

PACIFICA QUARTET
KAREN SLACK, SOPRANO

SIMIN GANATRA, violin
AUSTIN HARTMAN, violin
MARK HOLLOWAY, viola
BRANDON VAMOS, cello

FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809-1847)

Quartet No. 2 in A Minor, Op. 13

Adagio – Allegro vivace

Adagio non lento

Intermezzo: Allegretto con moto – Allegro di molto

Presto – Adagio non lento

JAMES LEE III
(b. 1975)

A Double Standard for soprano and string quartet
(Colorado Premiere)

INTERMISSION

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH **Quartet No. 3 in F Major, Op. 73**
(1906-1975)

Allegretto

Moderato con moto

Allegro non troppo

Adagio (attacca)

Moderato



PACIFICA QUARTET

PACIFICA QUARTET

With a career spanning nearly three decades, the multiple Grammy Award-winning Pacifica Quartet has achieved international recognition as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Quartet is known for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and often-daring repertory choices. Having served as quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music for the past decade, the Quartet also leads the Center for Advanced Quartet Studies at the Aspen Music Festival and School, and was previously the quartet-in-residence at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 2021, the Pacifica Quartet received a second Grammy Award for *Contemporary Voices*, an exploration of music by three Pulitzer Prize-winning composers: Shulamit Ran, Jennifer Higdon, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and an appointment to Lincoln Center's The Bowers Program (formerly CMS Two), and in 2006 was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. With its powerful energy and captivating, cohesive sound, the Pacifica has established itself as the embodiment of the senior American quartet sound.

Upcoming 2023-24 performances and recordings include projects with clarinetist Anthony McGill and guitarist Sharon Isbin. In addition, the Quartet will collaborate with soprano Karen Slack for performances of James Lee III's "A Double Standard," a new song cycle commissioned by Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Detroit, and the Shriver Hall Concert Series. Named the University of Chicago's Don Michael Randel Ensemble in Residence for the 2023-24 season, the Pacifica Quartet will perform and give masterclasses at the University of Chicago throughout the year. Additional performances include ones for Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Chamber Music Detroit, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, and Caramoor.

The members of the Pacifica Quartet live in Bloomington,

Indiana, where they serve as quartet-in-residence and full-time faculty members at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. Prior to their appointment, the Quartet was on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from 2003 to 2012, and also served as resident performing artist at the University of Chicago for seventeen years.

For more information on the Quartet, please visit www.pacificaquartet.com.

KAREN SLACK, SOPRANO

Known for performances that “ripped the audience’s hearts out” (*Opera News*), Karen Slack is “not only one of the nation’s most celebrated sopranos, but a leading voice in changing-making spaces in classical music” (*Trilloquy*). A recipient of the 2022 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, Slack is an Artistic Advisor for Portland Opera, serves on the board of the American Composers Orchestra and Astral Artists, and holds a faculty position at the Banff Centre.



KAREN SLACK

soprano

Highlights of Slack’s 2023-2024 season include her debuts with the New York Philharmonic and two performances as guest artist at Chamber Music Detroit, plus a return to the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, a return to the Festival Internacional de Música Sacra Bogotá in Colombia, and a performance with the Pacifica Quartet in Denver. Slack embarks upon an ambitious new recording project in collaboration with ONEComposer and pianist Michelle Cann, to be released on Azica Records, and debuts her new commissioning project *African Queens*, an evening-length vocal recital of new art songs by acclaimed composers Jasmine Barnes, Damien Geter, Jessie Montgomery, Shawn Okpebholo, Dave Ragland, Carlos Simon, and Joel Thompson.

Slack has amassed a body of work that reflects her dedication to elevating works by living composers, particularly Black artists. In recent seasons, she has premiered programs including *Songs in Flight* at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, two separate compositions by Hannibal Lokumbe with the Nashville Symphony and Oklahoma City Philharmonic; Jasmine Barnes’ *Songs of Paul* with Orpheus Chamber

Orchestra at Carnegie Hall; Damien Geter's *Justice Symphony* with the Fresno Symphony and The Washington Chorus; and Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney's *A Snowy Day* with Houston Grand Opera. When the pandemic limited live performances, Slack launched an acclaimed digital talk show, #kikikonversations.

She has performed on the stages of the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, Scottish Opera, San Francisco Opera, Dallas Opera, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and many others. She has appeared with the Melbourne and Sydney symphonies, the Bergen Philharmonic, the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, made her Carnegie Hall debut with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, and performed as a soloist with the Philadelphia Orchestra in the world premiere of Hannibal Lokumbe's *Healing Tones* led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

A native Philadelphian, Slack is a graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music and the San Francisco Opera's Merola Opera Program.

