major, K. 575, *Prussian* (1789)**
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Allegretto
Andante
Minuetto: Allegretto
Allegretto

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET: JEFFREY MYERS, RYAN MEEHAN,
violins; JEREMY BERRY, *viola*; ESTELLE CHOI, *cello*

- 9–13** **String Quartet no. 5 (1934)**
BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)
Allegro
Adagio molto
Scherzo: Alla bulgarese
Andante
Finale: Allegro vivace – Presto

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET: JEFFREY MYERS, RYAN MEEHAN,
violins; JEREMY BERRY, *viola*; ESTELLE CHOI, *cello*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685–1750) **Selections from *Musical Offering*, BWV 1079 (1747)**

In 1747, J. S. Bach visited the court of Frederick the Great. Frederick was widely hailed as an enlightened monarch and a devoted patron of the arts. A talented flutist and composer himself, Frederick installed an excellent roster of musicians at the Prussian court—including Bach's son, the composer Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach—and undertook to revitalize German musical life at large. It was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach who brokered his father's visit to Frederick's court. Bach's reputation as a great theoretician and contrapuntalist preceded him: upon the occasion of his visit, Bach was given a difficult theme, composed by the king—hence known as the King's Theme—to improvise on at the keyboard. Bach rose to the occasion and then some: two months later, he published *Musical Offering* (*Musikalisches Opfer*), a collection of various compositions based on the King's Theme, which he dedicated to Frederick the Great. The complete work comprises a three-part and a six-part *ricercar* (a term variously used to describe pieces of a technical or esoteric nature—here, essentially synonymous with fugue), ten canons, and a four-movement trio sonata for violin and flute—presumably in tribute to Frederick's flute playing.

The final decade of Bach's life produced some of his most seminal creations. In addition to the *Musical Offering*, he composed the *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988 (1741); the *Canonic Variations* on "Von Himmel hoch," BWV 769 (1747); the *Mass in b minor* (assembled ca. 1747–1749 from new and preexisting movements); and *Die Kunst der Fuge* (*The Art of Fugue*), BWV 1080 (ca. 1742–1750). Martin Geck writes: "All these projects spring from the same intention: his desire to articulate and summarize the essentials of his work. The result are cycles that go to the root of one particular subject, that demonstrate the richness of music through the use of one model theme." The *Musical Offering* cycle, headed with the clever acrostic *Regis Iussu Cantio Et Reliqua Canonica Arte Resoluta* ("the theme given by the king, with additions, resolved in the canonic style"), opens with the *ricercar a 3*. The fugue, in c minor, begins with a plain statement of the King's Theme; the second voice follows with the theme at the fifth (beginning on G). From the third voice's entrance, Bach deftly weaves the king's thorny theme into a fluid texture, expertly managing airtight counterpoint while creating music of the deepest expressive quality.

The cycle's ten canons collectively display a dizzying array of contrapuntal techniques. One surmises that the first two canons alone, each under a minute long, must have quickly astonished the king. Canon 1 a 2 (that is, for two voices) is one of several musical riddles, in which Bach presents a single melodic line with clues to the performer as to how to interpret the canon. Here, Bach indicates *cancrizans*—reverse—and places a backwards clef, key signature, and time signature at the end of the single line of music. This single line of music is to be played by two voices simultaneously, one voice playing as printed and the other in reverse. The second canon, a 2, *violini in unisono*, features two violins playing a florid melodic line in canon above the King's Theme in the bass voice. The violins read a single line of music; Bach merely indicates when

the second violin is to begin. Similarly, in the *Fuga canonica in epidiapente*, the King's Theme appears above an energetic bass line. Bach provides an indication of when the third, unwritten, voice is to enter, repeating the melody up a fifth (*epidiapente*). The two ongoing voices begin trading active eighth-note figures and sustained notes as the third voice enters the fray, creating a dizzyingly dynamic texture. This canon—like, indeed, the whole of the *Musical Offering*—testifies to the essence of Bach's singular genius. As his obituary read, "Once he had heard a particular theme, he could grasp, as it were instantaneously, almost anything artistic that could be brought forth from it."

