

Chamber Music Corvallis presents:

## Aris Quartet

February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

First Presbyterian Church



**Anna Katharina Wildermuth** • *violin*

**Noémi Zipperling** • *violin*

**Caspar Vinzens** • *viola*

**Lukas Sieber** • *violoncello*

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# Program

Quartet in C major, K. 465 (“Dissonance”)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756–1791)

I. Adagio – Allegro

II. Andante cantabile

III. Menuetto. Allegro

IV. Allegro molto

Quartet in F minor, Op. 80

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809–1847)

I. Allegro vivace assai

II. Allegro assai

III. Adagio

IV. Finale: Allegro molto

## *Intermission*

String Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 27

Edvard Grieg

(1843–1907)

I. Un poco andante - Allegro molto ed agitato

II. Romanze: Andantino

III. Intermezzo: Allegro molto marcato - Più vivo e scherzando

IV. Finale: Lento - Presto al saltarello

## Program Notes

In 1781, **W.A. Mozart** attended and perhaps even played for a gathering where he heard Haydn's Op. 33 quartets first hand in what was surely their informal premiere. Mozart was living in Vienna by then and became familiar with the music of J.S. Bach. Over the next four years, Mozart would write string duos, trios and quartets inspired by the music of Bach and Haydn, culminating in six new string quartets dedicated to Haydn himself, his Op. 10 of 1785. Upon hearing these works, also in a collegial, salon setting with Mozart playing viola, Haydn remarked that Mozart was the greatest living composer he knew.

The sixth and final quartet, Quartet in C major, K. 465, is arguably the most noteworthy of this collection: the innovative and foreboding introduction earned the quartet its nickname "Dissonance." Mozart explores extremes of counterpoint and harmony in the first movement's introduction, but this two-minute dramatic feint becomes the foil for one of Mozart's most radiant and beneficent sonatas of all, bursting forth as a bright triumph of consonance in the natural key of C major. The first movement is a finely wrought sonata form, exquisitely articulated and naturally fluid with the fresh textures of Viennese high classicism: melody, motive, counterpoint and development, a refined dialog among four independent and highly cultivated souls.

**Felix Mendelssohn's** last complete string quartet, Quartet in F minor, Op. 80, is a dark tour de force celebrated for that blistering intensity that music writer James Keller calls "combustible." Throughout Mendelssohn's work one finds passionate drama and his signature nervous drive. But in the F minor quartet of 1847, the mood is unrelentingly sustained across three of the four movements ending with a virtuosic firestorm, a conflagration of musical angst.

At the time of the quartet's composition, Mendelssohn had already achieved fame and recognition. On 17 May 1847, word arrived that his sister Fanny suddenly died of a stroke. Devastated, Mendelssohn took a vacation with friends in Switzerland and composed his final quartet dedicated to her memory, which he completed in September of that year. Only two months later, Felix would follow the fate of his sister, father and grandfather, dying of a stroke himself at the age of 38. Whether one dares to connect this biographical setting to the abstract music of his string quartet, one cannot deny the musical effect: surging agony enfolding a loving elegy within. It is conjectured that this work signified the beginning of a new style in

Mendelssohn's music, perhaps something more professional than personal, a craft rather than a confession. Regardless, the quartet is unique and would become his final completed composition.

**Edvard Grieg** produced only one complete mature string quartet, the String Quartet in G minor, Op. 27 dating from 1878 when he was 35. The historical record indicates that it was a challenge for Grieg, a composer who was perhaps more accustomed to writing in smaller forms such as his celebrated art songs and Romantic piano miniatures. Yet this work remains one of the most original and influential string quartets of the late 19th century, approximately contemporaneous with the first quartets from Tchaikovsky, Brahms, Borodin and Dvořák. It was written in the same year as César Franck's piano quartet with which it shares some prominent elements of innovative cyclic design. Grieg's quartet even managed to impress Debussy who, fifteen years later, wrote his only quartet in the same key with more than a few striking similarities.

Like many composers, notably Schubert and Mendelssohn, Grieg borrows from his own music for the main theme of the quartet: a portion of his own somber song *Spillamæd* (Minstrels). The icy theme is announced in unison by the quartet right at the beginning, the emphatic slow introductory *andante* before the bristling *allegro*. Almost all of the musical material in the first movement is derived from it including several creative variations of the full theme itself in a wide range of expression and affect. There are at least eight clear permutations for the listener's delightful discovery. Like the cyclic designs of Franck and, later, Debussy, the theme extends beyond the bounds of the first movement to obliquely influence the second, reappear in the third and frame the fourth including a nearly literal restatement of the quartet's beginning just before the final conclusion.

One of the most striking aspects of Grieg's quartet is the distinctive way he uses textures and colors for the string ensemble. Grieg employs skillful counterpoint, a fluid exchange of voice-leading across all four instruments, and a variety of novel sounds that he may well have borrowed from Norwegian folk music for fiddle. Moreover, Grieg's musical language was considered progressive for its time: highly chromatic with rich harmonies and bold modulations, the quartet explores modal and pentatonic scales with an exotic folk flavor leading the vanguard of new music invading the traditions of Western Europe.