NOTES

FELIX

MENDELSSOHN:
QUARTET NO. 2 IN A
MINOR, OP. 13, "IST
ES WAHR?"

IN BRIEF

BORN: February 3, 1809, Hamburg, Germany

DIED: November 4, 1847, Leipzig, Germany

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: November 7, 2018, Calidore String Quartet

DURATION: 31 minutes

The "genius" stories about young Felix Mendelssohn are well known to most music lovers. He had completed the splendid Octet, Op. 20, at age 16, and within a year had written his magical Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Op. 21. These two masterpieces on their own would have earned him a place in music history, even had he not gone on to compose the Hebrides Overture, the Italian Symphony, *Elijah*, the Violin Concerto, and dozens of other magnificent works. Most of us also know that Mendelssohn played a key role in the rediscovery of Johann

Sebastian Bach's music in the 19th century. During his late teens, Mendelssohn also became engrossed in the music of Beethoven, an absorption that bore fruit in the 1827 string quartet we hear this evening.

Beethoven may seem an unlikely model for the refined and elegant Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn is often regarded as the most classic of the German romantics, taking Mozart as his model. Beethoven was indisputably the most influential figure of the first half of the 19th century, however, and it makes sense that Mendelssohn would acquaint himself thoroughly with Beethoven's music. The late quartets held a particular fascination for young Felix, especially the A minor quartet, Opus 132. Although that quartet was not published until the end of 1827, Mendelssohn had certainly heard it performed. A comparison of Opus 132 with Mendelssohn's A minor quartet Op. 13 makes it clear that Beethoven's work served as a model for the 18-year-old composer.

Even for those who do not know Opus 132 well, the spirit of Beethoven in Mendelssohn's music should be apparent. Surprisingly, this quartet borrows more from the stormy, passionate character of middle-period Beethoven than it does from the transcendent beauty of the late works. This is particularly evident in Mendelssohn's liberal use of recitative style, most prominently in the finale.

The subtitle of Mendelssohn's quartet is from his song "*Ist es wahr?*" ("*Is it true?*", Op. 9, no. 1, also known as "*Frage*" [*Question*]). Mendelssohn wrote it in 1827, the same year as the quartet, while on holiday at Sakrow, near Potsdam. He had gone there for a rest and a change of scenery, and to visit some family friends. Apparently, he became enamored of a young lady there. The attachment was short-lived, and the girl's identity is unknown. "*Ist es wahr?*" is thought to be an expression of his romantic devotion. It is brief: a mere 24 bars in A major on one page of music. The declamatory text is by Johann Gustav Droysen, an historian and Felix's good friend:

Ist es wahr? Ist es wahr?
Daß du stets dort in dem Laubgang,
An der Weinwand meiner harrst?
Und den Mondschein und die Sternlein
Auch nach mir befragst?

*Is it true? Is it true
that over there in the leafy walkway, you always
wait for me by the vine-draped wall?
And that with the moonlight and the little stars
you consult about me also?*

Ist es wahr? Sprich!
Was ich fühle, das begreift nur,
Die es mit fühlt,
Und die treu mir ewig,
Treu mir ewig, ewig bleibt.

*Is it true? Speak!
What I feel, only she grasps --
she who feels with me
and stays ever faithful to me,
eternally faithful.*

The song appears in full in the quartet score. In 19th-century salon performances, the song would precede the quartet. Mendelssohn incorporates its opening motive as a motto in the quartet's slow introduction and brings it back in the finale. Listeners familiar with the keyboard literature will note a striking resemblance to the *Absence* motif from Beethoven's piano sonata, "*Les Adieux*."

The least Beethovenian movement is the *Intermezzo*, which encloses a decidedly Mendelssohnian scherzo section within a capricious folk tale. The dramatic recitative that opens the stormy finale reestablishes Beethoven's influence in this startling work.

JAMES LEE III:
A DOUBLE
STANDARD FOR
SOPRANO AND
STRING QUARTET

IN BRIEF

BORN: 1975, St. Joseph, Michigan

FIRST PERFORMANCE: June 18, 2022, Carnegie Hall

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

PERFORMANCE: Tonight marks the first performance of this work on our series (Colorado Premiere).