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
String Quartet in D Major, K. 575, Prussian (1789)

In late 1789, his star having begun to fade among Vienna's fickle audiences (and his family's financial security becoming consequently precarious), Mozart set out for a concert tour with stops in Leipzig, Dresden, and Berlin. In this last city, he appeared before Friedrich Wilhelm II, who requested that Mozart compose a new set of six string quartets and keyboard sonatas. Mozart, for various reasons, set to work on the king's request with meager enthusiasm: he was despondent over his dwindling prospects in Vienna, and he moreover began to suffer from a spate of physical ailments, complaining in letters of frequent headaches, rheumatism, and insomnia. His wife, Constanze, was pregnant and incapacitated by a foot condition. Nevertheless, nearly desperate for income, Mozart completed the first of the quartets for the king of Prussia (thereafter known as his *Prussian Quartets*), the Quartet in D Major, K. 575, within a month of his return to Vienna. The Quartets in B-flat Major, K. 589, and F Major, K. 590, followed a year later and would be Mozart's last quartets. He died from rheumatic fever in 1791, leaving the set of six unfinished.

The *Prussian Quartets* appear to have never found their way back to Berlin. Mozart sold them to the publisher Artaria—from such a weakened negotiating position that he reported, "I have now been obliged to give away my quartets...for a pittance, simply in order to have cash in hand"—and they were printed in 1791 without a dedication. The D Major Quartet's carefree demeanor does nothing to betray the direness of Mozart's circumstances at the time of its composition. It is, on the contrary, music of light and delight immediately from the *Allegretto* first movement's opening measures. Mozart takes care to pay due homage to Friedrich Wilhelm II, a competent amateur cellist: violins and viola begin the quartet, as though preparing the way for his majesty's entrance. The first violin presents the first theme, *sotto voce*: an ascending arpeggio and then a graceful descent. The viola (Mozart's instrument, which he likely manned for the quartet's first performance) takes up the theme as the cello appears. As the movement proceeds, the king's instrument is given ample time in its bright upper register. Although upper strings deferentially step aside as the cello introduces the second theme (like the first theme, a rising arpeggio followed by a descending melody), each voice issues the melody in turn, creating a rich, conversational texture. Despite a brooding, minor-key exchange between first violin and cello, the brief development section remains predominantly lighthearted, arriving easily at an untroubled recapitulation.

The *Andante* is a work of quintessentially Mozartian beauty. Rich chordal textures surround warm, long-breathed melodies. The movement is cast in A major, the same moonlit key as the Piano Concerto no. 23 (K. 488), Clarinet Concerto, and Clarinet Quintet, and has in common with those works an air of romantic serenity. Naturally, the movement likewise features lyrical melodic writing for the cello, in its soulful tenor voice. The third movement *Minuetto* appears, at first glance, merrily uncomplicated, but an abrupt passage of stark forte octaves, fortissimo syncopations, and moody staccato gestures hints at something darker behind the minuet's seeming placidity. But, the clouds pass as quickly as they gathered, and the minuet returns to its characteristic elegance. The cello soars in the lovely trio section. The *Allegretto* fourth movement's central theme begins with an ascending arpeggio, recalling the opening of the quartet but now set in the cello, colored by a legato countermelody in the viola. Set in rondo form, the movement features more textural than emotional contrast between its refrain and alternating episodes. Indeed, the melodic generosity, textural brilliance, and spirited ensemble dialogue found throughout the previous three movements are on equal display in this wholly satisfying finale.

BÉLA BARTÓK (1881–1945)
String Quartet no. 5 (1934)

In his 1931 essay, "The Influence of Peasant Music on Modern Music," Béla Bartók arrived at a three-tiered prescription for the use of folk melodies in contemporary composition:

We may, for instance, take over a peasant melody unchanged or only slightly varied, write an accompaniment to it and possibly some opening and concluding phrases. This kind of work would show a certain analogy with Bach's treatment of chorales. Two main types can be distinguished among works of this character. In the one case accompaniment and introductory and concluding phrases are of secondary importance; they only serve as an ornamental setting for the precious stone: the peasant melody. It is the other way round in the second case: the melody only serves as a "motto" while that which is built round it is of real importance. ...

Another method by which peasant music becomes transmuted into modern music is the following: the composer does not make use of a real peasant melody but invents his own imitation of such melodies.

There is no true difference between this method and the one described above. ...

There is yet a third way in which the influence of peasant music can be traced in a composer's work. Neither peasant melodies nor imitations of peasant melodies can be found in his music, but it is pervaded by the atmosphere of peasant music. In this case, we may say, he has completely absorbed the idiom of peasant music which has become his musical mother tongue. He masters it as completely as a poet masters his mother tongue.

Having ultimately found the first two means of incorporating folk sources—i.e., straight transcription and the invention of original, inauthentic peasant tunes—unsatisfactory, Bartók turned to his third prescribed method. By probing the folk music that he collected in his travels through Central Europe

to ascertain its character, Bartók integrated that character into his own work, thereby cultivating one of the twentieth century's most compelling musical voices. This absorption of "his musical mother tongue" into a highly developed compositional technique is in evidence in Bartók's String Quartet no. 5—the fifth of the composer's six quartets, which, alongside those of Haydn, Beethoven, and Shostakovich, constitute one of the repertoire's most influential quartet cycles.