DURATION: 14 minutes

James Lee III is a composer to watch. Currently Professor of Music at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Lee holds a DMA in composition from the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty, William Bolcom, and Bright Sheng. He was also a composition fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, working under Michael Gandolfi. Lee was the winner of a Charles Ives Scholarship and the Wladimir Lakond Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His music has been widely performed by orchestras and chamber music ensembles throughout the USA. In spring 2024 Lee will have his music performed by the Augusta Symphony, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Louisiana Philharmonic, Mississippi Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, and Hamburg Symphony. His works have also been heard in South America, Cuba, and Russia.

This evening the Pacifica Quartet partners with soprano Karen Slack to perform Lee's *A Double Standard*, which they premiered at the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall in June 2022. The piece was a consortium commission among Carnegie Hall, Shriver Hall Concert Series, Chamber Music Cincinnati, and Chamber Music Detroit. Lee's composer's note explains the title, the work's socio-political background, and its powerful message:

A Double Standard uses the texts from a poem by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, an African American poet who was born free in Baltimore in 1825 and died in Philadelphia in 1911. Ms. Harper was also an abolitionist, suffragist, teacher, public speaker, and writer. In 1845, she was one of the first African American women to be published in the United States. Harper often expressed her passion for social revolution through her poetry. *A Double Standard* is a musical journey that displays her pain and frustration about the biases against women and the 19th-century mind-set of sex, gender, and societal roles. The work begins with an extended introduction in the strings that is highly agitated... [T]he soprano sings a four-note motive on the words 'Do you blame me' that

recurs frequently when the word ‘blame’ is uttered. One can really sense the righteous indignation in Harper’s voice as she wrote these words. Throughout *A Double Standard*, various emotions are evoked at contrasting dynamic levels... The climax of both poem and music arrives when the quartet vigorously and angrily ascends, followed by the singer’s highest note, sung *fortissimo*:

Crime has no sex and yet today
I wear the brand of shame;
Whilst he amid the gay and proud
Still bears an honored name.
Can you blame me if I’ve learned to think
Your hate of vice a sham,
When you so coldly crushed me down
And then excused the man?

Harper address the double standards society practices. . . and how women are often treated more harshly than men. She then calls on God to be the true judge and arbiter of justice:

I’m glad God’s ways are not our ways,
He does not see as man,
Within His love I know there’s room
For those whom others ban

Here the music pauses its brash dissonance, evoking the beauty of God’s throne and His righteous judgment. These passages are short-lived, however, as the agitated, frustrated nature of the poem returns:

And what is wrong in woman’s life
In man’s cannot be right.

The initial musical material returns and continues to demand positive change!

– James Lee III

Lee’s music is angry, and understandably so. His quartet writing both presages and echoes the singer’s highly

charged words. Craggy dissonance expresses her rage and frustration in the face of gross injustice. Instrumental interludes provide commentary linking the soprano's powerful utterances, reinforcing the drama of her operatic delivery. Their shared motivic material unifies the musical and poetic message.

IN BRIEF

BORN: September 25, 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia

DIED: August 9, 1975, Moscow, Russia

FIRST PERFORMANCE: December 1946 (Moscow) by the Beethoven Quartet, to whom it is dedicated.

MOST RECENT FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE: October 1, 2014, Emerson Quartet

DURATION: 33 minutes

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH: QUARTET NO. 3 IN F MAJOR, OP. 73

The violist Fyodor Druzhinin joined the Beethoven Quartet in 1964, succeeding his teacher Vadim Borisovsky. This esteemed group, one of the Soviet Union's most distinguished ensembles, had been associated with Shostakovich since 1940, and its members had presented the premieres of nearly every major chamber composition he wrote. In conversations about the last string quartets, Druzhinin recalled:

Only once did we see Shostakovich visibly moved by his own music. We were rehearsing his Third Quartet. He'd promised to stop us when he had any remarks to make. Dmitri Dmitriyevich sat in an armchair with the score opened out. But after each movement ended he just waved us on, saying, 'Keep playing!' So we performed the whole Quartet. When we finished playing he sat quite still in silence like a wounded bird, tears streaming down his face. This was the only time that I saw Shostakovich so open and defenseless.

Why did this comparatively early quartet, written primarily in 1946, elicit such strong emotions in the composer nearly twenty years later? We know he wrestled

with the piece while he was composing, yet he was satisfied upon its completion, writing to the Beethoven Quartet's second violinist, Vasily Shirinsky:

It seems to me that I have never been so pleased with one of my works as with this quartet. Probably I am mistaken, but for the time being this is exactly how I feel.

In Shostakovich's lifetime, this quartet acquired the nickname "War Quartet." When the Beethoven Quartet played the first performance in Moscow, on December 16, 1946, the program included the following subtitles for each movement:

- I. Calm unawareness of future cataclysm
- II. Rumbblings of unrest and anticipation
- III. The forces of war unleashed
- IV. Homage to the dead
- V. The eternal question: Why? And for what?

Shostakovich subsequently rejected these subtitles; still, they seem expressive.

Like so many of his more personal compositions, this one was withdrawn shortly after its premiere. Within two years, the Zhdanov purge of 1948 had disgraced Shostakovich, along with numerous other composers and prominent artistic figures in the Soviet Union. Although the Third Quartet was not officially cited on Zhdanov's list of proscribed music, it became one of Shostakovich's so-called "unofficial" works. He had written no large-scale composition since his Ninth Symphony (1945). At nearly 33 minutes, this five-movement quartet clearly fell into the category of major work. Shostakovich treated the quartet in places as if it were a symphonic ensemble. At the climaxes, particularly those in the third and final movements, the ensemble seems to be straining the confines of the quartet medium. Elsewhere, Shostakovich's musical fabric is characteristically spare and transparent, often reducing the texture to a trio or even a duo.

The quartet opens with a sonata form movement in F major. Two diatonic, deceptively innocent themes flirt with that underlying element of irony that so often shadows Shostakovich's music. A series of brief *ritardandi* lend a “pushmi-pullyu” aspect to the music that subtly derails the forward momentum. The melodic emphasis is primarily in the first violin, but its part is not virtuosic in this opening movement. Shostakovich introduces elements of canonic imitation in his exposition, expanding the counterpoint to a full double fugue in his development. A truncated recapitulation leads to a surprisingly energetic and forceful coda.

Tradition has ascribed number symbolism to this quartet, with the People associated with 3 and Stalin associated with 2. These links are easy to follow in the second and third movement. With its vigorous pace and spare textures, the Moderato con moto pairs a 3/4 waltz with the insistence of a march. Even though the meter is 3/4 throughout, the stubborn pulse—initially in the viola, but presently shared by all four players—almost pounds the downbeat of each measure with relentless force that suggests military discipline. Repeated patterns refuse to relinquish their hold, even in the staccato middle sections. Not until the end of the movement does an element of individuality emerge in the cello's elegiac, *adagio* close. The ensuing Allegro non troppo is a violent statement in G-sharp minor with abrupt switches between 2/4 and 3/4 that throw the listener off balance. In its even more military atmosphere, it foreshadows the scherzo of the Tenth Symphony (purportedly a caricature of Stalin) which it preceded by several years. Atavistic dance rhythms are also at play here, but the overall impact of this movement is a damning indictment of the military.

Shostakovich's Adagio is the emotional heart of the quartet. It opens fortissimo with an extended unison passage for the lower three parts, answered by a more resigned, gentle duet for the two violins. The dichotomy between these two ideas sets up a dialogue that forms the narrative for the movement. Eventually each lower part gets a solo turn with the principal theme, in the manner

of a threnody. The Adagio proceeds *attacca* to the finale, a Moderato in the home tonality of F major. The cello introduces the extended main theme, with viola pizzicato as accompaniment. The second theme seems straight out of a Prokofiev ballet: sweet, melodious, piquant, shadowed. As he works out both themes, Shostakovich slides between 2/4 and 6/8, eventually building to a tremendous and agitated climax that alludes back to the slow movement. Presently he inverts the carefree principal theme of the opening movement. The quartet concludes with recitative-like, anguished cries from the first violin, soaring into the sky in harmonics before ending with pizzicato.

Program notes by Laurie Shulman ©2023

PIANO SERIES

BEATRICE RANA

TUE, FEB 20 | 7:30 PM

Gates Concert Hall



Photo by Simon Fowler

Italian pianist Beatrice Rana has become an international star in the classical music world, receiving praise from audiences and critics alike. With “all the virtuosic flair that you’d expect, but never for its own sake” (*The New York Times*), Rana will perform a program of masterworks including Liszt’s towering Piano Sonata in B Minor.

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A composition residency at East High School concluded in November. Students from several music classes created music in a spontaneous and improvisatory way through *Sound Painting*—a unique hand gesture language taught by the talented musicians of The Playground Ensemble. Musicians have also performed in several other schools, including Munroe, Newlon, and Southmoor Elementary Schools, thanks to our partnership with Community Resources, Inc.

If you know a school that would be interested in our educational programming, contact us at info@friendsofchambermusic.com or 303-388-9839.

"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." - Pablo Picasso.

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PIANO SERIES

Beatrice Rana, piano

Tue, Feb 20, 2024 | 7:30 pm

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