Throughout these works, Bartók utterly reimagines the sonic possibilities of this most essential chamber music genre. In addition to expressing Bartók's cultural identity with subtlety and sophistication—indeed, "it is pervaded by the atmosphere of peasant music"—the quartet, like its five siblings, is quite revelatory for its palette of timbres and inventive instrumental techniques. The quartet comprises five movements, arranged in a symmetrical arch form. The outer movements are fast and have thematic material in common. The second and fourth movements both exemplify Bartók's "night music" style, described by Bartók scholar David Schneider as characterized by "eerie dissonances providing a backdrop to sounds of nature and lonely melodies." At the work's center is the piquant scherzo. The *Allegro* first movement opens with a striking gesture: a *forte* salvo of repeated B-flats (leaning, in the first measure, into neighboring C) that unleashes a rollicking melody, barreling forward with total abandon. In contrast to these insistent repeated notes, the aggressive second theme features wide upward leaps of ninths and tenths in all four instruments.

Following a brief recollection of the first theme, the second violin introduces a new musical idea: legato triplets, marked *piano, dolce*, rising and falling as if inebriated, underpinned by soft pizzicati. Each theme figures in the furious development section. In the recapitulation, foreshadowing the quartet's overall mirror-image structure, the three themes appear in reverse order, with the legato triplets falling then rising and the second theme leaping downwards. Quiet trills and disconsolate gestures begin the *Adagio molto*. These settle into a hymn-like series of pianissimo triadic chords in the lower strings, above which the first violin utters keening melodic fragments. This poignant music quickly dissolves into a more enigmatic section, marked by anxious tremolandi and impassive pizzicati. The scherzo movement, marked *Alla bulgarese*, evokes a Bulgarian folk dance in its rhythmic asymmetry, dividing each measure into 4 + 2 + 3. Despite its irregular gait, the melodic lines flow easily atop the cello's pizzicati, suddenly erupting into a lively hoedown. The swirl of eighth notes continues into the trio section, but pianissimo and *con sordino* (with mutes), as accompaniment to a rustic tune shared between the viola and cello. The Bulgarian dance returns with gusto.

The *Andante* fourth movement returns to the second movement's "night music" character but takes a more lighthearted tack. Glissando pizzicati, featherweight thirty-second-note figures, and other playful touches give the music a blithe air. Tremolando chords faintly echo the hymn-like chorale of the second movement before the music escalates to an agitated climax. As this turbulence subsides, the violins more clearly recall those earlier chords. The movement ends with a colorful masterstroke: beneath a glassy harmonic in the first violin, the lower strings tap a quiet chord *col legno* (with the wood of the

bow), answered by glissando pizzicato chords in the cello. The finale transfigures the first movement's thematic material nearly beyond recognition. After a cursory preamble of slashing triplets and expectant silences, the repeated notes that began the quartet reappear, launching the movement into a barn-burning *Presto*. The opening movement's legato rising-and-falling theme here retains that relentless energy. The wide intervallic leaps likewise reappear as the dance continues to spiral into a frenzy. Following a fortissimo climax, Bartók inserts a strange tune, *con indifferenza*, like a bizarre nursery song. From here, the piece charges inexorably to its resounding conclusion. Bartók composed his Fifth String Quartet on commission from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation; the score bears a dedication to Mrs. Sprague Coolidge, one of the early twentieth century's most prominent patrons of new music.

Recorded July 28 and July 31, 2018, The Center for Performing Arts at Menlo-Atherton. Recording producer and engineer: Da-Hong Seetoo. Steinway grand pianos provided courtesy of Pro-Piano. Cover art: *Castrum Doloris*, by Gonzalo Fonseca. Photos by Geoff Sheil. Booklet design by Nick Stone. CD production: Jerome Bunke, Digital Force, New York. Production manager: Nathan Paer. Music@Menlo 2018 was made possible by a leadership grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Additional support provided by Koret Foundation Funds, U.S. Trust, and the many individuals and organizations that share the festival's vision. American Public Media was the official radio and new-media broadcast partner of Music@Menlo 2018. © 2018 Music@Menlo LIVE. All Rights Reserved. Unauthorized Duplication Is a Violation of Applicable Laws. Printed and Manufactured in the U.S.A. www.musicatmenlo.org



STEPHANIE MCNAB, *flute*; CALIDORE STRING QUARTET: JEFFREY MYERS, RYAN MEEHAN, *violins*; JEREMY BERRY, *viola*; ESTELLE CHOI, *cello*